

## **SCRUTINY COMMISSION.**

### **REPORT OF CHIEF OFFICER (HOUSING, COMMUNITY SAFETY AND PARTNERSHIPS)**

#### **RE: RSL RECOMMENDATIONS UPDATE**

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#### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To update members on progress following the Scrutiny review of Registered Social Landlords (RSL's).

#### **2. RECOMMENDATION**

The Scrutiny Commission:

- 2.1 Note the contents of the report.

#### **3. BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT**

- 3.1 In early 2010 the Scrutiny Commission carried out a review of RSL's operating in the Borough. Three RSL's (Midland Heart, Orbit and Waterloo Housing Group) attended Scrutiny meetings and answered questions around certain aspects of their work, including accountability, community involvement, sustainability, homelessness prevention, disabled adaptations and rent restructuring.

- 3.2 A number of recommendations were made by the Scrutiny Commission around disabled adaptations, homelessness duties, linking with Neighbourhood Action teams, accountability of associations to their tenants and Member involvement. Progress against these recommendations is detailed below.

#### **4.0 DISABLED ADAPTATIONS.**

- 4.1 The Commission asked for specific figures for the number of major adaptations and the cost to this authority in the associated disabled facilities grants (DFG). The Commission asked for further discussions to be held with RSL's regard regulating the arrangements.

- 4.2 In 2010/11 3 RSL properties were adapted at a total cost of £35,000 (out of an overall spend of £351,000).

- 4.3 In 2011/12 £39,000 has been paid to date on RSL property adaptations and a further £113,000 is committed. The total spend this year on RSL properties will be in the region of £152,000, which relates to 17 properties (overall budget for 2011/12 is £609,000).

- 4.4 The amount spent on DFG's for RSL properties will vary year on year and will depend on the needs of their tenants and recommendations from the Occupational Therapists.

- 4.4 The county wide review of DFG's did consider the issue of RSL's and their contribution to the cost of adaptations to their properties, however resolution could not be found. East Midlands Housing have said that they will consider contributions to DFG's on a case by case basis.

## **5.0 HOMELESSNESS**

- 5.1 The Commission asked that work to prevent homelessness is documented and communication with the council improved.
- 5.2 A meeting was held with the RSL's and it was established that a number of initiatives are in place with all the RSL's present including:
- Support Officers in place to assist tenants facing difficulties.
  - Homelessness Champions within organizations.
  - Homelessness Strategies in place.
  - Debt advice workers/arrangements in place with CAB to assist tenants with financial difficulties.
  - Hardship funds.
  - Housing option advise training for front line officers.
  - Early home visits to new tenants to identify support needs.
- 5.3 Communication between the RSL's and the Housing Options team has improved. Early contact is made when RSL's are considering evictions in order that joint visits could be undertaken and advice given to the tenant on the consequences of them not modifying their behaviour. RSL's have also been actively involved with the Community Safety team and police when issues of anti social behaviour have arisen with their tenants.

## **6 NEIGHBOURHOOD ACTION TEAMS**

- 6.1 The Scrutiny Commission recommended that RSL's linked more closely with the NAT's.
- 6.2 Where RSL's have substantial stock in a NAT area they have contributed to projects and initiatives taking place. For example, Orbit housing have held surgeries from the Community Houses, have contributed to project costs at Barwell community House and have been one of the partners involved in the provision of the Credit Union.

## **7. ACCOUNTABILITY TO TENANTS.**

- 7.1 The Scrutiny Commission recommended that accountability to tenants be documented and that performance targets and customers service standards mirror that of the local authority.
- 7.2 Since the Commission undertook this review the regulation of social housing providers has been brought under the remit of the Tenants Services Authority (TSA). All providers, both RSL's and council, were required to meet the TSA's standards and produce local offers in consultation with their tenants which identified performance targets, standards and priorities. Local offers were in place for all organisations by 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011.
- 7.3 Accountability to tenants is further increasing through the move towards co regulation introduced in the Localism Act. The TSA will only become involved in ensuring the standards are met in issues of serious detriment and co regulation of services is recommended. Co regulation involves tenants of social landlords taking the lead in scrutiny of services and performance. There are a number of methods of tenant scrutiny, including tenant inspectors, mystery shoppers and tenant scrutiny panels. All RSL's are engaged with this work and in developing their regulatory frameworks.

## **8. MEMBER CONTACT**

- 8.1 The Scrutiny Commission recommended that all RSL's were to be encouraged to engage in direct contact with Members and that a Borough councilor be invited to sit on a partnership board to allow input into issues that concern residents of the Borough.
- 8.2 Contact details were provided by the RSL's who attended the Scrutiny Commission.
- 8.3 A Partnership Board is in operation with Orbit Housing. This is a historical board, dating back to the time that the trickle transfer arrangement was in place. Councillor Crooks and Councillor Morrell sit on the board which meets quarterly and allows for an exchange of information and resolution of issues. The discussion at this board has been positive and has allowed a greater understanding of the changing landscape within which RSL's are operating.
- 8.4 Partnership Boards with other RSL's have not been set up and issues are dealt with on an ad hoc basis. If Members want an opportunity to meet with RSL's consideration could be given to holding an annual meeting with RSL's to which members could be invited.

## **9 OTHER DEVELOPMENTS.**

- 9.1 A number of positive developments with RSL's have taken place. These include:
- Participation in the sub regional Choice Based Lettings scheme.
  - Working with RSL partners in the bid round for HCA funding for 2011-15.
  - One to one meetings with RSL's regarding their approach to affordable rents and conversions/disposals of existing stock.
  - Joint consultation event with RSL's and the other Districts around development of our Tenancy Strategy.

## **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS (DB)**

There are none arising directly from this report

## **5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS (AB)**

Contained in the body of the report

## **6. CORPORATE PLAN IMPLICATIONS**

Decent, well managed and affordable homes.

## **7. CONSULTATION**

None.

## **8. RISK IMPLICATIONS**

None – report for information and update.

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

None – no decision being taken.

## **10. CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

By submitting this report, the report author has taken the following into account: [if you require assistance in assessing these implications, please contact the person noted in parenthesis beside the item]

- Community Safety implications [Sharon Stacey, ext 5636]
- Environmental implications [Jane Neachell, ext 5968]
- ICT implications [Paul Langham, ext 5995]
- Asset Management implications [Malcolm Evans, ext 5614]
- Human Resources implications [Julie Stay, ext 5688]
- Planning Implications [Simon Wood, ext 5692]
- Voluntary Sector [VAHB]

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Background papers: Scrutiny Commission Review of RSL's

Contact Officer: Sharon Stacey ext 5636.