Summary

In Spring 2010 Riverside-ECHG (RECHG) launched an organisation-wide change programme and restructure focusing on meeting the emerging needs of clients, staff and service commissioners. Now successfully in place, Fit for the Future (F4F) is delivering enhanced services and employment opportunities to homeless clients through employment traineeships and social enterprise programmes.

It is also delivering significantly enhanced input into frontline services through the creation of a new scheme-based Team Leader management role. This is ensuring a focus on consistent high services and direct onsite management support for any client service issues. The new Team Leader roles are also giving our staff greater career progression opportunities, reducing the leap from frontline to management roles.

Importantly, the new structure is also delivering greater flexibility in the ways we can configure our services locally and as a result we have reduced our hourly rates locally and our overall costs by £1 million.
9,000 service users continued to be effectively supported throughout F4F implementation
Zero impact on overall numbers of posts for RECHG staff
Improvement across all performance areas despite change period
Half a dozen new social enterprises, providing client employment and local income
£1million cost savings.

What did you set out to achieve?

Need:
1. Customers: they need high quality support services, as well as access to employment and training in order to move on effectively. As a large-scale employer RECHG knew we could develop a structure that allowed access to existing job opportunities and created new ones. Performance-related payments based on outcomes are becoming a reality and therefore ensuring that our services deliver high standards, meet customers’ needs and give positive outcomes was a key driver for F4F.

2. Commissioners: financial and social drivers mean that commissioners’ needs are continually evolving. Our regional managers were feeding back that they needed to be able to offer more flexible staffing and service delivery options to maintain local contracts. There was therefore a clear need for a more flexible menu of services which could be delivered to a range of structures and costs.

3. Business sustainment: in the tough competitive climate RECHG needed to pool its business development and innovation functions. Without creating additional posts a new Business & Innovation Team has successfully brought together fifteen roles into a unified business support team.

Issues:
1. Securing funding for services: Needed to free up regional management to focus on working closer with commissioners to anticipate future service needs and future funding possibilities.

2. Service delivery standards: Needed to ensure strong management support to frontline teams so that quality and service delivery could be further improved.

3. Staff training, development & retention: Need for greater career progression opportunities via a broader menu of staff roles.

Objectives:
1. Ensuring enhanced customer satisfaction and outcomes

2. Directing resources to frontline service-delivery
3. Flexibility to respond to our customers and commissioners

4. Improving value for money and therefore financial viability

5. Creating achievable career pathways for all staff

6. Focus additional resources in business development, strategy, innovation & quality.

How were these aims and objectives met?

- Putting internal resources in place: the start of the F4F process in autumn 2009 was supported by the advance appointment of an internal manager to provide project lead support. The Project Manager’s role in gathering information and feedback ensured the correct range of evidence to support the F4F proposals to the Board.

- Piloting F4F: during autumn 2009 the F4F service delivery structure model was trialed in three key local authority areas. The positive feedback was subsequently included as part of ensuing consultation information with other commissioners, staff and service users.

- Commissioner consultation – ironing out concerns: following the pilots, senior RECHG managers met with key local and national commissioners to brief them, identify queries and gauge their feedback. The overwhelmingly positive response reflected the validity of the evidence compiled from RECHG frontline experience of local service needs.

- Coordinated communications to staff: Identifying the importance of coordinated and timely staff communications RECHG launched a communications cascade programme in May 2010. This started with simultaneous managers briefings, followed within a week by managers holding their own local team briefings on F4F. All information briefings & FAQs were then posted onto a new dedicated F4F intranet site.

- Customer consultation – keeping them in the loop: written and face to face communications with clients took place during May 2010. The messages they carried around F4F’s ability to deliver enhanced customer service meant that client concerns were minimal and addressed early in the process and subsequently clients gave a positive reception to the proposals at our national Tenants Conference in October 2010.

- Bedding F4F in: at the beginning of 2011 a series of nationwide roadshows involving presentations from a diverse range of RECHG staff including the Managing Director and frontline staff were delivered across the entire Riverside Group to bed in the programme and promote its new structure and benefits.
What challenges did the project face, and what lessons were learned?

Challenges faced:
1. Ensuring workability of new service-delivery model – was dealt with by initially piloting the structure in key local authority areas (Manchester, Hull, Cambridge) driven sometimes by commissioners' imminent need for funding changes, and gauging feedback from them.

2. Paving the way for nationwide rollout of F4F – successful pilots where followed by stress-testing the F4F model in each of RECHG’s ten regional cluster areas, with RECHG’s two North & South lead Directors working with their ten Regional Managers to formulate viable restructures.

3. Encouraging workforce commitment to restructure – an advance communications plan was formulated and in the six months before F4F was launched RECHG prioritised regular Director communications which pump-primed staff by focusing key messages on the tough financial and tendering climate and the need for RSLs to adapt. As initial pilot successes were secured, the Director communications flagged these using them as examples of the benefits of flexibility in regional service delivery structures.

