

Briefing Paper for Housing Associations Scrutiny Panel: Registered Providers operating in Crawley

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 This report has been produced in response to a request to provide information on the registered providers [housing associations] operating in Crawley. This report is for information purposes and therefore contains no recommendations for further action.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Registered providers provide homes and services for people in housing need. They are independent organisations, many of which are charitable and are non-profit making (where surplus is used to maintain existing homes and finance the build of new homes). Of the [approx.] 4.5 million social rented homes in England, [approx.] 2.9 million are owned and operated by registered providers.
- 2.2 Registered providers are the country's main provider of new homes for affordable rent. Many also offer shared ownership schemes to help people on lower incomes afford home ownership. Registered providers also provide much of the country's supported housing, with specialist services for vulnerable people such as those with mental health issues, learning disabilities, women fleeing domestic violence and homeless households.
- 2.3 Registered providers fund the development of new affordable homes predominantly through using privately raised finance, together with funding provided by Homes England and their own reserves. They may also receive enabling funding through partnership working with local authorities. They are managed by Boards of Management that comprise of independent people, volunteers, residents, representatives of local authorities and community groups. These boards have overall responsibility for the work and financial management of the organisation and for ensuring compliance with regulatory requirements.

3.0 Crawley Context

- 3.1 As a stock holding authority the Council owns and manages approximately three quarters of all social rented housing in the Borough. The remaining quarter is owned and managed by registered providers. A breakdown of social housing stock by provider is shown in table one.

Table One – Registered provider housing stock in Crawley as of 31st March 2023

Registered provider	Location	Properties
A2 Dominion	Southgate/Northgate	128
Abri	Pease Pottage	14
Anchor Hanover Group	Tilgate	71
Clarion Housing	Various Neighbourhoods	141
Guinness Trust	Broadfield	476
Housing 21	Southgate	104
Hyde Housing Association	Various Neighbourhoods	392
Keniston Housing Association	Southgate	67
London and Quadrant	Broadfield	286
Moat Housing Association	Various Neighbourhoods	475
Mount Green Housing Association	Langley Green	44
Raven Housing Trust	Various Neighbourhoods	223
Southern Housing Group	Various Neighbourhoods	300
Stonewater	Southgate	47
Town and Country Housing Association	Broadfield	39
Transform Housing Association	West Green	62
Aster Housing Association	Kilnwood Vale	8
Orbit	Kilnwood Vale	5
YMCA Downlink	West Green	40

Rosebery	Various Neighbourhoods	68
	Total	2,990

Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/registered-provider-social-housing-stock-and-rents-in-england-2022-to-2023>

3.2 Of the affordable housing built in Crawley over the last 3 years, 225 homes were built by registered providers. Over the next two years it is estimated that registered providers are set to deliver approximately 57% of the new build social housing in Crawley, this equates to over 270 homes, much of which will become available at social rents via the housing register. The nomination rights to registered providers properties secured by the Council play a significant role in helping to meet the demand for affordable and social housing locally.

4.0 Nomination Rights and Preferences

4.1 Through nomination agreements with our registered provider partners, the Council has secured nomination rights to 100% of newly built social housing in Crawley and up to 75% of social housing once it becomes available for re-occupation. When properties become available, they are let via the Council's housing register. The Council operates a choice-based lettings scheme. This means that households on the housing register (including those threatened or who are homeless and living in expensive temporary accommodation) choose which properties they bid for. Property adverts clearly state who the landlord is (the Council or one of the registered providers), giving applicants the ability to choose who they want as a landlord.

4.2 Of the social tenancies that started between 1st January to 31st December 2022 in Crawley, a quarter (113 in total) were with registered providers, with the factor most heavily influencing the bidding (along with the size of the property and any adaptations needed) was the area in which the property was situated. The majority of applicants placing less importance on the landlord and more on the area in which they want to live. 40% of those properties went to homeless households in temporary accommodation, without which those 45 households would have remained in temporary accommodation at significant cost to the Council.

4.3 At present of the 838 households on the housing register who have applied to transfer to another property, only a quarter (211) are registered provider tenants. The most common reasons for wanting to move being overcrowding and having a medical need to move, suggesting that households are not (as a rule) moving into registered provider properties with a view to transferring to a Council owned property.

5.0 Regulation and Governance

5.1 The responsibility of governing and regulating registered providers lies entirely with the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) and not Crawley Borough Council. The RSH's role is to:

- protect social housing assets
- ensure providers are financially viable and properly governed
- maintain confidence of lenders to invest into the sector
- encourage and support the supply of social housing
- ensure tenants are protected and have opportunities to be involved in the management of their housing
- ensure value for money in service delivery

5.2 The RSH take a co-regulatory approach. This means boards who govern providers' service delivery are responsible for ensuring that their organisation is meeting the RSH standards, and for being open and accountable in how their organisation meets its objectives. Co-regulation also requires providers to support tenants in the shaping and scrutinising of service delivery and in holding boards to account.

