

REVIEW OF REGISTERED PROVIDERS 2022/23

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report is to inform Members of the Overview and Scrutiny committee on the outcome of the 2022/23 Registered Providers (RPs) Review. The purpose of the review meetings is to continue to build good working relationships with our RP partners, to monitor the performance and activities of the RPs and work together to resolve any problems. It also provides an opportunity to explore how RPs can support the council in the delivery of its corporate themes set out in the Business Plan. The report gives an overview of the scrutiny process and for each of the RP's reviewed and identifies; what is working well, causes for concern and any issues to follow up which may need to be raised with the Portfolio Holders for Planning and Economy or Operational Services.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Overview and Scrutiny RP Review sub-group for 2022/23

Members	Officers
Councillor Diane Bedford Councillor Mike Smith Councillor Nem Thapa Councillor Keith Dibble Councillor Sophie Porter Councillor Stuart Trussler	Zoë Paine Sarah Clark

- 2.2 Registered Providers: Meetings held

Registered Provider	Meeting date
Southern Housing Group	19 th October 2022
Grainger Housing Trust	17 th November 2022
Vivid Homes	19 th January 2023

3. THE SCRUTINY PROCESS:

- 3.1 Each RP provides financial and performance information, it's policies and strategies in advance of the meeting giving the Group the opportunity to consider the information in advance.

4. KEY DISCUSSIONS IN THE REVIEW PROCESS:

- Housing management for all tenures
- Maintenance of property and neighbourhoods
- Customer service and compliance with the Housing Regulators Customer Standards
- Risk management: fire, gas, and electrical safety
- Financial and performance information
- Assisting residents with welfare issues including cost of living pressures and damp and mould awareness
- Development opportunities
- Working together on Climate Change
- Tackling deprivation and equality opportunity
- Ward Members experience of working with RPs

5. SUMMARY OF REVIEW GROUP FINDINGS

5.1 SOUTHERN HOUSING GROUP (SHG)

Rushmoor Housing stock:

- 116 homes
- 55 General Needs rented
- 24 Supported homes
- 37 Shared Ownership properties.

A Stock Transfer of properties previously owned and managed By London and Quadrant was completed in December 2022 which will increase their stock in the Borough by 184 homes: a mix of rented and shared ownership.

Members were pleased to hear about the Hardship Fund available to residents, that can be ongoing or just one-off assistance. Since Covid, SHG have allocated £250,000 to this fund and plan to allocate this amount for 23/24.

This support will be available to the stock transfer residents from London and Quadrant once the transfer is completed, and they have been made aware of any existing support requirements for these residents.

SHG use a rent management programme which looks at rent payments and anticipates if a resident is likely to go into rent arrears allowing the team to offer support to resident before this happens and which includes assisting with budgeting, debt management and accessing benefits and grants.

The repairs service has been impacted by labour and material shortages however they are completing 93% of emergency repairs within target.

SHG have been provided with a stock condition report on the properties which will be transferred, they will be put into the planned maintenance programme which will prioritise urgent repairs.

Anti-Social behaviour complaints are logged and go through a risk assessment process which are responded to according to the level of risk. Budget available to provide improvements that can help with environmental causes of ASB, for example, carpet fitting and acoustic insulation.

Members raised that housing management issues at Mills House have been improving since the appointment of a new Neighbourhood Manager, planned maintenance works should also improve the situation.

Members requested a follow up meeting with SHG once the London and Quadrant transfer is completed in order to assess the impact to residents.

5.2 GRAINGER HOUSING TRUST

Rushmoor Housing Stock:

- 364 Homes
- 226 Affordable rented
- 138 Shared Ownership properties

Unsecured development pipeline of a further 861 units across Wellesley.

Members asked if Grainger have a mould policy – they do not but are aware of the intrinsic issues of ventilation in new builds and ensure residents are aware of what they need to do to ensure their property is ventilated appropriately; in light of the high profile of mould management in housing they may implement a mould policy going forward.

