

17th June 2021

REPORT NO. EPSH2017

REVIEW OF REGISTERED PROVIDERS 2020/21

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report is to inform Members of the Overview and Scrutiny committee on the outcome of the 2020/21 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 are able to support the council in the delivery of its corporate themes set out in the business plan and This 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 2020/21

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

- 2.2 Registered Providers: Meetings held

Registered Provider	Meeting date
Vivid	19 th October 2020
Accent	16 th November 2020
Southern Housing	26 th January 2021

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.
- 3.2 Accompanied site visits prior to the meeting; these were unable to take place in this programme due to Covid-19 restrictions.

Key Discussions in the review process

- 4.
- 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
 - Development opportunities
 - Working together on Climate Change
 - Tackling deprivation and equality opportunity
 - Ward Members experience of working with RPs
 - Impacts of Covid-19

5. **Summary of Review Group findings**

- 5.1 **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.
- Vivid officers had met with residents and ward members at North Town the week prior to the meeting to discuss concerns about service charging. Collaborative working prior to and during the meeting enabled key issues to be identified and now resolved. Members appreciated Vivid's positive approach and keenness to work with members for the benefit of the residents on this matter.
 - A scheme for members reporting resident's issues had recently been carried out and proved successful, this will continue going forward.
 - Some examples were cited of residents' dissatisfaction with the repair service, repairs satisfaction currently stands at 89%. It was explained that there was still a backlog of repairs due to initial Covid restrictions when only emergency repairs could be completed, this is expected to be resolved by the end of the financial year. Vivid explained they are working to expedite repair issues and are planning to introduce 2-hour appointment slots, including evenings, to help working customers.
 - Members were impressed with the amount of community development work Vivid are involved with, during the pandemic Vivid have provided

£125,000 to local foodbanks, £125,000 to community support groups, and made available 400 IT devices to households in need.

- Vivid offer a high-level tenancy support to tenants with welfare needs, including a specialist money advice and employment and training teams, with officers dedicated to their residents in Rushmoor. During the pandemic additional support has been put in place to help with benefit applications, debt and rent arrears payment plan in some cases debts have been written off. A Wellbeing service is offered to residents to improve access to mental health services.
- Vivid has an ambitious development programme and are committed to building social rent properties. Rushmoor remains a priority development area.
- Members were impressed with Vivid's plans on cutting the carbon emissions in their housing stock and their commitment to partnership working.

5.2 Accent Group: Total properties in Rushmoor: 158, 54 general needs rent, 53 shared ownership, 7 Leasehold, 34 intermediate rent and 10 market rent. Accent properties in Rushmoor consist of 105 x 1-bed flats 53 x 2-bed flats.

- Members were pleased with Accent's approach to resolving the ongoing problems at Alexander House in Aldershot. Councillor Crawford was closely involved with the issues.
- Accent staff councillors and council officers are working together on management issues with leaseholders at Alexander House relating to roof repair and service charges. Members are pleased with Accent's approach and to move this forward which includes the recruitment of a specialist officer to deal with issues arising for home owners
- Accent own 2 buildings in the borough with cladding which needs to be replaced, they are not passing any of the £3million costs to leaseholders.
- Members were impressed with Accent's support to residents relating to the pandemic, welfare calls were made to all vulnerable residents to ensure that they were coping and had support including arranging food parcels. Members also acknowledge Accents assistance to the council with the provision of temporary accommodation during 2020.
- Accent is working towards decarbonising its existing housing stock initially by installing new energy efficient double glazing and heating systems. They are open to working in partnership working with the council to further tackle climate change and fuel poverty.

5.3 Southern Housing: Total properties in Rushmoor: 86 affordable housing properties, 52 general needs rent 23 Supported, 9 shared ownership, 2 intermediate rent; of which 44 are houses and 42 Flats and are expanding their development programme in Rushmoor.

- Southern Housing acquired housing stock from Hyde Housing Association in 2018 and are proactively seeking development opportunities within the borough. They are working with Cala Homes at The Crescent in Farnborough where they will deliver 88 affordable homes.

- Members were pleased with Southern's vision to excel at customer service. The majority of their customer's initial interaction is through the Customer Service Centre via telephone or other digital platforms, however, they recognise there is a need for face to face interaction and have put in place mobile Home Service Managers.
- Members complimented Southern on their governance structure, listening to residents and their positive approach to anti-social behaviour, they were particularly impressed with the New Beginning scheme providing essential furniture and white goods to prevent new tenants getting into debt when they set up home..
- Members were reassured to hear of the additional welfare and financial support given during the pandemic. Southern advised that rent arrears had risen slightly in the early months but have now stabilised and contained by engaging with tenants at an early stage. Tenants are offered to attend courses on money management and Southern provide electronic devices where needed to support residents with online aspects of sustaining their tenancy.
- There are number of initiatives Southern are involved relating to climate change. They are in the process of setting up environmental groups for residents to raise environmental issues within neighbourhoods and demonstrate what can be done at a local level. Southern have also developed a biodiversity toolkit which is available for residents and local communities and are keen to utilise this at The Crescent in Farnborough.

5.4 A2Dominion: Total properties in Rushmoor: 369, 184 general needs rent, 100 shared ownership, 5 Leasehold, and 80 Freehold

- In January 2021 the RP Review group was asked to call A2 Dominion into an extra ordinary meeting to support council officers and members in dealing with unresolved complaints relating to structural repairs, communal areas and poor communication.
- As a result of that meeting a schedule of actions was drawn up for A2 to implement, members have recently been able to meet with residents in person and a follow up meeting is planned with A2 on 10th June to review progress and for members to decide if any further action is necessary.

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 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.

Following consultation with the Chairman of the Review Group, it is proposed that a further programme of review is carried out in 2021/2022.

The Review Group will agree the process and select the registered providers for review at its next meeting.

7 Recommendation

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is requested to:

1. Endorse the programme of work carried out in 2020/21.
2. Authorise the Review Group to prepare a programme of reviews for 2021/22

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

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

CONTACT DETAILS:

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