5.3 The RSH expect providers to identify problems and take effective action to resolve them. If a provider takes responsibility and it is concluded that they are able to respond to the problem, the RSH work with the provider to help it deliver the necessary corrective actions. If the provider is unable or unwilling to respond positively, the RSH may use their regulatory enforcement powers.

5.4 The RSH do not carry out surveys of registered provider tenants, however registered providers do carry out customer satisfaction surveys and some provide a limited summary of results on their websites. For the

purpose of this report, the data obtained from their websites indicates good levels of customer satisfaction amongst registered providers who own and manage housing stock in Crawley and across the UK.

6.0 Tenancy Policy and Strategy

- 6.1 Each social housing provider, whether a registered provider or stock holding local authority is required to develop its own Tenancy Policy setting out its service standards. In doing so the social housing provider must meet legislative requirements, which includes a requirement to “have regard” to Local Authority Tenancy Strategies.
- 6.2 Tenancy Strategies were a requirement of the Localism Act 2011 and are intended to guide housing associations and stock holding Council’s on matters such as rent levels, length and type of tenancies, and local housing needs.
- 6.3 As the majority of registered providers operate on a regional, if not national basis, their Tenancy Policy will be regionally rather than locally based and as such will need to “have regard” to the Tenancy Strategies of the range of local authorities across their operating areas. This inevitably serves to dilute more local needs and, as such, Tenancy Strategies carry little weight in the development of Tenancy Policies.

7.0 Service Standards

- 7.1 *Accessing Information* - All residents of social rented housing should have quick and easy access to information they may need during their tenancy. Tenants will want to know about repairs standards (detailing how they go about requesting a repair and the timeframe in which it will be dealt with) and complaints procedures (detailing how they go about making a complaint and what will happen when they do). Information, documents, policies, and procedures for use by tenants should be clear, concise and easy to understand.
- 7.2 The websites of social housing providers with a presence in Crawley were checked to see whether this information was quick and easy to find and understand. All complaints procedures and repairs processes viewed clearly outlined what was expected of the customer and in turn, how the association would respond.
- 7.3 *Rent Levels* - Social housing providers set social rents in line with government guidelines and the Rents Standard. Social rent is set using a formula from which a ‘target rent’ is calculated. Each year the Government and the Regulator for Social Housing adjust the formula to the new annual Consumer Price Index to calculate rent increases. A search was carried out of rent levels of housing association properties let via the housing register in 2022 and all were at or under the LHA rate and considered affordable.
- 7.4 *Standards and Disrepair* – Registered providers have certain responsibilities to maintain their stock (with a particular focus on issues such as gas safety, electrical safety and the structural fabric of the building for example). Complaints about disrepair are dealt with internally using the association’s own procedures in the first instance. Where this does not result in a satisfactory outcome, tenants have the right to request that the matter is investigated by the Housing Ombudsman. The Council’s Private Sector Housing Team may become involved where tenants have been through the complaints procedure and contacted the Council for advice.
- 7.5 Both the Council and registered providers work to a ‘standard’ of repair. Whilst all social housing must (as a minimum) meet the decent homes standard, providers of social housing are able to set their own repairs standards. Whilst there is no mechanism for requiring consistency, it is not a matter of which standard is ‘best’, but of whether they are being adhered to.
- 7.6 Approx. 14% of disrepair complaints (around 20 per annum) coming into the Private Sector Housing Team are regarding disrepair in properties owned by housing associations. Of the complaints made in 2022, none escalated to the point where enforcement action was considered necessary, and the landlord satisfactorily resolved the issues.

8.0 How do service standards compare?

- 8.1 Service standards and operational processes for social housing providers must conform with their individual regulatory and governance requirements and are thus set at a level which meets requirements to protect both tenants and housing stock and which reflects the expectations of their respective tenants. Service standards and operational processes will inevitably vary between individual registered providers and between registered providers and the Council as there is no requirement for consistency.
- 8.2 Registered providers are not under any obligation to provide data on performance or customer satisfaction to the Council and in many cases this is collected on a sub-regional rather than a local authority basis and therefore does not necessarily reflect the local picture. However, the data that was obtained for the purposes of this report reflects good levels of performance and customer satisfaction within registered providers who operate within Crawley.
- 8.3 In April 2023 the RSH introduced tenant satisfaction measures standard, requiring registered providers to annually collect and publish information to support effective scrutiny by tenants of their landlord's performance in managing their homes and neighbourhoods. This will allow for easier monitoring and comparison of tenant satisfaction in the future.

9.0 Conclusion

- 9.1 Registered providers play a critical role in the delivery of social housing and meeting local housing need. A quarter of social housing let via the housing register in 2022 was owned by registered providers, and over half of new build social housing to be delivered over the coming two years will be built by registered providers.
- 9.2 The Council receive low levels of complaints about housing standards within properties owned by registered providers, and no enforcement action has been necessary over the previous year. The introduction of tenant satisfaction measures will soon allow for easier and more effective comparison of how housing standards are implemented in registered providers across the Borough.
- 9.3 Given the increasing demand for social housing (through rising homeless and housing register applications), and the pressures on the Council's temporary accommodation budget, positively engaging with our registered provider partners is vital if we are to meet housing need in the borough through partnership working.

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