

JIGSAW HOMES SCRUTINY PANEL

Income Loss – Voids & Lettings (Scoping Meeting One)

Minutes of a meeting - Wednesday 21st September 2022

Present: (Employees) Samantha Hornsby (SH), Janet O'Connor (JO'C), Shehnaz Akhtar (SA), Khaled Miah (KH) and Dean Wall (DW), Claudine Harrison-Draper (CHD)

Present: (Panel) Susan Connell (SC), John Harvey (JH), Christopher Pinnock (CP) and Dot Shepard (DS)

1. Welcome (SH)

SH- Neighbourhood Engagement Officers welcomed everyone to the meeting, explanation she will be facilitating this meeting.

2. Online Housekeeping (SH)

SH - Explained that the meeting would be recorded and did anyone have any objections? All the panel agree it is ok to continue.

SH - Any questions - no questions at this point by panel.

SH reminded the panel that there will be an opportunity to ask DW questions after the power point presentation.

3. Introduction To Scrutiny (SH)

Topic discussion – Income Loss

SH - Confirmed that all panel members had received the relevant paperwork including presentation by email prior to this meeting - all panel were okay and understood the contents.

Any questions? None from panel.

SH - unable to share the presentation via Zoom, DW also tried to show the presentation and also had problems, panel agreed they were ok to proceed with out and DW would talk the presentation through.

4. Reminder Of Meeting Dates (SH)

SH reminded the entire panel they need to attend all 3 meetings to receive full points for Jigsaw Rewards. All scrutiny meetings must be attended to enable residents to receive their points and the meetings will be via Zoom - - all panel were okay with this.

5. Meeting Process

1st Meeting – looking at what we are going to cover in the scrutiny. This is to narrow it down to a scope that is meaningful and manageable. Looking at what we can and can't control. Following this meeting there will be a number of investigations to complete, research to be done and questions to be answered. The Chief Executive's Team will help us find out these answers.

2nd Meeting – feedback from the Chief Exec Team and investigation findings. What do the panel want us to investigate next?

3rd Meeting – discuss the findings further and decide on any additional recommendations.

6. Presentation (DW)

DW introduced himself, explaining his commencement at Jigsaw Homes and his role within the organisation and the teams under his role. He advised that he is responsible for Voids and Lettings and is very passionate about this role.

DW then commenced the presentation and explained each slide with additional information or scenarios. DW explained that his presentation is an overview of his department, benchmarking against other similar organisations that operate a tenancy management scheme and best practice.

SC asked – what is the 1% in regards to figures of properties?

DW – We currently have apx 31,000 properties, therefore we are looking at around 310 properties empty/voids. We do have weekly reports to which we look at as to get these figures down.

7. Q and A's (Panel)

On returning back to the panel, SH asked if they had any questions, they would like to raise that had not already been raised?

JH asked – How many people (staff) are in the process when letting out a property from when the tenant moves out to the new tenant moving in and is there different departments, which would be time consuming?

DW responded- Since Last summer we have revaluated and we have combine roles so that we now work in area patches; one staff member is responsible for the whole process from start to finish.

SC asked – from personal family experience, do you have spare employees for when that delegated person is off due to absences, as my knowledge of this is that you don't.

DW responded – We now have a buddy scheme where staff members work together so in cases of absence a colleague is aware of individual lettings. We also have a duty rota for the roles so all queries can be raised and responded to 5 days a week.

JH asked – Are Jigsaw checking that the council and Right Move are moving to fill the property as fast as possible?

DW responded – Local Authorities have service level agreements with individual organisations, Officers have responsibility to chase each LA and ensure homes are let within target.

JH asked – Is this actually happening?

DW responded – Difference experiences with different Local Authority, we are looking at this currently in more detail.

JH/DS asked 1%, could this not be looked at in more detail i.e. regionally/area as some

areas could be 0% other 50%?

DW responded – We do look at this and are currently looking into this.

JH asked – Do Jigsaw count from when a tenant moves out and new one moves in, or from when the contract is closed and new contract opened. The time the property is empty?

