

AREA CLUSTER MEETINGS – HOUSING REPORT OF CITY HOUSING MANAGERS CATH STOCKS AND WILL MORRITT

SUMMARY

Area Cluster reviews for Housing, more specifically Nottingham City Homes, took place during September, October and November 2017. The purpose of this report is to share with Area Committees an overview of these meetings and additional feedback on additional questions asked by Councillors.

REPORT DETAIL

The NCH service offer

Creating and maintaining successful tenancies and communities lies at the heart of our vision to create homes and places where people want to live. Since our creation as an Arms' Length Management Organisation (ALMO) of Nottingham City Council back in 2005, we have taken a major role in building communities where people can thrive and feel they belong, now and in the future.

The ground breaking work we do to tackle anti-social behaviour, to support our residents in sustaining their tenancies, collect rents and to develop flagship new developments has been recognised at a national level. Underpinning this is our commitment to delivering the day to day services that our residents rely on – repairs and maintenance, tenancy sustainment, Homelink, lettings, involvement, and tenancy and estate management.

Results from our annual resident survey are testament to our success. Customer satisfaction between January and March 2017 hit over 91% - a record high for an individual quarter – and satisfaction for the year was 89.3%. Residents are satisfied with the ways in which we take their views into account, satisfied with their neighbourhoods, and satisfied that their rents offering value for money, with record scores in all these areas.

Satisfaction with the ASB service was better than target, and we collected more than 100% of the rent due to us (by chasing arrears and outstanding debt). Empty homes were re-let more quickly, and the number of lettable empty properties reached a record low.

This is great news for us as we deliver the final year of our three-year Corporate Plan, and it gives us a solid foundation upon which to build the next. We're proud of our achievements, but we're not resting on our laurels. These are challenging times, and challenging times create great opportunities – opportunities that we're seizing with both hands.

Challenges include:

- Impact of welfare reform on residents
- 1% rent cut
- Loss of homes through Right to buy leading to reduced income
- Funding challenges
- Increasing homelessness
- Reduction in provision of support services
- Increased demand on services.

Successes include:

- Record levels of customer satisfaction
- Best new social housing development in the county – Palmer Court Independent Living Scheme, Lenton
- National awards for tenancy sustainment and equality and diversity
- Building more new homes than any other ALMO in the country – 159 built, 414 under construction, 471 proposed.

The future:

- New Corporate Plan from April 2018
- More joint working with partners
- More joint working internally, to get it right first time and to empower staff and increase resilience
- NCH Enterprises Limited (buying and building homes for market rent, under the brand name LiveNG)
- NCH Registered Provider (enabling us to draw down funding from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) to build more affordable homes, which we will own and manage.

Within the Area Cluster meetings, we asked Councillors to share their concerns and priorities. Many of the questions and queries were similar across the different areas and we also had some useful 'local' discussions. In addition to the information we shared within the presentation and reports, additional questions and concerns were answered and responses have been collated to share with Area Committees.

COMMON THEMES CITYWIDE	NCH RESPONSE
Repairs offer and getting it right first time, reducing the need for multiple visits and conflicting information and advice	<p>89% of tenants are satisfied with the way that NCH deals with repairs and maintenance.</p> <p>Getting it 'right first time' is our goal and for colleagues to take ownership of jobs. We now have terms and conditions in place to allow for this, including van stock profiles and training.</p>
Universal Credit preparation and incentivising Credit Union accounts	<p>We are continuing with our preparations for the roll out of Universal Credit, however with a slightly amended time scale due to the delay of the full digital roll out until October 2018. In addition there will be no new UC claims under the live service from this month and therefore we will see a decline in the total number of UC cases being managed by the team. We currently have 402 live cases. We have launched the new facility within Northgate, our housing management system which will allow us to work more effectively and manage a larger caseload, in readiness for the full roll out when we will have more people actually paying rent.</p> <p>The team is continuing to collect data to show which NCH tenants do not have a bank account, access to the internet or confidence in using the internet. We are targeting these households to offer support prior to the roll out of the full service. We are also continuing to work with partners, including the Credit Union, to help tenants to access affordable credit and banking facilities. Members of the Tenancy Sustainment Team are able to set up Credit Union Accounts on behalf of NCH tenants and we cover the £10 set up fee for all those who take up this account. All members of the team have targets for setting up Credit Union Accounts for NCH tenants.</p> <p>Our Head of Rents is meeting with Sam Whitworth, Head of marketing, and Ella Ferris from the Credit Union on 16 January to discuss how we can help to promote the Credit Union. We will look at ways in which we can support NCU with marketing materials and an improved social media campaign. There will be a Rents Week of Action from the 22 January and we will be heavily promoting the use of NCU during this week.</p>

