

## **Appendix D**

### **Social Housing – Task and Finish Group**

#### **Meeting with Senior Officers from Clarion Housing Association**

**25 June at 10am (Virtual Meeting) and 30 June at 2pm (Virtual Meeting)**

Present: Elected members M Goldspink (In the Chair), M Brady and J Wyllie

Clarion Housing Sarah Wells, (Head of Operations East Region and Marek Witko (Regional Director)

Officers: Lorraine Blackburn, Scrutiny Officer and Claire Bennett, Service Manager – Housing Services

*This meeting was adjourned as a result of an IT related situation and resumed on 30 June at 2pm (see below) the meeting resumed again at Question 7*

#### **1. Apologies**

Elected member N Symonds submitted apologies for absence. She was unwell. Elected member M Goldspink agreed to Chair the meeting of the Task and Finish Group.

#### **2. Introductions**

The Group introduced themselves.

#### **3. Questions to Clarion Housing’s Senior Officers**

The Task and finish Group was reminded that questions established at the meeting in December 2019 had been circulated to Senior

Officers who had prepared a summary of responses. The Scrutiny Officer suggested that she read out the responses received from the Clarion Officers (herein 'the Officer(s)') to allow the Task and Finish Group the chance to focus on any supplementary questions they may wish to ask. This was supported. (Clarion's written responses are listed in italics immediately under each question in these notes.) Cllr Brady expressed concern at the number of acronyms in Clarion's response. The Officers apologised for this and agreed to clarify them as the meeting progressed. This was subsequently forwarded from Clarion as an appendix.

**1. How well does the council's approach in allocating vacant RP properties work? Do the RPs have any suggestions for how things could be done differently?**

- *"We work well with the Housing Options team, we get nominations in a timely manner and whenever there are issues the relationship we have with the team will see the problem is resolved. We have 100% nomination agreement, but if there is a case that may requires internal move we speak with the HO team and they agree to the move. There is also a process in place that allows management moves granted from Clarion to be awarded extra points via the CBL system and this assists both Clarion and the residents."*
- The Regional Director explained that East Herts system worked well and that they worked with whatever letting based system was preferred by each authority whether this was Home Choice or Home Locator.

**2. How well does the council support RPs to develop new homes in the district? Do the RPs have any suggestions on how things could be done differently?**

- *“East Herts is an important focal point for Clarion in terms of providing new homes for both affordable tenures and private sale. East Herts has been supportive in relaxing the local connection criteria at Hazel End Phase A where we have had difficulty selling some of the shared ownership homes. Future flexibility would be appreciated at an early stage if similar schemes have the same difficulty”.*
- *“A willingness to discuss affordable tenure mixes on individual sites and to develop the conversation around why the provision of 1 bed flats and 4 bed houses as affordable homes would be beneficial. The other area of interest is working with East Herts and HE to discuss how grant rates and additional funding can be used to increase the amount of affordable homes on sites in East Herts”.*
- In response to a question by Cllr M Brady, the Clarion Head of Operations explained the need to get the right mixture of tenures in relation to new housing provision and the difficulties encountered in achieving the right mix usually through Section 106 Agreements.
- She explained that there was a need to have early conversations with planning officers to achieve what was right for particular areas, for example there was a high need for 1-bed properties but a high concentration of 1-bed properties caused a problem in relation community cohesion.
- Ideally there should be a mix of 1, 2 and 3-bedroomed properties (as 2 and 3-bedroom properties were the greatest in demand).
- Four-bed room properties were also a problem because local need was based on private and public sector housing guidelines. The Head of Operations explained that there was demand for 4-bed properties in the private sector but not within the public sector and that they were often unaffordable.

- Cllr J Wyllie suggested stressed the benefits of early discussion with Planning to achieve the right mix of tenure. It was also suggested that there should be two separate lists related to the affordable and private sector needs.

