**Notes from the Housing Directors Network meeting on 23/03/16 at Coastal Housing, Swansea.**

**Action Points in Red in the main body of the notes**

**Attendance:**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Organisation** | **Name** | **Jobtitle** |
|  | Bro Myrddin HA Ltd | Mark Richards | Head of Housing Services |
|  | Bron Afon Community Housing | Cath Stenson | Head of Inclusion and Support |
|  | Cardiff Community Housing Association | Matthew Thomas | Customer and Community Services Director |
|  | Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd | Enid Roberts | Assistant Director of Customers and Communities |
|  | Coastal Housing Group | David Piggford | IT Manager |
|  | Coastal Housing Group | Serena Jones | Director of Homes, Communities and Services |
|  | Community Housing Cymru | Hugh Russell | Policy Officer |
|  | Derwen Cymru | Steve Evans | Director of Housing |
|  | Merthyr Tydfil HA | Tim MacDermott | Director of Operations |
|  | Newport City Homes | Sharon Wilkins | Head of Housing Services |
|  | Newport City Homes | Solitaire Pritchard | Regeneration Coordinator |
|  | NPT Homes | Claire Maimone | Director of Housing and Community Regeneration |
|  | NPT Homes | Clare Way | Head of Specialist Services |
|  | Pembrokeshire Housing | Elin Brock | Housing Director |
|  | Rhondda HA | Annalisa Beavan | Housing Services Manager |
|  | Taff HA Ltd | Mike Friel | Interim Director of Customer Services and Development |
|  | Tai Ceredigion | Eleri Jenkins | Director of Housing & Support |

Apologies:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Aidan Ackerman | Mid Wales Housing Association. |
| Kevin Barry | Cynon Taf Community Housing Group |
| Luke Takeuchi | Rhondda Housing Association |
| Richard McQuillan | Hafod Housing |
| Scott Sanders | Derwen Cymru |

**Clare Way – NPT – notes to accompany powerpoint presentation on how NPT have changed their Sheltered Housing schemes.**

Disempowering tenants by providing support to everyone, regardless of level of independence.

No onsite residential managers

Rationale for change:

Anticipated cuts to SP grant (hadn’t been passed on to tenants, as, in part, the grant wasn’t flexible enough to apply to individuals, so the HA was taking the hit).

Also, Aylward Review recommendations – move support away from buildings and toward supporting individuals.

Risk:

Application of change before had been resisted by tenants. Pilot projects had received complaints, from tenants and councillors and forced NPT back to the drawing board.

Presentation to Tenants:

Status Quo cannot remain, but this is an Opportunity to build trust and relationships

Letting People know about Changes:

Importantly, they met with the council first, who appreciated the early heads up and worked as partners.

2 independent members were included on the review panel – gave tenants reassurance that it wasn’t just coming from NPT. Keith Edwards and Mike Wiseman (Tenant Advisory Panel).

Honest, transparent approach.

A brand consultant attended meetings – told NPT that the tenants expect too much from their HA! E.g. royal mail misdirection.

NPT requested that ANYONE who wants to be involved make themselves known! Great way of encouraging interaction from tenants who might not have been engaged previously.

Took comments and divided them into themes – generic comments and local issues

Positive comments provided source material for goals for the project.

NPT undertook an asset mapping exercise with their tenants, to establish what they could realistically offer. Outcomes included swapping assets with other bodies, e.g. ABMU using tenants’ front rooms to run community pain relief sessions.

Consultation led to finding out that tenants actually really wanted to be involved in much of the stuff that scheme managers traditionally do.

Tenants understood that scheme managers could not be there just in case.

Leaflet went out after every consultation session so everyone knew what was happening.

Took opportunity to discuss with tenants the need to pay for warden call systems should grant funding be cut.

Tenants were told that they would have to pay for a scheme manager, if they wanted them all day, and they realised that, actually, all the positive ideas for the communities they said they wanted were undermined by having this scheme manager.

Finished with a celebration event, organised by tenants, utilising their skills.

Haven Housing – name chosen for sheltered housing

Bridge – the name chosen for the new team support service, replacing onsite wardens.

