

Scrutiny Review Registered Housing Providers Panel Meeting 12th January Draft Minutes

Present: Cllrs Alexander (Chair), Adje, Beacham, Schmitz & Watson

1. Apologies for absence

1.1 Cllr Christophides

2. Declarations of interest

2.1 None received.

3. Late items of urgent business

3.1 None received.

4. Scoping report feedback from housing providers

4.1 The scoping report was distributed to a number of local registered housing providers for comment and suggestions (those that sit on the Integrated Housing Board). A number of officers from Homes for Haringey (the ALMO) were also consulted on the scope of the review. A summary of the main issues feedback to the panel and subsequent discussion is summarised below.

4.2 A consistent response from the consultation was that the emphasis on common standards within the review objectives may deter participation and support from local housing providers. It was suggested that it would be impractical for housing providers, which may have stock with many different authorities, to develop common standards with each local authority in which they have housing stock.

4.3 In addition, the panel noted that the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) have developed a set of national standards which may help to create greater consistency of service among registered housing providers. Furthermore, the process of developing 'local offers' (effective from 1/4/10), which allow for localised agreements between tenants and landlords, may supersede moves to develop common standards among housing providers.

4.4 The panel noted that it would be helpful to record local housing providers concerns about common standards within the review, and for them to identify solutions to problems that stem from areas where there are multiple landlords (e.g. responsibility for services, consistency in services).

4.5 A second issue to emerge from the consultation with housing providers on the scope concerned the timeframe for the review. It was noted that there had been many new housing and related welfare policy announcements which may impact on issues related to this review. Housing providers noted that it would be important to allow sufficient time within the review to reflect on these

proposals and allow the council and local providers to consider responses and appropriate actions (and subsequently captured within the review).

- 4.6 The panel noted that the TSA were actively encouraging housing providers to look at ways to encourage greater consistency in housing management and where practicable, rationalisation of service provision. The panel heard that rationalisation among providers has already taken place with some high profile mergers already completed (i.e. Family Mosaic). It was anticipated that further stock swaps and other rationalisation processes would continue.
- 4.7 The panel were keen to understand what impact public funding cuts would have on the strategic housing service and its work with registered housing providers. It was noted that a paper on prospective service changes was due to go before Cabinet later in January. The implications of this would be assessed. In the same context, the panel agreed that it would be mindful of the cost implications of any recommendations that result from the review.

Agreed: that the financial implications of recommendations would be fully appraised prior to final agreement and would accordingly be prioritised in the final report.

5. Strategic Housing Service

- 5.1 Representatives from the housing service presented a paper to the panel on liaison and partnership work with local registered housing providers. The following is a summary of the main points from this presentation and subsequent panel discussion.
- 5.2 It was noted that the strategic housing service and local housing providers had common aspirations which necessitated close working within the sector. A number of examples were cited which included the council consulting housing providers in the development of the Haringey Housing Strategy (2009-2019). The council and local housing providers also worked closely together to secure new social housing development in the borough as well as tackling homelessness. For much of this work, housing providers were noted to be key delivery partners for priorities set by the council.
- 5.3 The council has developed an infrastructure to support communication and partnership work with housing providers, this included:
- An annual conference hosted by the Council for local housing providers on a topical theme or local priority
 - The establishment of an Integrated Housing Board (5 registered housing providers are members) which oversees housing aspects of the Community Strategy
 - A number of forums to facilitate partnership work in the sector which include:
 - Developers forum - issues of housing supply
 - Letting forum – issues of allocations and lettings

5.4 The strategic housing service has also developed a partnership agreement with local housing providers. Although the agreement is voluntary and not legally binding, it sets out a framework for liaison with the council and for partnership working among local housing providers. Key elements of the Partnership Agreement include a commitment to support the delivery of council strategies, roles and expectations for key areas of local housing service provision (i.e. nomination and lettings, management and repairs & development and marketing) and cooperative and consistent approaches to other community priorities such as tackling anti social behaviour (ASB) and domestic violence and ensuring appropriate safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults.

Agreed: that the partnership agreement is circulated to the panel.

