

Housing Services and Property Services Panel Meeting

9 May, 2023 – Council Chambers, Harrogate Civic Centre

Attendance: Staff - Lucy Tyne (Tenant Involvement Officer); Reno Cooper (Neighbourhood Team Leader, Community); Lorraine Larini (Executive Officer, Property services); Paul Boreham (Housing Safety Manager); Paul Cole (Capital Planned Works Manager)

**Guests – Lee Gatley-Hall – Align Property Partners
Chris Hesketh - Tenant**

**Involved Tenants - Pauline Lockley; Barbara Rickards; Lesley Peplow;
Michael Fenwick-Scott; James Jenner; Teresa Fox; Carlow Lawson;**

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies

1.1 Barbara welcomed all to the meeting.

1.2 Apologies for absence had been received from- Duncan Morris, Arnot Wood and Jenny Pateman-Harrison, Ian Howard (Repairs Manager)

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 7 February, 2023

2.1 The minutes had been previously circulated and were approved as a correct record. As with other recent minutes these would now be publicly available on the tenant involvement section of the council's website.

2.2 Barbara ran through the minutes and a number of matters were raised:

2.2.1 An update on tenant void inspections was requested; Lucy explained that she and 2 tenants were going to see the first completed void tomorrow, working with Paul Cole. The group will continue to be updated.

Action:

2.2.2 Barbara referred to the request of information from James Tuck on empty homes. Lucy confirmed that it is included on the agenda for this meeting.

2.2.3 Barbara queried if we have started to use choice based lettings. Reno explained that we are still using the points system for the time being but we will be move to CBL in the future.

3. Property Services update – Lorraine Larini, Executive Office (Property Services)

3.1 Lorraine explained how the team were doing post vesting day, she said they have a lot to get their heads around with new processes and systems and they are currently working with no head of service. Andrew Rowe is in the process of appointing them, as Lorraine understands there will be a separate head of service for property services and housing management. Lorraine went on to state that a few things have been placed on 'soft pause' while they co-ordinate with colleagues in Richmond and Selby.

3.1.2 Lesley asked if when heads of service are appointed, will they be invited to panel meetings. Lucy confirmed that they will.

3.1.3 Lorraine went on to mention that there had been a key resignation within the team - Jim Clemans has gone to work for Anchor housing. Jim's duties have been divided up amongst the team, as for the moment they cannot recruit to management posts until heads of service are in place. She explained that they can still however recruit to front line posts so are hopeful tenants won't see an impact.

3.1.4 Next, Lorraine spoke about the team having meetings with Align Property Partners, a wholly owned company of North Yorkshire Council. They have a wealth of experience and a range of professionally qualified individuals, for example people who can carry out retrofit surveys, consultants and experience with building council properties. Lorraine explained that having access to Align will save the council money and time as we will no longer need to go through individual procurement process for these sorts of jobs.

3.1.5 Lorraine gave an update on the decarbonisation pilot scheme. She noted that this was one of the projects that has had a soft pause put on it. The funding is still there, the team are just deciding how best to spend the money in Harrogate.

3.1.6 The 1st step now is for Align property partners to undertake retrofit surveys for properties that have an ECP certificate of E and F (around 90 properties). It still remains that all council properties need to be at an EPC C by 2030. Lorraine also confirmed that the team will still do retrofit surveys on the volunteer properties but there

wasn't the breadth of low grade EPC's that they needed to start with these. These will take place a little later. Lorraine also added that the properties with an EPC of E and F aren't necessarily in that position because they haven't been offered improvement works, the team have found that these properties often have long standing tenants who may have refused improvement works. After this step, the team will start the retrofit surveys on properties with an EPC rating of D.

3.1.7 Chris asked what EPC rating the development at Dene Park will be – Lorraine confirmed that it will likely be a high B. Chris queried if this could be higher. Lorraine explained that the council cannot make every property meet a rating of an A as it is just not feasible, the team are doing everything they can to exceed the certificate C requirement where practical within funding limits, Lee also commented that gaining an EPC A, is very difficult in reality.

3.1.8 Chris requested the data set of properties with low EPC ratings – Lucy confirmed she would speak with him regarding this.

3.1.9 Lorraine then touched on ground source heat pumps, she confirmed that the methodology had been approved by cabinet members and she is working her way through most serious cases and will be in touch with eligible tenants about compensation.

3.2 Paul Cole – Capital planned works manager

3.2.1 Paul confirmed approvals for the kitchen contract are progressing. This will be a 3 year contract utilising 2 contractors, meaning works will be carried out quicker.

3.2.1 The windows contract is also pending final approval. Paul stated that there were lot of works to be done but this project will help with energy efficiency and the decarbonisation pilot. Again, this contract will be utilizing 2 contractors. He explained that by the end of this year we should be in a much better position with these programmes of work.

3.2.2 Teresa asked what will happen to the properties that have tenants in them that will refuse the improvement works. Lorraine explained that the team are trying to be more proactive when working with these tenants and informing them why the works are so important. Paul also added that these sort of improvement works are also been done at the point of void where possible – this makes it much easier to carry out the works.

Paul and Lorraine explained that this may impact statistics of void time.

3.2.3 Lorraine explained that the team are also looking at putting sensors into properties. These sensors read temperatures and humidity so they will be especially useful in properties that have damp and mould issues where the source of the problem has not been identified.

3.2.4 Paul also added that the sensor can also pick up compliance, for example if your fire alarm or carbon monoxide alarm fail. There is also an app that goes along with the sensor that gives the tenant real time data.

