

Crawley Borough Council

Minutes of Housing Associations Scrutiny Panel

Wednesday, 7 February 2024 at 7.00 pm

Councillors Present:

T Lunnon (Chair)

M L Ayling, H Hellier and S Pritchard

Also in Attendance:

Councillor I T Irvine

Clare Easton - Regional Head of Customer Services South East (The Guinness Partnership)

Officers Present:

Heather Girling

Democratic Services Officer

Apologies for Absence:

Absent:

Councillor S Piggott

1. Disclosures of Interest & Whipping Declarations

No disclosures of interests were made.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Housing Associations Scrutiny Panel held on 23 November 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. Witness Sessions

The Panel had invited witnesses to help inform their investigation.

Clare Easton, Regional Head of Customer Services South East at The Guinness Partnership had been invited to offer views on the current processes, practices and systems, together with the provision of initiatives and support currently being provided to tenants.

The Panel was aware of the new legislation and consumer standards for Registered Providers due to come into effect later in the year and consequently was keen to understand the preparation for these.

Councillor Irvine, as the Council's Cabinet Member for Housing had also been invited.

The Panel received an introduction from Clare Easton, on Guinness' work as a landlord in the borough. The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- Confirmation provided regarding the process for undertaking tenant satisfaction surveys. It was noted much work had been carried out with regards to resident engagement.
- With regards to issues such as parking and ASB, it was noted there were challenges given the more emotive subjects on occasions. However, it was important to engage with residents and partner agencies as it was recognised that working together was the best way to tackle some of the shared challenges faced. The Panel felt it was important that should problems remain unrectified, the council should have a role in compelling action from registered providers and other agencies.
- It was noted that ASB was a concern and clarity was sought and obtained on the working relationship with local policing teams and the liaison regarding ASB concerns. Customer Liaison Officers (Housing Officers) would have the liaison with the local policing teams. In addition, it was confirmed there were ASB reporting systems in place which would feed through, together with 'quarterly estate inspections/walkabouts'. The Panel felt it would be beneficial if ward councillors could be made aware of the estate inspections / walkabouts where possible.
- It was commented that one improvement which would assist and develop the positive working relationships already in place from the registered providers perspective would be once the tenancy was agreed, to provide as much information (in accordance with GDPR) so the registered provider can assist the tenant fully. Similarly, the registered provider would provide information to local authorities regarding any associated factors prior to a social tenancy agreement.
- Recognition that there had been challenges for the repairs service within Crawley brought about through the age of stock, cost of materials, supply issues as well as the damp and mould concerns, all of which were being addressed. It was important to acknowledge the challenges and adapt new working practices.
- Acknowledgment that investment was planned for the future which would ensure fit for purpose properties.
- With regards to the new legislation and consumer standards for registered providers due to come into effect later in the year, it was noted that the data would be provided nationally but the tenant satisfaction measures should be able to be broken down into local authority area. Whilst it was yet unknown how the data was to be published, it was hoped it would be available on the web (eg The Guinness Partnership website) or potentially the Regulator of Social Housing, as the tenant satisfaction measures survey for [Crawley Homes](#) was currently live and information was being collected for the Regulator of Social Housing.

Councillor Irvine as Cabinet Member for Housing then updated the Panel that:

- The nomination agreements existed detailed the nomination arrangements for the allocation of social and affordable rental housing ensuring that the Council's statutory duties were met by the housing providers operating within the borough. The nomination rights to registered providers properties secured, played a significant role in helping to meet the demand for affordable and social housing locally.
- With regards to complaints, where this did not result in a satisfactory outcome, tenants had the right to request that the matter was investigated by the Housing Ombudsman.
- However, it was noted over the many years there had rarely been complaints received about registered providers due to the positive partnership and multi-agency working.

RESOLVED

That Panel Members thanked the witnesses for their attendance and contribution, all of which had been most interesting and informative. The discussion would aid the Panel in forming its recommendations.

