

Ref.	Item / issue summary	Ref No. / Suggested Recommendation	Proposed action	Who by	When by	How monitored	RAG	Comments on progress
3.1 to 3.9	The panel noted that home visits were governed by the general approach of lone visits unless there was a 'red flag' where staff would go in pairs. There were some loose arrangements whereby staff could also go in pairs if there was training or support needs and managers would maintain close supervision of how this worked in terms of staff time.	R1. A review of the risk assessment for home visits should take place and all staff should be briefed on arrangements for all home visits.	Risk assessment reviewed last year. Income Managers to reinforce risk assessment Income Managers through 121s and team meetings. Risk assessment to be issued to staff immediately. To circulate copy of Risk assessment to Panel members	Income Managers/Colin Alexander	Immediate Jan-14			
	The panel noted that staff mentioned that managers spent a large part of their time on 'strategic' work and that this was impacting on the ability of the teams to actively recover rent and support tenants who are experiencing problems.	R2. That there should be a review of the seating arrangements for the Income Team once moved into the new office within six months	Agreed to review Income Managers sitting within teams. Also try to ensure that Senior Income Officer sit with teams. Colin Alexander to arrange to discuss the stragic role of managers with Income team members.	Colin Alexander	Apr-14			
	The panel heard from Colin Alexander that he was intending to move away from a patch approach to a 'one team' approach with greater flexibility of staff working between the current patches. Some officers would also welcome more flexibility in 'patch' sizes as they felt there were significant imbalances in workloads in some cases.	R3. That there should be a greater emphasis on a whole team approach and flexibility between patches and teams	Dave Sutherland and Colin Alexander to come back to Panel with ideas for more effective team working.	Dave Sutherland/Colin Alexander	Feb-14			
	Attendance at an income team meeting by panel members revealed that some officers were apprehensive about the new office environment at Bernard Weatherill House, in particular the need to hot desk and as a result they are now required to spend one day a week out of the office visiting customers in their homes. Officers felt that this would impact on the time available to them to complete the required paperwork for court actions. However the panel were reassured that tenants would still be able to 'drop in' without an appointment following the move.	R4. That tenants should still be able to 'drop-in' without an appointment following the move to Bernard Weatherill House.	Colin Alexander to investigate current practice of seeing tenants in Access Croydon.	Colin Alexander	Mid Nov 13			<p>Access Croydon: Appointments</p> <p>Karl English, Income Manager confirmed the following by email 5/11/13 I have met with Access Croydon this morning and they have confirmed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customers (tenants) can be seen without appointment • Guidelines state officers should make appointments with tenants to guarantee a reserved interview space/zone • If a tenant does not have an appointment every effort is made to see them. The team/officer is contacted and they will meet the tenant in any available area • To date, Access Croydon has said there has not been a problem arranging for officers to see tenants without appointments • There has been no identified issues with CSL
3.1 to 3.9	The panel noted that there had been some flexible working of staff to contact tenants at weekends or evenings and welcomed the intention to consider greater flexibility for staff working in the future.	R5. That management should consider greater flexibility of staff working to support tenant access to the service e.g. staff available evenings and Saturday mornings	Staff that want to work do this on a voluntary basis. Colin Alexander to canvass staff on their views.	Colin Alexander	Feb-14			

Ref.	Item / issue summary	Ref No. / Suggested Recommendation	Proposed action	Who by	When by	How monitored	RAG	Comments on progress
3.10 to 3.17	Despite the increasing arrears Colin Alexander advised the panel that staffing levels were adequate to cope with the additional pressures	R6. The impact of current and future welfare reform changes should be monitored very closely and staffing levels and mitigating actions reviewed regularly. It is suggested that reports are submitted to each Performance Monitoring Panel meeting.	Monitoring currently happening especially with proposed introduction of Universal credit. Publicise information on both the web site and in OPENHOUSE as a standing item. Will take info to performance monitoring panel	Chris Stock/Colin Alexander/Paul Edwards	Jan-14			
	The panel was impressed with the range of action taken by the council to mitigate the impact of the benefit reforms on both tenants and the council. However the panel also felt that there was no evidence of learning from outside the Council and that the service could benefit from looking at how other social landlords were tackling rent arrears in the light of welfare reform.	R7. Performance information on rent collection and arrears does not give a clear or consistent picture to management or councillors of how well the service is performing against other Councils. In addition arrears are increasing at a considerably higher rate in south central district. This should be fully investigated and reported back to the scrutiny panel	Meet with Housemark to discuss benchmarking performance and how this is determined.	Chris Stock/Colin Alexander/Paul Edwards	Feb-14			
	The panel noted the impact the welfare reform changes introduced from April 2013 and onwards was having on arrears levels and on some tenants ability to afford their rent:	R8. More detailed analysis of those in rent arrears to identify the local areas and tenant groups facing financial difficulty	Ongoing. Looking at additional OHMS modules to facilitate this.	Paul Edwards/Income matrix group	Apr-14			
	The panel was impressed with the range of action taken by the council to mitigate the impact of the benefit reforms on both tenants and the council. However the panel also felt that there was no evidence of learning from outside the Council and that the service could benefit from looking at how other social landlords were tackling rent arrears in the light of welfare reform.	R9. Visits or contacting social landlords should be arranged to see how they were approaching rent arrears as Croydon may learn from others	Ongoing. Make approach to other Local Authorities and Housing Associations to look at examples of good practice	Chris Stock/Colin Alexander/Scrutiny Panel members	Dec-13			
	In addition whilst the number of home visits were welcome these had not included individual budgeting advice. This would have been of help to tenants who choose to 'pay and stay' without having the ability to sustain their tenancy.	R10. That there should be greater use of individual budgeting to help tenants understand their circumstances when choosing whether to 'pay and stay'	Individual budgeting already being used. Recognised that this needs to be done at the initial assessment	Colin Alexander	ongoing			
3.10 to 3.17	The panel noted that the cost of providing the income service was £107 per property in 2011/12 and this was one of the highest in levels in London.	R11. That the high costs of the service compared to other similar landlords should be investigated and reported to the scrutiny panel	Benchmark with other Local Authorities & Housing Associations to look at their costs compared with Croydon and report findings to scrutiny panel	Chris Stock/Colin Alexander	Feb-14			

