

Report of a Scrutiny Panel on the topic:
**REVIEW: HYNDBURN HOMES AND HYNDBURN HOMES
REPAIRS SERVICE**

**As agreed by the Communities and Well-Being Overview
and Scrutiny Sub-Committee at its meeting held on 23rd
January, 2008**



Panel Membership:

Councillor C Pritchard (Chair)
Councillor N Collingridge
Councillor M Dad
Councillor D Mason

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1** A Scrutiny Panel was set up in July, 2007 with the remit to undertake a scrutiny review on the progress, challenges, achievements and future plans of Hyndburn Homes and Hyndburn Homes Repairs Service to be referred to as “scrutiny review”. Its findings would be reported to the January 2008 meeting of the Communities and Well-Being Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee¹.
- 1.2** The Panel also felt that in order to gain a clearer insight and better understanding of the situation with regard to Hyndburn Homes and Hyndburn Homes Repairs Service, they wished to receive evidence, pre-stock transfer, from the Council’s Head of Regeneration and Housing, the Stock Transfer Project Sponsor (Steve Tanti, Deputy Managing Director, Hyndburn Borough Council) and the Housing Portfolio Holder. The Panel wished to explore the processes and procedures that were actually involved.
- 1.3** The Panel comprised a politically balanced membership of one Conservative Member (Councillor D Mason), two Labour Members (Councillors M Dad and C Pritchard) and one Independent Member (Councillor N Collingridge). Councillor C Pritchard was appointed Chair at the Scrutiny Panel’s first meeting.
- 1.4** Following initial correspondence, the Managing Director of Hyndburn Homes brought to the Panel’s attention that Hyndburn Homes and Hyndburn Homes Repairs Service were independent organisations with rigorous governance arrangements, and they were both part of the Contour Housing Group which had overall responsibility. Contour Housing Group was regulated by the Housing Corporation and was subject to inspection by the Audit Commission. He also reported that the progress, challenges and achievements of Hyndburn Homes and Hyndburn Homes Repairs Service were reported regularly to the Council’s Strategic Housing Service and that the Council’s Head of Regeneration and Housing Services reported regularly to the Council’s Cabinet on an annual basis.
- 1.5** In addition, the Managing Director of Hyndburn Homes sought clarity about the purpose of the scrutiny review and suggested that the review would be more appropriate if it was to consider specific objectives of the Council where Hyndburn Homes and other stakeholders made a key contribution.
- 1.6** Scrutiny Panel Members received a Project Plan in July, 2007 including the terms of reference; objectives; information and timescales for this Scrutiny Panel topic. The Panel took into account the concerns and issues raised by the Managing Director of Hyndburn Homes and Hyndburn Homes Repairs Service before undertaking this scrutiny review. The timescale for the completion of the scrutiny review was also extended to January, 2008 at the November, 2007 meeting of the Communities and Well-Being Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee.
- 1.7** The Scrutiny Review Panel met on five occasions. This final report outlining the Panel’s findings and detailing their recommendations on this Scrutiny topic was then produced.

¹ The Council’s Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules – Paragraph C17 allows for each Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee to appoint up to one Scrutiny Panel at any one time (a time limited Task and Finish Group) and may determine the Panel’s terms of reference, size, membership and duration (provided that the composition of the Panel is the same as the political balance of the Sub-Committee which appointed it).

- 1.8** A summary of the main findings of the Scrutiny Panel based on the evidence/verbal submissions and research information received, is included in Section 3 of this report.

- 1.9** Section 4 of the report explains the key factors emerging from the Witness/Documentary/ Research evidence considered by the Scrutiny Panel during the course of its work.

- 1.10** The Panel's final recommendations are set out at Section 5 of the report.

2. INTRODUCTION, TERMS OF REFERENCE AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Background to the Review

2.1.1 The Communities and Well-Being Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee, at its meeting held on 25th July, 2007 agreed to the inclusion of this scrutiny review topic in its 2007/2008 Work Programme.

2.1.2 The need for such a review had arisen following observations made by a number of Councillors about the Housing and Housing Repairs Services in Hyndburn pre and post Stock Transfer. In particular, it was emphasised that Councillors, as the Elected Representatives in their Wards, still had a continued and important role to play in supporting their communities on Housing and Housing Repairs matters post Stock Transfer. It was agreed that there was a need for this topic to be scrutinised in depth by this Scrutiny Panel.