4. Recommendations

Following the witness sessions and the action points, it was agreed that the following be determined for possible inclusion in the draft report:

1. That Guinness Partnership (and other Registered Providers if relevant) be requested to inform councillors when estate inspections/walkabouts are due, so specifically Ward Councillors can attend if they wish. Email Democratic Services (democratic.services@crawley.gov.uk) to be included in Councillors' Information Bulletin.
2. That as much information as possible (in accordance with GDPR) be provided to Registered Providers by the Council once a social tenancy is agreed.
3. That as a result of the new legislation and consumer standards in 2024, following the completion of tenant satisfaction measures surveys, request information from Registered Providers on local authority area data (if the figures are not available from the RSH website).

5. General Update and Actions for Next Meeting

The Chair updated the Panel that the next meeting was scheduled for Monday 18 March and was currently set to be the final meeting of the panel. However, there was an option for other Registered Providers to attend should responses be forthcoming.

However, ultimately recommendations discussed at previous meetings would be drawn together to be discussed at the next meeting and agreed. It was then usual for the draft report to be written by the Lead Officer and circulated by email to Panel Members with a deadline for any comments.

The report would need to be ready by 13 June in order for it to be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission on 24 June and Cabinet on 26 June. The report would be presented at both meetings by the Panel Chair.

It was noted that should any Scrutiny Panel meetings be required for the new municipal year, the Overview and Scrutiny Commission would need to agree the membership and re-constitute the Panel at its first meeting in June, prior to any Panel meeting taking place.

Closure of Meeting

With the business of the Housing Associations Scrutiny Panel concluded, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 7.49 pm

T Lunnon (Chair)

This page is intentionally left blank


Agenda Item

Appendix A

 **Housing Association Scrutiny Panel – Crawley BC**
7th February 2024

great service, great homes
a great place to work and a great business


1

 **About The Guinness Partnership:**

- **History of Guinness**
 - Started in 1890 from £200,000 donated by philanthropist Edward Cecil Guinness to improve lives of ordinary people in London
- **Today**
 - Now owns 70,000 properties across England
 - Work across 125 LA areas
 - 4th largest HA
 - Charitable/not for profit organisation
 - Largest concentration of stock in London, Cheshire, Milton Keynes, Hampshire & Manchester
 - Split into 7 regions

great service, great homes
a great place to work and a great business


2

 **Building new homes**

- Nationally have 5,206 properties under construction, due by end 2025
- 4,000 in pipeline
- Recent merger with Shepherds Bush HA

great service, great homes
a great place to work and a great business


3

 **In Crawley**

- Guinness own @500 properties
- Predominately in Broadfield
- Predominately houses
- Housing for Older people scheme
- 2 supported housing schemes
- **Current challenges in Crawley**
 - Age & condition of stock – investment of £40k planned for next year
 - Repairs service

great service, great homes
a great place to work and a great business


4

 **Guinness 2022/3 Performance:**

- Completed 814 new homes
- Rent arrears of 3.81%
- Investment of £177.5 million in improving & repairing our homes
- Assisted over 12,000 customers in claiming £14m in benefits
- Hardship Fund of £750k helped 2,442 customers with cost of food, consumables, furniture & day to day expenses
- 71% tenant satisfaction

great service, great homes
a great place to work and a great business

5

 **Recent work at Guinness :**

- Set up Tenant Scrutiny Panel (looked at Complaints process, ASB process & how we deliver emergencies)
- This panel has developed into a Customer Committee of residents and Board Members
- Are also in process of setting up Resident panels in each region during 2024
- In depth resident engagement (on their neighbourhood & what is important to them, also interpreting the new TSM's)
- Consulted customers on our D&M policy & parking on estates
- Work on 10 year plan to invest £1.2 billion in our existing homes

great service, great homes
a great place to work and a great business

6

This page is intentionally left blank