



**MINUTES OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TASK GROUP - QUALITY OF HOUSING PROVIDED BY SOCIAL LANDLORDS**

**MEETING DATE** Monday, 29 January 2018

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Councillor Jane Fitzsimons (Chair), Councillors Charlie Bromilow, Tom Gray, Margaret Lees, Matthew Lynch, June Molyneaux, Alistair Morwood, Steve Murfitt and Kim Snape

**OFFICERS:** Fiona Hepburn (Housing Options and Support Manager) and Ruth Rimmington (Democratic and Member Services Team Leader)

**APOLOGIES:** Councillor Mick Muncaster

**17.OS.1 Declarations of Any Interests**

Councillors Charlie Bromilow, Matthew Lynch and Steve Murfitt declared a non-pecuniary interest in all items on the agenda.

**17.OS.2 Background information**

Fiona Hepburn, Housing Options and Support Manager, will give a short presentation to give Members some background information and context.

Chorley Community Housing and Places for People are the two largest landlords managing the majority of social housing in borough.

The Council interacts regularly with the Registered Providers (RPs) in terms of securing new properties via the Select Move Choice based lettings scheme, Community Safety Partnership working, Planning and Community Engagement.

The Homes and Communities Agency, relaunched as Homes England, are the regulators of RPs. Their objective as social housing regulators is to work alongside RPs performing their functions in a way that minimises interference.

RPs are regulated to make sure that they're well managed and financially secure, to maintain confidence, protecting homes for tenants, however the council have limited information in terms of how this is enforced by Homes England or what powers, if any, they have when issues are reported.

There have been a number of changes introduced nationally which the RPs claim are impacting on their business models. In particular, the Welfare Reform changes which have been introduced over a number of years. RPs have seen an impact on the

pattern of demand for properties and revenue streams seeing a reduction of 1% each year for four years which commences April 2016.

Members considered the Decent Homes Standards. In 2000 the Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions published its Housing Green Paper, Quality and Choice: A Decent Home for All. It requested a step change in the quality of the stock and the performance of social landlords with a committed to ensuring that all social housing is of a decent standard within 10 years.

The Decent Homes Standard was a technical standard introduced by government which underpinned the Decent Homes Programme which aimed to provide a minimum standard of housing conditions for all those who are housed in the public sector. The standard evolved and the criteria against which 'decency' is measured were set early in the programme and changed in 2006 by the introduction of the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) under the Housing Act 2004.

Absence of Category 1 hazards under the HHSRS became the test of criterion, replacing the previous statutory 'fitness' standard. The then government were of the opinion that the tough new statutory assessment of housing standards raised the bar to drive further housing improvements which also led to an increased number of homes that could be considered to contain hazards. This replaced any tangible standards measures which were seen in the decent homes standards.

For purpose of background information and understanding the decent homes standards guidance which provided a framework for RPs to assess standards within their stock, were:-

- The property should meet the HHSRS
- To be in a reasonable state of repair
- To have reasonably modern facilities and services
- To have efficient heating and effective insulation

Some examples of how properties can be deemed not a decent standard by an RP.

- Hazards in your home such as persistent damp or a heating or electrical system that is in poor condition. (This is based risk and the can undertake enforcement)
- Bathroom has not been improved in the last 30 years
- Kitchen has an inadequate layout or not enough space
- it isn't warm because of an inefficient heating system or ineffective insulation

Members discussed the Select Move choice based lettings system and noted that the system has operated in Chorley from March 2011. It includes RPs from Chorley, namely, Accent, CCH, New Progress, Contour, and PfP. The scheme operates a single waiting list and advertising and letting of at least 75% of their void housing stock on the system. One of the main priorities for the Council over a number of years has been to ensure a significant proportion of social housing continues to be available and is accessed for those applicants in housing need with a local connection to Chorley. The relationship with the RPs is through the Select Move Steering Group governed by a memorandum of understanding which has been instrumental in maintaining a decent level of percentages of properties to continue to be advertised to those in need.

Although the Council work regularly with RPs in regard to allocations and community involvement, it has limited knowledge of the full extent of the standards within Chorley, good or bad. This is due to level of involvement from the Council when new tenants

are signed up. The Councils Housing Options Team's priorities have been to secure properties for people in need with a local connection, so view allocations as a success and do very little follow up on move in, which is mainly due to resources.

The Council will be involved with property standards or take action if a property is deemed to have risk that contravenes the HHSRS. This can be frustrating for tenants as issues that are brought to the attention of the housing team can be on cleanliness and décor, so no real access to challenge.

In 2017 Regulatory Services (RS) received 23 housing standards complaints relating to RP properties (2 are about the same issue affecting adjoining properties). 10 properties were visited, the others were dealt with by contacting the tenant and the RP (usually this is where the tenant is not satisfied with the timescale for repairs provided), and RS will confirm the repairs are on schedule and close the case.

In January 18, RS served notice on CCH regarding pests at 2 properties. They had 13 complaints in 2016 and 7 in 2015 logged on council systems, however this will not include any call backs that were dealt with straight away and not inputted on IT systems. RS figures give a very limited view of standards as the threshold is high to trigger a case and it does not reflect complaints or enquires made direct to the RP.

Members discussed community investment and involvement. In 2016, PfP supported the council with key priorities in their community action plan for proposed investment for the Clayton Brook area. Their planned improvement works was woven in with the Council's plans.

CCH have worked in partnership with the Council on a number of community project, in particular a successful project for employability where they provides funding for training and support for their existing tenants.

Members noted the numbers of RPs who operate within Chorley and the numbers of housing units owned and the New Home Reret Standard for Chorley Community Housing and Places for People.

Members noted that Shelter is undertaking a piece of work regarding housing standards.

**Decision: that the information be noted.**

### **17.OS.3 Scoping of the review**

Members considered the scoping document and discussed each of the requirements in turn.

Members suggested several potential future topics:

- protecting and supporting vulnerable people,
- impact of welfare reform,

Members were keen to consider RP's investment in their portfolios versus improvements to existing properties and their policies on properties that have been adapted. The use of the service charge and the need to excellent customer service and communication with residents was highlighted.

**Decision: that the draft scoping document be circulated to Members for comment.**

**17.OS.4 Date of next meeting**

Thursday, 22 February at 6.30pm.

Chair

Date