*The council's Service Manager – Housing Services Manager explained that the council's District Plan includes separate preferred housing mixes for affordable and private housing on a development. She also reported that the Housing service works with the Planning service to secure the right size of affordable homes to meet the current identified needs for affordable homes. She explained the process of negotiation with the developers and with the planning service and the balance the developers needed to establish on what properties sold well for shared ownership homes.*

### **3. How well does the council communicate its aims and objectives to RPs? Could this be improved?**

- *“Quarterly /Ad Hoc meetings at all levels and named contacts. An RP forum for operational issues would be beneficial”*
- The Head of Operations explained that quarterly meetings were held with the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and there was a strong working relationship with Housing Officers and the Head of Service.
- She provided an update on what other forums of communication and media were used. The Head of Operations said that she would like to see the Housing Forum reinstated and include housing management and asked if further thought could be given to this. It was noted that the last Forum was held in January 2020. The Head of Operations explained that other elected members were regularly updated in relation to housing matters, specifically the Executive and the elected member champion.

- It was noted that a joint presentation with Network Homes and Clarion would take place to provide an overview of housing provision in the district and to afford elected members the opportunity to ask questions.
- Cllr Wyllie said that Housing Officers should be invited to pre planning discussions.

*The East Herts Service Manager – Housing Services explained that the Housing service’s views were sought at the early stages of developers’ proposal and that the Housing services was fully engaged on the most strategic sites, notably Gilston. She pointed out the strategic housing market assessment is in the District Plan. This provides a detailed breakdown of property type and tenures that Planning colleagues use as part of the pre-application discussions with developers.*

**4. What are the RPs’ views on how elected members and/or officers raise tenants complaints with them? Could this be done differently?**

- *“All complaints should be raised via contact centre*
- *Agreement with Peter Boylan that Council Elected members/officers should ensure that tenants have raised issues with us first, to allow us the opportunity to resolve, prior to their involvement- this is working well generally*
- *Manage expectations of tenants- ensure that council elected members do not promise actions that RP is unable to carry out i.e eviction for alleged ASB prior to correct procedures/investigation/Management moves”*
- Elected members were provided with the generic contact number for Clarion 0300 500 8000. Clarion Officers explained that all enquiries should be logged with Clarion to allow them the opportunity to address an issue. The Director for the East Region explained that if an elected member was unhappy with

the result they could email him. (He subsequently forwarded this to elected members on 26 June 2020. )

**5. How satisfied are tenants / residents with the way their complaints are handled; is there a pattern of complaint which can be addressed?**

- *“We do not report on or measure satisfaction by boroughs or specific areas. However, the overall Clarion figure of customer satisfaction for complaints handling. As of 2019-20 quarter 3, 59.8% of Clarion customers are satisfied with the complaints handling and 64% of our customers are satisfied with the outcome/resolution of their complaint*
- *Low volumes received – average of 13 a month in the last quarter 80% of complaints are repair related”*
- The Clarion Officer explained that during the last quarter March-June there had been a drop in complaints which may have been as a result of the lock down but that this could rise.
- The Task and Finish group commented that a figure of 59.8% customers being satisfied with their complaints being handled was not a high satisfaction rate. The Task and Finish group felt that this should have been in the 80s.
- The Clarion Officer explained that people tended not to complete feedback satisfaction if they were dissatisfied with the outcome and that it was more about managing expectations.
- The Clarion Officer explained that their scrutiny service was currently reviewing customer satisfaction survey and comparing this with other housing forms and providers. It was also noted that there were two areas which had low satisfaction results and that a team was reviewing the breakdowns.

**6. How do you communicate with tenants / residents? Does this comply with equality / disability requirements?**

- *“Preferred method of communication is listed on CRM and used to communicate with tenants*
- *Newsletters, LSO, RI consultation, website, partnership days, clarion voice, translation service*
- *Surveys at each transaction, random surveys and repairs surveys, together with tenants early adopters (NHF) RED”*
- The Clarion Officer explained that a new Customer Relationship Management service was being established. She explained the role of Local Service officers in gaining information in relation to turnover, Anti-Social Behaviour and Complaints in a locality; essentially they targeted an area and gathered information. The Director for the Region explained the use of ONS data to tailor services to particular areas, identify issues and to try and support an area which looks at beyond the provision of housing.