**Q&A**

Did SP team give an indication as to how things would need to change?

SP team was undergoing a review – those leading it didn’t have SP service provision background – their priority was that NPT planned for cuts and offered a service outside of buildings and in the communities. Not prescriptive and they were pleased with the outcomes.

Any pockets of resistance?

100% of people aren’t totally excited, but 100% of people had the opportunity to present objections and they all understand the rationale for change – NPT have received no complaints!

How did Scheme Managers react?

They understood the rationale. They were involved in codesign. Nobody has lost their job. Same stage as tenants – they know what will come but they’re still not certain about the changes. Onboard, no resistance – trade unions were supportive.

No Surprises was the theme of all this.

Did you consider age ranges beyond this group?

Both demand for the support service and demand for the buildings themselves were areas of consideration.

NCH saw demand for sheltered schemes drop as they reduced support. Left them with hard to let schemes.

Safety and security were key areas of consideration for NPT – the assurance of having someone on site is important, so things like the ABMU visits help with this.

Bron Afon did this 5 years ago – still hear ‘bring back my warden’ – because they didn’t employ the same level of coproduction. Their wardens weren’t happy with the changes from building based to floating support either.

How will the ambassadors develop as a group?

They’ll be monitoring the changes, enabling NPT to tweak the services.

Tenants from one scheme have gone to offer their services as entertainers in other schemes – asset trading.

WHQS running alongside this.

Work to be done on co-designing living areas.

Regarding staff, NPT have moved away from job descriptions to role profiles – percentage of time to be spent on certain tasks – but maintained pay and conditions.

Funding for alarm service now paid by tenants.

NCH have moved away from fixed alarms, with positive results.

Staff providing floating support for over 55s (joining with another floating support team) beyond the sheltered housing schemes. This provides flexibility, with a range of skills (and expectations on the job roles) within that team.

Identification of those with need for support: Referrals for anyone over a certain age, then break down into their area of need.

Have service charge costs gone down? No. Change is within the floating element; SP and the element that NPT were propping up.

**Solitaire Pritchard – NCH - Notes based on presentation and video:** [**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nIsKHkBxLQo**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nIsKHkBxLQo)

Pill – area of significant and multiple deprivation – has been subject to many initiatives over the years.

Community is open minded and enjoys these initiatives.

NCH started with a blank sheet of paper – collected people’s thoughts by door knocking – 5 minute conversations turned into 40-60 minute conversations. Raised multiple issues. Found that people believed in the area; demolition was not an option.

They found that many people living in Pill didn’t go out after 5! They were complimentary of NCH’s security measures, to date, however.

ASB conducted by outsiders, because Pill can’t be accessed by cars (hence inaccessible to police).

Sheltered scheme feedback was excellent! Skewed the overall feedback – the onsite warden made it a much safer environment than others experienced. Flats, with higher turnover, provided very different feedback – people had aspirations to move on.

People wanted security; drug and alcohol use was high – public order pushes people from city centre to places like Pill.

Flytipping was a major problem.

Residents were clear that this was happening to them, not because of them. They wanted to recommend it as a place to live, wanted more welcoming public space.

Most engaged residents were brought together. Met with an architect.

Housekeeping issues came up often – NCH could deal with some of this, partners could deal with others.

Produced Neighbourhood Action Plans – now on their 4th year of them. These plans enabled them to maintain engagement with their tenants, along with monthly engagement meetings.

The meetings led to the employment of a dedicated caretaker; bins brought into the site; graffiti removed; worked with council to get street sweepers in; events produced to help people understand issues like recycling; community run environmental issues; increased police presence; communal facilities locked (agencies that use them given fobs) for short term.

NCH continue to face language issues, given the mixed make-up of Pill’s residents.

Residents involved in design, in procurement.

Demolished properties not necessarily being replaced; NCH’s board were clear that if density is causing some of these issues, then they should not be.

Action plans (and delivery on these) has been intrinsic to the successful engagement with the community

Owner occupiers – fine – compensated for loss of property – partnerships with police, etc. have been key to maintain trust of this group.

