

## **Minutes of the All-Panels Meeting 13<sup>th</sup> March – 2pm – Council Chambers, Harrogate Civic Centre**

**Involved tenants: Lesley Peplow; Barbara Rickards; Richard Hinson; David Thomas; Carol Lawson; Duncan Morris**

**Staff: Lucy Tyne (Tenant Involvement Officer); Susie Eales (Housing Management Team Leader – Richmond)**

### **Action:**

#### **1. Welcome and apologies**

1.1 Lesley welcomed all to the meeting.

1.2 Apologies for absence had been received from – Gary Bridge, Teresa Fox

#### **2. Minutes of the All Panels' meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2023**

3.1 David asked for an update of void inspections – Lucy confirmed this will be covered in the meeting.

3.2.1 Duncan asked for an update on the ground source compensation scheme – Lucy confirmed that this has been successful.

#### **3. Review of minutes of recent panel meetings**

##### **3.1 Housing and Property Services Panel held on 13th February 2024**

The draft minutes of this meeting had been circulated previously. No matters were raised.

##### **3.2 Neighbourhood Services and Housing Needs Panel meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2024**

The draft minutes of this meeting had been circulated previously. A number of comments were made.

3.2.1 Duncan asked about why the Dene Park properties were not tenanted yet. Lucy explained that Reno gives reason for this within the minutes.

#### **4. Restructure update**

4.1 Lucy shared the new staff structure with tenants. Interviews are taking place throughout March with the majority of staff hopefully being in post by the start of April.

It was stressed that this structure is still a work in progress and things may still be tweaked.

It was discussed that there will be a standalone tenant involvement team – consisting of a manager and 3 officers. This is very positive and shows the work that will be going into involvement.

4.2 Duncan asked if posts are being advised internally, Susie confirmed that all vacancies will be advertised internally first. If no applications are received or internal candidates aren't successful, then roles will be advertised externally.

4.3 Barbara asked what the tenancy support officer role will consist of - Susie explained that they will assist the estate and income housing officers. They are not an admin role, there are not admin roles within this structure.

4.4 Barbara wanted to know if new role roles in this structure required employees to have relevant housing qualifications. Susie explained that if the law is passed that requires people in specific roles to have housing qualifications, then the council will fund the employees training in order for them to meet the requirements. If the council advertise externally, the advert will state that an applicant will need the relevant qualification or be working towards it.

4.5 Barbara asked about property services restructure and why the meeting isn't been shown it. