

**REPORT TO THE SCRUTINY PANEL COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP
MEETING OF 6th DECEMBER 2012**

Status: Recommendation
Title: Seven Locks Housing five years after stock transfer
Originator: Jim Wheeler
Where from: Scrutiny Panel Places
Where to next: Not applicable

Objective: Confirm that delivery of promises to tenants has been completed; review continuing development of Seven Locks Housing working in partnership with Harborough District Council.

1. Outcome sought from Panel

1.1 Confirmation that the Panel is satisfied that Seven Lock Housing (SLH) has delivered the promises made in the Final Consultation Document published by the Council to the transfer of Council owned homes prior to the transfer of Council owned homes to SLH.

2 Background

2.1 The 3rd December 2012 is the fifth anniversary of the transfer of Council owned homes in Harborough District to SLH.

2.2 Progress on the delivery of promises to tenants referred to as the "Seven Locks Standard" in the Formal Consultation Document has been monitored by the Council through regular reports to Scrutiny. This report is the final report to Scrutiny on the delivery of the "Seven Locks" standard. At appendix A is the monitoring framework report to the Board of SLH summarising the delivery of the promises at September 2012.

2.3 All but three projects were completed as at September 2012. The three projects that will continue delivery into 2013 are:

- Solid wall insulation. Members may be aware of the dramatic impact this work has had on the street scene, for example, at Welland Park Road, and that the contribution this work is making to carbon reduction and energy efficiency. The lead-in period for this work was longer than anticipated given the complexity of finding solutions to external wall cladding requirements and meeting requirements for planning permission. However, work on external cladding of homes with solid walls will be completed in 2013.

- § SLH will have delivered 45 new homes, including homes delivered via S106 funding and development of garage sites transferred from Council ownership funded with grant from the Homes and Communities Agency. They also have an additional 26 units in the development pipeline by the end of 2012 through a S106 agreement at Northampton Road, Market Harborough. It is anticipated that development of this site will begin January 2013.
- § Mobility Scooter storage and charging provision has been provided where it is needed and where it is currently physically possible to make provision including provision of £24,000 for storage at Hazeland Court Lutterworth IN 2012-13. Further provision of mobility scooter storage and charging will be considered as part of the refurbishment of older persons' schemes as SLH roll out the standard for older persons' accommodation recently agreed through customer consultation.

2.4 SLH have recently reviewed their Housing Community Strategy to consider what is needed in the future. A joint working group of tenants, staff and Board Members have developed an initiative ("Seven Locks -Unlocking Potential") with a focus on employment, training and skills and development of additional services to improve the well being of people in their homes and benefit the wider community. The implementation of Unlocking Potential to date has led to the recruitment of apprentices in customer services and business admin and the recruitment of a volunteer co-ordinator whose role will enable Seven Locks to expand its service offer to customers and provide opportunities for tenants to gain experience to improve their employability.

2.5 SLH have also been proactive in helping tenants to understand and respond to the impact of welfare reform. They have published information about welfare reform in the tenants' newsletter, and have developed customer profile information to identify tenants most likely to be affected, who may need support to manage the impact of welfare reform. A new and dedicated welfare reform project team has been put in place to work with those affected by the changes, and review policies, procedures and working practices. They are currently visiting all the over 300 customers identified as being potential under-occupiers to discuss their options and support them through the change. New tenancy, income and debt policies will go to Acclaim Board for approval in November. These include for the introduction of starter tenancies. Further joint work is needed with HDC to consider the following aspects of welfare reform; advice and support, digital inclusion, use of discretionary housing benefit payments and availability of suitable financial products.

3 Points for discussion

3.1 Deborah Bennett Executive Director for SLH will attend the meeting of the Scrutiny Panel along with the Chair of the Board and representatives of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel to discuss:

- § Next steps for further development of the SLH customer offer

- § SLH response to welfare reform
- § Opportunities for further development of SLH in community development

4 Equality Impact Assessment Implications/Outcomes

- 4.1.1 SLH have completed an Equality Audit of all their services, and the related action plan. As part of this action plan, Equality Impact Assessments were completed in ten priority areas, and continue to be rolled out as part of the policy review process.
- 4.2 External validation of the approach taken by SLH has been undertaken by the P3 Equalities Consultancy. Their report to the SLH board said that SLH can demonstrate key elements of the Equality Act 2010 and that processes are in place to make a difference and improve equality outcomes for all.

