



Meeting **REPORT TO AD HOC SELECT COMMITTEE FOR NCC STRATEGIC
PROPERTY REVIEW**

Date **Wednesday, 24th November 2004**

agenda item number

From: **Jas Hundal, Deputy Director of Environment**

STRATEGIC PROPERTY REVIEW – CONSULTATION ON PROPERTY ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Purpose

1. To summarise and present the outcomes of the consultation undertaken with property occupiers and managers as part of the Best Value Review to the Members of the Select Committee.

Methodology

2. A questionnaire was prepared and issued to a wide range of property occupiers and departmental managers across the whole authority. The questions related to the users experience and satisfaction with the manner in which property is managed by Corporate Property. The table below summarises the number of responses which were received across each department, and the whether the respondent is a property occupier or manager.

Department	Occupier / Manager	Number returned
Culture and Community	Occupier	18
	Manager	1
Education	Occupier	4
	Manager	3
Environment	Occupier	3
	Manager	2
Resources	Occupier	3
	Manager	0
Social services	Occupier	8
	Manager	0
	total	42

3. Due to the low level of response from some departments it is statistically unreliable to draw direct conclusions from their answers. However if the 42 responses are taken together, broad conclusions can be drawn from the responses. In addition to this empirical data, a number of respondents have provided direct feedback in the form of comments that provide a useful insight into their perception of how Property is currently managed.

Findings

4. A **full table of results** is attached to this report in **Appendix A**, starting with a summary table and followed by a single table for the responses per Department.
5. The questionnaires canvassed opinion on whether respondents felt that the **responsibilities** (for both tenant and landlord) in property management were clear and agreed. The overall response showed only 12% (5 respondents) felt fully clear on their property responsibilities, and only 10% responded that these responsibilities had been mutually agreed. These results are supported by a number of direct comments;

"I have no idea where my responsibilities lie, and there has been no discussion"

"Consultation and communication need improving"

"Greater clarity required on the roles of the Corporate and Departmental property Teams"

6. Questions 4 and 5 of the questionnaire concern the **charging system** of operational property costs and whether the existing system incorporates appropriate **incentives** to encourage efficient use of property. Despite the recent introduction of the 'Real Rents' property charging system, 52% of respondents answered 'don't know' as to whether they regard the existing charging system as appropriate. This suggests a lack of awareness and/or understanding of the Real Rents system. Similarly 38% answered 'don't know' whether the incentives system is appropriate to encourage more efficient property use. This again suggests a lack of awareness or understanding of the system or what incentives might be available.

"Budgeting is extremely difficult.....what 'incentives' are there?"

"Charges are made to service budgets at will with no prior notification or clarification"

7. A key factor in the ability to manage property effectively is the provision of meaningful **management information**. However 36% of respondents answered 'No Fully' as to whether they receive sufficient management information, with only 7% answering 'Yes Fully'. It is not clear however whether respondents are unhappy with the quantity, format or frequency of management information. More research is required to ascertain to what information is required and how that information is best communicated.

"I receive no information....."

"Answers given are reactive not proactive"

"Condition survey is not user friendly – real information is hard to find"

8. Question 8 concerned an **assessment of the support provided by Corporate Property** services. The responses received differ markedly between Departments with 75% of Social Services Respondents answering 'Yes Partly', whereas 37% of Culture and Community responses answered 'No Fully' to whether they are receiving adequate support. This suggests either an inconsistency in the level of support provided by Corporate Property or that Departments themselves have different levels of need and/or expectation. It may also reflect the internal structures of the Departments, with some benefiting from their own departmental property teams whilst other departments lack this resource.

"Too slow in responding, not customer service orientated, too distant"

"I have often received excellent support but the arrangements are often beyond their control"

"Greater focus on service output has helped"

9. The final question concerned **how the Council's Property Asset Management policies could be improved**. It was recognised by all concerned that improvements could and should be made and the suggested areas for improvement concentrated on some key themes; communication, consultation and improved joint-working.

"Better communication about strategy and policies..... and better consultation on a regular basis"

"I am not too sure exactly what service I can expect.....could you let people know what is on offer"

"Better communication and tracking of accommodation processes"

Conclusions

10. Based on the feedback received through the questionnaires, there are some **key areas where Corporate Property can work to improve**. The table below briefly outlines the areas where improvement is most required and the action that is currently being undertaken to improve Corporate Property in that area.

Area for Improvement	Action
Clearly defined roles and responsibilities for both tenant and landlord	Richard Hanson, Assistant Director of Resources in collaboration with each Department is formulating a policy document that clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of the both landlord and tenant
Ensure that these roles have been mutually agreed and that they are clearly understood by both parties	
Improve consultation with property occupiers and managers and seek to develop a more sophisticated and programmed approach	Corporate Property to improve consultation with property users through both formal and informal means. Existing monthly meetings between Corporate Property and Departments to be supplemented by formal annual consultation

Area for Improvement	Action
Improve the understating of the 'Real Rents' system and promote the incentives available from more efficient use of property	Time must be given to allow the Real Rents initiative to become established. The importance of Property as a resource is gaining in profile and the benefits of effective management are becoming more obvious
Discuss with Departments their requirement for property management information	Use the monthly Departmental meetings to consider how to improve the management information currently received
Consider the level of Departmental expertise and resources and then tailor support to each meet the needs of each Department	Build upon the example of existing good working relationships with some Departments as a model to improve joint-working with those areas most needing of support

Recommendation

11. It is recommended that Members of the Ad Hoc Select Committee:

- a) Note and comment on the issues raised in the report and consider the conclusions with regard to their inclusion in the Best Value Review Report and Action Plan.

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