Properties are allocated in line with the local lettings plan. Members asked about the possibility of larger family homes being built on the development in future phases, Grainger advised that the homes are delivered in accordance with the Affordable Housing Strategy in place for the site.

Rent arrears are at 3.8% and have been rising reflecting inflationary pressures, in response to this Grainger are investing in support services to help residents when they fall into difficulty. Rent increases for affordable rented properties will be at the recommended 7%; Shared Ownership rent increases have been set at 9% but have not been increased to the recommended level of 13%.

There have been no mid-year rises to services charges as providers have honoured original prices, but this is likely to change once current contracts end.

Plans for a permanent play area due to be submitted in early 2023 and also a permanent community centre.

5.3 VIVID HOMES

Rushmoor Housing Stock:

- 5,559 Homes
- 4,353 General Needs Affordable/Social Rented
- 280 Housing for older persons
- 32 Supported Housing
- 621 Leasehold Properties
- 252 Shared Ownership Properties
- 21 other social and non-social Properties.

In addition, 74 units are due to be completed by the end of March 2023 to complete phase 6 of the North Town redevelopment. Planning consent is granted for North Town phase 5 (30 units) however construction contract is not yet let.

Members were advised that Vivid's Board are mindful to agree 7% rent increase in line with national policy and that this is likely to apply to Shared Owners despite the rent cap not applying to Shared Ownership tenancies.

Changes to the Fire Safety Regulations will require essential works to be carried out where necessary.

A specialist Damp and Mould repair team was established in 22/23 and this is expected to be expanded in 23/24. Reports of Damp and Mould are triaged on severity and specialist contractors are used when required.

Vivid are aware that they are not getting the Customer experience right, with difficulties getting through on the phone lines as a frequent issue. In order to overcome this, they are planning on recruiting more customer service staff in the coming year and working to improve the 1st time resolution rate. They are also investing £25,000 in IT systems to allow residents to do more online as the current system is limited to reporting repairs and rent payments.

Members noted that, whilst repairs completions have increased since the previous review, most of the complaints provided by residents to Members are related to the time it takes for repairs to be completed, often exacerbated by incorrect tradespeople being sent in the first instance. Vivid noted that this has been an issue that has been made more problematic by a lack of tradespeople and lack of knowledge in the repairs team when allocating works orders. There are plans to increase staffing levels in 23/24, and a target to have all backlogged repairs completed by

September 23, thereafter a target to complete every job raised within 2 weeks of reporting.

Members were advised that Vivid have a Decarbonisation Fund to improve 550 properties across their stock portfolio, although the majority of these properties are in Farnborough. The Project Lead will contact us with a breakdown of where these properties are located.

6. ADDITION TO ANNUAL REVIEW

- 6.1 It was brought to members attention that the condition of the Military homes in the Borough was a concern. Propose that Vivo/Pinnacle are included as well as Vivid for review each year due to the number of homes in the borough.

7. CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The RP Review process continues to play an important role in developing good working relationships with housing providers operating in the borough. The meetings enable the council's members and officers to improve their understanding of the condition and management of the affordable housing stock in the borough. The process also provides a platform to hold open and candid conversations about concerns so that they can be addressed and resolved, as well as the opportunity to see how the council and its RP partners can support one another in the delivery of their objectives.
- 7.2 Following consultation with the Chairman of the Review Group, it is proposed that a further programme of review is carried out in 2023/2024. The Review Group will agree the process and select the Registered Providers for review at its next meeting.

8. RECOMMENDATION

- 8.1 That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is requested to:
1. Endorse the programme of work carried out in 2022/23.
 2. Authorise the Review Group to prepare a programme of reviews for 2023/24
 3. To highlight to the Review Group, any specific concerns or matters for exploration during the 2023/24 programme of reviews

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

- Minutes of the review meetings
- Supporting documents supplied by RPs.

CONTACT DETAILS:

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