

Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Select Move

Tuesday, 22 October 2013

Present: Councillor Graham Dunn (Chair), Councillor Hasina Khan (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Alison Hansford, Paul Leadbetter and Paul Walmsley

Also in attendance

Councillors: Councillors Steve Holgate (Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee)

Officers: Lesley-Ann Fenton (Director of Partnership, Planning and Policy), Zoe Whiteside (Head of Housing) and Dianne Scambler (Democratic and Member Services Officer)

13.SM.11 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

13.SM.12 MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Task group – Select Move meeting held on 19 September 2013 be held as a correct record.

13.SM.13 DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS

There were no declarations of any interests.

13.SM.14 STOCK PROFILES

The Group were provided with information for each of the main Registered Providers that had housing stock in the Chorley area. Details were given on the management structures and housing stock profiles:

- Adactus Housing Group (that includes Chorley Community Housing)
- Places for People Group Limited
- Accent
- Progress Housing Group Limited
- Symphony Housing Group
- Anchor

Members asked if the Right to buy (RTB) process was impacting on reducing housing stock in Chorley as there was a feeling that this scheme was becoming more popular. Officers commented that they were aware of only a handful of properties per annum sold by Chorley Community Housing under the scheme but would investigate this further with other providers.

The Council had recently been approached by Places for People to obtain support for the disposal of their housing stock in Astley Village and Clayton. This support from the Council had not been given.

A number of affordable housing developments had been built with 183 last year and 170 the year before. The Council were well on target to reach their 100 target for this year. Unlike previous initiatives such as Home Buy and First Buy, the new Government scheme, Help to Buy could not be classed as affordable housing, so the authority was expecting a dip in future performance. It was also explained that CIL money was only available for infrastructure contained on the 123 list and could not be used to build affordable housing developments.

Although many of the Registered Providers had charitable status, they also had quite complex management structures and were structured more around being financially viable and profit driven. A recent consultation exercise on Providing Local Housing for

Local People: Strengthening Statutory Guidance on Social Housing Allocations had been published which provides the Council with an opportunity to raise concerns they may have on the approach taken by some Registered Providers to allocating properties. It was AGREED for this response to be circulated by the Group before submission by 22 November 2013.

The Group discussed the possibility of inviting a representative of the Homes and Communities Agency to a future meeting of the Group as there was a feeling that their regulatory powers had been significantly reduced since this responsibility transferred to them from the now defunct Tenant Services Authority. It was AGREED that a decision on their invitation would be made at a future meeting.

13.SM.15 CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY

At a previous meeting the Group had agreed to conduct a customer survey to obtain feedback on the processes relating to the Select Move lettings scheme. The Group received information that would help them decide the best way to achieve its intended purpose.

Members were informed that email addresses were unavailable for the majority of applicants and that a general online survey on Select Move may present problems like biasing the sample and the likelihood of a lower return rate. Those applicants that had been rehoused recently were also unlikely to be accessing the Select Move site and this was a cohort of people that the Group wished to hear from. It was therefore considered that the best feasible way of conducting a robust and ample survey was to conduct a postal survey; this method was also the best way of ensuring that everyone was contacted.

To fit in with the Task Group timetable the survey would need to be posted out the week commencing 18 November with a four week deadline being given of Friday 20 December 2013 to allow for the results to be analysed and presented.

There are currently 1,442 'active' Chorley households on Select Move and 348 applicants that had been housed within the last six months. It was considered that the more surveys that are sent out would yield a better percentage return, so the Members AGREED to the postal survey being sent out to 1790 households in Chorley, provided that funding could be secured.

Members discussed the possibility of using a £50 prize as a way of obtaining a greater response to the survey and felt that this would not necessarily ensure that the right information was fed back. It was thought that the key to getting people to complete the survey was how it was presented to the customer and that any covering letter should be signed off by the Chair, Councillor Graham Dunn.

The Members then discussed the content of the survey and proposed questions they thought needed to be included. It was AGREED that the officers would draft the survey content in line with the Groups views; this would then be circulated to all the Elected Members of the Council for their input, with the Chair and Vice Chair agreeing the final version.

The Group also considered the possibility of holding a Focus Group meeting in order to speak directly to applicants and felt that Ward representatives and Housing Officers would be able to highlight potential participants. However Members decided to wait for the completion of the survey as the results may steer the Group to looking at a particular aspect of Select Move/housing allocation..

13.SM.16 REGISTERED PROVIDERS CONSULTATION

Members were updated on the arrangements for the next meeting of the Group. A number of Registered Providers had been invited and the proposed timetable was as follows:

- 6.00pm – Accent/Contour Homes/ Progress Housing Group Limited
- 6.30pm – Chorley Community Housing
- 7.00pm – Places for People Limited

A number of representatives had already confirmed their availability to attend and those that couldn't have agreed to supply a written response.

Officers explained that although Community Gateway was responsible for the Select Move system, their involvement on the process had only been the initial setting up of the system and training for the Registered Providers. Now that this had been completed it was the full Partnership that was responsible for the management of the site including the uploading of the information.

There was however an upgrade of the system expected shortly that would have a better look and feel, similar to that of the Right Move system that was currently available on the private market, with a smart phone app also available to download. It was generally felt that this improvement would greatly improve the customer experience.

Chair