

**AGENDA ITEM**

**REPORT TO CABINET**

**15 JUNE 2006**

**REPORT OF CORPORATE  
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

**INFORMATION ITEM**

**Housing– Lead Cabinet Member- Cllr Leonard**

**TRISTAR IMPROVEMENT PLAN PROGRESS**

**Summary**

This report is to update Cabinet on the progress being made in the drive for Tristar Homes to achieve excellence in its delivery of housing services, in particular the progress that is being made in implementing the Service Improvement Plan developed after the last Audit Commission inspection in 2005.

**Detail**

1. In May 2005, Tristar Homes received a reduced inspection score of one star (fair), with poor prospects for further improvement. One of the key recommendations within the inspection report was that an improvement plan should be produced to bring the service back to its previous two star (good) standard within twelve months.
2. This Service Improvement Plan (SIP) was produced in July 2006, following a period of intense analysis of the actual position and what was required to achieve excellence in each of the key services provided by Tristar Homes. The SIP was a high level document, detailing 90 key actions to be undertaken, with each action having a named responsible officer and a specific deadline for completion. Below this document, action plans were developed containing the larger number of smaller actions and pieces of work required to achieve these key actions.
3. In order to ensure that the SIP was effectively delivered, it was essential that the performance management framework was strengthened from the previous arrangements that were in place. This revamped performance management framework has included:
  - **Monthly reports to Tristar Board** - detailing progress on delivering the SIP, highlighting any overdue actions and graphically representing the latest performance results against target.
  - **Monthly Tristar Performance Clinics** – Tristar’s Executive Management Team and other managers meet to discuss performance issues in-depth. These sessions look behind the headline performance indicators into performance in individual service areas and at patch level, highlighting areas that need improving.
  - **Monthly Tristar staff meetings** – following the Tristar Performance Clinics, managers take the discussions to the staff at their team meetings and one-to-

one sessions – this way staff are made aware of the issues and, crucially, the role they have to play in improving performance.

- **Monthly Tristar/Council liaison meetings** – senior managers from Tristar and SBC meet on a monthly basis to discuss relevant issues, with performance and SIP implementation being standing items on the agendas.
- **Internal Audit** – instead of undertaking audits of specific areas within the service, the Council's Internal Audit service have adopted a much broader approach, basing their audits on the headings within the SIP, to ensure that the performance information is reliable and accurate.
- **Scrutiny exercises** – the Council's Housing and Community Safety Select Committee are undertaking scrutiny exercises based on broad areas within the SIP – the first area to be scrutinised was access to Tristar services, with this area currently being revisited prior to the next inspection.

4. The Tristar Service Improvement Plan has been in place since July 2005 and has been a key driver in bringing about fundamental improvements in service delivery in that ten month period. Some of the significant achievements to date include:

- **Change in culture**

The culture of the organisation has been transformed in a very short period from one where challenge was seen as a threat and to be discouraged, to the present situation where challenge is being embraced as vital to the continuous improvement of the company.

The change in culture is particularly evident at Board meetings, where informed and in-depth discussions now take place on virtually every agenda item, with directors much clearer about their role in driving improvement. Board members also now attend monthly drop-in sessions where they can find out more about specific service areas and regular tailored training sessions.

- **Management and Staffing structures**

Tristar's management and staffing structures needed to be radically reshaped and strengthened to enable the necessary service improvements to be delivered. To this end a completely new management model was developed and fully populated, and major staffing restructures were undertaken in virtually every service area.

The majority of posts under the new staffing structures have now been filled, with the expected improvements in performance now being realised.

- **Decent Homes Programme**

A full long term programme of works to bring Council houses up to the Government's Decent Standard has now been developed. This enables Tristar to advise tenants when they can expect to receive the improvements to their homes, which is a major step forward in communications.

- **Performance Results**

The success of the fundamental changes to service delivery undertaken over the past year will be judged on the effect that these changes have on the bread and butter housing issues of how effectively rent collection, repairs and maintenance and the reletting of properties is carried out.

The performance trends in these areas are now positive, with the services now operating at the performance levels that would be expected of a good/excellent rated housing provider.

This can be most clearly seen in the area of reletting properties. In previous years, the average time for reletting Council homes were between 70 – 80 calendar days, which compared very poorly with national standards. This level of performance continued up until September 2005, when new procedures, management and staffing arrangements were introduced into the voids service. Since then, the majority of homes that have become vacant were re-tenanted within the target time of 30 days, due to the better use of staffing and management resources.

5. Full details of Tristar's results over the past year are attached at **Appendix 1**, which is a copy of the performance report which forms the basis of discussions at Tristar's Board and other performance framework meetings each month.
6. The Service Improvement Plan has now been updated for 2006/07, with the key actions that have been completed removed and emerging issues (such as responding effectively to the Respect Agenda) added in. A full re-assessment of timescales and available resources on the outstanding actions has also been undertaken, to ensure that the SIP continues to be delivered effectively.
7. Two issues of major importance that will be focussed on very heavily in the next few months are resident involvement and value for money, particularly with regards to the repairs service. These both featured prominently in the inspection report as areas that would require a significant amount of effort. Since the management and staffing structures have been put in place in these areas, these issues have begun to be fully tackled with good progress being made.
8. The Audit Commission's Housing Inspectorate are due to be on-site from the 30<sup>th</sup> October 2006 to carry out the re-inspection of the service. All the key recommendations from the previous inspection either have, or will have been, complied with by the inspection start date.

### **Financial and Legal Implications**

9. None directly from this report, although it is vital that Tristar Homes is operating within Best Value principles as it is the key partner in the delivery of cost effective housing management services to the Council's tenants.

### **Community Safety Implications**

10. None directly from this report, although the delivery of excellent housing management services is of importance to several policy platform areas within the Community Strategy, in particular Community Safety and Well-being.

### **Consultation including Ward Councillors**

11. The Service Improvement Plan was drafted following an intensive period of analysis and consultation with residents, Tristar board members and staff of both Stockton Borough Council and Tristar Homes. Improving resident involvement in the development of Tristar Homes is also one of the key priority issues tackled within the Service Improvement Plan.

**Contact details:**

**Telephone:**

**E-mail:**

Julie Allport

Head of Housing

01642 527072

[julie.allport@stockton.gov.uk](mailto:julie.allport@stockton.gov.uk)