

REVIEW OF REGISTERED PROVIDERS 2015/16

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report is to inform members of the Community Panel on the outcome of the 2015/16 Registered Provider (RP) Review. The purpose of the review meetings is to scrutinise performance and develop partnership working. The 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 Community Panel RP Review Sub group comprised:

| Members | Officers |
|---|----------------------------|
| Councillor Mike Smith (Chair) Councillor Charles Choudhary Councillor Jennifer Evans Councillor Mike Roberts | Zoë Paine Sue Thornett. |

2.2 RP's Reviewed in 2015/16 were:

| Registered Provider | Meeting Date |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Accent Peerless | 12 th November 2015 |
| Oak Housing Association | 16 th December 2015 |
| Stonewater Housing Association | 20 th January 2016 |
| A2 Dominion | 11 th February 2016 |

3 The Scrutiny Process:

3.1 Each RP is required to submit financial and performance information in advance of the meeting. This gives members and officers the opportunity to consider the information in advance and to give structure to the questioning process.

3.2 Accompanied site visits are made prior to each meeting, providing members and officers with the opportunity to understand the location, nature and quality of the housing stock..

4 Key Issues explored through the review process:

- 4.1
 - Performance Management
 - Quality of housing and development opportunities
 - Customer Satisfaction
 - Estate Management and Repairs
 - Anti-Social Behaviour
 - Impact of housing reforms, including the 1% rent reduction

5 Summary of Review Group findings

5.1 Accent Group – Rushmoor stock of 158 mixed tenure units: 50 general needs rent, 57 shared ownership, 7 leasehold, 34 Intermediate rent, 10 Market rent

The review followed a period of intensive partnership working between the housing association, council officers and elected members to resolve problems associated with flooding issues at Stafford House in the winter of 2014/15. Accent invested over £1million to resolve these issues and compensate their residents. Stafford House is now used by Hampshire Fire and Rescue as a high-rise training site.

The site visit identified that the front and back doors in Whitley Court were not shutting properly; Councillors were also disappointed with the condition of the communal areas at Whitley Court. The doors have since been repaired and a funding bid has been put forward to bring forward the redecoration works to 2016/17.

Accent has a dedicated leasehold officer who will be carrying out a comprehensive review of service charges in 2016/17. Accent is able to offer leaseholders help with flexible payment plans for the costs of section 20 major works.

Accent has revised their business plan to reflect the 1% rent reduction, they have a centralised contact centre and will be looking to secure cost savings by extending kitchen and bathroom replacement cycles and retendering their repairs contract

Customer satisfaction levels are slightly lower than Accent would like, however the review group recognised that this may be a reflection on the recent problems at Stafford House and organisational change and are confident that Accent are putting the right structure and processes in place to improve this.

5.2 **Oak Housing Ltd- Rushmoor stock of 45 units of temporary accommodation**

Oak are a London Based *for profit* housing association and new to Rushmoor. They have converted the former Sargent's Mess, which is part of the Wellesley development to form 45 units of much needed temporary accommodation in Aldershot for up to 7 years, when the area is scheduled to be redeveloped. The scheme has been occupied since August 2015. Oak became a registered Provider of affordable housing in 2015, this meant the format of the meeting was less about performance review and more focussed on building our working relationship.

At the site visit Councillors were impressed with the building, the outside greenspace and the approach of the scheme manager. During the meeting Councillors were interested to know what would happen at the end of the 7 years period. Oak are keen to explore alternative schemes with the council's housing team including holding further discussions with Grainger about access to additional empty buildings.

Oak were open and honest about teething / snagging problems when the scheme was first handed over and are now resolved. RBC officers are happy with Oak's management and maintenance processes and procedures, and any issues are dealt with as they arise.

5.3 **Stonewater - Rushmoor stock of 96 units: 71 general needs rent, 2 shared ownership 24 sheltered housing 1 wheelchair home and 1 leasehold home.**

Stonewater is a new organisation formed through the merger of Raglan and Jephson Housing associations in December 2014. The merger has meant a period of restructuring and re-allocation of management patches and Rushmoor is now included in a management patch of 700 units across Rushmoor, Winchester and Basingstoke.

Stonewater are undertaking a strategic review of their asset base. They are working with the strategy and enabling team on the redevelopment of Wavell Court to provide 6 x 1 bed and 2 x 2 bed affordable rented flats and are currently on site. There may be other opportunities to dispose of or regenerate stock in the longer term and Stonewater will work with the Strategy and Enabling team to achieve the best outcome for Rushmoor residents as decisions are made.

The organisation has a clear understanding of the impact of welfare reform on their residents and the merger/ restructure and asset review will enable them to accommodate the challenges of the 1% rent reduction.

From the site visit councillors felt that the properties are generally well maintained although at Upper Union Street there were issues with intercoms

not working properly and the maintenance and cleaning of some of the communal areas Councillors also asked if spy holes could be installed into doors to improve safety for residents.

Councillors had received complaints about grounds maintenance and cleaning contractors not turning up. Stonewater explained that there had been an issue with the sub-contracting of work and that this would be addressed in their new maintenance contractual arrangements.

The Chair suggested that Stonewater be invited back next year once the new management and maintenance arrangements are more established.

5.4 **A2 Dominion- Rushmoor housing stock 369 units 184 rent 100 shared ownership 85 leasehold**

A2 are an established housing association with good performance in all areas. The site visits at both Concept House and Farnborough Central schemes are of a high quality. The panel were shown the difference in the condition of door entrances and communal areas of two identical blocks, one occupied by general needs rented residents and the other by shared ownership residents. The difference in condition was marked and the A2 officers explained this as being due to the more intensive use and the number of children occupying the rented block compared to the shared ownership block.

During the meeting A2 explained that they will not be developing Section 106 sites going forward as they are not happy with the design and build standards and are constrained by having to use managing agents in delivering the most cost effective management and maintenance service to residents.

In respect of housing reform A2 are investing in improved customer services, a Right to Buy administration service and trained outreach officers to assist residents with welfare reform problems. A2 are looking to develop 1000 new homes each year in London and the South East and keen to explore joint venture working with Local Authorities to achieve this.

6 **Conclusion**

The RP Review process plays an important role in developing a good understanding of the affordable housing stock in the borough where it is located, what condition it is in and how well it is managed. The site visits and meetings also provide an opportunity to develop working relationships with our housing providers; they provide a platform to hold open and candid conversations around any concerns and to work together to resolve any problems.

Recommendation

That a review programme is scheduled for 2016/17.

Councillor Mike Smith
Chairman of Community Policy and Review Panel
ON BEHALF OF THE RP REVIEW GROUP

Background papers:

- Minutes of the review meetings
- Supporting documents supplied by RP's.

Contacts:

Zoë Paine: Housing Strategy & Enabling Manager Tel: 398687