2.1.3 By making recommendations as appropriate, the aims and outcomes would be:-

- to further enhance/develop Councillors knowledge and understanding of the work and responsibilities undertaken by Hyndburn Homes and Hyndburn Homes Repairs Service;
- to raise awareness and further develop the mutual understandings and working relationships between the Council and Hyndburn Homes and Hyndburn Homes Repairs Service;
- to have regard to the important role that Councillors, as elected representatives in their communities, still have in helping to address the Housing and Housing Repairs matters of the citizens they represent;

2.2 Terms of Reference

2.2.1 The meeting of the Communities and Well-Being Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee held on 25th July, 2007 agreed the terms of reference of this Scrutiny Panel as follows:-

- To undertake a scrutiny on the topic of the progress, challenges and achievements of Hyndburn Homes post stock transfer and on Hyndburn Homes future plans².
- To present a report on the Scrutiny Panel's findings to the meeting of the Communities and Well-Being Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee to be held on 14th November, 2007³.

² (Note: Following the commencement of the Scrutiny Review, the Managing Director of Hyndburn Homes confirmed that Hyndburn Homes / Hyndburn Homes Repairs Service were keen to work in partnership with the Council as demonstrated by their joint working at Charter/Chester Street. He also felt that attendance at a Panel meeting would be appropriate if the Scrutiny Review was considering specific objectives of the Council where Hyndburn Homes and other stakeholders were a key part of the process).

³ (Note: The duration of the Scrutiny Panel was extended to the 23rd January, 2008 with the agreement of the Communities and Well-Being Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee at its meeting held on 14th November, 2007).

2.3 Establishment of Scrutiny Panel

2.3.1 It was decided by the Communities and Well-Being Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee, as part of its Work Programme for 2007/08 to establish a Panel of four Non-Cabinet Members to carry out this scrutiny review and report back its findings and recommendations to the November⁴ meeting of the Sub-Committee.

2.3.2 The Scrutiny Panel was also politically balanced, as required by Hyndburn's Constitution.

2.4 Meetings of the Scrutiny Panel

2.4.1 The Panel met on five occasions between September and November, 2007.

2.4.2 At the first meeting of the Scrutiny Panel held on 20th September, 2007, as part of their Project Plan, the Chair with other Panel Members agreed the method of working they would adopt.

2.4.3 The Panel received verbal contributions and written submissions from two Officers of the Council (Panel meeting held 15th October, 2007) and from the Managing Director of Hyndburn Homes (29th October, 2007). Written correspondence was received from two residents of the Borough in response to an article published in the local press informing the public of the work being undertaken by this Scrutiny Panel (Appendix A lists all the witness submissions/evidence considered by the Panel).

2.4.4 The Overview and Scrutiny Officer acted as Clerk and provided research support to the Scrutiny Panel.

2.4.5 The Scrutiny Panel, at its fifth meeting held on 27th November, 2007 assessed all the information received, reached its conclusions and formulated recommendations. The contents of final report were agreed by the Scrutiny Panel Members at this final meeting.

2.5 Thanks

2.5.1 The Scrutiny Panel would like to record its thanks to all those persons who took part in the consultation on this scrutiny review topic and in particular, expresses its appreciation and thanks to the undermentioned individuals who contributed their time and expertise during the information gathering stage of the process:-

Steve Tanti, Deputy Managing Director, Hyndburn Borough Council.

Mark Hoyle, Head of Regeneration and Housing, Hyndburn Borough Council.

J K Bury, Managing Director, Hyndburn Homes.

⁴ (Note: The duration of the Scrutiny Panel was extended to the 23rd January, 2008 with the agreement of the Communities and Well-Being Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee at its meeting held on 14th November, 2007).

3. THE PANEL'S MAIN FINDINGS

3.1 Local Context - Evidence Considered

- 3.1.1** The Scrutiny Panel, chose to interview the Deputy Managing Director, Hyndburn Borough Council, in his capacity as the Council's "Project Sponsor" for the Housing Stock Transfer, the Head of Regeneration and Housing, Hyndburn Borough Council and the Managing Director, Hyndburn Homes in order to assess the current and past situations relating to the Housing Stock and the Housing Repairs Service.
- 3.1.2** The Panel interviewed the Deputy Managing Director and the Head of Regeneration and Housing, Hyndburn Borough Council to obtain a better understanding of the situation regarding the Housing Stock and Housing Repairs Service pre-stock transfer; and to discuss issues arising and ascertain what progress had been made post Stock Transfer by Hyndburn Homes and Hyndburn Homes Repairs Service.
- 3.1.3** The Managing Director, Hyndburn Homes was interviewed in order to gain an in-depth perspective and greater understanding of the role and remit of Hyndburn Homes and Hyndburn Homes Repairs Service post stock transfer, including how they worked in partnership with the Council; the specific objectives of the Council of which Hyndburn Homes and other stakeholders were a part of the process; and focussing on the services provided to the Council by Hyndburn Homes and Hyndburn Homes Repairs Service.
- 3.1.4** The Panel also received written submissions from two residents of the Borough in response to an advertisement in the local press highlighting the role and remit of this Scrutiny Panel⁵.