5.5 The panel noted that although housing providers are publicly funded, each has a separate constitution and managed by an independent board. In this context, although the TSA is responsible for the overall regulation of housing providers, local authorities do not have any powers to enforce any conditions. All partnership work and joint enterprise between the local authority and housing providers is therefore undertaken on a voluntary basis. This being said, it was noted that there was a very positive relationship with between the council and local housing providers.

5.6 The panel were keen to further understand what leverage the council may have in working with housing providers. It was recorded that point of maximum leverage would centre at the point at which new development is agreed. It was noted however, that housing providers were social businesses in which profits were reinvested in to social housing.

5.7. The strategic service was asked to identify a number of priorities which it would be helpful for the review to focus on during its investigation. Two areas were identified:

- In the context of declining public funding, there will be an emphasis on working with housing providers more effectively and efficiently and to maximise what resources are available. It was therefore noted that it would be helpful for the review to identify ways in which priorities of housing providers may be aligned and how resources could be pooled for more effective and efficient service provision.
- Given that there are a number of housing providers it is inevitable that there are variations in the way stock is managed locally, that is, local people may experience different levels of service from individual housing providers. The housing team is already involved in helping to resolve local issues where these cannot be resolved with individual housing providers and many of these centre around issues to do with multi-landlord estates. In this context it would be helpful for the review to identify the nature and scope of local offers to tenants and housing providers responses to these locally identified standards.

- 5.8 The housing service was also asked to identify any 'stumbling blocks' in seeking to improve partnership work among local housing providers. It was noted that the large number of housing providers that have stock in the borough clearly present a number of issues for communication and engagement. But the numbers of providers also presented ongoing opportunities too; housing providers change over time and there are peaks and troughs of engagement across the sector, some are good at securing development whilst others are good at tenancy management or dealing with ASB. The point being, that the variety of housing associations in the borough provides a rich seam of partnership opportunities for the strategic housing service and possible interventions to improve social housing in the borough.
- 5.9 It was noted that most complaints that the strategic housing service receive about housing providers are around upkeep and maintenance of estates. In particular, the maintenance and general cleanliness of common areas and issues relating to ASB on those estates were noted as areas of concern. It was recorded that housing providers find ASB issues quite difficult to resolve, especially as there is a need to develop an evidence base before a housing association can act upon the problem. Similarly, as some housing providers may have a small number of units in Haringey, they may not be aware of problems or officers may be based outside the borough
- 5.10 The panel noted from their own casework that there were problems in dealing with ASB of tenants in some housing associations, particularly as these may be in single isolated units or where offices or officers are external to the borough (and have little knowledge of local issues). Similarly, there were also issues with ASB and the tenants of hostels which are operated by registered social landlords. It was not clear how involved housing providers were in the work of local Safer Neighbourhood Teams and if there was an established process through which to relay concerns.

Agreed: Consult with community safety to ascertain how housing providers can be consulted / involved further in the work of local SNTs (with a view for future recommendation within the review).

- 5.11 The panel heard that some of the larger housing providers had already embarked upon stock rationalisation processes (stock swaps and stock sales). In a discussion about what role the council could play in facilitating such rationalisation processes, it was noted that the council clearly cannot dictate such processes; however it could map stock and providers in the borough which may help to facilitate dialogue between providers.
- 5.12 The council was noted to have a very proactive role in this field in that it has a regular dialogue with many local housing providers. Conversely, the dialogue between local housing providers may not be as consistent or developed. In this context, it was suggested that the council may be able to play a brokerage role in helping to put housing association in touch with each other to improve coordination and integration of local housing provision.

Agreed: that the panel explore further the potential of the strategic housing service developing a brokerage role among local housing providers.

6. Future evidence to the panel.

- 6.1 A number of future attendances at the review panel were confirmed including Homes for Haringey, National Housing Federation and the report from a pilot project from the Campsbourne Estate (Hornsey).
- 6.2 It was noted that a number of consultations were planned for the review including a i) dedicated event for local housing providers ii) attendance at a tenant meeting at a multi-landlord estate. Dates and times would be agreed with the panel.

Agreed: the date and time for the planned consultation event with housing providers to be re-circulated to panel members.

**January 19th 2011
Cllr Alexander
Chair of Panel**