DW responded – We count is from Key to Key, normally we get keys handed in on Monday and then to when the new tenant receives their key.

JW asked – What about if a key is returned early e.g. a week, can work to re-let start earlier?

DW responded – If key/s is/are returned earlier, we can start the work early, yes.

JH asked – Are there flexibility in the Jigsaw staff, e.g. staff capable of doing different parts of the property letting structure, and not waiting for certain individuals to complete a task, that slows down the process?

DW responded – Similar to the previous response, it is good to have a point of contact and personal responsibility but due to absences this is why we have introduced the buddy scheme and duty rota.

JH asked – Has there been any monitoring?

DW responded – We will be monitoring, the manager will be checking this, however, we are open to change.

JH asked – Is there a manager that oversees the process of the lettings, If so are they accountable to the board.

DW responded – I am, I am accountable for the whole process with my team and I am accountable to the board as it is me that produces these reports.

Additional Questions

SC asked – I am aware of Voids and Homelessness as worked in this field, I'm currently looking at two void properties, which are still empty after a very long time. How long is a major void left for as one property has been empty for apx 9 months and the other apx 6 months?

DW responded – It is fair to say that we do have a back log, we do have more properties with major works and we need to do more for the demand and lead services. We currently have re-housed, working with local authority from 20% to 30%, homeless families.

SC asked – A possible benchmarking project, could you look to work with new tenants that they sign up but be prepared to move into a property as long as the works are completed as and when (as soon as possible) so the property is let sooner.

DW responded – This is good to take forward.

SC asked – Is there anything to assist with energy costs, can we look at draft proofing, making void properties more energy efficient before re-letting.

DW responded – We are looking into this and it is a good point.

DS asked – Why have voids increased recently?

DW responded - Bigger refurbishments have increased due to deaths in tenancy unfortunately and not just with Covid, often 3 beds that need updating have not been for longer periods of time. We have our own teams internally working on these and we are looking to move this around to quicken the process.

CP responded - I'm still waiting on jobs being done from when I signed up for this property five years ago.

DW responded - Unfortunately major works are done as a matter of urgency and then other works follow as soon as they can be done.

CP raised - I don't know who my lettings officer is, I could do with a list of contacts.

DW responded - You are right, you could do with a leaflet with officers' contacts for reference.

DS raised - New tenant's could do with a fact pack.

DW responded - We do give contact centre number, we could look to do. We may need to ask tenant's more about this.

DS raised - You could look for help with furnishing from local charities i.e. Mustard Tree in my areas for example.

DW responded - We have found that lots of the local charities which we used have gone bust; we do have a scheme gifting items and money to buy new furniture which we are piloting at the moment. We are also looking at furnished tenancies similar to what Stockport Homes are currently doing.

JH raised - This would be a different audience.

DW responded - yes, carpeted flats improves properties and assist the tenant to get a start in their property, we are also looking at furniture package as another incentive.

JH asked - Do you look at property or area and why they are a long time empty/void?

DW responded - We do look at this and we are aware of this and we do have measures in place.

SH asked if anyone had any questions for DW at this time - The panel were happy there was not. SH thank DW for his time and he now left the meeting.

SH then asked the panel if they were happy to have 10 minutes chat amongst themselves in regards to the presentation and feedback any questions or queries they have. The panel were happy to do this so all except the panel removed themselves from the meeting for 10 minutes.

Upon returning back to the meeting SC raised we thought the questions were the topic but did have a few additional queries.

DS commented - Jigsaw seem reliant on MCC and Right move, in previous experience of a former property with Orbit, they had a website that you could see availability and apply for any properties, it would also tell you if you could apply for this property with your information submitted.

SH informed the group - Right Move is like this.

DS added - Right Move is an agent though Jigsaw needs their own run website.

JO'C commented – Whatever research, we will include all areas, and we will look at this with possible JR Survey.

DS added – I didn't know Right Move included choice base lettings scheme.

SC added – Do potential Jigsaw tenants know where to look.

JO'C responded – again this is something we could raise.