**The meeting was adjourned...**

Present: Elected members N Symonds, (Chairman) M Goldspink M Brady and J Wyllie

Clarion Housing Sarah Wells, (Head of Operations East Region) Marek Witko (Regional Director)

Officers: Lorraine Blackburn, Scrutiny Officer and Claire Bennett, Housing Manager,

**7. What are your procedures for complaints?**

- *“We have a two-stage procedure co-ordinated by our Customer Solutions team:*

- *Stage One - We do all we can to resolve customers' issues and put things right. (10 working days)*
- *Stage Two - Is a review if our customer is unhappy with the stage one resolution. (20 working days)*
- *We aim to comply with the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment National Standard which states that "we have an approach to complaints that is clear, simple, accessible and ensures complaints are resolved promptly, politely and fairly. "*
- *OUR PROCEDURE DOES NOT COVER:*
- *Matters already being dealt with by the Housing Ombudsman Service (Ombudsman).Matters already being dealt with by the Information Commissioners Office (ICO)*
- *Liability or personal injury claims.*
- *Where we're advised that legal action has begun,( we will continue to manage through the complaints process until confirmation of legal action has been received)*
- *Complaints from one resident about another. This goes via the neighbourhood housing team for advice on neighbour disputes.*
- *Issues regarding antisocial behaviour (ASB). We will manage complaints about the handling of an ASB process.*
- *Feedback about our policies and procedures from customers or other parties will be recorded and form future reviews.*
- *Any complaint closed over six months ago unless:*
- *There are issues on going related to the complaint – e.g. ASB, damp or mould*
- *An MP or the Ombudsman have asked us to review the complaint*
- *Complaints from non-residents will be acted on but are not covered by the complaints policy. These will be recorded as feedback".*
- *In response to a question regarding how long it would take to process an anti-social behaviour (ASB) case if evidence was being gathered to present to court, the Clarion Officer*



explained that various types of ASB had different categories which were outside of the complaints process. She explained that the association do not take a case to court unless they have strong evidence supporting a conviction and that a Judge would not evict an individual unless the case was water tight. She explained the other forms of Categories 1, 2 and 3 (1- Crime); (3 - noise) reports in 7 days. Vulnerable residents (domestic abuse etc) get an immediate response. Category 2 (noise nuisance); five days to investigate and response Category 3 (Any other issue) this would take seven days to respond. The T&FG were advised that each complaint was looked at on an individual basis.

**8. In terms of the bidding process and viewing properties, what are your protocols? Do you experience difficulties with this?**

- *"We have minimum involvement with the bidding process; we aim to allow viewings of all properties during the void period. 100% Noms"*
- The Director for the Region explained that with regard to the bidding process Clarion respected whatever bidding protocols were used by the local authority. The Clarion Officer emphasised the strong working relationship Clarion had with Housing Officers.

*The East Herts Service Manager – Housing Services explained that there had been some instances when some new build properties had been advertised too early but that was not the fault of the registered providers. She explained the good work which had been done to release void properties to get people out of temporary accommodation.*

**9. How do you resolve problems issues with tenants? What are your protocols in relation to anti-social behaviour?**

- *“The Contact Centre is responsible for signposting the victim to other agencies, correctly recording / categorising the ASB case and transferring complainants to the TS teams.*
- *Tenancy Specialists have overall responsibility for managing all qualifying ASB cases from the beginning to the end. This will include, but it is not limited to action plan creation, booking customer visits, record keeping, keeping the complainant informed and deciding on legal and non-legal actions.*
- *The NHO will complete statements, interviews, inspections and liaise with the local agencies after they receive customer visit appointments from TS’s.*
- *Ensure that residents know their rights and responsibilities in relation to ASB.*
- *Record incidents of ASB and will categorise them as Crime, Noise or Other ASB.*
- *Investigate reports of ASB in accordance with our policy and inform residents if their complaint has not reached the threshold for investigation.*
- *Assess the vulnerability of complainants and tailor our response accordingly.*
- *Keep residents informed about the status and progress of their case.*
- *Signpost residents to other agencies if we are not able to help them or if another agency is better positioned to help*
- *Use the tools and powers available to us to resolve ASB where it will make a difference and the use of our resources is proportionate.*
- *Work in partnership with other agencies to ensure that the most appropriate action is taken to resolve ASB and challenge them to use their powers, where appropriate.*