4. FACTORS EMERGING FROM THE WITNESS/DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE CONSIDERED BY THE SCRUTINY PANEL

- 4.1 A number of factors emerged from the Panel's deliberations. These are discussed below. The Panel's recommendations are summarised in section 5 of the report.**
- 4.1.1** The Panel felt that it would be useful to have information on the name(s) of dedicated Officers to contact in respect of matter(s) relating to Hyndburn Homes and Hyndburn Homes Repairs Service and enquired whether the Hyndburn Homes Repairs Reporting Line number could be changed from a 0845 number to a 01254 number?
- 4.1.2** The Panel, as a part of its research, requested and considered a report of the Deputy Managing Director, Hyndburn Borough Council detailing the Council's involvement pre and post housing stock transfer. The Panel was made aware that the Council's Head of Regeneration and Housing had a responsibility to scrutinise the performance of Hyndburn Homes on behalf of the Council following stock transfer. The Panel noted that the Housing Transfer Agreement legally bound Hyndburn Homes to commitments given by the Council in the offer document to tenants. The Transfer agreement had also established

⁵ Hyndburn Homes was also requested by the Panel to respond to the specific issues raised by the Residents in their written/e-mail correspondence who contributed to this Scrutiny Review. The Panel acknowledged receipt and considered these responses and Hyndburn Homes replied directly to the residents concerned by letter on 28 November, 2007

arrangements by which Hyndburn Homes would report to the Council, including an annual report to Hyndburn's Cabinet. Regular quarterly meetings were also held between Hyndburn Homes and the Head of Regeneration and Housing, Hyndburn Borough Council.

- 4.1.3** The Panel however felt, that the levels of service that tenants and customers received from Hyndburn Homes and Hyndburn Homes Repairs Service could be further improved. The Panel acknowledged that Hyndburn Homes had put in place measures to address service standards on repairs and its improvement programme, but stressed it was an area where performance should improve.
- 4.1.4** The Panel also reviewed the relationship between Hyndburn Homes/Hyndburn Homes Repairs Service and the Council. The Panel felt there was an urgent need to look at ways of improving and promoting better working relationships and communications between Hyndburn Homes/Hyndburn Homes Repairs Service and the Council. They also felt Hyndburn Homes/Hyndburn Homes Repairs Service needed to have a greater appreciation and understanding of the role local Councillors played in the Borough, with specific regard to housing/housing repairs matters and the people they represented within their wards.
- 4.1.5** The Panel considered information they had received about Neighbourhood Management and Anti-Social Behaviour and the Hyndburn Homes housing stock. The Panel felt, based on examples of experiences they were personally aware of in their Wards/the Borough, that continued emphasis and priority should be given by Hyndburn Homes to addressing anti-social behaviour issues.
- 4.1.6** The Panel expressed their support for Choice Based lettings as a way forward in partnership with the Council. Choice Based Lettings was a Central Government Initiative designed to allow social tenants to have more say on where they lived. The idea behind the scheme was to enable residents in a Borough who were in need of housing to choose where they wanted to live rather than being matched with a vacant property by Council or Housing Association staff.
- 4.1.7** The Panel felt that early interventions and a Multi-Agency approach should be embraced where Registered Social Landlords (RSL's) were having difficulties with tenants (paying the rent, Anti-Social behaviour etc). The Panel were keen to emphasise the "Social" element that the RSL's provided to the communities they served.
- 4.1.8** Community Cohesion and Integration – the Panel felt that Hyndburn Homes had an important and prominent social role to play in developing and promoting community cohesion and integration and in partnership with others.
- 4.1.9** Dog Fouling Bins – The Panel enquired whether Hyndburn Homes could consider providing a dog bin emptying/cleaning service within their housing stock areas. Hyndburn Homes had indicated that if further details could be provided on the cost and frequency of emptying and cleaning, they would consider this request.

- 4.1.10** Community Events and Insurance – Following on from an enquiry by the Panel, Hyndburn Homes had responded that their insurance was currently provided through the Contour Group and did not include public liability insurance for events in Dyke Nook Gardens. The Panel was informed that the Residents Associations had been advised last year that after enquiries the cost of public liability insurance was too expensive for Hyndburn Homes to consider paying for.
- 4.1.11** Community Events – The Panel has asked Hyndburn Homes to consider giving more publicity/support to Community Events. Hyndburn Homes had subsequently indicated that consideration could be given to putting Community events into their Hyndburn Homes “News & Views” Residents newsletter.
- 4.1.12** Liaison with the Council/Area Councils – The Panel felt that to further improve communications and relationships with the Council, Hyndburn Homes should liaise with Hyndburn’s Area Council’s team with a view to improving communications, including providing a report to the Area Council meetings, commencing February 2008 cycle.