KM added that he has produced a list of scoping topics as detailed below and the panel agreed these.

Monitoring/management

- Newly introduced buddy system/rota system – evidence of this working against previous system process
- SLA's with LA's – are they doing their bit or slowing us and our processes down

Major voids

- Some cases for months – quick case study timeline for current longest void?
- Any trends and patterns emerging
- Plans to address this
- Converting types of properties/incentivising lets and or property types

Moving to a demand led service

- What does this mean in practice
- 1 in 3 properties currently go to homeless families up from 20%
- Low demand properties i.e. bedsits/over 55's or areas with ASB/criminality etc.

Support for moving tenants

- In general
 - i. Signpost to money advice services
 - ii. Piloting furnished properties
 - iii. Affordability checks – eligibility for gifts/grants for furniture and set up costs
- In context of cost of living crisis
 - i. Draught proofing
 - ii. Any other specific and targeted measures
- **Jigsaw rewards** – question if tenants know where/how to access advice/support?

Tenancy end analysis

- Reasons for recently increased voids – increased in the sense of the number of major voids not the overall number, compare to same quarter in previous years?
- **Jigsaw rewards** – if anyone on rewards has ever ended a tenancy with us reasons/further understanding – anecdotal info?

Voids and repairs

- 'Minor' repairs are missed, which are then not carried out as property accepted 'as is'
- Ensuring such repairs are completed, no ownership of this or clarity on what was agreed at sign up
- **Jigsaw rewards** – are there any repairs that were 'promised' on sign up that either were not done or took a long time and what are the reasons for this?

Points of contact following Sign Up

- Named points of contacts to be given following sign up, usually signposted to Connect – is this possible, why/why not/alternatives
- **Jigsaw rewards** – question to check awareness of our advertising methods?

Advertising of vacant properties

- Reliance on LA's and Right Move – look at having Jigsaw's own offer for Jigsaw properties only – integration with current application and eligibility etc.
- Some tenants did not know we used Right Move
- **Jigsaw rewards** – question to check awareness of our advertising methods?

Current long term voids

- Analysis

JH raised – Looking at properties hard to let, could they be converted into something more in need and lettable i.e. higher standard.

JO’C responded – We can look at categorising properties and why they are not being let out i.e. longer than apx time, why KM to investigate long term voids.

SH advised the panel there would be further opportunities for investigations following the next meeting, if the panel have any additional ideas after the meeting today.

8. Jigsaw Rewards Survey (SH)

SH explained to the panel that if they want more views she could work on producing a survey for Jigsaw Rewards. The panel said that these maybe useful.

SC raised – We could ask the following:

- Is there a problem with voids in your area?
- What do you consider a long term void?
- If furnished accommodation, would this be more appealing?

DS raised – We could also ask the following:

- Do you know the letting process?
- Do you know where our void properties are advertised?

CP raised – there is currently a survey on Jigsaw Rewards, this has just become available and some of the questions are similar so we may be duplicating them.

SH commented – Once this survey is closed and completed we would look at this before putting a new survey on JR as not to duplicate questions.

9. Group Photo (CHD)

CHD took a photograph all of panel members who had provided consent prior to the meeting.

SC commented that she was unable to download the form, SH agreed to send a paper copy out and for SC to either scan and send or returned in the pre-paid envelope.

10. Dates of next meeting (SH)

SH reminded the panel of the dates of the next meetings:

2nd meeting Wednesday 9th November 2022 at 10:00am – 12 noon – feedback from the Chief Exec Team and investigation findings. What do the panel want us to investigate next?

3rd meeting Wednesday 14th December 2022 at 10:00am – 12 noon – discuss the findings further and decide on any additional recommendations.

All documents and Zoom links will be sent at least 7 days prior to meeting

11. Close of meeting (SH)

SH thanked the panel for being actively engaged and their participation. She advised that panel members could email if they have any queries after the meeting and that the minutes would be distributed to all panel members via email. SC asked SH if she could remain on the meeting to discuss further the addresses of the properties raised in the Q&A part with DW.

The meeting was brought to a close.

