

## Summary of Scrutiny July/August 2019

The Scrutiny team looked at two specific communities in the Northampton region, Bidders Close & Pen Court and Newlife Apartments; to find out what makes a sustainable community. The scope of this exercise included but was not limited to: -

- How sustainable are these communities?
- If they are not sustainable, why not?
- If they are, what makes them so?
- What resident engagement was evident?
- How does anti-social behaviour effect communities?
- Stigma?

Overall, we conclude features of a non-sustained community are present, such as Anti-social behaviour, lack of resident engagement and stigma. Although, with new staffing and working practices, (e.g. The *Neighbourhood Toolkit*, outcome of Resident Profiling) there are enhanced prospects of the communities becoming more sustainable. The conclusions we have made give rise to a number of recommendations both made later on pages 4, 5 & 6.

Ultimately, this Scrutiny aimed to learn lessons regarding what helps communities become and remain 'sustainable', and how these might be applied for the communities studied and others in PA's stock.

*Value for Money.* (VFM) We did not attempt to measure Value for Money or reach to a conclusion on this as the new staffing arrangements are still in their early stages.

### Bidders Close and Pen Court

- Evidence of fly tipping was noted and regular drug dealing in the area was reported when residents were interviewed.
- Outside lighting was said to insufficient.
- There was evidence of a former resident's association but this was no longer functioning,
- The numbering system and signage of the estate was unhelpful and this made postal and other deliveries difficult and often misdirected.
- We noted that we could still gain access to the communal areas of the flats at 2.30 pm although there was a security entry system in use.
- The lighting in the indoor communal areas was on all day.
- There were no recycling facilities for any of the flats.
- Residents had no knowledge of the *Neighbourhood Improvement and Community Improvement Funds*.
- The best thing about living in the areas was said to include proximity to shops and buses as well as schools and most enjoyed living by the waterway.

## **Newlife Apartments**

- We were advised that the area historically had a poor reputation, but that this has improved.
- The introduction of full-time security personnel and electronic security was well received by residents.
- We discovered that there is some confusion as to the role of the Neighbourhood Coordinator, some residents thinking that the post holder has replaced the former caretaker position.
- There is fly tipping in the communal bin area, even though there is CCTV in operation.
- Outside lighting was said to be poor.
- An access fob for restricting which floor can be accessed via the lift was well spoken of by some. On the other hand, some residents were less happy when their lift was out of action, meaning the other lift could not be used for their floor, which means using the stairs. (Each lift serves either odd or even floors only.) Even then, access to a resident's floor can only be provided by a member of security staff releasing the stairwell door.
- Property improvement has been undertaken via a refurbishment scheme eight years ago. residents recall that a pathway has been provided and a play area built, including outdoor adult gym equipment.
- The best thing about living in the area was said to include being near the town centre.

## **We interviewed staff members and outside agencies:**

- A key objective of PA is to rebuild trust with residents, particularly after the resident facing staffing cuts of 2016 in the Midlands area, due to the effect of the government's 1% decrease in rental income. Lessons learned include the impact of the front-line staff reductions arising from the 2016 onward rent cuts. Although money was saved, there was an impact on community sustainment.
- Plans to support community development, include community days in school holidays, *Neighbourhoods on Tour* with other agencies, development of *Residents' Watch*, Tenant Surgeries, MAD (Maintenance Action Days) and greater Resident Involvement.
- The view was expressed that greater financial investment is required in these communities. Despite the focus of this Scrutiny being on the *social* aspects of sustainable communities, we infer from the interviewee's remarks that investment in the *physical* aspects of the neighbourhoods will have a *social* impact.
- Also mentioned was that the layout is important for managing Anti-social behaviour, for example, avoiding or removing 'cut throughs' taking away access/egress.
- It was commented that people's own input supports communities to become sustainable.
- To maintain the estate to a good standard, door to door visits are made to promote good behaviour and respect for the neighbourhood environment. There is a limited level of Resident Engagement, however, with the introduction of the role of the Neighbourhood Coordinator, interaction with residents over time will encourage involvement.

