

## Blackpool Coastal Housing (BCH) Commentary

### KPI Performance:

The KPI's selected by the panel have been circulated and may prompt questions. In terms of additional commentary it is worth noting that;

- A monthly update has been provided on repairs satisfaction rather than the annual figure so the Board can follow trends and the annual performance will be reported after year end.
- Commentary has been included on the More Positive Together jobs programme, including how many participants have been placed in employment in the last month to give the Board an idea of progress towards the project target that is due in 2019.
- The percentage of empty homes is above target as properties are being held vacant in a number of areas in advance of demolition and redevelopment most notably at Troutbeck which was a scheme highlighted at a previous Board. At the end of July there were 120 voids of which 51 were being held in advance of redevelopment.
- The rent arrears figure does not show a smooth profile as a number of rent free weeks were operated throughout the year which means those paying by direct debit evenly throughout the year will create a mismatch between collectable rent and arrears. Of greater concern is the underlying economic position coupled with universal credit which is beginning to impact on arrears particularly among working tenants whose income is a mix of wages and in work benefits.

### Key Issues:

#### Finance:

The budget performance of BCH has remained strong. £500k was available to transfer to the general fund as part of the current year's budget process despite operating on a frozen fee. Price and wage inflation was dealt with through a value for money approach and performance has been maintained or improved in all areas. The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) has sustained some lost rental income as a result of the delays in completing Queens Park, the latest projected completion date is November this year. The necessary legal and contractual steps have been taken that will allow the Council to pursue liquidated damages which would be rental loss in the main. At present the focus is ensuring Lovell's complete all units to the required standard. Once BCH is assured of a final handover date a decision will be made on liquidated damages.

#### Development:

Following the Councils' decision to demolish and redevelop Troutbeck work has taken place to relocate existing tenants and deal with leaseholders. Those affected are being given priority when bidding for properties and the company is ahead of programme with just short of two thirds of the units vacant. BCH is still aiming to complete all the decant programme by agreement and will only resort to legal powers to compel people to leave if there is no other option. Architects will be

appointed by October 2018 to produce plans for the site prior to the Council making a decision about the overall scheme and housing mix.

The final piece of demolition at Grange Park, the Chepstow Road shops and flats should now be demolished; work had begun at the time of writing this report. A masterplan has been consulted on with local people and scheme appraisal is under way as is an evaluation of delivery options. Again a final option will need to be agreed by the Council. Depending on final scheme designs Troutbeck and Grange together will provide somewhere between 200 and 250 new homes.

## Core Services:

Performance has remained strong on all housing services; both the Anti-Social Behaviour service and lettings have had their external accreditation renewed following inspections which sit alongside the rents service's existing accreditation. A review of the Operations Service is nearly complete which is designed to make the in house delivery of repairs and capital works as efficient as possible. The review will deliver a smaller more productive workforce. Job losses have all been achieved by voluntary means and repairs performance has been maintained throughout the process. The review will produce significant savings which will allow the company board to reinvest in services and provision that furthers the business plan objectives which are aligned to the Council plan.

## New Service Areas:

Positive Transitions, which is a service that is provided for Children's Services and targets the provision of stable accommodation and support for care leavers moving into independent living. Feedback from Children's Services and care leavers themselves has been positive and the early engagement with care leavers coupled with the collaborative approach to selecting a property and the subsequent support is resulting in much improved stability. The service is continuing to develop and a proposal to extend a time limited support offer to those who have missed out on the current programme but still fall under the care of the Council (18 to 25yr olds) will be the subject of a funding bid this autumn. The only concern with the future development of the programme is the lack of specialist and mental health support for the small number of young people in the programme that have needs that cannot be met by the universal service.

## More Positive Together:

This scheme is funded jointly by BCH and European Structural and Investment Funds and provides for a team to support tenants across Blackpool with the aim of getting people closer to work and into jobs and/or training. BCH is leading the Fylde Coast cluster of social landlords and making significant progress with customers who are a distance from the labour market. The programme is set to run to December 2019 but given the progress and impact discussions are being entered into to extend the programme and bid for additional funds.

## Other Issues:

The long awaited government Green Paper on social housing has been launched for consultation. The paper was preceded by the Grenfell tragedy and understandably reflects the concerns that have emerged in the aftermath of the fire and throughout the ongoing inquiry. The Green Paper was

being heralded as a significant re launching of social housing as a key element of market change and meeting housing need. While the paper has some warm words about the role of Councils and social housing providers it is short on substantial measures beyond the creation of league tables for providers and the strengthening of complaints procedures and consumer regulation. It is a missed opportunity to reposition Council housing as tenure of choice and to start to develop substantial numbers of new social houses. There is no new money other than the additional borrowing powers that have already been made available for areas of high demand; Blackpool is not an eligible area. There remains a significant lobby to raise the HRA borrowing cap to allow more new development but as yet there has been no move to accommodate this lobby.

Two areas of concern that were being promoted but have been dropped in the green paper are the potential to force the sale of high value council homes by levying a charge on Councils based on a formula and the forced removal of lifetime tenancies. The problems around right to buy receipts have been acknowledged and there is a promise to consult further.

BCH will work with the Council to produce a response to the consultation but it is likely given the content and tone of the Green Paper and the ongoing pressure from Brexit that any housing solutions for Blackpool are going to have to be driven locally rather than rely on legislative change from the government.