



Submission

Best Contract

Award

Location: Greater Manchester, Cheshire, and Lancashire

(1000 square mile contract area)

Contract: Decent Homes 2010/11

Start: August 2010

Completion: December 2010

Value: £1.2 million

What makes this Great Places Housing Group Contract different from others?

- During the initial contractor selection stage we were different by ensuring that panel members were made up of a diverse grouping from senior Great Places management, through to Contract Administrator Bernard Taylor's directors and the inclusion of two tenants
- This Partnering Contract is unusual in that it is spread over a vast geographical area of 1000 square miles, meaning the normal localised Decent Homes works were far more challenging.
- The contract evolved from development and agreement of Scope of Works and Outline Specifications, to validation of stock condition surveys, full survey and scheduling of works and construction.
- Extensive and bespoke Communications and Resident Liaison procedures were adopted throughout the scheme.
- A Sustainability Policy was developed and implemented for the scheme.
- The site teams implemented full waste management tools to measure segregation and recycling
- Two site headquarters were established to manage separate geographical areas.
- Continual project reviews were carried out to identify areas for continuous improvement
- The partnering team agreed specific KPIs to monitor customer complaints
- The introduction and usage of a portal set up on the great Places web site to facilitate the loading of real time information from all parties involved in the contract.

## Introduction

Great Places Housing Group is a fast-growing housing association with ambitions to continue to expand whilst constantly improving its already excellent customer service.

Owning and managing more than 15,000 homes in 30 Local Authority areas across the north, the landlord is also a renowned developer and regenerator, creating homes to rent and buy that are as desirable as they are affordable, transforming areas that might have seemed as though they would never thrive or be vibrant again.

Residents include people of many ethnic backgrounds with differing housing management needs and expectations. The group also has in its portfolio several sheltered housing schemes for elderly residents and 1,500 supported housing places for vulnerable people who require 24-hour staffing and one-to-one support, from care leavers and teenage parents to people with drug or alcohol problems, or mental health issues.

Stock ranges from large 1930s former local authority neighbourhoods to Victorian terraces in dense Manchester and Lancashire districts, to key worker accommodation attached to hospitals, as well as a range of flagship new-build apartments and family homes that add up to some of the very best affordable and social housing provision around.

This means repairs are wide-ranging – much more so than, say, for a city stock transfer association. To meet obligations and aspirations of such diverse people in differing homes – in so many geographical areas – the group's property services team provides a consistent standard of service, rigorously monitored and regularly reassessed, that's flexible and responsive and undergoing constant refinement.

## Contract Aims

Great Places are regenerating neighbourhoods all over the north to help them thrive, shine and be truly great places to live. This project focuses on some of the work that is being undertaken to occupied properties.

Great Places Housing Group's board set itself an ambitious target by investing in the housing stock to achieve the Decent Homes Standard within challenging timescales ie the end of December 2010, and across a vast geographical area while creating the blueprint for a ground-breaking customer-focused repairs service.



One of Great Places Housing Group's goals for its framework partnership in delivering its Decent Homes programme is 'to make customers smile'.

When the partnering team including builders Casey and Project Managers Bernard Taylor Partnership with Appleyard and Trew Quantity Surveyors, together with residents, embarked on this unique project with Great Places in 2010 it was apparent that this progressive Housing Group was committed to greatly improving services for its tenants.

## The Challenge

The team was challenged to create a seamless Decent Homes repairs service across a 1000 square mile geographical area from Middlewich in Cheshire to Morecambe in Lancashire and from Blackpool on the Fylde Coast to Oldham in the Pennines, whilst exploring every area of the service in their quest to develop the perfect partnership.

From the outset it was about empowering the partnering team including front-line trade operatives and customer service centre staff to enable them to question the processes and remove any obstacles, which may affect the flow of work.

Areas including material stocks, repair diagnosis, and pre-measurement jobs have all been rationalised and improved and results have been extremely positive.

“When we began working on this project we had a clear vision,” said Bryan Beaumont, Investment Manager for Great Places Housing Group “We needed to tackle the condition of the properties and make each dwelling and the surrounding areas better for the tenants who live there.”

Great Places Housing Group partner, P Casey, was appointed as the main contractor to carry out refurbishment of the existing housing stock in order to bring the condition of each property up to Decent Homes Standards. These works included external fabric repairs and redecoration, including windows, roofs and communal areas, and internal refurbishment including kitchen & bathroom fit-out and electrical rewiring.

## What is Innovative about the Service Provided?

This Decent Homes Contract is innovative in a number of ways;

During the initial contractor selection stage by ensuring that panel members were made up of a diverse grouping from senior Great Places management, through to contract administrator Bernard Taylor directors and the inclusion of two tenants

This Partnering Contract is unusual in that it is spread over a vast geographical area of 1000 square miles, meaning the normal localised Decent Homes works were far more challenging.

