

REVIEW OF REGISTERED PROVIDERS 2019/20

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report is to inform Members of the Overview and Scrutiny committee on the outcome of the 2019/20 Registered Providers (RPs) Review. The purpose of the review meetings is to continue to build good working relationships with our RP partners and scrutinise performance. This report gives an overview of the scrutiny process and for each of the RP's reviewed identifies:

- What is working well
- Causes for concern
- Issues to follow up

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The Overview and Scrutiny RP Review sub-group for 2019/20:

Members	Officers
Councillor Diane Bedford Councillor Mike Smith Councillor Charles Choudhary Councillor Rod Cooper Councillor Keith Dibble Councillor Terry Bridgeman	Zoë Paine Sue Thornett

2.2 Registered Providers: Meetings held

Registered Provider	Meeting date
Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing	23 rd October 2019
Vivid	4 th November 2019
Grainger Trust	27 th November 2019
Mears	4 th December 2019
Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO)	22 nd January 2020

3 The Scrutiny Process:

- 3.1 Each RP provides financial and performance information in advance of the meeting giving the group the opportunity to consider the information in advance.
- 3.2 Accompanied site visits prior to the meeting help the group understand the location, nature and quality of the housing stock in the borough.

Key Issues explored through the review process

- 4.
- Quality of housing product and estate management
 - Customer satisfaction for tenants and leaseholders
 - Risk management: fire, gas and electrical safety
 - Financial and performance information
 - Review of leaseholder service charges
 - Assisting residents with welfare issues
 - Development opportunities
 - Dealing with anti-social behaviour

5. Summary of Review Group findings

- 5.1 **Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing (MTVH):** Total properties in Rushmoor: 732, 466 general needs rent, 258 shared ownership/ Leasehold and 8 Market rent.

- The group visited three Farnborough schemes all of which were in good conditions. Concerns regarding compromised communal entry system door were raised which is now being dealt with.
- Members raised the issue of anti-social behaviour at one scheme and its impact on other residents and were satisfied that MTVH were addressing this appropriately.
- MTVH offered to speak directly to residents impacted by the repairs and antisocial behaviour issues raised by Members.
- In terms of delivering genuinely affordable homes, MTVH set Affordable Rents at the Local Housing Allowance level and aim to deliver Social Rent wherever possible.
- Repairs can be reported by phone or on-line and logged on a central management system and dealt with quickly and MTVH continue to invest in improving their online services.
- Members were impressed with the many community events MTVH undertake for their residents in Rushmoor, their community Investment has also supported many of their tenants into employment.
- Members were impressed with MTVH's approach to supporting tenants, they offer early intervention and support to ensure tenants can maintain their tenancy. Their effectiveness in preventing rent arrears is evidenced in the performance data.

- RPs face difficulties enforcing gas safety checks on leaseholders and this is of concern to our Members. MTVH include a clause in lease agreement for leaseholders to carry out annual gas safety check and provide a copy of the certificate but difficult to enforce
- Rushmoor is one of MTVH's key areas for development.

5.2 Vivid – Total properties in Rushmoor: 5,523 (a breakdown of tenure has not been provided)

- Vivid are Hampshire's largest provider of social housing and Rushmoor's stock transfer organisation.
- Members observed a good impression to the overall appearance; clean and well organised, with obvious care being taken on walkways and storage areas in the schemes visited. It was evident tenants knew their neighbourhood officer.
- A tenancy support team supports Rushmoor's Housing Options Team with homelessness prevention, money and benefit advice, employment support work and health and wellbeing support, including mental health and advocacy work.
- Members shared examples of some repairs related complaints. Vivid are aware that the repairs service could be better and are actively looking at ways for improvement. A new central online complaints log has been launched, at the time of writing residents are reporting that centre waiting times are much quicker.
- It was recognised that policy for digital repairs reporting needs to be flexible in some circumstances, they are reviewing their policy to ensure the processes accessible for older and other vulnerable residents. They are looking to introduce an Older Persons support worker surgery at least once a week at Alma House in North Town to ensure sheltered housing residents receive appropriate housing support
- Members also raised that communication with Vivid had deteriorated. Vivid has taken this on board, provided training for Rushmoor's Members in supporting residents with making complaints. Member enquiries are now dealt with by the aftercare team and team of specialist advisors in VIVID.
- Discussions took place around addressing anti-social behaviour in some neighbourhoods. Vivid work with the police and Rushmoor Community Safety and are currently reviewing the size of area that neighbourhood officers are responsible for.
- The organisation's new Customer Experience Team are working to improve their re-let times. They provide decorating vouchers for tenants where the decoration is poor.
- Vivid launched a Customer Engagement Strategy in June which is working well in some areas, Members acknowledge the community development and good customer engagement at Totland Close.

- Vivid has an ambitious development programme and are committed to building social rent properties. Rushmoor remains a priority development area.

