

Crawley Borough Council

Minutes of Housing Associations Scrutiny Panel

Monday, 18 March 2024 at 7.00 pm

Councillors Present:

T Lunnon (Chair)

M L Ayling, H Hellier and S Pritchard

Officers Present:

Heather Girling

Democratic Services Officer

Apologies for Absence:

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 7 February 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. General Update

The Chair updated the Panel that further requests had been issued to Registered Providers requesting their attendance at this meeting. Responses were received from Hyde Housing sending their apologies and they kindly provided an update on the service provided in Crawley. However unfortunately no reply was received from Moat Housing on attendance.

Furthermore, research had been understand regarding housing advice and campaigns from Citizens Advice Bureau. However having reviewed these and the policy research it was felt the issues and topics were distinct.

The Panel discussed the update received from Hyde Housing, which was welcomed as it informed Members of the activity in Crawley and some details about the work undertaken to improve homes and become a more customer focused organisation.

However, concern was expressed that some of the points noted did not appear to reflect the experiences faced at various locations within the borough. It was commented that more than 6 cases of outstanding damp and mould were known to the Panel.

It was noted that the ASB approach had improved, and it was hoped that the full review of ASB and having an individual on site would result in having a holistic approach to ASB and assist in dealing with the known outstanding issues.

Panel Members commented that an overview would have been beneficial regarding the target repairs data, together with information on the service level agreements which would provide additional details on the routine work orders and repairs carried out. Concern was raised that when tenants had asked for routine repairs to be carried out, they had been informed that these may impact the cost of the service charge, which was separate to the rent. The Panel queried how this would apply in Crawley Homes.

Other Panel Members felt that the update provided a satisfactory depiction of the work undertaken by Hyde to rectify the issues encountered and a new way of working had been introduced to improve contact with customers. It was commented that it would be interesting to analyse any tenant satisfaction measures survey and any benchmarking data when these would be available from the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH).

4. Recommendations

The proposed recommendations were discussed to be included in the draft report.

1. That officers consider establishing regular meetings with relevant partners at a strategic level (local where appropriate and where the need was identified/resources dictate) to inform/review issues, trends and share best practice, with particular reference to ASB issues.
2. That Guinness Partnership (and other Registered Providers if relevant) be requested to update councillors regarding each neighbourhood (including when estate inspections are due so Ward Councillors can attend if they wish), to be included in Councillors' Information Bulletin via Democratic Services.
3. That officers provide as much information as possible (in accordance with GDPR) to Registered Providers once a social tenancy is agreed.
4. That as a result of the new legislation and consumer standards in 2024, and following the completion of tenant satisfaction measures survey, officers request information from Registered Providers on local authority area data (if the figures are not available from the RSH website).
5. That the Overview and Scrutiny Commission receives an (annual) report following the publication of the TSMs, to specifically include comparison with Crawley Homes.
6. Request that the Cabinet Member for Housing and/or Chief Executive write to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, along with relevant Government Departments calling for councils to have greater powers to scrutinise registered housing providers, along with powers to direct registered housing providers to make amends where failure occurs.

RESOLVED

That the draft recommendations as documented be agreed.

5. Information and Preparation of Report

It was noted that the Scrutiny Review overall had been interesting and thought provoking. Members believed that it had been successful in considering potential improvements but it was acknowledged that it was a wide ranging topic and it was again acknowledged that the responsibility for governing and regulating RPs lay with the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH). However the Panel noted that working together was the best way to tackle some of the shared challenges faced.

The Panel discussed the preparation of the report. It was agreed that a draft report would be compiled incorporating the proposals as discussed and agreed. The draft recommendations would be further elaborated upon within the report, along with background information and supporting evidence resulting in further details being emphasised as to the importance of each recommendation. The draft report would be circulated via email to enable comments to be incorporated into the final version for a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission and Cabinet on 24 and 26 June respectively.

The Chair took the opportunity to thank the Democratic Services Officer together with the representatives that had attended the sessions for their reports, as the information had greatly assisted the Panel in informing the draft recommendations. Panel Members were also thanked for their input into the review.

RESOLVED

That a draft report be compiled and circulated for comment, agreement and submission for OSC and Cabinet in late June 2024.

Closure of Meeting

With the business of the Housing Associations Scrutiny Panel concluded, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 7.26pm.

T Lunnon (Chair)