- There is an example of the engagement of residents in helping to improve their environment. At Pen Court, the painting of a wall and cutting back bushes by a team of residents.
- It is acknowledged that drugs can be a problem to a community, staff have a range of materials, including a *cannabis card* as a part of the Neighbourhood Coordinator's *Toolkit*.
- A suggestion was that there be a wider invitation to *Neighbourhoods on Tour* to non-PA residents nearby, to help deal with stigma of social housing residents.
- There are large numbers of drug gangs operating in the Northampton area. We were advised that it is difficult to access external services owing to closures, cut backs, and in the case of the County Council, its special measures. In some instances, PA are having to 'pick up the pieces'.
- It was said that Universal Credit is having an impact on the sustainability of the communities, with increase in rent arrears and budgeting problems.
- Supporting sustainability is helped by working in partnership with other agencies. For the future, priorities are getting support services established, promoting the Neighbourhood Coordinator service, evidencing outcomes and improving PA's reputation with partner agencies.
- Northamptonshire has areas that are in the top 1% most deprived nationally for education and skills, income and employment, health, crime and housing comparable with the National Average. 19.1% of Northampton has childhood poverty leading to negative health outcomes and premature mortality. Education deprivation measures acknowledge the education, skills and training level for children, young people and adults.
- The potential for Northampton University students undertaking community projects was discussed. The University is keen to embed community activities into the curriculum. This could include providing community workshops, including working with the media department generally and on social media.
- It was said that a top priority for the neighbourhoods should be to ensure that residents know what services PA provide.

### **Considered Good Practice**

- A sustainable community is defined as the provision of good quality, affordable housing which delivers healthy communities, with access to all essential services, green space and amenities.
- A sustainable community fosters a sense of 'ownership' and place, supporting social networks within it and between neighbouring communities.
- Essentially, sustainable communities create a sense of belonging which in turn helps to create a positive quality of life for both the individual and for all the residents.
- It is recognised that the physical nature of the living environment can impact on such social aspects. For example, layout that helps anti-social behaviour and crime, lack of amenities and space for residents, unpopular design and appearance.
- The main lesson for social housing providers is to develop a vision for sustainable communities jointly with the people within that community and to work in a collaborative manner with all project stakeholders to achieve that

vision. This requires an understanding of what is culturally and socially important to the community.

## Helpful contacts

### **The Environmental Crime Team 2019 (Northampton BC website)**

This document produced by Northampton Borough Council describes how Environmental Crime Officers can tackle issues such as Fly Tipping, Dog fouling and Graffiti.

### **Councillor Community Fund (Northampton BC website)**

The Northampton Borough Council document sets out a fund to enable Councillors to “efficiently and effectively” allocate money (grants of £3,000 per year) within their ward to make a positive impact on the areas they represent and to empower local residents to be active in their communities.

## Conclusions

- ❖ Although this Scrutiny is focused on the *social* aspects of the communities being sustainable, we acknowledge that *physical* aspects cannot be ignored as they themselves do impact on the *social*. Through undertaking this Scrutiny, we have a far better understanding of *sustainable communities* and able to apply it to the communities being considered here. We note from the evidence from our briefings, interviews and independent advice that the communities are on the margins of sustainability. Whilst considered sustained, there are some un-sustainable features present, detailed in this report
- ❖ Achievement of sustainable communities will depend upon effective partnership working with other agencies, for example the police with regard to ‘county lines’ drug supplies and working with the university on community projects
- ❖ The lack of recycling facilities is not helpful to the neighbourhoods’ environments and CCTV use is not effective in preventing fly tipping
- ❖ That there are no local Resident Associations is a constraint to the communities being sustainable. As a step toward better resident engagement, encouraging complainants to become involved would be helpful
- ❖ People feeling safe and secure where they live is central to a community being sustained. That the rubbish chutes are still in use (and therefore a fire hazard) and whether stairwell doors in the blocks may not be releasable in the event of a fire, is a major concern. We are uncertain whether the new fire evacuation policy (from stay put to get out) has been published effectively. The layout of the estates, for example providing ‘cut throughs’, means a less secure and safe place to live, exacerbating less sustainability.