Lessons learnt:
1. Stress-testing new models is vital – it provides ultimate evidence of efficacy of proposals, and provides first-hand evidence from the staff, clients and commissioners involved in the local test areas, that can be used nationally to show the model works!

2. Rapidly changes environments require flexible working - RECHG didn’t wait for final implementation of F4F to tender under this new structure - for example securing £1million of new business using the F4F structure in Buckinghamshire in summer 2010.

3. Valuing & Developing staff – times of organisational change demand additional support for staff. A core element of F4F has been the introduction of the nationally-recognised GOALS UK motivational and personal development programme for all RECHG staff. From the very beginning, the message to staff about F4F was clear – “we need you to help us develop and in return we will help you develop”.

How was the success of the project measured?

Clients accessing employment and training:
- A dozen employment traineeships for homeless people have already been prioritised. Based within RECHG supported housing schemes around the country, these new roles have come about as a direct result
of the introduction in the new F4F structure of the entry-level Project Assistant role. Each client’s traineeship places them in a Project Assistant role for 10 months, with lifecoach support.

- Two new social enterprises in Teeside (community café) and Yorkshire (garden landscaping) have already been developed and are now providing training and employment opportunities to homeless clients. Four additional social enterprises (cafes, bakery) will be operational by autumn. All result from the formation of a social enterprise programme as part of the establishment of RECHG’s Business & Innovation Team.

Corporate performance:
Improved across all ten monitoring areas including:

- Staff attendance
- Rent arrears
- 93% QAF ratings at B or above (from 86% in 2010).

Commissioners:
Feedback from commissioners was overwhelmingly positive:

- No concerns raised that RECHG was not able to address to commissioners’ satisfaction
- New business secured, with direct commissioner feedback that wins were because of flexible new structure.
- New funding streams opened up in partnership with commissioners – Department for Education funding secured in partnership with Derby City Council for young careleavers; Health funding from PCT in Middlesbrough.

Business is growing
In the last year we have had:

- 4% increase in contract numbers
- 7% increase in contract value

Successfully managing a worst case scenario
At the beginning of 2011 RECHG faced a worst case funding scenario. Hull City Council cut 50% of its Supporting People funding and notice was given to RECHG and all other support providers of contract terminations.

In Hull RECHG has been able to offer a flexible reconfiguration of support that has maintained our work in the city. These include a move to staff support targeted at individuals rather than at schemes, as well as a reconfiguration of staff to the provision of support to young people, which remains a priority funding area in Hull.

RECHG’s ability to work with Hull council to find innovative ways to continuing support means that homeless clients have lost out much less than they would
have; that Hull is being actively supported to address it homelessness issues; and that RECHG’s presence as a provider in Hull remains strong despite the current funding circumstances.

What were the key positive outcomes?

Many of the elements that ensured the effective delivery of Fit for the Future are highly replicable:

- A structure fit for purpose: funding for the creation of new frontline Project Assistant roles has been delivered through savings from merging together disparate localised housing management functions and by streamlining a tier of locally-based middle management - replacing them with fewer but more focused Area Managers, or scheme-based Team Leaders at a lower grade.

- Valuing frontline feedback: listening to our frontline managers was key to identifying the need for a substantial increase in the flexibility of local teams to deliver services.

- Knowledge-pooling for better results: F4F brought together various business development functions, spread around the country, into a focused Business & Innovation team. These included quality & performance; business development; marketing and tenant communications. This team is made up of existing roles, but through monthly meetings and co-ordinated business plans, is now enabling a strong and enhanced focus on service and business development.

- Senior management experience: using the experience and enthusiasm of senior managers and the stability their leadership provided through a period of rapid change ensured that the F4F process maintained credibility and remained on track.

- Additional project lead support: as experience and knowledge of the organisation is key an important component is the secondment of an internal manager to Project Lead – this is achievable to most organisations.

- Costs: most organisations with Supporting People funding will be reviewing their costs and staffing and these processes will incur the usual consultation and redundancy costs. However, because of the use of entirely internal resources for things such as Project Management, HR and Marketing – and no additional expensive branding done – the cost impact of implementing the Fit for the Future restructure was virtually neutral.
How can you demonstrate that services are more efficient?

Reduced costs
- Running costs reduced by £1 million as a result of F4F
- Salary costs reduced by over £4 million which has enabled RECHG to continue to offer services locally despite absorbing substantial Supporting People funding cuts in most areas
- Dedicated Income Management teams delivering greater focus on tackling rent arrears.

Improved performance & outcomes for clients
- In QAF ratings, from 85% at grade B or above in 2010 to 93% at B or above in 2011
- Staff attendance 1% improvement (at a time of severe structure change!)
- Rent arrears 2% improvement from 2010 to 2011.