Leaseholders – some issues – removal of balconies, for example. Not classed as repair work, so not charging for it.

254 properties total in NCH, only c.20 of these are not NCH owned.

Redesignation of sheltered – broadly accepted – some stayed and now have floating support.

**David Piggford – IT Manager – Predictive Rents Subgroup Update**

Idea was to merge IT, Housing and Finance

Different approaches to welfare reform and UC

Emerging themes:

* Tenant Profiling
* Financial awareness courses – for reasons of sustainability – generally for the new tenancies
* Alternative approaches – improving arrears collection or improving IT systems, without really changing how income collection is managed.
* Some are doing so well with income collection that ‘do nothing’ is an option
* Matter of looking at the quality of data collected, whether arrears are stopped early or arrears are managed when they have occurred.

2018-2021 – the major UC migration – our early approaches are not necessarily going to scale up to meet these.

Shift in group make-up; fewer IT people and more housing people.

Measuring performance in UC collection – small approaches; e.g. 1 HA is targeting a single patch for arrears monitoring. Some talk of Geographical Information Systems.

Some common measures across the sector would be useful, followed by implementation of the systems to measure this.

Coastal have analysed their dataset and predict a 3% drop in income; need to be able to rely on the data they pull in – Who’s Home will help them with the quality of that data.

Predictive Rents Group can provide information on IT systems to Housing Directors Network if they’re given the needs of the group.

**Hugh to contact David re: ensuring broad attendance at future events.**

**CHC to update on UC data collection – has a set of common data been confirmed?**

**Housing Services Forum to focus on collection of UC data?**

**UC Group Update**

Replicating English model of working alongside DWP.

More recognition of the issues that are being faced

DWP demonstrated the digital platform for UC; which looks simpler than might have been expected.

There will be a UC phone line (chargeable).

Manual application process and manual process at the other end. Leads to human error and inconsistency. Digital back-end should mean that there is greater consistency.

Need for bilgingual system has slowed down process – mid to late 2017 in Wales.

Caerphilly has the highest level of claimants, closely followed by NPT and Flint. Wales is a tiny proportion of the 7 million UK (potential) claimants.

DWP have set up a team to tackle notifications to landlords – DWP realise that if they work on that, then the HA can help them. Some denial of the problems – need case studies to make these changes.

**CHC to work on compilation of case studies where notification to landlords that someone has switched to UC has failed to come through and the resultant issues caused.**

Charter making formal complaints for individual issues as this prompts a full system review.

Landlords portal is being considered (possibly to enable landlords to oversee progress of claims).

Personal relationships are really key to making this work (i.e. between JCP staff and HA staff).

Collection of examples of issues that are not working is going to be important.

Lots of new staff in call centres

Some HAs have secure email connections to the DWP – if you haven’t got one of those it’d be worth looking at.

**19/04 next UC meeting in Bangor. Directors: send through any queries to Steve Evans beforehand.**

DWP will accept a rent increase letter from the landlord (as long as they’re not in a batch and they’re accompanied by the letter which has been sent to the tenant).

Before UC went live in Pembs. staff went to see that tenants knew what was happening. DWP have since written to PHA to say that they were giving UC a bad name!

**LHA Debate**

Charter- understanding impact is crucial for them; need to segment that group (difference between 21 year olds and 34 year olds is huge).

Supported housing schemes – projected developments – need to establish what happens here

Care and Support in Newport are working to ensure that homeless people are provided with appropriate accommodation.

People come into social housing without any expectation that you’ll need to share. Esp. in rural areas. If you can’t afford a one bed flat in Pembs there is nothing else!

What will shared housing look like? Charter’s experience is poor – long voids

Bron Afon piloted a scheme - scuppered by box room

Taff – 50% go to homeless people – RSLs in Cardiff are being asked to rehouse the same numbers as before. Taff discussed moving rents round within their properties – is this acceptable to the Council? – Council said you’ll need a legal opinion. Council said charge full rent, collect what the person can pay, write off the remaining rent.

**Hugh to look into the legal issues of rent pooling (contact Mike Friel at Taff for further info) and update the network**

Fixed term issues to under 35s from April in one case.