- ❖ Poor signage at Pen Court and Bidders Close makes navigating the neighbourhood difficult, for visitors and deliveries
- ❖ We commend the aspiration that the communities in the next twelve months be somewhere where people are proud to live and be family connected. This is a major feature of a sustainable community
- ❖ The customer facing staff cuts arising out of the 2016-2020 rent reductions have been unhelpful to supporting the sustainability of the communities, but we are encouraged by more recent introduction of neighbourhood arrangements, the results of which will be apparent in due course
- ❖ Working *with* the community on plans for a more sustainable community, learning the lesson that *doing things to people* has failed in the past, *doing things with people* is more likely to work

## Recommendations

- The format of future Scrutinies remain as successfully carried out in this one, including overnight stay for report writing, and other activities if appropriate
- The Neighbourhood Coordinator organizes residents to work with the local Councillor(s) to access the Northampton BC *Councillors' Fund*. This should be combined with PA's Neighbourhood Improvement and Community Funds
- PA discuss with Northampton Borough Council the provision of recycling facilities at the neighbourhoods
- It be ensured that the estates are fire safety compliant
- The effectiveness of the introduction of Resident Involvement on the communities, be assessed at April 2020
- The signage at Pen Court and Bidders Close be made clear for navigation of the neighbourhoods and tackling stigma
- *Neighbourhoods on Tour* and other initiatives include residents from nearby neighborhoods (including other tenures), to support a sustainable community and tackle stigma
- *All* sections of PA encourage Resident Involvement and identify potential candidates
- PA implements plans to work with partner agencies to improve its reputation and introduce support services for benefit of the residents in the communities

- Working *with* the community on plans for a more sustainable community, learning the lesson that *doing things to people* has failed in the past, *doing things with people* is more likely to work

**Appendix 1 Phase 1 & 2**

**Appendix 2 Scrutiny Process**

**Appendix 3 Action Plan**

### **Scrutiny is in two parts Phase 1 and Phase 2**

#### **Phase 1 is described as the nuts and bolts of the scrutiny.**

Generally what happens is the team reviews paperwork, conducts interviews with managers, admin staff, resident's and staff from other agencies, depending on the Scrutiny that is taking place. Visit properties, and when necessary visit other housing associations. In conclusion Phase 1 examines the day to day workings of the area being scrutinised.

A final report of findings is then prepared and submitted for consideration of Phase 2.

#### **Phase 2**

The report from Phase 1 and Policies and Procedures and KPI's (key performance indicators) are examined closely. Benchmarking against other Housing Associations. Senior staff members such as Executive Directors and Heads of service are interviewed.

A final report is then prepared taking into consideration the report from Phase 1, interviews conducted, and the close examination of other information provided.

There are further stages, a Roundtable discussion takes place with managers to discuss the report, Resident Council approves the report and the Customer Service Committee discuss and note and follow recommendations.

An Independent Advisor assists the teams at various stages and during report writing. The work and conclusions are undertaken without any influence from PA Housing, however we do rely on PA to make appointments for any visits and interviews, arrange meeting rooms and provide any paperwork that is necessary.

