

Scrutiny 2: report on Local Offers

May 2011

Headline findings

1. Interviews with tenants confirmed that no-one knows what 'Local Offers' are, or what 'local' means and recommend Soha change the name. The group notes that this change has already been agreed.
2. The group notes that Soha effectively had 'local offers' in place before the TSA required housing providers to do this. Soha's service standards were developed in detail with tenants in 2009 and Soha already has in place many of the enhanced standards that form other providers' local offers.
3. The timetable for local offers was imposed by the TSA. Consultation was undertaken with tenants but the group notes that existing representative groups (AFA, Seniors Group) could have been more involved in shaping the offers. The group also notes that while Directors and Managers were consulted extensively, front-line staff could have been involved more.
4. Soha is not visible enough to many of its tenants. Interviews suggest people don't feel Soha is 'local' to them – even where satisfaction is good. The feeling of isolation from Soha was especially strong in Witney. More personalised communication such as texting may help with this.
5. Soha needs to be creative with communications on the local offers, for example Herald adverts, pieces in parish magazines.
6. Soha's local offers are specific and SMART. This compares favourably with local offers from some other providers. However, further information is needed regarding piloting offers, monitoring, and what will happen if local offers are to be withdrawn.
7. Soha already has high standards, developed and maintained via resident involvement. Local offers provide a good opportunity to do new things and for continuous improvement.
8. The TSA will not be regulating local offers in any way. The group recommends that Soha agree, as soon as possible, a formal mechanism to monitor, evaluate and review local offers via Soha's co-regulatory framework.

Background

This Scrutiny Review looked at how Soha decided on its local offers

The scope of the review was to

- Assess the extent and effectiveness of resident consultation on local offers
- Make recommendations about how local offers can be implemented and communicated
- Look at how Soha can 'brand' local offers
- Look at the impact on different areas

Scrutiny of local offers is especially relevant due to the absence of any regulatory oversight from the TSA.

Methodology

This review has researched regulatory information and legislation, relevant Soha documents and information from other housing providers. Independent advice was provided by TPAS.

TPAS Localism Briefing

Building Block for defining local offers

TSA Local Offers Toolkit

Soha Annual Report 2011: Summary TSA standards

STATUS results for local offers

Board paper on Local Offers

Hometalk

Report on Local offers consultation

Examples of local offers from other housing providers.

Interviews have been conducted with Soha tenants, Soha staff and a representative from TPAS

- Elvina Goddard, Seniors Group, Soha tenants
- Maureen Hodgkinson, Access for All (AFA), Soha tenants
- 'Door knock' survey of residents in
 - Brightwell cum Sotwell
 - Chinnor
 - Witney
 - Swindon (by post)
 - Visitors to Soha's reception
- Richard Peacock, Chief Executive, Soha Housing
- Maureen Adams, Director of Customer Services and Operations
- Nicki Peedle, Resident Involvement Officer
- Jackie Silver, Resident Involvement Officer

- Suzette Starmer, Interim Policy and Initiatives Manager / Project Administrator
- Samantha Goodwin, TPAS

The Scrutiny Group team for this review

- Valerie Edwards (team leader)
- Margaret Buckell
- Andy Dunsmore
- Mike Andrews
- Wendy Selwood
- Katie Robertson

Detailed Report

Richard Peacock reported that after feedback from the Tenants' Forum and the Scrutiny Group, Soha are going to call Local Offers 'New Standards'. Hopefully this new name will give tenants a better understanding of what Local Offers actually is.

TPAS does not have a definition of local offers, but in their presentation used the term "local service delivery offers". When asked "What do you think the difference is between local standards and local offers?" Sam Goodwin from TPAS said:

"Standards are TSA legislated standards that have been put in place for landlords to meet. Local offers are what a landlord offers above those TSA standards. "

The group is pleased to note that Soha is maintaining its commitment to limit new development to within a one-hour drive-time of Didcot, retaining its community based identity.

Front line staff felt that they could have had more input into the devising of local offers and the planning of consultation. This could have involved Neighbourhood officers as well as RI staff. More long-term planning of RI and consultation would be welcomed, with more consultation of frontline staff at the planning stage.

The group find that there is a strong feeling that local offers must not detract from

- Existing high standards of service for all Soha tenants
- Planned maintenance of existing properties
- Services to tenants and properties not part of new schemes or developments
- Services to existing tenants

There is most support for the maintenance of high standards for all

The group would like to see more information for tenants on

- what is being implemented
- what is being measured
- how this will happen

For example, how will tenants understand why 85% is the target for 'First-time Fix'? What is the current performance (50%? 84%?), and how it compares to other providers performance and targets (eg: West Kent's target is 80%)

Clarification of Safer, Cleaner, Greener would be welcome. What is it and how will it be measured?

Soha's local offers are a combination of services, standards, targets and offers. The mechanism for monitoring performance should identify the ways in which these will be measured and include a timescale.

This should also include information on

- how will agreement be reached on withdrawing or changing local offers?
- How will the next set of local offers be agreed?
- Are HAs expected to keep producing new local offers ?
- What would happen to any spare capacity as a result of a local offer being withdrawn?

The group noted that Soha's Annual Report had received top marks from the review conducted by tenants' organisations. The summary of Soha's performance against the TSA standards, including the plan for local offer consultation, which formed part of the Annual Report was very clear and helpful for this scrutiny review.