

Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Chorley Community Housing

Tuesday, 5 August 2008

Present: Councillor Mike Devaney (Chair) and Councillors Alistair Bradley, Harold Heaton, Kevin Joyce, Roy Lees, Marion Lowe, June Molyneaux, Rosie Russell and Stella Walsh

Also in attendance: Councillors Julia Berry and Pat Haughton

Chorley Council officers: Lesley-Ann Fenton (Assistant Chief Executive (Policy and Performance)) and Ruth Hawes (Assistant Democratic Services Officer)

Chorley Community Housing officers: Paul Lees (Group Chief Executive), Annabelle Robinson (Group Housing Management Director) and Morna Maines (Project Manager)

08.16 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were submitted.

08.17 DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS

No Members declared any interests in respect of items on the agenda.

08.18 MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Task Group – Chorley Community Housing held on 9 July 2008 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

08.19 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No members of the public requested to speak at the meeting.

08.20 INFORMATION ON THE CONTRACT WITH CHORLEY COMMUNITY HOUSING, THE FORMAL CONSULTATION ON THE TRANSFER OF COUNCIL HOMES AND STOCK TRANSFER MONITORING REPORT

Members noted the documents enclosed with the agenda:

a, inquiry scoping document,

b, briefing note from the Assistant Chief Executive (Business Transformation) Chorley Community Housing contract and promises to tenants,

c, Delivery of promises to tenants one year on from stock transfer (26th April 2008).

RESOLVED – That the information be accepted.

08.21 INFORMATION RECEIVED FROM CHORLEY COMMUNITY HOUSING

The Chair introduced Paul Lees, Annabelle Robinson and Morna Maines from Adactus to the meeting and thanked them for the information received so far.

It was considered that several of the concerns listed as questions had been adequately answered within the information CCH had supplied.

Reorganisation

Paul outlined the recent reorganisation of CCH which made the organisational structure more like the Adactus model, with a reduction in the management tier and increased staffing on the service delivery front. It was noted that communication had previously been an issue for customers both with CCH and contractors used. Assurances were given that this issue was being addressed and if there were any specific cases Members could contact Morna.

Performance

In response to a queries it was clarified that the performance statistics reported as year 0 were for 2007 2008 and the year was mainly fact finding. Surveys were completed, the contractor was appointed and consultation was underway. The figures within the report were work achieved and based on the first quarter of 2008 2009 (year 2).

Partial renovations

Members received assurances that CCH was anxious to consider alternative accommodation needs when properties were being renovated and acknowledged past shortcomings had been addressed. The importance of recording renovations, including where tenants requested that certain work should not be done was accepted and recorded. It was also established that there had been little feedback from tenants and it was therefore assumed that the work done was satisfactory. However, some concerns were expressed by Councillors. Officers from CCH were also concerned that any dissatisfaction was passed to them for investigation.

A particular issue was the state of the central heating systems, including boilers over 10 years old and the compatibility between the actual heating installation and the central heating unit. CCH stated they were aware of the problem and were working as quickly as possible to upgrade older heating systems. This work was being undertaken in a well programmed manner, but this was being made more difficult by having to react to older boiler breakdowns.

It was clarified that if tenants do not take up the offer of a new kitchen or bathroom (for example as they have just redecorated) and the work being offered is being done to all properties the money not spent on a particular property will be ring fenced to keep the money in the renovations account. Accurate records are kept about work done to each property for the decent homes standard.

The appointment system for maintenance was still in place. CCH have their own maintenance workforce and felt this was important as experience showed a better quality of work than contractors. Despite a restructure, the maintenance staff were very positive and it was promised that a marked improvement in performance would be seen over next few months.

Some partial renovation has been done in all areas of the Borough, though going forward the focus will be area by area. It was acknowledged that if there are houses requiring work to bring them up to standard, but not in the programme of work for this year, these would be reviewed on a case by case basis. A project manager monitors the performance of the contractor and quarterly key performance indicator reports will now be presented to the CCH board for monitoring purposes.

Total refurbishment

It was confirmed that the three houses requiring total refurbishment in Charnock Richard would be subject to a survey soon although the project was not in the budget for this year. It was confirmed that it was not in the long term plan to sell them, although shared ownership could be considered after refurbishment.

Residents' car parking spaces

One of the areas highlighted by the survey carried out by CCH is a lack of residents car parking spaces. The resolution of the issue would solve a number of related problems as tenants would be likely to take ownership of the parking area, leading to a reduction of litter. 168 car parking spaces had been identified through providing hard standing areas for residents. It was recognised that car parking issues would never be resolved to satisfy everyone.

Residents associations

Members were surprised that there are only three formal residents associations. CCH do give assistance when requested, including attending meetings, finding venues for meetings, setting up constitutions etc. Residents could invite the ward councillor if they wished. Councillor Walsh advised that a residents association was in the process of being set up in Longfield, Coppull.

Affordable housing

It was reported that 38 houses currently on site to date and that the target of 40 would be achieved, with the probability of 2 or 3 more. CCH were committed to providing affordable housing and it was acknowledged that Adactus are an experienced builder. There was potential to acquire land to build more easily in the current financial climate. Adactus are also in discussions with the Council regarding any suitable land.

Antisocial behaviour

Concerns were expressed about anti-social behaviour and clarity was sought in the difference in criteria applied to new tenants (up to 12 months) and tenants of longer than 12 months. After this point tenants have assured tenancy and therefore more rights. Assurances were given that it was the policy of CCH not to tolerate anti-social behaviour and that a dedicated team was in place to combat this. There were currently around 90 cases, ranging from garden disputes to drugs issues.

Lesley-Ann queried whether CCH felt they were receiving sufficient backup from other agencies, in particular Lancashire County Council, and it was agreed that she would have further discussion with Annabelle to see if any further improvements could be made. Discussions would also consider how partnership working could be improved over issues like anti social behaviour and residents car parking.

After the question and answer session, Paul Lees explained the current policy of the reorganised CCH and how this would improve their service to tenants and make them more accessible to tenants. Members were assured that a marked improvement would be seen in the next few months and years. CCH will be based in Chorley for the next five years at least.

Paul explained that talks were in progress to increase the number of properties within the remit of CCH to make the organisation more of an equal partner in the Adactus group. This would increase resources in areas such as anti social behaviour, maintenance team etc. Services such as human resources would be provided elsewhere in the Adactus group to allow CCH to focus on delivering the service to the customer.

The Chair, on behalf of the Task Group, thanked the officers for the honest and open discussion.

08.22 COLLECTION AND CONSIDERATION OF EVIDENCE FROM MEMBERS AND THEIR CONSTITUENTS

Members noted the positive response to queries by the CCH representatives.

Councillors Walsh and Lees outlined issues raised with them in relation to anti social behaviour. Contact had been made with CCH and the problems were in the process of being resolved.

Members discussed the importance of partnership working on issues such as anti social behaviour, car parking, speeding motorists and litter.

It was queried how long the Council would receive a percentage of the funds made from the sale of houses. This would be reported to a future meeting.

Members AGREED to continue to gather evidence from their constituents to be reported back at the next meeting.

08.23 THE WAY FORWARD

Members requested the following for the next meeting of the task group:

- Representatives from the three residents associations be invited to receive feedback on their experiences.
- An up to date contacts list from CCH.

08.24 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- Thursday 11 September 2008
- Tuesday 7 October 2008

Chair