

**SCRUTINY COMMISSION – 1 JULY 2010**

**REPORT OF THE CHIEF OFFICER (CORPORATE & CUSTOMER RESOURCES,  
SCRUTINY & ETHICAL STANDARDS)**

**RE: REGISTERED SOCIAL LANDLORD REVIEW**

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**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To support the Commission in making recommendations arising from the recent review of Registered Social Landlords (RSLs).

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

That the Scrutiny Commission thanks the representatives of Midland Heart, Orbit and Waterloo Housing Group for their attendance and makes the following recommendations:

- (i) specific figures for the number of major adaptations be provided along with the cost to this authority in disabled facilities grants and further discussions be held with regard to regulating this arrangement
- (ii) work to prevent homelessness be documented and communication with the Council on this be improved;
- (iii) Registered Social Landlords link more closely with the NATs;
- (iv) accountability to tenants be documented and that performance targets and customer service standards mirror that of the local authority;
- (v) all housing associations encourage direct contact with Members and that a Borough Councillor be invited to sit on a partnership board to allow input into issues that concern residents of the borough.

**3. BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT**

3.1 At the meetings of the Scrutiny Commission on 4 March and 8 April 2010, representatives of three Housing Associations (Midland Heart, Orbit and Waterloo Housing Group) attended the meetings and gave a brief presentation on the work of their organisations. Members had the opportunity to ask questions of the representatives, covering areas including accountability, community involvement, sustainability, homelessness prevention, disabled adaptations and rent restructuring.

3.2 Following the presentations, Members expressed concern with regard to some areas of work of the Housing Associations, namely in the areas of disabled adaptations, homelessness duties, linking with Neighbourhood Action Teams, accountability of the associations to their tenants and Member involvement.

3.3 At the meeting of the Commission on 20 May 2010, Members agreed that in order to conclude the review, a written report be prepared and, whilst it is acknowledged that Housing Associations are not obliged to accept or action the Commission's recommendations, recommendations be formed based on the issues highlighted and outlined in the following paragraphs.

3.4 Disabled adaptations

Whilst Members were pleased to hear that the RSLs had budgets and little or no waiting list for disabled adaptations, they were concerned that in terms of major works such as level access showers, the organisation claimed a disabled facilities grant from the Borough Council. It is recommended that specific figures for the number of major adaptations be provided along with the cost to this authority in disabled facilities grants and further discussions be held with regard to regulating this arrangement.

3.5 Homelessness duties

Whilst the representatives demonstrated that work to prevent homelessness was undertaken, Members expressed concern that as homelessness was a priority for this authority, work on this should be monitored closely until the function is well established. It is recommended that work to prevent homelessness be documented and communication with the Borough Council be improved.

3.6 Linking with Neighbourhood Action Teams

Whilst the representatives in attendance were aware of the Neighbourhood Action Teams (NATs) and some showed that they had supported these, Members felt that more partnership working was needed. It is recommended that Registered Social Landlords link more closely with the NATs.

3.7 Accountability of the Associations to their Tenants

Whilst some examples of involving tenants in the organisation and decision making, Members were concerned that the association was not subject to the same performance targets and customer service standards that the Council had to meet and that, as a private organisation, it was not accountable as part of a larger structure or to its tenants. It is recommended that accountability to tenants be documented and that performance targets and customer service standards mirror that of the local authority.

3.8 Member involvement

Members were concerned that they had no involvement in the Housing Associations, despite being accountable to and responsible for the wellbeing of the entire community including those in housing association properties. Whilst it was acknowledged that Orbit had committed to resurrect their Partnership Forum, on which a Borough Councillor had sat, it was felt that other housing associations did not have the same mechanism which would be beneficial. Concern was also expressed that Members had to contact the associations via a general contact number and did not have contact information for problems out of hours. It is recommended that all housing associations encourage direct contact with Members and that a Borough Councillor be invited to sit on a partnership board to allow input into issues that concern residents of the borough.

4. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS [IB]**

None arising directly from this report. However officer time involved in regulating any future agreement and officer time involved in the provision of future management information will have to be met from existing budgets.

5. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS (AB)**

None raised directly by this report

6. **CORPORATE PLAN IMPLICATIONS**

This report supports the Corporate aim of Decent, well managed and affordable housing.

7. **CONSULTATION**

Representatives of the largest Housing Associations serving Hinckley & Bosworth were included in the Scrutiny Review, however there has been no external consultation in the preparation of this report.

8. **RISK IMPLICATIONS**

It is the Council's policy to proactively identify and manage significant risks which may prevent delivery of business objectives.

It is not possible to eliminate or manage all risks all of the time and risks will remain which have not been identified. However, it is the officer's opinion based on the information available, that the significant risks associated with this decision / project have been identified, assessed and that controls are in place to manage them effectively.

The following significant risks associated with this report / decisions were identified from this assessment:

<b>Management of significant (Net Red) Risks</b>		
<b>Risk Description</b>	<b>Mitigating actions</b>	<b>Owner</b>
Housing Associations not accepting the recommendations made	None available – low impact	Sharon Stacey / Louisa Horton

9. **KNOWING YOUR COMMUNITY – EQUALITY AND RURAL IMPLICATIONS**

Recommendations made as part of this review will not have a negative impact on any communities or groups and should the recommendations be actioned by the Housing Associations, there will be positive results for vulnerable groups, Housing Association residents and the wider community by improving the services provided by Registered Social Landlords, improving communication with the Council and Elected members, providing services for the wider community and supporting vulnerable groups.

## 10. **CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

By submitting this report, the report author has taken the following into account:

- Community Safety implications
- Environmental implications
- ICT implications
- Asset Management implications
- Human Resources implications
- Planning Implications
- Voluntary Sector

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Background papers: Minutes of the Scrutiny Commission on 4 March & 8 April 2010

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