Support with preventing evictions	<p>We know that the cost of evictions is high, both from a financial and social perspective and are committed to reducing evictions which we have been successful in doing year on year, from a high of 442 ten years ago to less than 100 last year. Eviction is only ever considered as a last resort.</p> <p>We have recently introduced an Eviction Prevention Protocol which has been implemented to provide further protection to families and vulnerable adults who are at risk of losing their homes. Multi-agency meetings, which are chaired by NCH are now held fortnightly to discuss all vulnerable tenants at risk of eviction, with partners including Housing Aid, Housing Benefit, Child Services and Nottingham Law Centre. Housing Aid and Child Services are also now conducting joint visits where families are at risk of eviction.</p>
Ability for NCH to manage and maintain other social housing in the area	<p>We are currently in the process of extending our PA (ASRA) contract to manage and maintain a further independent living scheme within St Ann's, this in addition to the properties we currently manage on their behalf. We provide Homelink to 13 RSL partners in the City as well as Nottingham on Call services to 16 other organisations in the locality. In addition we provide out of hour call handling services to Tuntum housing, Enviro Energy and Robin Hood Energy.</p> <p>Construction Repairs & Maintenance have established a Commercial team to complete works that would sit outside the traditional work streams covered. This team has been established to generate growth and additional income through new work streams such as Schools, market and private rent properties, new build projects etc.</p> <p>We continue to identify opportunities for new business wherever we can, dependent on commercial opportunities.</p>

<p>Buying private voids and purchasing scattered Registered Provider stock</p>	<p>NCH Enterprises Limited (NCHEL) is enabling us to buy and build home for market rent, under the brand name Living and we currently have 92 market rented properties.</p> <p>NCH Registered Provider will enable us to draw down funding from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) to build more affordable homes, which we will own and manage.</p> <p>Through our subsidiary company NCHEL, we have recently acquired 50 dispersed properties for homeless accommodation and we are planning to purchase a further 50 properties following NCC borrowing approval.</p>
<p>Case responses and prompt updates from Asset Management</p>	<p>Asset Management have reviewed internal processes and are having Quarterly performance meetings with the Customer Relations Team to discuss overall performance/Members casework/training/quality responses/ first time resolution for Asset enquiries. This has already had a positive impact, with Asset management responding to 100% Cllr enquires within set timescales for December 17.</p>
<p>Support of Tenant and Resident Associations (TRAs) and increasing access for Councillors through other involved customers, e.g. the Block and Street Champion initiative</p>	<p>We are committed to supporting and empowering TRAs to ensure that they are able to sustain themselves but also recognise that TRAs are not the best solution in every area and are looking at different ways of engagement with our tenants and residents.</p> <p>We will share details of Block and Street Champions with Councillors to support with engagement and consultation. Increasing uptake and developing great links with our newly formed Block and Street Champions is an initiative within our Team Plan. Establishing closer working relationships with Housing Patch Managers (HPMs) and Ward Members, helping to create great places to live as well as ensuring increased neighbourhood satisfaction and opportunities to get involved.</p>

<p>Increasing partnership working with Registered Providers to tackle shared challenges</p>	<p>Continuing to improve partnership working with other Nottingham Social Housing Providers is a priority for us over the coming year. This will include supporting work linked to the Nottingham Standard to improve the overall quality of service from social housing providers to ensure increased neighbourhood satisfaction. We are members of Nottingham Social Landlords Forum and regularly attend meetings.</p>
<p>Targeted work to support tenants with downsizing and freeing up family size accommodation</p>	<p>We currently offer Band 2 priority for tenants who are downsizing and releasing two bedroom houses as these are in high demand. We have a Rightsize team to specifically support tenants who want to downsize, and our Tenancy Sustainment Team carry out targeted work. However as we are giving priority to offering accommodation to homeless families to support with the homeless crisis, this means that there are less properties to assist with downsizing. We are promoting mutual exchanges to mitigate some of this impact as well as the option of taking in a lodger.</p>
<p>Management of ASB and links with police. This was specifically with regards to police support with regards to drugs cases</p>	<p>Preventing and tackling anti-social behaviour and criminality through a victim focused approach is a priority for us. It is central to achieving our goals set out in our Corporate Plan and in contributing to city wide objectives set out in the wider Nottingham Plan and Nottingham Crime and Drug Partnership Plan 2015-20.</p> <p>Customer satisfaction with the ASB service has continued to improve. Current performance for Q2 2017/18 is 91.11% exceeding the target of 85%. Year to date performance is 89.22%. This is currently our best ever performance.</p> <p>As a partnership, NCH, Nottinghamshire Police and Community Protection recognise the impact of drugs and associated crime and anti-social behaviour on our estates and are committed to tackling drugs on estates. The numbers of drug-related warrants referred to NCH from the Police has declined and we are working to understand this and ensure appropriate priority is given to tackling drugs as feedback suggests that drug-related activity is still a priority for tenants living in the neighbourhoods.</p> <p>Neighbourhood Policing Inspectors (NPI's) have a certain amount of autonomy for policing decisions within their own areas and will prioritise competing issues. We would encourage Councillors to report drug concerns to local NPIs.</p>

