

# REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE OF HOUSING PROVIDERS

## SUMMARY

This paper provides the outline of the scope and interim findings of the review of the Performance of Housing Providers.

## BACKGROUND

- The main issues and overall aim of this review is to determine:
  - The performance of Registered Providers (Erimus Housing and Tristar Homes Limited) following the 2007 SSVT & 2010 LSVT – specifically in relation to ‘promises’ made to tenants in the Council’s pre-ballot Offer Documents. Examples of ‘promises’ included: Repairing and improving homes / Rent guarantees / Housing management service improvements / Enhanced tenant and resident involvement opportunities / Broader regeneration (LSVT only)
  - The impact of the current economic climate on the ‘promises’ made to tenants in the Councils SSVT and LSVT Offer Documents.

## DETAIL

<p>Developing the ‘Offer Document’</p>	<p><b>A summary of the ‘promises’ agreed with Erimus Housing tenants:</b></p> <p><u>Invest and improve 3 schemes</u> (Lauder House, High Grange House and Ewbank Gardens) including; property improvements, communal area improvements, improved security and environmental improvements.</p> <p><u>Demolition and rebuild of 3 blocks:</u>                  Witham House – rebuild with older persons apartments for sale and rent.</p> <p>Eden House – rebuild a new sheltered housing scheme for rent and shared ownership.</p> <p>Derwent House – rebuild a new sheltered housing scheme for rent and shared ownership.</p> <p><u>Maintaining homes</u> - repair timescales agreed.</p> <p><u>Rents</u> – to remain affordable.</p> <p><u>Provision of a quality housing service</u> – including named contacts.</p> <p><u>Specific older peoples services</u> – same level of warden support as with the Council, provision of adaptations.</p> <p><u>Tenant rights</u> – would be protected tenants to be issued with a new assured tenancy agreement.</p>	<p><b>A summary of the ‘promises’ agreed with Tristar Homes tenants:</b></p> <p><u>Improving and repairing homes</u> - a new ‘Tristar Standard’ (a consistent standard) included double glazed windows and doors for properties that did not have them within 3 years of transfer. And for properties with old kitchens, bathrooms and heating systems replacements within 5 years of transfer. Improved repair service, offering early evening and Saturday appointments.</p> <p><u>High and medium rise properties</u> – Investment programme of £11m over 5 years included renewing lifts, upgrading security/door entry systems and communal area decoration.</p> <p><u>Tackling ASB and Crime</u> - providing support for tenants outside of office hours and additional resources to ensure there are employees in each team to provide advice and support on ASB.</p> <p><u>Rent and Service Charges</u> – rents would stay affordable, no hidden service charges or hidden increases, home contents insurance would continue.</p> <p><u>Delivering better local services</u> – Introduction of a handyperson to carry out minor jobs which are a tenant’s responsibility (only cost would be for materials).</p> <p><u>Tenant/Customer involvement</u> – Development of a co-regulation approach with tenants scrutinising performance and service quality. Increased budgets for local Reaching Out Area Panels.</p> <p><u>Services for the elderly and vulnerable</u> - £1m per</p>
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		<p>year commitment to adapt homes to meet individual needs. Deliver a priority repairs service to meet needs.</p> <p><u>Tenant rights</u> – key rights and entitlements would be protected. Those tenants who qualified retained a preserved Right to Buy.</p>
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2. The Offer Document generally covers a '5 year' period and as time goes by the Offer Document/'promises' are considered to have less weight due to contractual changes that are agreed with tenants or because of statutory changes. There have also been occasions when due to changing circumstances the Council has agreed to re-consider an Offer Document 'promise'
3. The Committee noted that Welfare Reform could have a significant impact on the Registered Providers Business Plans as previous assumptions about rental income; void loss, bad debt provision etc. were subject to additional risk.
4. With over 200 promises to deliver over a 5 year period they are currently monitored through the Tristar Board as well as their Customer Panel. Timescales have been set for delivering against key projects and prioritised these following customer consultations after transfer. The Committee has heard that Tristar Homes exceeds its customers' expectations and aims to establish innovative new services as well as improve existing ones. Scrutiny of Tristar performance indicators in its annual report provided written evidence.
5. The Committee met with residents on Tristar Homes Scrutiny Panel who were able to show improvements made to Tristar properties. However the low number of participating residents has suggested that a Vela Customer Scrutiny Panel be formulated covering both Tristar and Housing Hartlepool properties and tenant representatives from both organisations.
6. Site visits were organised to allow the Committee to see the investment for modernisation of Tristar properties. Amongst the properties visited were Wrensfield Court and Meadow Rise, Stockton and Kennedy Gardens, Billingham.
7. A Member's survey was undertaken to gather views about housing stock transfers but due to a low response rate and very few negative comments this has provided very limited relevant information.
8. As a result, the Committee are positively reassured that the promises are either being met or are being surpassed and therefore recommendations have not yet been recognised. Members are still due to meet Cath Purdy, Chief Executive of Vela to discuss the future plans after which consideration will be given to the possible recommendations.
9. At this stage no recommendations have been identified that relate specifically to the delivery of offer document promises'. However one area which has been highlighted throughout the scrutiny review and therefore a potential for recommendation relates to general communication between councillors and all social housing providers. This should improve Member awareness and cover automatic invitations to walkabouts in their wards, potentially the sharing of complaints, and two-way communication between Council scrutiny and individual Registered Provider tenant scrutiny regarding reviews and findings.

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