5. THE SCRUTINY PANEL'S RECOMMENDATIONS/FINDINGS TO HYNDBURN HOMES

RECOMMENDATION 1:

That Hyndburn Homes produce and circulate to all Councillors, a Contact Information leaflet detailing the names of dedicated Officers to contact in respect of matters involving Hyndburn Homes and Hyndburn Homes Repairs Service and to consider whether the Hyndburn Homes Repairs Reporting Line number could be changed from a 0845 number to a 01254 number.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

That the Panel would be grateful if Hyndburn Homes would outline the process for Elected Members to follow where they do not get a satisfactory or appropriate response from the dedicated Officer.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

That, on the basis of evidence considered and correspondence received, the Panel recommends that Hyndburn Homes management continue to review the level of service they currently deliver to their tenants/customers, with a view to achieving sustained and tangible improvements to the Repairs and Improvements Programme Service.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

That having examined the relationship between Hyndburn Homes/Hyndburn Homes Repairs Service and the Council, the Panel felt there was an urgent need to look at ways of improving and promoting better working relationships and communications. They also felt Hyndburn Homes/Hyndburn Homes Repairs Service needed to have a greater appreciation of the role local Councillors played in the Borough, and the need to improve communications with Hyndburn Borough Council Councillors, with specific regard to housing/housing repairs matters and the people they represented within their wards.

RECOMMENDATION 5:

That Panel expresses its support for Choice Based lettings allocations, in partnership with the Council, as a way forward in the Borough.

RECOMMENDATION 6:

That, having considered the information they had received about Neighbourhood Management and Anti-Social Behaviour and the Hyndburn Homes housing stock, The Panel feel that greater emphasis and priority should be given by Hyndburn Homes to addressing anti-social behaviour issues.

RECOMMENDATION 7:

That early interventions and a Multi-Agency approach should be embraced where Registered Social Landlords (RSL's) are having difficulties with tenants (paying the rent, Anti-Social behaviour etc), with specific emphasis on the "Social" element that the RSL's should provide to the communities they serve.

RECOMMENDATION 8:

Dog Fouling Bins – The Panel recommends that Hyndburn Homes consider providing a dog bin emptying/cleaning service within their housing stock areas.

RECOMMENDATION 9:

Community Events – The Panel recommends that Hyndburn Homes consider giving more publicity/support to Community Events, including through their "News & Views" Residents newsletter.

RECOMMENDATION 10:

Liaison with the Council/Area Councils – The Panel felt that to further improve relationships with the Council, Hyndburn Homes should liaise with Hyndburn's Area Council's team with a view to improving communications and providing a report to the Area Council meetings, commencing February 2008 cycle.

RECOMMENDATION 11:

The Scrutiny Panel requests that Hyndburn Homes provides a report back to the Communities and Well-Being Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee upon progress made in achieving the above recommendations within six months from the date this report is considered by Hyndburn's Cabinet (6th February, 2008).

FINDING 1:

Community Events and Insurance – Following on from an enquiry by the Panel, Hyndburn Homes had responded that their insurance was currently through the Contour Group. This did not include public liability insurance for events in Dyke Nook Gardens. The Panel was informed that Residents Associations had been advised last year that after enquiries the cost of public liability insurance was too expensive for Hyndburn Homes to consider paying for.

FINDING 2:

Community Cohesion and Integration - That with regard to Community Cohesion and Integration, Hyndburn Homes has an important and prominent social role to play in developing and promoting community cohesion and integration and in partnership with others.

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APPENDIX 'A': List of Evidence Considered by the Panel

Written/Research evidence:

1. Background information re: Hyndburn Homes and Hyndburn Homes Repairs Service submitted by the Deputy Managing Director, Hyndburn Borough Council to provide the Scrutiny Panel with details of the Council Involvement pre and post housing stock transfer.
2. Written Information provided by J K Bury, Managing Director, Hyndburn Homes:- letters dated 12th and 28th September, 2007 from Hyndburn Homes; a Hyndburn Homes Newsletter "News and Views" Autumn 07 – Issue 5; Hyndburn Homes – The Improvement Programme and Regeneration Bulletin – Issue 8 – October, 2007; and a copy of the Hyndburn Homes Status Survey 2007 – Key results.
3. E-mail /written correspondence from two residents of the Borough in response to article published in the Accrington Observer, Friday 26th October, 2007.

Verbal evidence:

The Panel considered verbal evidence from the following witnesses:-

1. Steve Tanti, Deputy Managing Director, Hyndburn Borough Council.
2. Mark Hoyle, Head of Housing and Regeneration, Hyndburn Borough Council.
3. J K Bury, Managing Director, Hyndburn Homes.