

## Introduction

2009/10 has seen a number of improvements to the Trust's services for residents and a very successful year for the delivery of new homes. We also delivered one of the largest property investment programmes of the last five years, investing £9million in improvements to homes, such as new heating, kitchens, bathrooms and external refurbishments. A very successful partnership with Rok at Snow Hill in Bath has delivered an extensive internal refurbishment programme, and achieved high levels of customer satisfaction.

At the same time, we have worked intensively with our residents and Savills on a responsive programme of investment for the next five years, based on the need to maintain our stock at the Decent Homes Plus levels we have achieved so far, and what our residents tell us is important to them.

Elsewhere, we have made significant improvements in our older persons' service following a 'systems thinking' intervention. We also took full account of residents' requirements, through our formal Sheltered Housing and Older Persons' Working Group and from monthly resident surveys. As a result of what we heard, we have recruited a dementia specialist, increased the number of

opportunities for people to get active, and focussed on personal, face-to-face services, where people want them. We work very closely with colleagues from both the local authority and the Primary Care Trust and are now putting in place a more strategic approach, to both the accommodation and the support sides of our older persons' service.

This year also saw the introduction of a new regulatory framework, based on resident scrutiny and co-regulation. We are currently setting up a framework to deliver the six Tenant Services Authority (TSA) standards on: tenant involvement and empowerment; home; tenancy; neighbourhood and community; value for money; and governance and financial viability.

We believe that our 'Better Places' approach to neighbourhood management gives us a successful platform on which to develop the 'local offers' also required by the TSA. Much of what is being required of us is already central to what we do – putting residents at the heart of service delivery, being accountable to residents for our performance, and responding flexibly and consistently to local requirements.

In March, we were notified of a short notice inspection on our voids, lettings and gas safety services by the Audit Commission. The inspection

was triggered by performance on voids and lettings, which you will see we planned to review during this financial year. We will be communicating specifically on this issue with you over the next few weeks, but I wanted to say here that we were aware of all the issues the inspectors raised with us, and were already addressing them or planning to do so imminently. Staff from Somer Housing Group and our partner local authorities have been working very hard with residents to put in place the recommendations the inspectors have made. We are certain that the work we are doing will benefit residents and improve services.

Also attached to this Business Briefing is a copy of Somer Housing Group's corporate plans for the coming year. There are certain to be many changes in what will no doubt be a challenging year for all of us engaged in delivering services to people on low incomes across the South West. The Trust is focusing on continuing to improve core services, improve value for money and increase access to services for a diverse customer base. Please contact me if you have any comments regarding our plans for the next year or anything else in this briefing.

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## Planning and development

The Trust is the lead organisation for the Somer Housing Partnership, responsible for the delivery of the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) development programme on behalf of the member organisations of Somer Housing Group. This year the partnership has completed over 270 new homes for much-needed affordable housing, well exceeding our HCA targets. We also started 287 new homes for completion in future years as well as spending £13.5m of grant, 180% of our target at the start of the year.

We are beginning to see some signs of a returning sales market. Purchasers are required to have a minimum of a 10% deposit; this is an improvement on mid-2009 when 20% deposits were required. Since January 2010 the Trust has sold eight properties on a shared ownership basis, including one property which was originally let on a 'Rent to HomeBuy' agreement.

# News from Bath and North East Somerset

## Core strategy

The Trust has submitted a formal response to the consultation on the council's Core Strategy, part of the Local Development Framework which replaced the former Local Plan.

Staff and Board members from both the Trust and Shape met to consider the plan and the response was considered by the Trust Board. Whilst being very aware of the differences of opinion with regards to the requirement for new homes in the area, the Board has called for the Secretary of State's figures to be used in the strategy. The Trust's tenants, Board members and staff see every day the need for new homes and the consequences of under supply. Despite the controversy attached to this issue, it is this need which has driven our response.

## Play areas



When B&NES Council's homes transferred to the Trust in 1999, we also took responsibility for maintaining a number of pieces of open ground and play areas. Whilst at the time this made sense, the Trust maintains a small number of playgrounds in areas where we have no tenants at all. Given that our income comes from the rents paid by our tenants for the most part, this does not seem fair. We are discussing how we can return these areas to the council, as well as formally transferring areas that are at

the heart of our communities into our ownership. As usual the devil is in the detail, but we are hopeful that we can reach a decision that is fair to our tenants in the long term.

## Rapid transit system

The Trust was asked for its response to the compulsory purchase of land for use by the Rapid Transit System planned for Bath. We are aware that this is an important project for the council. Our key consideration was the impact on the Trust's tenants adjoining the land and the possible loss of access to the rear of their properties. We therefore asked for, and received, confirmation from the council that pedestrian and vehicular access will be maintained, and that residents will be consulted as part of the process. We have asked for details of the consultation and will also carry out our own consultation to help us make a decision on the voluntary sale of the land.

## News from South Gloucestershire

The Trust has been assessed as a 4.1 out of a possible score of 5 by South Gloucestershire Council for our development and housing management services. We scored the top mark of 5 for our ability to deliver and for the quality of the homes we build. To improve the score, we will be transferring more schemes to our partners to comply with the Homes West Partnership principles. The delay to date has been caused mainly by the recent poor market conditions slowing down development. More than one in five of our new homes is built in the South Gloucestershire Council area and we are currently its largest provider of new homes.

