



Case Study

THE CLIENT

City Housing (CH) provided support and accommodation for 58 homeless people in a variety of housing environments in an inner city area. The main associated vulnerabilities of their clients were offending behaviour, substance misuse and mental ill health.

The presenting problem at our initial contact with CH was one of significant arrears of housing benefit income which was threatening the financial viability of the organisation. We were commissioned to assist with a review of their rental policy and operations with the object of establishing a sustainable balance between the housing income stream and housing-related expenditure.

Work undertaken in the early weeks of our contact with CH on rental models in association with somewhat more protracted negotiations with the local Housing Benefits service resulted in the upward revision of unit weekly rental charges, which averaged some £35 across the supported housing portfolio.

WIDER CONCERNS

It soon became clear that CH were experiencing other problems in addition to the rental income deficits which were fundamentally more of a threat to the long-term survival of the organisation. Significant among these was the very poor quality of the relationship between City Housing and the Supporting People service of the local authority. Of particular concern:

- On only two of the six SP Quality Assessment Framework (QAF) core objectives were rated at level 'C'. On the other four core service objectives, they were rated at 'D'.
- There were concerns about the high unit costs of some support services and CH's inability to demonstrate value for money in these services.
 - Standards of CH record-keeping, inspection returns and other accountability mechanisms to the major funder were judged to be inadequate.
- The SP service raised concerns about the governance arrangements. CH was unable to demonstrate that their reporting and decision-making arrangements were robust enough to keep the board properly apprised of key issues.
- There were significant gaps in the awareness and understanding of staff of policies and procedures.
- The relationship between CH management and the SP team was characterized by poor communication and high levels of distrust.

Case Study

THE PROJECT OBJECTIVES

CH therefore, entered into a longer-term relationship with Resource Solutions and agreed a consultancy project aimed at addressing the fundamental issues which were damaging CH's reputation and threatening its viability as a provider of support services to vulnerable people. Among the objectives of the project were:

- Restoration of relationships and good quality communications with the Supporting People team.
- Achievement of 'B' ratings on all QAF core objectives within 15 months.
- Put CH in a position to achieve a successful outcome to the tendering processes which the Supporting People service will be introducing for all service providers in the medium-term.
- Enable CH to be in a position to extend and diversify its services within a two-year time frame.

THE PROJECT

A programme of organisational development was undertaken with City Housing managers and staff which included the following elements:

- Completion of a revised QAF action plan in close collaboration with the SP team of the local authority.
- Revision and enhancement of CH's corporate risk assessment procedures and management reporting arrangements to the board.
- Facilitated workshops to develop the value-base of CH and establish effective service user involvement.
- Strengthening organisational capacity to deal with the changed demands of the environment. This involved the appointment of two additional posts, one dealing with quality and performance and the other assisting with operational management of the supported housing service.

PROJECT BENEFITS

A relationship which began by addressing a short-term crisis in finances has developed into a long-term advisory and developmental role, which seeks to address all areas where the organisation is in need of development; whether this is experienced in terms of:

- Understanding and relating effectively to key stakeholders.
- Understanding the nature of the business in which CH is involved and the opportunities and challenges which confront it.
- Adopting and maintaining appropriate governance arrangements.
- Understanding and developing strategic vision based on the right values and organisational culture.
- Ensuring that robust financial planning underpins service objectives.
- Recognizing and fostering the skills and experience of staff and service users in the development of the services.