- *Provide support to victims and witnesses via our internal support services and referrals to other agencies.*
- *Work to prevent ASB by working proactively with other agencies to provide diversionary activities and support to potential perpetrators.*
- *Design out ASB & crime by carrying out physical improvements to our estates and carrying out appropriate checks before letting our properties.*
- *Always consider whether ASB is an indicator of domestic abuse and respond in line with our domestic abuse policy and procedure.*
- *We classify reports of ASB as Crime (category 1, requires crime ref number and to report to police first), Noise (category 2) and all other forms of ASB (category 3). Some crime issues are also identified as urgent where they are a threat to someone's physical safety such as, domestic violence, hate crimes and physical violence.*
- *The thresholds for 2 and 3:*
- *Three separate incidents reported in the last 7 days by the same person or an elected member of the same household*
- *Five separate incidents reported in the past 28 days by the same person or elected member of the same household*
- *Two separate incidents reported in the last 28 days by two or more people from different households*
- *For serious one-off events where the incident has been investigated by the Police or the local authority, and they ask us to get involved where they feel it would help and we agree with their assessment*
- *At a time of our choosing, based on local intelligence (e.g. if several residents make isolated complaints about the same household)*
- *We reserve the right not to investigate a case, even when the threshold is met, where we have evidence that the complainant is being unreasonable, vindictive or vexatious"*

- The Task and Finish group members were pleased to see the ambition to keep residents up to date with progress of their case, and queried if there was a commitment to a specific timetable for this.
- Clarion Officers explained that a new policy had been drawn up about this, last November and action plans are devised with the complainant. This policy now asks the complainant to choose how often he/she wished to be updated and by what method.
- An elected member of the Task and Finish group was concerned that there might be long waits for Tenancy Sustainment support. The Officer confirmed that the length of wait depended on the urgency of the support required and if it could be provided in-house or via signposting to more specialist support agencies.
- It was noted that Clarion have a Domestic Abuse Support Worker who works closely with SADA (Survivors Against Domestic Abuse) who also have a Service Level Agreement with the East Herts Housing service to provide support and advice to those experiencing domestic abuse. Clarion tenants can be referred to SADA.

**10. Is there a mechanism to feed back to Social Services in terms of a holistic approach to issues which might be of a Social Services nature?**

- *“Safeguarding policy*
- *Tenancy specialist*
- *Partnership*
- *Data sharing protocol”*
- The Task and Finish group was advised that support was outlined in Clarion’s Safeguarding Policy and by referral to Herts County Council’s Safeguarding Service under their Policy.

- The Task and Finish group was reminded of the need to be careful about sharing personal information.
- The Task and Finish Group was impressed how well tenants were looked after by their landlord especially compared with private tenants.
- Furthermore elected members could make their own referrals to Social Service directly if they had concerns about a situation or incident.

*The meeting finished at 2:40pm*

## **Acronyms**

*RP- registered provider (Housing Association)*

*CBL- Choice Based Letting- system used by East Herts for people to bid on available properties*

*HE- Homes England. Non-departmental public body that funds new affordable housing in England. Responsible for increasing number of new homes built in England, improving existing affordable homes, increasing supply of public land and speeding up rate it can be built on.*

*ASB- Anti Social Behaviour*

*CRM- Customer Relationship Manager .System used by Clarion to manage interactions with customers, build customer relationships, streamline processes and improve customer services*

*LSO- Local Service Offer. A local offer is an additional service or initiative over and above Clarions' Core Offer that is designed to address a specific, identified issue or need over a period of time, to help us achieve our neighbourhood vision. Local offers should assist in improving the quality*

*of local service delivery, quality of life and/or well-being of residents within their neighbourhood.*

*Local offers go beyond a one-off estate management action to resolve an immediate problem such as a skip clearance day. They are intended to address longer term or more entrenched issues that we have been unable to tackle through our usual services.*

*RI-Resident Involvement*

*NHF-National Housing Federation. The trade body for the Housing Association Sector. Influence, campaign and engage on behalf of the elected members (800 Housing Associations)*

*TS-Tenancy Specialist Team, who manage the anti-social behaviour (Clarion)*

*NRO-Neighbourhood response officer*