5 Impact on Communities

- 5.1 SLH fund community initiatives which make a difference to their customers and promote social inclusion. In 2012 these include:

Support to other agencies:

- § The Good companions Befriending Service provides support and company for lonely and isolated people as well volunteering opportunities
- § Homestart – to support young families
- § Schools – respect handbook

SLH initiatives:

- § Seven Locks – Unlocking Potential. Free two week training for work academy for local people offered in partnership with South Leicestershire College.
- § Family fun days in Lutterworth and Market Harborough in conjunction with Rock on the Rec
- § Funding play equipment Coventry Road, Lutterworth
- § Jubilee parties for at older persons' schemes

6 Legal Issues

- 6.1 There is an ongoing legal relationship between the Council and SLH based on the Transfer Contract, including for example:

- § Assisting the Council in performance of statutory duties related to homelessness
- § Housing Benefit administration
- § Service level agreement for Harborough Homesearch

- 6.2 The Homes and Communities Agency operates the regulatory framework for Registered Providers which SLH must also comply with.
- 6.3 The regulatory framework says that governance of registered providers should be based on the principle of co-regulation so that the governing bodies of registered providers are also accountable to their stakeholders, including to their tenants.
- 6.4 Co-regulation is achieved through equal representation on the SLH board for tenants, Harborough District Council and independent members; and a Resident Scrutiny Panel. Wider tenant involvement has also been achieved through a Customer Panel. There are 527 involved tenants on the Customer Panel (25% of all SLH tenants).
- 6.5 Performance is tested in various ways e.g. through reports to the Board, Resident Scrutiny Panel Reports, void inspections and mystery shoppers. SLH also publish a Tenants Annual Report. This includes information about performance benchmarked against similar providers; national benchmarking information; service standards; value for money; new investment; customer care and involvement; customer satisfaction.
- 6.6 The Residents Scrutiny Panel has been fully involved in the development and production of the Annual Report which is available on the SLH website. SLH also promote tenant involvement through regular publication of a customer newsletter.
www.sevenlockshousing.co.uk

7 Resource Issues

- 7.1 The Regulatory Framework says that there should be a continuous focus on effective financial management and improving value for money. SLH is operated on a sound financial basis with a clear business plan. All tests of financial viability set by funders (Barclays Bank) and the regulatory agency (Homes and Communities Agency) have been passed.

8 Community Safety Implications

- 8.1 Delivery of home improvements including new doors and environmental improvements are contributing to improved community safety.

9 Carbon Management Implications

- 9.1 Energy efficiency improvements undertaken by SLH have achieved significant reductions in CO2 emissions and also ensure that tenants' homes are warmer and more affordable. Seven Locks is one of the partners involved in the Big

Lottery Sustainable Harbrough Challenge and will be delivering an eco-house demonstration project.

10 Risk Management Implications

10.1 The Board of SLH is responsible for effective management of risks including the need to set out clear objectives and develop a forward looking strategy that enables SLH to make the most of future opportunities and mitigate potential risks.

10.2 The Executive Director for SLH meets regularly with Assistant Director Community Leadership to discuss any risk management issues affecting SLH and Harbrough District Council.

11 Consultation

11.1 The Regulatory Code says that providers are expected to engage meaningfully with their tenants and offer them opportunities to shape the tailoring of services to reflect local priorities.

11.2 Tenants should have the ability to scrutinise their provider's performance, identify areas for improvement, influence future delivery and be supported to develop their skills and capacity.

11.3 SLH have developed a Customer Involvement Standard which says "Let involved customers shape our service, help decide our priorities and test how well we are doing." Performance against Local Standards developed and agreed with tenants is reported to the Board every three months.

11.4 SLH is consulting tenants about what they would regard as their priorities for further modernisation and improvement in the next five years. Tenants will receive a complete update on delivery of the promises in the first five years in a special newsletter to be published in December.

12 Background Papers

12.1 The Transfer Contract

12.2 Formal Consultation Document (Minutes 308; 357; 584/2006-07 refer)

12.3 SLH annual report to tenants (www.sevenlockshousing.co.uk)

12.4 Equality Impact Assessment considered by Scrutiny Panel (Service Development) 6th March 2008 (Minute 552/2007-08 refers).

Previous report(s): Scrutiny Panel Services 16th July 2009; 15th July 2010; 20th October 2011

Information Issued Under Sensitive Issue Procedure: N

Appendices:

- A Performance Information submitted to the Board of Seven Locks Housing shown as Appendix A to this report**