The contract evolved from development and agreement of Scope of Works and Outline Specifications, to validation of stock condition surveys, full survey and scheduling of works and construction.

Extensive and bespoke Communications and Resident Liaison procedures were adopted throughout the scheme. Only by thorough tenant liaison can we as a company hope to ensure that our main aim of making our customers smile is ensured.

The site teams implemented full waste management tools to measure segregation and recycling. By utilising the Portal this information can be uploaded and monitored by all to ensure that recycling of materials is maximised and recorded.



Two site headquarters were established to manage separate geographical areas.

Regular project reviews were carried out to identify areas for continuous improvement. By monitoring of these reviews, concerns and problems could be reviewed to ensure that they were rectified before becoming an issue.

The partnering team agreed specific KPIs to monitor customer complaints

The introduction and usage of a portal set up on the Great Places web site to facilitate the loading of real time information from all parties involved in the contract. This is an ongoing innovation and by the utilisation of the Portal in conjunction with Great Places Asset Register, all parties are able to ensure that any tenant requirements are dealt with (for example if we have tenants with special needs) prior to start on site.

A Sustainability Policy was developed and implemented for the scheme. This is monitored by the consultants and Great Places to ensure that any future technologies can be incorporated into our stock which will have a positive impact on our tenants.

## Sustainability and Tenant Choice

As part of Great Places commitment to ensuring the sustainability of our stock we have implemented a sustainability policy on this years programme. This has followed a review after the first site meeting held for the contract, during which everyone involved discussed what would help the tenants, whilst being un-obtrusive and offer value for money.

This contract has changed from previous years works after the implementation of key areas of this policy. For example;

- Tenants are now offered a built in recycling storage unit in the kitchen during initial design stage to encourage recycling in their properties and greater social responsibility.
- Bathroom basins are now fitted with low flow taps to help reduce water consumption. This also has the added advantage of ensuring tenants on water meters reduce their bills.
- Energy efficient light bulbs were distributed to tenants whilst works were done to save on electricity consumption.
- Mira showers with thermostatic cut off valves have been installed to help prevent scalds in the home for the young and vulnerable.
- Energy efficient condensing combi boilers have been installed where Great Places have replaced existing boilers.
- The implementation of full waste management tools to measure segregation and recycling rates

All these choices are helping Great Places to reduce the impact their housing stock has on the environment and to ensure as many tenants as possible have energy efficient homes fit for the future.

## What are the Benefits to;

### The Client

“Decent Homes repair services can be a minefield of hard-to-measure performance targets with no real focus on the customer experience. This partnership is different and every installation is measured from end to end clearly recording the life of the repair from the time the order is placed to the point when the repair is completed. This ensures the customer remains at the centre of the service the partnership provides and that is, after all, why we are here.” Bryan Beaumont, Development Manager, Great Places Housing Group.

### The Contractor

The whole project partnering team developed systems thinking that has helped deliver real and significant benefits and a high degree of collaboration and true partnership work was needed for it to be really successful.

The partnering team believed in Project and Contract Management through a process of collaboration and teamwork. The expertise has been built-up over a number of years through the knowledge gained from the successful completion of similar significant and prestigious schemes.

All parties addressed the project visions and objectives from the earliest stages and implemented management tools such as risk registers, value engineering, design assessments and costing frameworks to review and refine the overall scheme.

By involving all parties including the residents and the supply chain partners in the development of designs, Great Places have been able to significantly improve the efficiency of the complex refurbishment processes for the project going forward.

The benefits have included a single contract management team focused on a common set of objectives where all the individual skills have been utilised to maximum effect and have delivered exceptional tenant services.

“It’s only when all partners have shared objectives that real progress can be made” says Bryan Beaumont. “We have created a real partnership and the dividing lines between all organisations have become blurred, to everyone’s benefit.

The developing partnership ethos has helped individuals from Great Places Housing Association, Casey and Bernard Taylor Partnership build excellent working relationships at a personal level. This has been a big help in the delivery of the service going forward.



### And most importantly-The Residents

Great Places biggest asset are its residents. This contract has seen the involvement of having two tenants on the initial panel during the contractor selection process and subsequently Ms Frieda Southern (a Great Places Tenant) attends all site meetings to ensure the tenant’s needs are paramount in all aspects of the contract

*“Great Places Housing Group has a high regard for all its tenants. All staff members work hard to ensure that every member of its housing community is catered for, from the very young to the elderly. The standard of home improvement is very good and of a high quality. Standards across the whole group remain the same. Well done Great Places for getting it right!”*  
*Frieda, a very happy tenant*

With exceptional Resident Liaison Management across a wide geographical area the team encouraged residents to develop an active working relationship from the start. This encouraged trust and built confidence so that the residents felt able to communicate directly.

They also promoted high levels of accessibility through active ‘outreach’ wherever possible. This ensured that the project was made fully accessible to often-vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, residents for whom English is not a first language, and residents with physical or mental health needs. Close and early contact with members of such groups, ensured that all groups had a voice in how their homes and estates have been refurbished.