## **Scrutiny Process**

1. Choose a service / subject e.g. This is done through a review and planning session
2. Grounds Maintenance, Cleaning, Independent Living etc. Areas of interest are on a forward rolling plan.
3. Decide on the membership of Phase 1 & 2 and agree the appropriate leads. Discuss strengths and weaknesses of the teams.
4. Scope the chosen Scrutiny (what are the important factors relating to the scrutiny area).
5. Training and mentoring on scrutiny will be provided including for scrutiny projects.
6. Management briefing to all members of the relevant scrutiny project (The relevant manager will outline their role and those of staff in their department(s)).
7. Call for documents with the relevant Head of Service will be discussed (The scrutiny team can request any relevant paperwork that may be helpful to the project).
8. Staff briefing (The scrutiny team will inform staff involved to inform them what, when and how the scrutiny in their area will be carried out). With particular emphasis that this is confidential to the scrutiny team and nothing personal but about the process.
9. Phase 1 team will commence scrutiny. (after the first week and at the end of the phase 1 process, the lead of phase 1 will update the phase 2 lead of the report)
10. Who do we need to interview?
11. What questions should we ask?
12. Interviews; (staff and outside agencies, local councils, charities, citizens advice etc. During interviews and focus groups as much information as possible needs to be written down. Only note written down can be used as evidence when the report is written.
13. To avoid staff or outside agency members attending twice for interviews; Phase 2 members may sit in on interviews held during Phase 1.

Gather information –

- Focus Groups (talk with residents)
  - The use of surveys
  - Mystery shoppers.
  - Benchmarking (comparison with peer and other businesses).
  - document folder.
  - Key performance indicators (KPI's).
  - Any other relevant data (website searches etc.).
  - Visit relevant sites and offices.
  - Report writing (carried out with an independent advisor).
14. The Phase 1 report, including conclusions, recommendations and evidence file is then presented to the Phase 2 Team by the lead of Phase 1 Team. All written notes will be added to the scrutiny box for future proofing and a constant reference.
15. Phase 2 begins by examining the report and evidence file supplied by Phase 1 Team. Phase 2 will then carry out the same programme as Phase 1 but will interview more senior staff and will look at the scrutiny in a more strategic way (what are the plans going forward). Consider Value for Money (VFM). And include good practice (gathered from CIH, Tpas etc.) which we will be included in the appendices to the report. The good practice is generally sourced by the Independent Advisor.
16. After the first week and at the end of the report writing stage, the lead of phase 2 will contact the lead of phase 1 to update on the project.
17. When Phase 2 have completed their final report, it is then passed on to the Executive and Managers of the department to prepare a Roundtable discussion. **(At this stage the report is for scrutiny members and Senior staff only, it remains confidential).**
- The Roundtable (1) is made up from:
    - Executive of Department
    - Managers of Department
    - Resident Involvement Manager
    - Scrutiny Leads from Phase 1 & 2
  - This is to discuss the finding of the final report and make and agree any obvious changes and agree to right any incorrect information; but the fabric of the report remains intact.
18. Once approved the report is then presented to the Customer Forum and Resident Council for their approval; together with the Action Plan set by Management to meet each and everyone of their recommendations in the report.
19. Finally the report is presented to the Customer Services Committee (CSC) by the Phase 2 lead. The CSC is made up of Board Members, Senior Management and residents.

20. Roundtable (2) The Leads of the scrutiny, Resident Involvement Manager and the relevant Dept. Manager(s) will meet within 6 months to review the action plan.
21. Periodically the Customer Forum and Resident Council will revisit the action plan to ensure that any recommendations have been carried out to total satisfaction.

