

Briefing Note regarding the Council's working arrangements with ACIS Group Ltd



To assist Members in formulating their prospective questions for Officer Representatives from ACIS Group Ltd at their meeting on 1 September 2015.

The Council transferred its housing stock to the Acis Group Ltd in 1999. In the main, this means that Acis are now responsible for the physical housing assets as well as the tenants residing within. Acis are a Registered Provider and their operations and finances are regulated by the Government.

As a result of the transfer the Council still works with Acis across a variety of areas, these are set out below along with key questions that may be appropriate.

The Housing Register (Lincs Homefinder/CBL) – The Council administer the housing register through Lincs Homefinder and then provide nominations to Acis as one of the registered providers within the area. As the stock transfer partner, Acis have the largest share of social rented properties within West Lindsey and as such the majority of households registered for Lincs Homefinder will be nominated to Acis properties. The stock transfer agrees that at least 75% of the properties that become available should be let to households nominated by The Council.

Acis are an equal partner within the Lincs Homefinder scheme along with West Lindsey, City of Lincoln and North Kesteven. The scheme is used to advertise properties and the Council then nominate households to Acis to fill their properties. Acis will accept homeless accepted households but may refuse depending on the households needs. Acis may accept nominations of households with former tenant arrears where those arrears are under £250 and have been reduced by not less than 13 weekly payments. The stock transfer agreement states Acis must assist WLDC in administering their homeless duty.

Member note – we would suggest requesting information in advance to show that 75% of properties were let to households nominated by The Council. Furthermore ask Acis to detail what steps they are taking to rehouse the more vulnerable members of society with particular regard to their introduction of 4 weeks rent upfront for sign up, numbers of nominations refused, changes in welfare reform and changes to support provision within Lincolnshire via Public Health.

Right to Buy Changes, Implications and planning – During the last parliament changes were introduced to the right to buy. Firstly residents could get a maximum discount of up to £77,900 and secondly the eligibility criteria has changed reducing the requirement of 5 years public sector tenancy to 3. This applies to council tenants and those whose tenancies have transferred from councils to housing associations.

Also in May 2015 the government pledged to extend the right to buy to housing association tenants.

The money raised through extra sales since April 2012 goes towards building new affordable homes for rent.

Question – Is Acis undertaking any planning to understand the implications of these changes?

Question – What reassurance can The Council be offered that the receipts will be reinvested?

Question – In a more overarching sense, what are Acis' ambitions for the future. Members are aware that many Housing Associations nationally are merging to create greater economies of scale. Do Acis have any intentions along these lines and what might the implications for the Council be?

Social Role & Multi Agency Working - Acis contribute to multi agency meetings with the Council such as the Vulnerable Adult Panel, ASBRAC (anti-social behaviour risk assessment conference), MARAC (Domestic Abuse multi agency conference) and ARM (anti-social behaviour reduction meeting) to try and rehouse vulnerable individuals effectively.

As a social housing provider Acis are a key partner of The Council in meeting the wider needs of the community, in tackling deprivation and in challenging anti-social behaviour.

Question – How can we ensure our joint working is effective?

Housing Disrepair – the Council liaises with Acis in regards to complaints that are received about the condition of their properties. These do not occur frequently and when they do they are usually resolved through officer liaison. Acis will visit properties at the Councils request and then follow up with the Council to confirm the relevant works have been completed.

Question – please can information be provided to outline any plans that Acis have for improving their housing stock.

Question – please can you provide information on your policy for disposal of housing stock? Particularly homes that are situated in the South West Ward.

Affordable Housing – where development of affordable housing schemes take place, the Council works with Acis to ensure that the appropriate units are delivered and then allocated. Like all Registered Providers, Acis liaise directly with the Homes and Communities Agency in terms of any grants that are available. Over the last 2 to 3 years Acis have completed less developments in general, but are still actively pursuing sites.

Question – please can you provide information on the future plans that Acis have for developing homes and the type of homes that will be developed? To include any

specific examples of where you will be providing accommodation for any specific groups such as the elderly or the vulnerable.

Disabled Facilities Grants and Adaptations – the majority of the Councils DFG funding is spent within Acis homes, the Council, under legislation has to pay for this and it equates to around £250k per annum. Over time the Council has attempted to come to some agreement with Acis in regards to a contribution for the works that are completed but this has not been successful. Acis do carry out their own works on aids and adaptations but the level of these are unknown and this is still an area in which improvements are needed in terms of the relationship between the two parties.

Question – please can you provide information on the level of investment made in regards to aids and adaptations for Acis tenants?

Question – will Acis consider developing an agreement with the Council to ensure that persons needing adaptations are not moved into properties that are unsuitable for them? This is something that is regularly an issue.