

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL



15 FEBRUARY 2016 - 2:30PM

PRESENT: Councillor Yeulett(Chairman), Councillor Mrs Hay(Vice-Chairman), Councillors Mrs Bucknor, Buckton, Mrs Davis, Miss Hoy, Mason and Pugh

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Murphy (Observing).

APOLOGIES: Councillor Humphrey

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE: Jane Bailey (Member Services and Governance), Richard Cassidy (Corporate Director) and Geoff Kent (Head of Customer Services)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Jodie Cunnington-Brock and Jerry Harkness from Circle Housing

OSC32/15 PREVIOUS MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of 18 January 2016 were confirmed and signed.

*** FOR INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL ***

OSC33/15 CIRCLE HOUSING - RODDONS UPDATE

Members considered "The Year in Review 2015-16" presented by Jerry Harkness and Jodie Cunnington-Brock from Circle Housing.

Members asked questions, made comments and received responses as follows:

1. Councillor Mrs Hay asked with regards to the net promoter score, how many people were asked. Jodie Cunnington-Brock stated that the surveys went to anyone that had not recently been surveyed, and agreed to provide the figures following the meeting;
2. Councillor Mrs Hay stated that the satisfaction statistics have dropped this year with regards to Sheltered Housing and Circle Housing said that this would be a priority. Jodie Cunnington-Brock stated that sheltered housing has had some difficulties, the buildings are of an older style and there has been a withdrawal of the Warden Services. Some of the new schemes have opened in the area and ours are not so attractive, she reassured members that Circle Housing know that this is an issue and are working on it;
3. Councillor Mrs Hay asked for clarification with regards to the priorities for 2016-17 to review sheltered housing provision. Jodie Cunnington-Brock stated that Circle Housing as a group are reviewing its sheltered housing offers and how the service is delivered, we are expanding the remit of people that are offered this type of accommodation;
4. Councillor Buckton asked how the promoter score compares to other housing providers. Jodie Cunnington-Brock stated that it is a scoring system that is used widely commercially but that she was not aware how this compared against other housing providers. She agreed to investigate and provide some other scores following the meeting;
5. Councillor Mrs Hay stated that the presentation says that the re-let time target is 25 and asked for clarification that this was the number of days. Jodie Cunnington-Brock confirmed that this was the number of days;

6. Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated that Fenland has a large number of elderly people and so is surprised that Roddons are having difficulty letting sheltered housing accommodation. Jodie Cunnington-Brock stated that they welcome any ideas from members with regards to promoting sheltered housing. She added that there are some properties that are not attractive to older people, some properties that do not have their own bathing facilities or lifts, we need to look at how people's needs have changed and this accommodation needs to reflect that;
7. Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated that it is understandable that most elderly people would not be attracted to these properties. She asked that with regards to expanding the remit of people who can move into sheltered, how is that being processed. Jodie Cunnington-Brock confirmed that before a place is offered extensive checks are carried out to ensure that a person is a good fit. Searches are carried out on the Police National Computer (PNC), and a telephone based risk assessment is carried out with the applicant. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked if this was robust as people can lie on the telephone. Jodie Cunnington-Brock agreed that they could lie, but the PNC check is robust and shows any interaction with the police;
8. Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated that the police records might be good but they still might not be a good fit. Jodie Cunnington-Brock stated that the extended offers are only being made to people over the age of 55, and the PNC check does show up any interaction with the police;
9. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked how many empty properties Roddons have. Jodie Cunnington-Brock stated that she did not have that data with her today and agreed to provide the figures following the meeting;
10. Councillor Mrs Davis stated that she is concerned that if the voids are filled by changing the criteria for offering places, how the improvements will be made to the properties. Jodie Cunnington-Brock stated that supported accommodation will not solve the problem in the long term or on a permanent basis and will need to be reviewed moving forward;
11. Councillor Yeulett asked how much interest there has been since the criteria changed. Jodie Cunnington-Brock stated that performance is still not where we want it to be, we are trying to make the best use of the resources;
12. Councillor Yeulett asked for clarification with regards to re-let times. Jodie Cunnington-Brock stated that the average re-let time is 14-15 days, but some have been as long as 100 days and this is not acceptable when there are 1500 people on the waiting list;
13. Councillor Yeulett asked if this is one of the big challenges faced by Roddons. Jodie Cunnington-Brock confirmed that this is something that we are working hard to improve on;
14. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked for clarification with regards to the dates of the merger. Jodie Cunnington-Brock stated that she is not part of the project team, and agreed to provide some clarification following the meeting;
15. Councillor Buckton stated that he noticed that claims for Universal Credits needed to be made online; he asked what was being done to enable people to access the application process if they have no online facilities of their own. Jodie Cunnington-Brock stated that from research that was carried out more people have access to the internet than we thought, this is partly down to increased use of tablets and mobile phones. There are laptop loan schemes available and adult learning sessions to help people to get online, there are also computers in the Wisbech Office which people can use. The Universal Credit applications are moving in slowly and we can support people who want to claim;
16. Councillor Miss Hoy asked about the quality of the Roddons housing stock, as she has had complaints from constituents who have reported mould and other issues including the time in which it takes to get work done. Jodie Cunnington-Brock stated that damp and mould are generally an issue due to the age of a building as solid walls are difficult to deal with, we often give residents advice about ventilation and heating as this can make the issue worse. She added that there are not issues with the standards of health. Councillor Miss Hoy stated that for many people you are the last resort and they feel like they should 'put up' with these conditions, there are many older properties in the area and they do not all have these issues, so I do not believe that this is a good enough excuse. Jodie Cunnington-Brock agreed to discuss some individual cases following the meeting;