## News from Wiltshire

The Trust recently celebrated the completion of new homes at Hilperton, near Trowbridge. They were part of a larger development by Persimmon Homes of nearly 200 properties at Halfway Cottage and Harvest Rise. 46 of these were earmarked for affordable housing through the planning system.

An additional 25 homes were subsequently purchased directly by the Trust, using funding from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). The total investment was £7.65m. The homes have mostly been let at affordable rents to people registered with Wiltshire Council's choice-based lettings system, Homes 4 Wiltshire, with six sold through the New Build HomeBuy shared ownership scheme.



## West of England Partnership

The West of England Partnership is leading the HCA 'Single Conversation' process which the HCA uses to decide on its investment into new homes in the region. Each of the four West of England local authorities (B&NES, Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire) has agreed a joint investment plan for the sub-region which identifies and prioritises investment for new homes. All new investment decisions will be made in line with the sub-regional investment plan.

## Reviewing how we respond to local councillors and MPs

Councillors at a recent B&NES liaison meeting asked the Trust's Managing Director to look into the way that the Trust responds to councillor and MP enquiries. Whilst this is often very good, it can be patchy. So we are reviewing how we do this, as part of a wider, comprehensive review of the way we handle complaints. Further information will be available as the review progresses.

## 'Smooth Move'

We have reviewed the way we incentivise tenants in larger family homes to downsize so that we are able to release the home for a family. The Trust Board has approved a new policy called 'Smooth Move', which will give us greater flexibility to be able to help tenants directly. Following consultation with residents, we found that what they most wanted was assistance with practical removal arrangements, rather than a cash sum, and this is what we will now provide.

## New eco homes at Temple Cloud pay their way

The latest affordable homes for rent to be developed by Somer Community Housing Trust may reap a big dividend for residents.

The homes at Temple Cloud, near Keynsham, feature photovoltaic solar panels, generating electricity that can be used in the home. The residents will benefit from free electricity, or from being paid for energy they export back to the grid.

The properties are also the first developed by the Trust to meet Level 4 of the Code for Sustainable Homes. Code 4 homes generally have 44 per cent lower carbon dioxide emissions over 'standard' housing.

The homes were built on several sites, replacing old blocks of garages. In total, there are 4 two-bed and 2 three-bed houses, and a two-bed bungalow at Fieldgardens Road, Goldney Way and Ham Close. An additional 12 community parking spaces have also been created, as a direct result of consultation with local residents and ward councillor Tim Warren.



## 2010/11 budget

The Trust's rents have risen by 0.17% this year. The budget for Supporting People has been frozen. Our operating costs have increased by 11% due to increased investment we are making in the planned maintenance of homes, which will be in the region of £11million. Other operating costs are rising by 1% or £355,000. There has been no cost of living rise for staff.

# The Trust's development pipeline

NBHB = New Build HomeBuy, RTHB = Rent to HomeBuy, NB = new build, Eco Homes / Code for Sustainable Homes = measure of environmental performance.

Scheme	LA	Tenure	No. of Homes	Sustainability	Type	Completion expected
Amberley Close and Lulworth Road, Keynsham (PRC project)	B&NES	GN	48	Code for Sustainable Homes Level 3	NB	Various phases from Summer 2010 – Spring 2011
		NBHB	13			
Bryants Avenue, Radstock	B&NES	GN	20	Code for Sustainable Homes Level 3	NB	Summer 2011
		NBHB	7			
Dallas Road, Chippenham	Wiltshire	GN	6	Code for Sustainable Homes Level 3	NB	Spring 2012
Davids Road, Whitchurch	Bristol	GN	39	Code for Sustainable Homes Level 3	NB	Various phases from April – August 2010
		Intermediate rent	6			
		NBHB	11			
Day Crescent / Pennyquick View, Twerton (PRC project)	B&NES	GN	45	Code for Sustainable Homes Level 3	NB	Various phases throughout 2011
		NBHB	11			
Hewlett Packard site, Stoke Gifford	South Glos	GN	130	Code for Sustainable Homes Level 3	NB	Various phases from Spring 2010 – Spring 2014
		NBHB	97			
Holcombe Green, Weston (PRC project)	B&NES	GN	44	Code for Sustainable Homes Level 3	NB	Various phases from Autumn 2010 – Summer 2011
Meridian, Bristol	Bristol	GN	36	Eco Homes very good	NB	Spring 2011
		NBHB	10			
Riverside Yard, Radstock	B&NES	GN	10	Code for Sustainable Homes Level 3	NB	Summer 2010
Southgate, Bath	B&NES	GN	16	Eco Homes very good	NB	Spring/Summer 2010
		NBHB	9			
Southlands, Weston, Bath (PRC project)	B&NES	GN/NBH	74	Code for Sustainable Homes Level 3	NB	Spring 2012
Tynning Road, Peasedown St John	B&NES	GN	8	Code for Sustainable Homes Level 3	NB	May 2010
Ushers Brewery, Trowbridge	Wiltshire	GN	12	Eco Homes very good	NB	Two phases during Summer/Autumn 2010



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