**Report of the Resident Scrutiny Team  
PA Homes in Northampton – Building Sustainable Communities**

No.	Recommendations		Responsible Staff	By When	Progress to Date
6.1	The format of future Scrutiny's remain as successfully carried out in this one, including overnight stay for report writing, and other activities if appropriate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This recommendation is noted and will be put to the Scrutiny Group at the planning for the next session.</li> </ul>	RI Manager	October 2019	
6.2	The Neighbourhood Coordinator organises residents to work with the local Councillor(s) to access the Northampton BC <i>Councillors' Fund</i> . This should be combined with PA's Neighbourhood Improvement and Community funds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Freestanding external Noticeboard to be located in ex-play area. SK to obtain quotes with a view to accessing Community Funds. Agreed size 1800mm(71inc) x 1200mm(47inc) Lockable. Depending on cost and other agencies using noticeboard may also want to consider approaching Councillors Fund.</li> <li>DLO to erect Noticeboard</li> </ul>	NC	01/11/2019  22/11/2019	Quotes have been obtained and waiting for approval from the community fund  As above
6.3	PA discuss with Northampton Borough Council the provision of recycling facilities at the neighbourhoods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SK contacted Council and is awaiting a callback. Due to attend Bidders Court 25/10/2019. SK to attend the Council with a view to discussing promoting recycling via leaflet drop.</li> <li>Agreed following leaflet drop SK to door knock to gauge interest in recycling. Update to be provided 2/11/2019</li> </ul>	NC	01/11/2019  25/10/2019  2/11/2019	No response received from the council yet. NC will chase again and provide an update
6.4	It be ensured that the estates are fire safety compliant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regular neighbourhood inspections completed. At Newlife these are done weekly. At Pen Ct/Bidders Close these are done monthly. All reports are done on</li> </ul>			These are completed every Thursday by the NC. At Newlife

		Photobook and saved and available on Documotive. As well as these inspections the Estates team inspect the quality of grounds maintenance and cleaning and the Health & Safety also regularly check properties to ensure these are free from hazards and fire safety compliant.			we have 24 hour security who completes regular inspections
6.5	The effectiveness of the introduction of Resident Involvement on the communities, be assessed at April 2020	We are due to hold a Neighbourhoods on Tour event at Pen Court and Bidders Close on 30/10/19. RI in this regent is still in its infancy as the priority over the first 6 months has been on showing our visibility and building trust. We have recently launched Neighbourhood Champions and will actively look to recruit in the Northampton area. We are also due to hold our first Neighbourhood surgeries in Northampton starting in November which again will give us an opportunity to discuss RI and assess if there are people who would be interested in getting more involved.	All	31/03/2020	Currently ongoing
6.6	The signage at Pen Court and Bidders Close be made clear for navigation of the neighbourhoods and tackling stigma	Community Fund – SK to chase up quotes from Restore and Max Cleaners and also obtain quote from EA Signs for free standing road signs for Bidders Court with numbers and Pen Court with numbers.	NC	2/11/2019	See 6.2
6.7	<i>Neighbourhoods on Tour</i> and other initiatives include residents from nearby neighbourhoods (including other tenures), to support a sustainable community and tackle stigma	Newlife Apartment – NOT 19/10/2019 – Leaflet drop week before NOT, poster displayed in Noticeboard at Harborough Road, Newlife Omega House. No attendance from residents at Omega House or Harborough Road. Pen & Bidders Court NOT due 30/10/2019 – Leaflet drop to be completed by 25/10/2019 - 10am – 15:00	NC	19/10/2019  30/10/2019	Completed
6.8	All sections of PA encourage Resident Involvement and identify potential candidates	Newlife – 2 candidates referred to Resident Involvement Officer Pen / Bidders – SK to approach potential candidate to ensure flexibility and commitment as she has a	NC	8/11/2019	Completed 1 confirmed and 1 pending

PA Homes in Northampton (Building Sustainable Communities)

		child			
6.9	PA implements plans to work with partner agencies to improve its reputation and introduce support services for benefit of the residents in the communities	18/10/2019 – NC attended Hate Awareness Week with Northamptonshire Partnership 13/08/2019 – NC attended Community Action Day Awaiting dates for Northamptonshire Neighbourhood Partnership Meetings. 17/09/2019 – Cuppa with a Coppa – SK met with local PC and discussed areas of concern and any developments eg lower CCTV cameras/ Cutback of Trees.	NC	Ongoing	Working in partnership as and when events are arranged
6.10	Working <i>with</i> the community on plans for a more sustainable community, learning the lesson that <i>doing things to people</i> has failed in the past, <i>doing things with people</i> is more likely to work	As above, looking any opportunities to work in partnership with the local communities in Northampton. We are also keen to look at how we best utilise the Community Fund and work with our customers to make improvements or add additions which would help improve the community and make it more sustainable.	All	Ongoing	Working in partnership as and when events are arranged