

Report of	Meeting	Date
Director of Early Intervention and Support	Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group	29 January 2018

QUALITY OF HOUSING PROVIDED BY SOCIAL LANDLORDS

PURPOSE OF REPORT

- To provide the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group with background information in regard to standards within the social sector including processes and working relationships.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

- To review the points to consider detailed within the report in order to undertake an overview and scrutiny of social sector property standards.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT

- This report provides background information in regard to regulations, standards and working relationship in place for Chorley's Registered Providers.

Confidential report Please bold as appropriate	Yes	No
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CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- This report relates to the following Strategic Objectives:

Involving residents in improving their local area and equality of access for all	X	A strong local economy	
Clean, safe and healthy homes and communities		An ambitious council that does more to meet the needs of residents and the local area	

BACKGROUND

5. Social Housing in Chorley

There are approximately 16 independent Registered Housing Providers (RPs) providing social housing in Chorley with an estimated 7000 properties within the borough with a regular turnover equating to approximately 420 properties in 2016 and 450 in 2017, this figure does not include RP management transfers, so the figure could be higher.

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 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.

6. 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 were 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, it is worth understanding the decent homes standards guidance which provided a framework for RPs to assess standards within their stock, which 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

7. Voids Allocation

The Select Move choice based lettings system operating in Chorley from March 2011 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 this

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 Council's 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.

Week commencing 12th Jan 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.

8. 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.

9. Points that the task and finish group could consider:

- a) Need to fully understand regulations in regard to improvements, repairs and standards?
- b) Gather information for each RPs improvement programmes for comparison.
- c) How do they monitor standards within their stock? What surveys or tenant involvement do they undertake to identify issues?
- d) What are improvement programmes do they current have in place?
- e) How are new tenants supported when moving into new properties, particularly if they are vulnerable?
- f) What cleanliness standards do they have in place and how are they confident that adequate levels of cleanliness and décor are being maintained for new allocations.

- g) What actions are taken if RPs visit vulnerable individuals living in uninhabitable conditions?
 - h) How do RPs communicate to tenants, the Council and the wider community in regard to improvements to properties and the community?
 - i) How does each RP make the decision to replace kitchen and bathrooms or repair?
 - j) How much have RPs spent on community and property improvements? (This could be broken down by wards or estates, for example)
 - k) Has investment into improvement, repairs or standards dipped in any way due to other factors, Welfare Reform, for example?
10. It would be useful to have input from the main registered providers to understand the landscape from an RP perspective. Richard Houghton (from CCH / Adactus) has offered to provide the Task Group with tenant feedback, budgets or potential site visits to review current housing standards

IMPLICATIONS OF REPORT

11. This report has implications in the following areas and the relevant Directors' comments are included:

Finance	X	Customer Services	
Human Resources		Equality and Diversity	
Legal	X	Integrated Impact Assessment required?	
No significant implications in this area		Policy and Communications	

COMMENTS OF THE STATUTORY FINANCE OFFICER

12. No comments.

COMMENTS OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

13. No comments.

CHRIS SINNOTT
DIRECTOR OF EARLY INTERVENTION

There are no background papers to this report.

Report Author	Ext	Date	Doc ID
Fiona Hepburn	5706	17 th January 2018	***