

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our business plan outlines how we will manage the Council's homes over the next thirty years and how this will be financed. It is clear and focused; setting out our current position, our vision for the future and plans for delivering further improvements to the housing stock. Whilst it primarily addresses our role as a housing landlord, it also complements the Council's Housing Strategy and makes a significant contribution to national, regional and local objectives, including the Council's priorities for action. The plan also highlights our role as a neighbourhood manager, addressing the social and community issues facing our customers, in partnership with key stakeholders.

The last twelve months has been a period of significant change for Bury Housing Services. We have seen significant step change improvement in the delivery of services, with the Housing Inspectorate judging our rent collection service to be a good, 2* service with promising prospects for improvement. We believe this judgement, reflects our commitment to improving services and places us in a positive position for securing 2* across the full range of landlord services.

There can be no doubt that our plan will take us through a period of unparalleled development and change. We have assessed the commitment needed and believe we have the ability and capacity to meet the demands ahead. This commitment is based on a sound track record of delivering change and improving services.

Our plan is knowledge and evidence based and has been developed using robust information from a variety of sources. These include:

- A completed stock condition survey which has been updated and validated
- A completed Housing Needs Survey
- The Housing Inspectorate's report and judgement on our Rent Collection Service
- Significant and sustained improvements in performance demonstrated by improved key performance indicator (KPIs) results
- Best Value reviews and service improvement plans in place for the remainder of the landlord services
- Reality checks by the Greater Manchester Best Practice Unit
- An external performance assessment of the housing service by Capita Consulting
- The needs and aspirations of our customers, as identified through our tenant and resident participation framework
- An estate profiling exercise
- A tenant profiling exercise

This up to date information and knowledge has given us the confidence to be ambitious in the targets we have set ourselves in this business plan.

Our Financial Operating Account balances over the term of the plan and will be reviewed annually using updated information and projection forecast. Our commitment to improving and delivering high quality services will continue to be our top priority. This is clearly highlighted by our vision statement:

We will be a customer focused, open and accountable organisation. We will provide a quality, affordable and efficient service, accessible to all

We have become a more focused business over the last twelve months and are pursuing a clear strategy with ambitious but achievable priorities. We have refined these priorities over the last year, to reflect the changing environment within which we operate and following helpful guidance given by the Government Office for the North West last year. We have identified three clear priorities for the service to help us achieve our vision over the next five years.

- Providing good quality, customer focused services
- Improving the quality and condition of our homes
- Creating neighbourhoods where people want to live

The priorities have been developed using technical and financial information and an analysis of housing market needs. They also crucially reflect the concerns of our customers, based on their first hand knowledge of the conditions and problems on their estates. In deciding these priorities, we have also taken into account the Council's priorities as identified in the Corporate Plan and Housing Strategy, together with the Government's objectives for council housing.

Our tenants have endorsed our vision for the service and the priorities that will deliver them. We have assessed the commitment needed and believe we have the ability and capacity to meet the demands ahead. We have a clear strategy in place to deliver these priorities as illustrated in our customer focused action plan. We believe all the ingredients of an excellent housing service are featured in this action plan. We will know we have successfully delivered our priorities when:

- Our homes are of a decent standard
- Our homes meet the needs and aspirations of our customers
- Customer satisfaction levels are high
- We achieve top quartile performance for all key performance indicators

We have acknowledged our previously inconsistent performance in relation to tenant participation and have worked hard over the last twelve months to develop closer working relationships with our customers. The tenant and participation strategy we have developed will ensure our priorities are delivered in partnership with our customers. This includes widening representation and reaching out to

customers beyond the formal consultation framework. The robust performance management framework we have put in place puts our customers at the heart of monitoring processes to ensure we deliver what we say we will.

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

The completion of a robust and independent stock option appraisal by the Housing Quality Network. Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) identified by the Council and our customers as offering the best option for accessing the additional capital funding we need to provide decent homes for all our tenants

The validation and updating of our stock condition survey

Capita Consulting has undertaken an independent performance assessment of the housing service. Issues arising from this assessment have been built into our customer focused action plan

Our Rent Collection Service was judged by the Housing Inspectorate to be a good, 2* service, with promising prospects for improvement

We have reviewed our Tenant Compact and developed a tenant and resident participation strategy in partnership with our customers

Consistently improving KPI scores

We have secured significant improvements in performance against key performance indicators. This includes our rent collection and empty property service. Average relet times are now top quartile.

We have reorganised our repairs and maintenance service into one single delivery point and introduced a repair appointment system and multi-skill working

We will be implementing an introductory tenancy scheme in December 2003 following extensive consultation with our customers

We are unable to meet the Decent Homes standard by 2010 given our current commitments and the resources available. The redirecting of these resources towards achieving the Decent Homes Standard will seriously impact on our ability to meet the investment liabilities identified by our stock condition survey and result in a backlog of unfunded maintenance work. It will also prevent us from meeting the expectations of our tenants and protecting the long term viability and sustainability of our communities, particularly in areas of deprivation and poor housing.

In the past year we have reviewed all of the housing stock options available to us in partnership with our customers and concluded that an ALMO would offer the best option for us, from a financial, strategic and customer perspective. In particular, it will allow us to invest in our stock and meet the Decent Homes Standard by 2010.

It is not considered appropriate to pursue a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) for part of our stock or a large-scale stock transfer. We are, however, working closely with the Springs Tenant Management Organisation (TMO) to evaluate the

feasibility of a small-scale voluntary transfer of the 330 properties they manage on behalf of the Council, in recognition of their desire for greater independence and control.

Our tenants have played a crucial role in helping us determine the right option. This includes widescale participation in our ongoing consultation programme and the development of a Tenant' Panel to oversee the Council's Stock Option Appraisal.

Tenant representatives also sit on our ALMO Project Board. Our approach has been endorsed by the Council's Executive and the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP).

Our Expression of Interest in joining the ALMO (round four) programme has now been submitted to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and we are in the process of setting up our ALMO Board to manage the entire housing stock from June 2004.