3.2.5 Barbara asked what is in place for those tenants who don't have access to a device to view the app. Paul commented that he will ask the provider and update us with any developments.

3.2.6 Lesley asked what happens if a tenant refuses the installation of the sensor as they feel it may infringe on their rights. Lorraine confirmed that the sensor is not collecting any personal data about the tenants – it's purely there for the property and it allows proactive work to be done. The first ones will be being installed in the next couple of weeks.

3.2.7 Paul explained that other councils have rolled out the use of the same sensors and they are working well. Lorraine stated that there may be opportunity for tenants to volunteer their properties for the sensor to be installed. Many involved tenants raised their hands to be involved with this.

3.3 Paul Boreham – Housing Safety Manager

3.3.1 Paul explained that at the moment he is heading up the work around disrepair claims - wanting to get these numbers down. He explained that they want to get ahead of the game. They are planning on working with councillors, MP's and tenants to bring down the number of claims. Lorraine added that we don't have a high number of these claims but echoed the need to get ahead.

3.3.2 Paul went on to say that they will be working with all kinds of disrepair claims. As well as working with tenants on how the council can encourage them to call us and not solicitors. Paul explained that these solicitors that are advertising a no win no fee agreement are deceiving tenants and we want to stop this.

3.3.4 Paul also stated the approach that will be taken to ensure nothing is missed, he explained that if a property is showing signs of mould and damp they will also look at the properties around it. Also Paul is working with Ian (repairs manager) on repairs that might have been missed.

3.3.5 It was queried what would happen if a neighbouring property was causing a damp problem but it was privately owned. Paul explained that we have expert equipment that will be able to tell us accurately where the problem is coming from. If we can prove its coming from that particular property we will go and talk to them. If it's privately owned all we can do is highlight the issue and recommend that they treat the problem.

3.3.6 Pauline added that the council are dealing with her property at the moment, Paul asked Lucy to pass on Pauline's details so he could discuss this with her.

4. **Housing Services update – Reno Cooper – Neighbourhood Team Leader – Community**

4.1.1 Reno started with explaining that the team are carrying quite a few vacancies. In order to recruit, a job profile needs to be written and approved, as well as taking into account teams and roles in Selby and Richmond. He added that the team are currently under strain as they are without any support officers, he is hopeful that it won't be much longer until we can get the adverts out and recruit new staff.

4.1.2 Barbara queried if the team are short in housing management positions. Reno explained that it is more the front line staff, there has been some internal promotions and retirement that have led to the support staff roles becoming vacant.

4.1.3 Reno then explained that the team are trying to get back to being more proactive. He commented that housing officers will be out and about a lot more than what they have been recently. All estates should have an estate inspection by end of September. This allows housing officers to identify problems that may not be reported or noticed.

4.1.4 Reno described that the transition to the new council can be difficult at times, but we are progressing in a very positive way.

4.1.5 Lucy commented that she has spoken with James Robinson regarding property purchases – he has reported that we are due 12 homes in the next couple of weeks. He did mention however that there is a lot of snagging – he will not be accepting homes if he is not satisfied with their quality.

4.1.6 Lucy also explained that she had spoken to James Tuck regarding empty homes – he had reported that in "April 2023 the number of empty homes in the Harrogate district have increased slightly to 209. Some of this has been due to instability in the economy and the cost of living crisis making it harder for

homeowners to undertake necessary work ahead of sale. This has also hit prospective buyers and the mortgages they are able to achieve leading to a longer sales process.

The property on Oatlands Drive previously advised being marketed has sold and completed. Renovations should commence soon.

Compulsory Purchase Orders are being progressed on three properties with a referral expected to be made to the Secretary of State very soon.

Homeowners with properties that have been empty for six months, 18 months and two years continue to be contacted offering solutions to get them occupied again.”

5. Performance Information Report

5.1 The meeting then ran through the performance management figures for the fourth quarter 2022/3. Overall the figures were good and everyone was satisfied. A number of comments were made:

5.1.2 It was noted that the comment sections to explain the performance information was less detailed than usual, Lorraine explained that the officer that used to collate all this information no longer works with the council, Samuel left just after vesting day. Going forward we have another officer, Eloise, who will take this on.

5.1.3 Lorraine also added that our performance indicators are being reviewed in line with Selby and Richmond as we have different time scales for things are different ways of measuring things. There will be a degree of consultation on aligning these service levels but we don't know exactly how or when this will happen.

6. Any other business

6.1 Lucy received a question in advance regarding satisfaction surveys after repairs have been carried out, it was noted that when a member of the in house maintenance team carried out a repair, its requested that a satisfaction survey is carried out but when a contractor does the repair no satisfaction survey is sent – why is this? Lorraine and Paul stated that the tenant should receive a satisfaction survey no matter who has attended.

6.2 Arnot submitted a couple of queries in his absence. He referred to the fire safety improvement works that are pending in the independent living schemes. He wondered when this work will be starting. Paul Boreham and Paul Cole confirmed they are ongoing – works have started at Blossomgate Court and other sites will follow after.

6.3 He also submitted a suggestion that Carlton Lodge should maybe have CCTV or be gated to prevent damage and trespassing. Lucy has passed this onto Dawn Saxby.

6.4 He also commented that the external redecorations are due at Carlton Lodge. Again Lucy will query this with the planned team.

7. Date of next meeting

9.1 The next meeting would be held on Tuesday, 1 August, 2023 in the Council Chamber.

9.2 Lucy thanked all for attending and closed the meeting at 3:35pm.