Management – streamlined with new career pathways
- Middle and senior management streamlined - from 110 to 39 regional managers and 3 to 2 national Hub Directors.
- New first-time manager role of Team Leader has increased management of services at the frontline and is maximising internal progression opportunities for frontline staff interested in management.
- Consequently, frontline support staff better able to focus on doing what they do best which is supporting clients.

A flexible menu
Riverside ECHG can now say with confidence that we have a flexible menu of service delivery options for our commissioners. Regardless of whether they are moving more towards non-accommodation based floating support, or to young people, or to any other local priority service area – our structure can accommodate this.

New income sources
The development of social enterprises is already bringing in revenue from RECHG’s first community café – with initial income of around £400 per week. Additionally, a new employment partnership with the Royal British Legion is providing funding towards the first year’s costs if employers employ a disabled Veteran, recognising RECHG’s unique national role in providing specialist support for ex-Servicemen through our network of advice line and temporary housing schemes.

Have you achieved positive outcomes for residents, as well as efficiency savings for the organisation?

For Riverside ECHG a key driver to deliver Fit for the Future was to add extra value to our services to our 9,000 clients – in terms of training, employment and partnerships.
Creating employment & training opportunities

- RECHG’s new GROW (Giving Real Opportunities for Work) programme has been enabled by the creation of the new frontline Project Assistant roles as part of F4F, with homeless trainees taking up basic ‘entry-level’ administrative roles as a first step into employment.
- Six new social enterprises, with two already online are now providing training, qualifications and employment opportunities in catering and garden landscaping – with bakery skills and others coming on line later this year.
- In addition, by adopting the GOALS UK motivational and skills development programme for our staff, RECHG is also making this pioneering personal development programme accessible to our GROW trainees.

Developing staff-client partnerships

Increasingly our clients are now working in partnership with staff, not just in a support function, but in partnership to find ways of developing services and funding for their schemes and local communities:

- running community open days at their schemes to develop links to support, training and employment agencies
- taking part in external fundraising initiatives to raise funds for additional activities such as Digital Inclusion.

How does your project help address either a current challenge, faced by many providers, or meet a current priority in your part of the UK?

The impacts of the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review are now being felt across all local authorities and support providers are facing an immense set of funding challenges. Rising unemployment levels are making it increasingly difficult for those who have previously struggled in the jobs market to obtain any chance of employment. In addition, education funding restrictions are impacting on the availability of vital training courses.

“Riverside ECHG provides housing and support to over 9,000 vulnerable men and women in more than 140 local authorities around the country. Nationally, we recognise the difficult operating environment and cuts faced by service providers like ourselves. However, every single one of us - from our senior managers to our frontline teams - are committed to achieving the best outcomes for our service users – both in sustaining service provision and by seeking out new and innovative ways of ensuring our clients can access training and development. Fit for the Future has been a key tool in helping us achieve this.” Derek Caren, Managing Director, Riverside ECHG, March 2011

However, challenging times also present opportunities. With the increasing prevalence of person-based budgets via the national personalisation agenda there is a strong need for service providers to ensure that they are working in partnership with their customers to achieve the outcomes both want - Fit for
the Future has enabled RECHG to do this.

Additionally, the piloting of performance-related Supporting People payments and the short-term purchasing of support services has opened opportunities for the introduction of much more flexible service delivery models and arrangements with commissioners - Fit for the Future has enabled us to do this also.

Is your project influencing the way other providers work, will it help deliver improvements beyond those immediately involved?

While it is difficult to directly assess whether a national corporate change programme, such as Fit for the Future, is influencing the way other providers work, we believe that as a proven deliverer of successful change there is much that other providers could find useful in what we have achieved.

Locally, regionally and nationally our managers have been asked by other service providers and national agencies to talk about how Fit for the Future was delivered and the challenges we faced.

Nationally, we have had meetings with a number of other social landlords to share information and our experiences. Fit for the Future project leads are now working with other providers to instigate similar change processes. Our Chairman of the Board will be talking about Fit for the Future and other challenges Riverside has faced at the National Housing Federation’s national conference.

Locally, our frontline teams are at the heart of developing more flexible agreements between service providers to benefit customers and maintain services – such as in Wakefield developing direct access policies; in Westminster and Lambeth developing drug action protocols; and in Derby developing joint agency support for young women at risk of abuse.

Over the last year Fit for the Future has enabled Riverside ECHG to absorb a significant weight of funding cuts, but because of our new flexible structure and its cost savings we have been able to continue to provide most services.

Finally, we hope that in outlining in this submission the nuts and bolts of why we did what we did, and how we did it, this will provide an important opportunity for RECHG and all of our frontline teams who have achieved so much over the last year, to play a role in ensuring continued service improvements in the provision of support to vulnerable homeless people.