Tim – put in a FOI request (with MVH) to ascertain how the LHA was agreed.

LHA is capped until 2020.

PHA offer reasonable preference to under-35s for bedsits and cheaper properties.

Knock on for number of pregnancies?!

Bron Afon – gentle conditionality – asking people to join employability programmes at sign up. Paper to board suggesting that the assured tenancies are extended to two years. Looking for further exploration.

Deprioritisation of transfers?

BA still let to under-occupiers – change of priority

**CHC to consider template letters for members to send to MPs and AMs, building on the Homes For Wales momentum and raising awareness of the impact of the LHA cap.**

**Gwent Welfare Reform Partnership have written a letter to the DWP (Hugh to acquire a copy from Sharon and send round to the group)**

Need to simplify our arguments – supporting people, under 35s, under 21s, sheltered housing

**Consultation on DQR – 100% on lifetime properties – CHC need to push that the size issue is far too restrictive – means a lack of flexibility. Hugh to raise with Shea, who is writing CHC’s response.**

Foyer style accommodation based on under 35s.

Pressure to house those at the top of waiting lists

Priority should be the under 35s *outside exemptions*

PHA change to rent setting policies- if you go outside of £55, then PHA will take the hit

Nobody is looking at stopping housing under 35s; Taff are looking at capping the number of under 35s. Will mean changing allocations policies.

Shared accommodation is not effective – NPT’s experience.

Taff have looked at historical data (over 2 years) as to what has happened with under-35s.

**Welfare Reform and the LHA cap to be maintained as running themes for forthcoming Housing Directors meetings.**

Supported Housing

2.5 Million impact a year – Gwalia – looking at alternative uses for the buildings, reconfiguring the supporting people

PHA – Extra Care will be hammered

Mike (Taff) – Homelessness rate has been changed- DHP being used

DHP is used to limit the effect of bedroom tax, currently.

Issue of DHP applications taking up a lot of time. Also organsiations reliant on it.

Is health the answer? In One Place has been sluggish.

Betwsy regional director is spending a day with Enid at CCG.

Cardiff Housing Strategy Unit has decided not to spend any more on high rent properties

Gwalia are slowing building

Grwp Cynefin are building extra care in Porthmadog

PHA spending a lot on upgrades to computer systems – Capita are upgrading a module for them on UC (Melin has experienced some difficulty with this).

**IT is going to be a huge issue. Hugh to make the case that there’s someone added to the agenda of the LHA meeting on April 21st.**

**Change Management**

Changing Grant Regimes, Welfare Reform, LHA, Restructuring, Merger – change is everywhere!

NPT’s coproduction approach: using this model for ASB – gets new tenants involved. Also environmental works around WHQS (local investment plans for each area). Protecting People and Properties initiative – sending staff around every area, involving tenants.

Coastal and Charter have looked at Lean Systems/ Systems Thinking – Charter looked at income – found that they’d made multiple agreements with people who were in arrears

Rent Sense – enables you to look at the history of rent payments

NCH found that agreements, continually broken, bring in no cash

PHA have income reclamation staff, part of whose job is to look at that history

Charter find 50% of calls in are ‘can I pay my rent’? Takes up so much time! Putting in place a rent portal.

Lean review of voids process

Need to accept that during change there will be a detrimental impact on tenants; have to look long term.

Charter are looking at pushing performance data downward from director level to the front line – empowering staff.

NCH has changed its delegation scheme with the same outcome in mind.

NCH – 3 tiers of data – strategic, corporate, operational.

Taff - major restructure to reduce number of assistant directors, and to introduce a commercial element. Pulling resource away from service delivery to commercial.

NCH – engagement – asking staff, from bottom up, what they do, if they’re in the right job, etc.

Enid – changing to better match the corporate plan

Change to skills that staff need - Elin – we need to change how we use psychology (rebels, questioners, obligers, etc.); how do we get tenants to change behaviours?

Workforce planning – something NCH are looking at; what’s baseline in terms of workforce?

Push to encourage tenants to do as much as they can for themselves.