More regular information on breakdown of ASB cases	We are amending the Area Committee report to include a breakdown of ASB data by Ward.
Management of alleyways and untidy gardens	<p>Improving management of alleyways and untidy gardens is a priority for us over the coming year and a focus in our new Corporate Plan. We recently held an Estates Improvement Workshop with partners, including Community Protection, to discuss the issues on our estates and new ideas to resolve these. We will be creating management tools for HPMs to ensure that we meet our goal of 5 star estates, as set out within the new Corporate Plan.</p> <p>We are planning a Spring Clean initiative where we will hold week long “spring cleans” on each estate, targeting areas for deep cleaning, encouraging TRAs and Block and Street Champions to be involved, and encouraging all tenants to spring clean their homes and gardens at the same time.</p>
Garden Assistance	<p>We recognise the value of this service and conducted a quality assessment during October 2017 to determine the quality of the Garden Assistance service and the satisfaction of service users.</p> <p>We have discussed the decline in quality of service with Neighbourhood Services and have referred our concerns the NCH/NCC Housing Partnership Forum to agree improvement to the service</p>

Parking issues	<p>Parking continues to be the biggest cause of concern in their neighbourhood for our tenants. We held a Parking Workshop with partners last year to explore the different issues within different estates, and ways in which we can tackle these issues. Different options are appropriate depending on the issue and we have had some successes working with Traffic to put in permit schemes and double yellow lines, as well as some Environmental works to creating parking areas. We are currently working to put in place a permit scheme at the Woodlands where parking is a particular concern as well as access for Emergency vehicles.</p> <p>A hard-standing/driveway pilot is going to be trialled this year for a limited number of tenants whereby we will offer the opportunity for a dropped kerb and hard-standing, with the tenant repaying via a weekly payment arrangement. We are currently developing the criteria for this pilot.</p>
Trees	<p>Processes are in place in agreement with Tree Services to ensure that a quick response is received when enquiries relating to tree issues are raised. A number of site visits have taken place since September with HPMs and Tree Services Officers to identify concerns and agree resolutions.</p> <p>However we have some concerns with regards to value for money as we cannot evidence that the total HRA funding is being spent on HRA estates. A report is being prepared to take to the NCH/NCC Housing Partnership in early February.</p>
Consistency of front line staff managing cases	<p>We receive some excellent feedback from customers and Councillors with regards to case management from our HPMs. We're currently delivering a project to increase resilience across our citywide team of Housing Patch Managers. The project has been developed in response to increasing responsibilities for HPMs, reduced agency support, and the implications of reduced budgets, fewer staff, and increasing patch sizes.</p> <p>We're looking to provide extra training and support to make sure that HPMs are engaged in and aware of issues in the sector, the city and their patch. We're also seeking to make sure that they are equipped with the relevant tools, skills and knowledge to respond appropriately to challenging cases, and that they are empowered to make positive changes as appropriate.</p>

	AREA SPECIFIC ISSUES/CONCERNS	NCH RESPONSE
Area 1	Increasing access to advice sessions in Bulwell	<p>NCH Tenancy Sustainment Team provides a weekly drop-in advice service at Bulwell JobCentre Plus on Friday mornings. This is specifically to assist tenants transferring to Universal Credit, but is also available to support other tenants. Details of this session have been provided to Cllrs to promote with residents.</p> <p>Tenancy Sustainment Officers are able to carry out home visits to support tenants who need help and can also pre-arrange appointments at Bulwell Riverside.</p>
	New build in Knight's Close to be completed prior to Election in May 2019	We have noted the requirement to complete works by May 2019. We are currently revising the programme which will be shared with local Councillors once it is complete.
	Decent neighbourhoods – noted some great improvements to some of the bungalows in Bulwell but there are some gaps	We continue to work on a rolling programme of works in neighbourhoods. We would encourage Ward Members to share suggested scheme improvements to HPMs so that these can be added to advance plans, helping schedule work going forward.
Area 2	Management of the new build sites in Bestwood	Concerns on this specific site were fed back and are now resolved. To address this going forward, all information on new build sites is included within the Councillor e-bulletin and the New Build team has a dedicated team member to contact Councillors in areas where we are working, both in advance and throughout the project.
Area 3	None area specific	

Area 4	Purchase of potential private rent properties in Lenton area to reduce the impact of current HIMO lettings	NCH Enterprises Limited is enabling us to buy and build homes for market rent, under the brand name LiViNG and we currently have 92 market rented properties. We will continue to consider purchase of properties to improve areas and increase the number of NCH owned homes. Our HPMs are also attending training with NCC Safer Housing Team to highlight rogue landlord activities and identify what they can look out for.
Area 5	Impact of an increased number of private rented properties in Sherwood and Carrington	Further to the comments made by Councillor Urquhart at the Area Cluster meeting, we are working closely together with her as the local Councillor, and in her role as portfolio holder. She is contacting other housing providers in the area (including private landlords) to ensure that landlord standards are similar to NCH. As a commercial proposition NCH are able to provide management services which are already in place in other areas of the city. Any private properties we identify on our estates which are being poorly managed are referred to Community Protection for action. We also link in with the Safer Housing Team where there are concerns about standards within the property.
	Area development around Perry Road	A site visit has been carried out in partnership with the police, prison service and Cllrs. We are now developing option proposals.
Area 6	None area specific	
Area 7	None area specific	
Area 8	Opportunity for further development sites in Clifton area	We are currently reviewing the garage sites and looking at opportunities for development.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Area Cluster report