17. Councillor Mrs Hay asked what the process is for residents that are not satisfied. Jodie Cunnington-Brock stated that residents can raise a complaint; there is a formal complaints process. Councillor Mrs Hay asked if the process is made clear to residents. Jodie Cunnington-Brock explained that they can raise a complaint on the website or if they call us we will raise the complaint for them. She added that we listen to the issues and try to get work done as timely as possible, sometimes we have to manage residents' expectations, and we might not always get it right all of the time;
18. Councillor Yeulett stated that he noticed that the number of complaints had dropped this year and asked if this was a true reflection. Jodie Cunnington-Brock confirmed that this is a true reflection and stated that the complaints made are not just about repairs, residents make complaints about many different things including anti-social behaviour issues, she agreed to provide the panel with a breakdown of complaints;
19. Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated that she is surprised that the number of complaints has reduced;
20. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked for clarification that the £1m for improvements was just for Roddons properties or across the Circle Housing Group. Jodie Cunnington-Brock confirmed that £1.1m funding for improvements is for the Roddons properties;
21. Councillor Buckton asked if the £1.1m was for repairs and maintenance. Jodie Cunnington-Brock stated that it will be used for all types of repairs and major work like replacement kitchens, bathrooms, heating systems and windows;
22. Councillor Buckton stated that he would presume that the bulk of this funding has already been spent, he asked what the situation is with regards to next year. Jodie Cunnington-Brock stated that we know what work needs to be carried out during the next financial year, but the budgets have not been set yet;
23. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked for clarification with regards to the garage site at Wisbech. Jerry Harkness stated that there are 2 sites in Wisbech to look at, they are small sites but the plan is to look to get planning permission;
24. Councillor Yeulett asked what the impact will be on the Fenland community following the restructure and merger. Jerry Harkness stated that customers on the frontline should not notice any difference;
25. Councillor Yeulett asked where they see the pressures in terms of new homes. Jerry Harkness stated that the biggest pressure is the increased cost to build and the market is yet to recover;
26. Councillor Yeulett stated that he understood that house prices were increasing. Jerry Harkness stated that they are improving in some areas;
27. Councillor Yeulett asked if they will be able to keep up with the maintenance programme with the merger happening. Jodie Cunnington-Brock confirmed that the maintenance programme will not be affected and furthermore will be more efficient as part of the new structure;
28. Councillor Buckton asked with regards to the 13% reduction in income over 4 years has funding been ring-fenced for improvements to older properties. Jodie Cunnington-Brock stated that we have a duty under the 'Decent Homes Standard' to ensure the work is carried out and we have to comply with that standard;
29. Councillor Yeulett asked if the governance arrangements will affect the tenants. Jodie Cunnington-Brock stated that the governance structure following the merger will be more effective, she added that there are a lot of governance and legal issues to work through, but these in no way will affect the customers frontline service;
30. Councillor Buckton asked for clarification with regards to local authority representation on the boards moving forward. Jodie Cunnington-Brock stated that there will be local scrutiny groups, but these are yet to be finalised;
31. Councillor Buckton stated that the policies that are discussed at board meetings will have a different impact in Fenland than they would in other areas, he asked how local impact on decisions can be taken into account as it is not a 'one size fits all'. Jodie Cunnington-Brock confirmed that she was unable to provide all the details, there is a lot of change and these matters have yet to be decided;

