**CITY OF WESTMINSTER**

**CityWest Homes Task Group**

**NOTES**

Notes of a meeting of the **CityWest Homes Task Group** held on **16th August 2018**

**Members Present:** Councillor Melvyn Caplan (Chairman), Councillor Paul Dimoldenberg, Councillor Richard Elcho, Councillor Pancho Lewis, Councillor Mark Shearer, Councillor James Spencer and Councillor Paul Swaddle

**Also Present:** Barbara Brownlee (Executive Director of Growth, Planning and Housing), Tom McGregor (Director of Housing and Regeneration), Fergus Coleman (Head of Affordable Housing and Strategy), Sandra Skeete (Interim Managing Director, CityWest Homes), Andrea Luker (Executive Director of Strategy and Planning, CityWest Homes), Greg Campbell (Partner, Campbell Tickell) and Maggie Rafalowicz (Director, Campbell Tickell)

**1      Introduction and Apologies**

1.1     The Chairman welcomed those present.  Apologies were received from Councillor Adam Hug.

**2      CityWest Homes – Setting the Scene**

Campbell Tickell Review

2.1     Campbell Tickell have been commissioned by Westminster City Council (WCC) to undertake a high-level review of CityWest Homes (CWH).  The review focuses on four broad areas:
- CWH's alignment with the Council and its strategic objectives;
- CWH's service delivery;
- CWH's organisational and staff culture; and
- WCC's clienting of CWH

The review focused on what changes CWH and WCC would need to make if CWH continued as an arm's length management organisation (ALMO).

2.2     Alignment
- CWH sees itself as separate from the Council, this is an approach the WCC has allowed and at times encouraged.

2.3     Service delivery

- For the majority of its existence, CWH has been seen as an effective organisation that provides quality services. This changed in 2017 when CWH changed operating model.
- In Campbell Tickell's view, CWH attempted to make too many changes at once and were naïve in doing so. Campbell Tickell thought there was not enough understanding of housing management at a senior level and that staff turnover had resulted in a loss of experience in middle management.
- Campbell Tickell felt that specific changes (e.g. closing estate offices, changes to the call centre, the new repairs contract) had not caused the issues that CWH experienced, the problem was the how they were implemented, especially the phasing.
- The increased workload following the Grenfell Tower fire had exacerbated the issues.
- The removal of estate offices could have been a success, but they needed to be replaced with someone responsible for an area who can be contacted. The signposting for residents was too rigid.
- There was not enough training for CWH employees on the new systems that were put in place.

2.3 Culture
- Campbell Tickell found an issue of an 'us versus them' culture between CWH and WCC/residents.
- Campbell Tickell recommends a culture change programme

2.4 Clienting
- The way that WCC has approached clienting has not allowed effective challenge of CWH. The approach has been vertical, with issues raised up the chain in WCC, shared at senior levels of both organisations and then down the chain at CWH. A better arrangement would allow for interactions that are more horizontal.
- It was stressed that clienting approaches should not be too overbearing. There needs to be clear agreement on what is going to be monitored, which should be linked to WCC's strategic objectives, and clienting needs to be done at different levels.
- Campbell Tickell do not feel that the CWH board recognised the issues that it faced and that it needs to be restructured. Campbell Tickell felt the board was too large. The board should have a mix of independent members, Councillors and residents as well as reflecting the skill mix that was required.
- There needs to be stronger arrangements to allow scrutiny by residents, especially tenants.

2.5 Campbell Tickell recommended a 'back to basics' approach for CWH. Too few senior officers had experience working in housing and an understanding of the core business.

Westminster City Council

2.6     Barbara Brownlee highlighted that historically CWH had provided very good services that focused on the individual. She also highlighted recent work such as handling the change of cladding on Little Venice Towers and the care with which people had been dealt with. However, the way this service had been delivered varied across different estates and there was a need to standardise the offer to ensure a balanced and equal offer. This was a driver for the changes to the operating model of CWH.

2.7     A client side function was being developed within WCC; however, it was still very lean. The team was currently two officers; two more positions were being recruited to. This should help improve the clienting. WCC was doing a lot of work with CWH on how to progress complaints and channel of works.

2.8     WCC wanted to see from CWH:
        • Improved resident satisfaction
        • Fewer complaints
        • Contractors managed well and consistently
        • Improved void turnaround
        • Better income recovery

2.9     CWH's aims and purpose were not clear and the board did not spend a lot of time on performance management.

2.10    Despite staff being dedicated, the customer service function and other teams, such as repairs, were disjointed.

2.11    Major works was an area that had previously not been handled well and which CWH continued to find difficult. WCC is responsible for approving the major works plan based on CWH's technical recommendations. It is possible for leaseholders to effectively block major works. Previously, advice has been obtained to the effect that WCC leases do not allow for sinking funds to be established.

CityWest Homes

2.12    Sandra Skeete told the task group the previously CWH had had a unique model where 90% of services were outsourced, so there was a light touch clienting model. However, when CWH took on service delivery, the model did not change. CWH had not intended to make all of its service changes at the same time.

2.13    CWH needed to look at the way that it supported its board and provided better information to it.

2.14    CWH's stock profile presented unique challenges. Half of CWH's stock is pre-war, many properties are in conservation areas or are listed buildings and street properties are challenging.

2.15    90% of CWH residents are secure tenants and more than 60% are over 50 years old. CWH needs to understand the challenges this client base

presents, one of which is getting an insight into the expectations of a diverse resident group.

2.16    CWH recognised the need to make sure that its activities and priorities aligned more with City for All.

2.17    CWH accepted that it had not responded flexibly to the concerns of residents. The organisation had been focusing on the issues with the repairs contract and contact centre, which had meant that areas like estate management had not been improved. This was being addressed. £200,000 had been invested in staff training as part of CWH transformation project.

2.18    CWH did not have a good customer relationship management system. Sandra Skeet was the sponsor of the programme that was aiming to deliver a better system. The programme was linked to a broader IT strategy that was being implemented. WCC and CWH are looking to align more on digital services. This had been a proposal previously, but WCC's programme had been delayed.

2.19    Residents are involved in CWH decision-making processes via area panels, the residents' council and on the CWH board. Across CWH estates, there were twenty residents associations, nine tenant management organisations and a number of resident groups. There is currently no way for residents associations to feed in to the decision making process. Panels are not well known amongst residents. There is a need for more tenant involvement.

2.20    CWH has changed the way that it procures for major works. It now procures across whole programmes instead of against individual projects to try and deliver value for money.

## 3      Future Meetings

- 30th August 2018, 18:30
- 3rd September 2018, 18:30
- 5th September 2018, 18:30