

What Next for the ALMO?

Regeneration

Hounslow has consistently recognized and promoted the value of regeneration. During XXYR to XXYR Hounslow Homes in partnership with London borough of Hounslow delivered major refurbishment programmes and community development projects within their housing service for Brentford, Isleworth and Feltham, using Single Regeneration and Capital Challenge funding.

In addition, annual funding from London borough of Hounslow from 2004 to 2006 has been invested in regeneration projects on two of our hot-spot estates - Convent Way and Ivybridge

As well as enhancing traditional housing services, these programmes included schemes designed to tackle:

- crime and anti-social behaviour
- community safety
- social exclusion
- diversity and cohesion

Our regeneration schemes are progressing well, meeting agreed targets, and are monitored by LHB to ensure value for money.

Future opportunities

Hounslow Homes and the Council have also put forward expressions of interest for regeneration and area renewal funding for five additional projects. These would deliver:

- new mixed tenure housing
- maintain decent homes
- significant improvements to social and physical infrastructure

Decent estates

We want to consolidate this regeneration work and move on to the rehabilitation of more estates. Regeneration of communal areas and estates will also safeguard and make sustainable the decent homes investment. We have therefore developed a new programme called Decent Estates that will address elements of communal areas that are important to quality of life such as:

- The quality and appearance of buildings on estates
- Underused and undesirable land on estates
- Parking facilities and estate roads
- Condition of lifts, entrances, stairways and lobbies
- How rubbish is looked after
- Play and sporting facilities

Decent Estates is not just about bricks and mortar, the intention is to create sustainable communities and a living environment that is safer and that residents can take pride in, with improvements equal to standards used in private sector housing. It is different from Decent Homes Standard, which is mainly about the quality of individual homes rather than the overall quality of an estate. Furthermore, linking the Decent Estates programme with sustainable communities activities gives Hounslow Homes the ability to both build-out opportunities for crime and anti-social behaviour, and at the same time take firm action to deal with perpetrators

Our Decent Homes Standard (DHS) Story



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In 2001 the London Borough of Hounslow asked council tenants and leaseholders how they wanted housing services and improvement works to their homes to be managed in order to reach to government's Decent Homes Standard (DHS). The vast majority of tenants and leaseholders favoured the option of an arms length management organisation (ALMO), which guaranteed additional investment and offered residents greater control as an equal partner on the ALMO Board.

Working in partnership with Hounslow Federation of Tenant and Residents Associations (HFTRA), and with councillors, council officers and housing partners, a proposal was submitted for government approval to establish the ALMO and for a government subsidy to release an additional £90m (later increased to £99.7m) for investment in Hounslow council homes. Approval was given for the ALMO, which was tasked with managing housing services and improving 10,500 council homes that had failed

DHS. On 1 April 2002 we were established as the ALMO, Hounslow Homes Ltd.

In 2006, four years ahead of government target, Hounslow Homes aims to be amongst the first ALMOs in the country, and the first in London, to complete its DHS modernisation programme. Through our DHS programme we have also delivered savings of £28 million, exceeding Gershon savings. With 16,500 homes to manage – two-thirds of which required refurbishment work – this represents a significant achievement.

How Did We Do It?



Stock condition survey and asset management

During the first year of the ALMO we commissioned a stock condition survey which confirmed how many homes failed DHS and enabled us to specifically plan a programme to bring them up to standard. Below-standard kitchens, bathrooms, insulation and rewiring were the main reason for failing DHS. There were also some windows and roofs that needed upgrading.

The stock condition survey consisted of a sample survey based on 10% of estates and a higher proportion of street properties and small blocks, it was also designed to include other areas of work not impacting on decency, eg lifts and upgrading of electrical, mechanical and engineering services. The survey confirmed that 64 % of stock was below decent homes standard.

Further surveys were regularly undertaken and this information together with information from completed programmes of work was added to our data system. This meant that the original 10% sample survey now contains real internal survey data on 58% of our stock enabling us to manage our property assets according to real-life and up to date information.

Partnering with constructors for efficiency

We realised early on that putting work out to tender in the traditional way would not accomplish our goals. So we turned to a more collaborative and transparent approach to partnering with key property constructors.

By comparing traditional tendering with our new partnering concept we identified opportunities for savings and adding value. For example, we discovered that in a partnering process the unit costs come down significantly. Under traditional tendering we achieved a unit cost of over £14,000 a unit; the unit cost reduced to £10,000 using the partnering model.

These efficiencies in service delivery have been made without affecting the quality of the service for residents; in fact the savings have been put back into more and better refurbishment, further helping us to meet our targets.

All of the partners have brought different levels of expertise and experience into the relationship, from both the social housing and commercial sectors. In this way ensuring maximum return on our investment, while also keeping tenant satisfaction is high. By encouraging the partner contractors to share their experiences and solutions – rather than compete with each other – savings have been maximised.



DHS construction and improvement work was carried out in partnership with Balfour Beatty Refurbishment Ltd, Graham-Holmes Astraseal Ltd, Lovell Partnerships Ltd and United House Ltd, as well as by our own in-house repairs organisation. FPD Savills was partnering adviser and John Rowan & Partners LLP acted as the ALMO's consultants.

Partnering with the community - tenants setting the standard

Tenants and Leaseholders nominated by HFTRA were very closely involved in the development of the ALMOs investment programme and in the set up of partnering arrangements. Members of the HFTRA capital working group ensured that resources were balanced across the different priority areas, as well as geographically across the borough and that small estates and one-off street properties got a fair share of the investment. HFTRA also nominated a committed group who helped set up the partnering arrangements, from setting out the initial brief, to selection of partners and establishment of contractual arrangements. This group then continued to attend an intensive course of Core Group meetings with the partners to set up the working arrangements, considering every aspect of the scope, standards and specification of the works.

Putting tenants first

Tenants are our starting point in all our programmes. We aim to provide the highest service levels to our tenants, so we pay a lot of attention to what they have to say, ensuring that what we do is driven by their priorities and needs. Our Hounslow Homes' commitment to tenants was demonstrated by the way the ALMO consulted with and included tenants in the decision making process when shaping the Decent Homes programme. Among the areas tenants helped develop were:

> Pre design

Choosing the address list – criteria/geographical areas, colour/range choice, standards document, communication with tenants, selection of supply chain).

> Design stage

Survey – arranging access, scope of works, design issues and standards document, standard survey form, social survey, white goods survey, agree designs and colour choices with tenant, precautions/temp arrangements, pricing framework. Reaching agreement with consultants, testing electricity, gas, asbestos, damp and structural features.



> Pre start

Confirm design with tenant, conformation of programme to tenant, communication.

> On site operations

Temporary works, progress visits, tenant claims for damage, complaints procedure, out of hours arrangements, handover procedures.

> Post completion

Satisfaction surveys, defects and Key Performance Indicators.