32. Councillor Mrs Hay asked for clarification about the current scrutiny panel arrangements as it is her understanding that there are just 3 members. Jodie Cunnington-Brock confirmed that this is one of the structures that will be changing;
33. Councillor Mrs Hay asked for clarification of the members of this panel in the future. Jodie Cunnington-Brock stated that the details have not been confirmed yet, but the panel will be made up of residents, estate holders and officers;
34. Councillor Davis asked what the current situation is with regards to immigrants and refugees, as there is a suggestion that Council's will have to accommodate refugees. Jodie Cunnington-Brock stated that some Councils have opted to accept refugees;
35. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked for clarification with regards to inspection before re-let. Jodie Cunnington-Brock stated that when a customer is leaving we look at the specifications required and carry out any work. She added that if any resident is not satisfied when they move in to a property they need to raise those concerns;
36. Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated that she appreciates the need for turnaround, but has had reports of a property that a family have moved into that has used syringes and asbestos in the garden. Jodie Cunnington-Brock stated that this is not acceptable and agreed to discuss following the meeting;
37. Councillor Miss Hoy asked how often properties are inspected. Jodie Cunnington-Brock stated that they carry out tenancy health checks with new customers at 3 months and again at 9 months, but this can depend on the tenant and the programme;
38. Councillor Miss Hoy asked if these were full property inspections. Jodie Cunnington-Brock confirmed they were full property inspections, every room is checked;
39. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked for clarification that every property is inspected during a 12 month period. Jodie Cunnington-Brock confirmed that not every property is inspected, the inspection programme mentioned was with regards to new customers;
40. Councillor Miss Hoy stated that the properties managed by Roddons were not subject to the same standards as Private Rented properties and asked what checks the Council have undertaken with regard to these properties. Richard Cassidy stated that in the first instance we would want to be assured that tenants issues are being dealt with through the Roddons complaint procedures that are in place. However, he added that Council Officers will arrange to visit properties on an individual basis if there is a need;
41. Councillor Miss Hoy stated that if Roddons are not carrying out regular inspections how will issues be picked up and raised with the environmental health team? Richard Cassidy stated that we would want to be assured that as a residential landlord they are dealing with issues raised by tenants, and if there are public health concerns, there are legal standards that can be applied;
42. Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated that she had been told about a property that was standing empty for a year while the tenant was living somewhere else, but how would Roddons know unless they are carrying out regular visits;
43. Richard Cassidy reassured members that FDC officers will continue to work closely with Roddons, there are clearly going to be lots of change moving forward with these organisations moving to a centralised structure. We have also been asking about a local board to focus on issues that affect us directly. He confirmed that quarterly meetings with senior managers at Roddons have been set up to maintain communication with the organisation;
44. Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated that she is concerned that big is not necessarily beautiful and feels that they will be stretched to carry out all of the improvements as well as structural work needed on some of the older properties.

Councillor Yeulett thanked Jodie Cunnington-Brock and Jerry Harkness for attending the meeting today and stated that we look forward to seeing the outcomes of the merger, he emphasised the importance of reassuring the residents that their service will not change.

(Councillor Mrs Bucknor and Councillor Buckton declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in this item by virtue of the fact that they are members of the Roddons Board.)

(Councillor Miss Hoy declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in this item by virtue of the fact that she works for a letting agents.)

OSC34/15 FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered the Future Work Programme 2015/16 for the Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

Members agreed the Future Work Programme 2015/16 for the Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

3.45pm

Chairman