The team employed a mixed system of formal and informal consultation, initiated at the earliest possibility, and maintained throughout the length of the project. On this scheme the team soon found that a sound consultation system, as opposed to an ad hoc approach, was invaluable in achieving a smooth-running, timely project that has led to a successful outcome for the residents, Great Places and all stakeholders.

Despite the scattered nature of the properties involved the overriding policy towards consultation on both a group and individual basis could be described as ‘plenty and often’. Time and effort invested in setting up an open, healthy system of consultation has paid rich dividends by allowing a positive client/contractor/resident relationship to be engendered.



This in turn has allowed a system of early problem identification and intervention to develop so that the residents felt confident that they were dealing with a responsive, professional landlord.

By carrying out the installation of kitchens, bathrooms, windows, doors, insulated cladding and ventilation systems Great Places have improved the living environment of its tenants

Through the programme Great Places Housing Group has helped tackle fuel poverty, which is a growing concern for many landlords and their tenants, particularly in a time of increasing energy costs

## **The Neighbourhood**

Great Places central aim of this Decent Homes project was to deliver a product that was tailored to the needs and aspirations of its community. The partnering team translated this ‘customer focus’ into daily working culture so that the residents always remained the determining factor in decisions regarding how the contract was conducted from start to completion.

Additional benefits to the community are in economic and employment benefits

The extra investment in the housing has given the partnership the opportunity to create good quality, long-term employment opportunities for local residents,” said John Walmsley, Labour Manager for Casey.

The ethos of the drive for local employment has been to get people off benefits and into employment, which in turn generates additional money, most of which is spent in the local areas, further helping regeneration.

The partnering team have found that using local people to deliver local services has given people a greater sense of pride, created better relationships with residents, benefited from local knowledge and helped reduce travel times and carbon footprints.

“Underlying the use of local people and businesses is the need to deliver excellent customer service,” said Bryan Beaumont “The good news is that we’ve moved customer satisfaction up to 95%, so I’m confident we’re doing that. That’s not always easy with Decent Homes refurbishments because of the level of disruption necessary to complete the works.

The Partnership has focused on three key areas to help boost the local economy: employing people from the local area, using local suppliers and working with local subcontractors, which was extremely difficult due to the spread of the housing stock.

Building on the foundation of events like employment fairs and subcontractor forums to raise opportunities and create the opportunity for dialogue between itself and local people and businesses has paid great dividends.

To date, four out of five subcontractors and more than half of the suppliers used are based within the contracted areas. More than three-quarters of operatives live in the contact areas, with a target to move towards 100 per cent local employment in the future.



## What Were the Financial Costs and Benefits?

Great Places Housing Group is a founding member of the BLOC Framework, which comprises various Housing Associations, Contractors and Consultants working together in a partnering arrangement. In order to set up this programme of works Great Places undertook a process to select one of the partner Contractors from the framework.

This selection process involved a panel comprising Great Places personnel plus Consultant and Resident representatives. The process was based upon pricing of a typical schedule of work items plus a quality submission and the selection was made on a 70% Quality 30% price basis.

The object of this was not only to obtain competitive prices for the works but also to ensure that a quality service and end product was achieved.

The Casey Group were successful in submitting a competitive tender and an extremely high standard Quality submission and were selected as the Partner Contractor.

The BLOC framework also has a partner supply chain for all building materials and major components such as Boilers, Kitchen units, Sanitary ware's and plumbing and electrical materials. These suppliers have again gone through a rigorous selection process, which ensures that the materials are made available to the Contractor at the most competitive prices.

In order to ensure best value the cost element of the tender process was managed by the Partner Consultant Quantity Surveyors, Appleyard and Trew LLP, who are continuing to closely monitor and control expenditure throughout the works on site.

Regular reports are provided to Great Places giving detailed information on costs and cash flow for every element of the Works

Cost was not the prime driver for the delivery of this programme of works, but it is clear to see that substantial financial benefits have been, and will continue to be, provided whilst ensuring a high quality service and end product.

## An Example to Others

Great Places Housing Group, take great pride in being leaders in the Social Housing field. Lessons which other RSL's can learn from this project are many.

Perhaps, in relation to this particular contract, the most important lesson is how to manage a Decent Homes/Stock Condition project over a large geographical area rather than on a single estate.

By having a vision as to the Housing Association and Tenants requirements, which is clearly defined with all parties being kept informed along the way, can only be beneficial. As well as this, the procurement process which Great Places set up which put the emphasis on Quality rather than cost has helped to ensure that the project has kept within its budget whilst raising tenant satisfaction.

Key to a successful project is to ensure that residents needs are paramount in everyone's minds and that having tenant involvement throughout the process ensure satisfaction, and needs which may not seem important to an RSL, but are to the tenants, are addressed.

For further information on this contract please contact;

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