

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

MEETING DATE Wednesday, 23 May 2018

MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillor Matthew Lynch (Chair), and Councillors Margaret Lees, 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)

OTHER MEMBERS: Jayne Hurley (Places for People)

18.10 Minutes of meeting Tuesday, 20 March 2018 of Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Quality of housing provided by social landlords

Members noted Councillor Lynch as the new Chair of the Task Group.

Decision: That the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Quality of housing provided by social landlords held on 20 March 2018 be approved as a correct record.

18.11 Declarations of Any Interests

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

18.12 Discussion with Jayne Hurley, Operations Manager - West, Places for People

The Chair welcomed Jane Hurley, Operations Manager - West, Places for People (PfP) to the meeting and asked attendees to introduce themselves.

Jane advised that PfP is a diverse mix of companies. She works for the Property Management Company, within the Homes section and Place team. Other aspects of the team include lettings and marketing, income recovery, scheme for over 55's and the enforcement team. There are three regions and West covers Chorley.

PfP aims to deliver services according to signed agreements with customers. Neighbourhood inspections are undertaken about every 6 week based on a risk assessment. The inspection looks at all aspects and will plan for any actions required.

Property conditions should be in line with tenancy agreements. Where there are communal areas PfP will do inspections. The repairs and landscape team are monitored by the Place team.

The vision for PfP is to deliver affordable homes and value for money services. The Place vision is “to create sustainable places where people want to live”. The Place business plan aims to deliver efficient, value for money and sustainable services and work with customers to improve services.

As a housing provider PfP keep abreast of Government changes and national priorities regarding affordable housing.

Customer Service

Councillors queried how PfP processes match against other providers? There is a customer service centre to receive an initial point of contact by phone. There is also an online portal for existing customers. There has been feedback relating to delays to be answered at the contact centre, but this depends on the time of the call. There is a dedicated complaints team and policy, for example, a repair or antisocial behaviour. If a complaint needs to be escalated it will be - there is a dedicated place manager for Chorley. **Members requested a copy of the complaints procedure.**

Housing is referred to as affordable, rather than social. PfP maintain a sustainable lettings policy.

Councillors asked for information about the percentage of complaints. A lot of complaints relate to repairs, but this can be down to the expectation of the customer. Some relate to cases of antisocial behaviour. There is an expression of dissatisfaction, which is the stage before a complaint. Feedback is part of the review process for staff, for example, staff attitude, training, lessons learnt and these are shared through the company.

PfP no longer have customers on stage 2 of the complaints procedure - now there is a senior manager from another area. This was a business decision and the new process is quicker, only 20 days. **Members requested the percentage of complaints upheld, including customers on stage 2 complaints and satisfaction levels.**

Property maintenance and standards

Members queried the overall condition of properties, standards of repair and how PfP engage regarding customer satisfaction. The team carries out repairs and team meet on a regular basis to address local issues. If a customer is not happy complaints are referred to Jane at a quarterly meeting.

PfP review satisfaction and gaps in service provision. There is a repair standard in line with the lettings agreement. PfP will carry out a repair where there is an obligation. This can be an area for complaints. If a customer is not satisfied with the quality of a repair a trade supervisor will review it. The process is to acknowledge a complaint in 2 days, contact with a response in 5 days, and if the customer is still not happy they can make a formal complaint.

PfP inspect the fabric of building as part of the investment strategy. The inspection takes into account when the property was built, if any repairs are required to the

outside, including the thermal efficiency and then moves on to the internals. PfP own a range of properties.

There is a specialist team for planned investment, when inspections are undertaken this is a priority system which influences the investment scheme. There is also have funding bid, e.g. for kerb appeal and a pledge fund which certain managers administer. **Members requested information on the process for kerb appeal funding.**

A kitchen could be expected to last up to 30 years, but if it is failing it will be replaced, e.g. if a cupboard can't be fixed back on the wall. This includes work tops. A bathroom could be expected up to 30 years, although this will depend on how it has been looked after. PfP do try to replace things before they get to the point of failing.

Members noted the potential for complaints where there is a difference of opinion and noted that repairs should be sustainable, for example a replacement cupboard door which doesn't match. This might be a short term measure and the customer should be made aware of the long term plan in cases such as these. These issues can be resolved.

Members queried the process for emergency repairs in relation to a central heating boiler and if there is there a set target for a full repair. Customers would be given up to two heaters. An example was given where a family with a baby went five days without heating. Jane explained that the priority would be to make the boiler safe or do a temporary fix. PfP would then work with the customer to address longer term issues as soon as possible. There may be a need to order parts and PfP are tied in to specific providers.

Neighbourhood issues

Each service charge is specific to a scheme. This can depend on landscape improvements, fire safety, lighting, heating and an administrative service charge.

Members queried why some privately owned properties on Clayton Brook pay more than rental properties. Jane explained that some charges are specific to home owners. Jane agreed to meet Members on site to view the different types of properties.

Members queried how the restructure has affected how the service charges. Staff are out and about at schemes more now and pick up on any issues. Effectively site services have been merged, with internal operatives and external (grass cutting and litter picking).

RMG management in Buckshaw was discussed. For £150 RMG provide a community centre, play areas and landscaping, compared with a service charge of £350. Jane noted service charges are an emotive subject and that cost is a factor for people in affordable housing. **She undertook to look into this and report back.**

Health and Safety checks and inspections are undertaken, including weekly fire alarm testing and inspections.

In relation to antisocial behaviour PfP are reliant on customers reporting any issues. There is a dedicated tenant enforcement team for each area. There is a partnership approach to this, although this is dependent on the issue. In the case of a neighbour

dispute initial steps would be to facilitate a discussion between parties and mediation, escalating to the use of noise equipment. Cases have resulted in court action.

When a customer takes on a property there is an accompanied viewing. The customer signs to say the property is at an acceptable standard. If any minor repairs are required these would be recorded and actioned. There have been cases where PfP haven't got it right, but they do put it right.

If a number of properties are being refurbished PfP would start externally, for example the roof. It might be two years before the kitchen is replaced.

Jane undertook to send a copy of the planned work in Chorley for information.

Engagement and Communication

Members queried what power customers have to input into decision making. Jane noted that customer engagement has changed following a business decision to use an online portal.

There is a section on "Tell us how we can improve" which is monitored. Complaints are reviewed through general enquiries, surveys and random telephone surveys. If 5/10 was scored this would be followed up.

Members noted that not all people go online. Jane advised that customers can use the telephone. PfP have a digital inclusion strategy and are investigating an over 55's cyber café.

The team manager engages with council officers and there is a process for Councillors to contact PfP. PfP support the Youth zone.

Members noted the need for better communication with customers – Jane undertook to review this. Previously there were focus groups, but some customers are feeling lost. Jane explained PfP had to review how these groups added value.

The Chair thanked Jane for her attendance.

Councillor Margaret Lees left at 7.30pm.

The Chair noted that the Group are due to interview Richard Houghton from Jigsaw Homes next. Following this the tenant survey and Member survey results will be considered.

Chair

Date