5.3 Grainger Trust – Rushmoor housing stock: 227 affordable housing properties, 114 general needs rented, 113 shared ownership

- Grainger Trust are based on site at Wellesley which will deliver 3,849 new homes of which 1,340 will be affordable housing.
- Members were pleased with Grainger's service to residents and plans for how this high standard will be maintained as the site scaled up. Grainger's response to this was their digital platform which will enable most residents to report repairs, pay rents etc.
- Members visited Wellesley where it was evident Grainger staff are well known to their residents. Early intervention and support are available for tenants experiencing problems with rent payment.
- Grainger Trusts commitment to community development is making a positive contribution in the local area, they employ a Community Development Manager. Members were impressed with the number and quality of events Grainger is involved with and thanked them for their work in this area.
- For leaseholders, Grainger communicates clearly on service charges, providing a breakdown and sharing a programme of cyclical works and results of quarterly block condition inspections.
- Members were pleased with the good working relationship and partnership working within Rushmoor.

5.4 Mears – Rushmoor housing stock: 103 properties, 45 temporary rent at Clayton Court, 44 general needs rent, 6 social rent and 8 shared ownership

- Members visited both schemes in Aldershot and were impressed with the accommodation, management and staff.
- Mears is a national organisation, Area Managers and officers are dedicated to individual schemes which works well. Clayton Court is managed by an experienced officer from a social care background, an asset for this client group.
- Member's raised concerns regarding neighbourhood officer contact with residents at Birchett Road, a new scheme. Their response was that settling in visits will be made in January and for the rest of the year quarterly visits will be made to ensure new tenants are able to manage their tenancies well.
- Members were impressed with Mears approach to supporting their tenants. If a tenant falls into arrears, suitable payment plans are put in place. If required, property visits are arranged to go through income and expenditure of the household and help them understand their outgoings. Tenants can be signpost to other debt advice agencies. Clayton Court is seen as a new start for tenants, it

is not classified as supported accommodation, however, intensive housing management is in place.

- Repairs can be reported by phone or on-line they are logged on a 24/7 customer contact centre and dealt with quickly.
- Members were pleased with the high level of tenant's overall satisfaction with service and performance and the new Customer Strategy designed to improve tenant engagement.

5.5 Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) – Rushmoor housing stock:

- DIO manages accommodation for the Military of Defence. Members visited areas of service family accommodation of different ages, standards and properties at different stages of work in preparation of Move-In. They were impressed with the standards of accommodation, complimenting staff on the management of DIO accommodation in Rushmoor.
- Service Family Accommodation is occupied under a Licence for postings, typically 2 years 3 months. Rents are set at lower than social rented housing, this discount forms part of the overall pay offer to Service Personnel. Service Family Accommodation (SFA) is calculated based on three elements, size of the property, and condition.
- Members were also invited to attend a presentation to introduce the Future Accommodation Model (FAM). This scheme enables service personnel to source subsidised accommodation to rent or purchase in the local housing market. Members found the presentation informative. The FAM pilot indicated it would be happy to share any data they collect that may be helpful to the Council. DIO has made it clear that there is no opportunity for the Council to utilise empty DIO properties which become available as a result of FAM.
- DIO acknowledged that the external condition of some of the older stock in the Farnborough/North Camp area appear in need of some attention which reflected higher levels of voids. They hope to invest in 'kerbside appeal'. A national funding pot of £7 million available for the whole of the UK.
- Contractor performance for repairs and response times varies from 85% - 100% dependant on the category of repair. DIO operate a three stage repairs reporting process; Stage 1 to the contractor Amey, Stage 2 to DIO family representative, Stage 3 to main building in London. The percentage of Stage 1 complaints resolved within the reporting time are above 97%, however, repairs are not always reported correctly. Information on reporting repairs is contained within the Aldershot Garrison Service Community Official Guide (SCOG). Amey report performance to the DIO and satisfaction in the South East for 'Move In' and 'Move Out' exceed regional targets.
- Families have champion representation to progress complaints and can attend drop in sessions and welfare coffee mornings to talk to Amey and SFA representatives as well as welfare officers.

5.6 Future Work

- At the first meeting in the 2020/21 Municipal Year, the Review Group will be asked to prepare a programme for the year. This is likely to include Accent, the registered provider for Alexandra House where major repairs are planned.

6 Conclusion

The RP Review process continues to play an important role in developing good working relationships with housing providers operating in the borough. The estate inspections and follow up meetings enable Members and Officers to improve their understanding of the location, condition and management of the affordable housing stock in the Borough; they also provide a platform to hold open and candid conversations around any concerns and to work together to resolve any problems.

Following consultation with the Chairman of the Review Group, it is proposed that a further programme of review is carried out in 2020/2021, at its next meeting the Review Group will be asked to agree the process and select the registered providers for review.

7 Recommendation

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is requested to:

1. Endorse the programme of work in 2019/20 and request the Chairman of the Registered Providers Review Group to brief the Portfolio Holder on the issues raised.
2. Authorise the Review Group to prepare a programme of reviews for 2020/21

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

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

CONTACT DETAILS:

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