Ref.	Item / issue summary	Ref No. / Suggested Recommendation	Proposed action	Who by	When by	How monitored	RAG	Comments on progress
3.18 to 3.22	There was a mystery shopping exercise in August, following one carried out in March this year. The panel found that the previous action plan had not been fully implemented at the time of the review, with issues remaining about some callers not being given clear or correct information. The panel were reassured by Colin Alexander that training was going to take place in November.	R12. That the mystery shopping Action Plan be implemented including staff training	Training is currently happening via an external provider.	Colin Alexander	End of Jan 14			
	The panel were reassured by Colin Alexander that training was going to take place in November.	R13. That the training be followed up by a further mystery shopping exercise to ensure that the issue raised on sharing incomplete or inaccurate information has been resolved.	A Mystery shopping exercise will be carried out to assess how effective the training is.	Chris Stock	Feb or Mar 14			
	The panel noted that general training was delivered on the job through job shadowing or reading procedures. There were no formal training programmes for new or existing staff. Income officers only had a basic understanding of the welfare reform changes which had only been gained through emails and information provided on the intranet. Again there was no formal training. Some income officers said they referred all welfare enquires to the specialist officers so they didn't need this training.	R14. That a training needs analysis be conducted and a training plan developed for all income staff.	Training needs to be identified through 121 and team meetings and plans developed for individual/teams	Colin Alexander	Ongoing			
	The panel was also concerned about comments made in the survey that some tenants had to re-submit documents and wanted to understand why it was not possible to deal with queries at the first time of asking. It was also felt that every tenant should be advised of their tenancy and income officers. It was clear that this is not always the case.	R15. There should be more 'face to face' interaction, early debt counselling and tenants should be kept informed of officer changes	Agreed. Existing target already in place for officers to meet tenants (target 10 face to face visits per officer per week). Measures in place to monitor visits and agreed that this be maintained.	Colin Alexander	Ongoing			

Ref.	Item / issue summary	Ref No. / Suggested Recommendation	Proposed action	Who by	When by	How monitored	RAG	Comments on progress
3.23 to 3.24	The panel welcomed the introduction of the new on-line rent payment system which would benefit a number of tenants. However, officers raised an issue with the system which prevented officers accessing tenants on line accounts. One of the biggest issues raised by officers was poor IT systems and lack of mobile connectivity. It was said that the council's various IT systems (OHMS/CRM/Benefits) do not 'talk to' each other which means that the sharing of information and duplication is a problem. It was also frustrating that mobile devices had not yet been deployed to allow officers to directly upload data and access tenants' accounts in their homes which creates a lot of paperwork when officers return to the office.	R16. That the panel receive a report on the viability that all IT databases be united	On going review. Agreed that IT be contacted to discuss how viable an option this is	Colin Alexander/Mahmut Aydogan	Jan-14			
		R17. That staff should have access to handheld devices which enable them to work longer in the field and reduce paperwork	Ongoing project to look at how OHMS can be enabled on such devices. Agreed to review in April 2014	Colin Alexander/Mahmut Aydogan	Apr-14			
3.25	The panel noted that income officers were frustrated with the poor communication and the sharing of information between themselves and the benefits team. In particular, the lack of a direct phone line to the team and long delays in replies to emails. In some cases there was a need to get a manager involved before a reply was forthcoming. This was raised with the Housing Benefits manager, who welcomed the panel's identification of this as an issue, and referred to a recent meeting with the Income team which had resulted in agreement to hold regular bi-monthly meetings and training on Universal Credit.	R18. That the Income and Benefits teams meet regularly and minutes of these meetings to be provided to the Panel	Regular monthly liason meetings now taking place. Minutes of meetings to go to all Income staff members and minutes to Steve Driscoll to distribute to Panel members.	Colin Alexander/Steve Driscoll	Monthly			
3.26 to 3.28	The panel noted the letters to tenants in arrears, especially the second letter which was the first to mention the possibility of eviction. There was concern from the Panel that the message regarding welfare reform was not being understood by everyone. This was evidenced by one panel member who was working with the Somali community and they experienced difficulty in obtaining translated materials.	R19. That future reviews of standard rent arrears letters are checked by tenants	Check by Croydon tenants group to be re-established to review letters.	Chris Stock	Feb-14			
		R20. Look to change the way that tenants are contacted to focus less on letters and more on out of hours contact including the use of texting and email	Agreed that texting option be revisited.	Colin Alexander	Apr-14			
3.26 to 3.28		R21. Develop a cost effective communications campaign combining film, social media, literature and press to engage with all tenants	Regular updates on welfare reform to be included in OPEN HOUSE. Group to be set up to include tenants in looking at how to develop a communications campaign. Look at how the Council reach ethnic minority groups whose first language is not english. Make better use of estate notice boards.	Colin Alexander/Chris Stock	Apr-14			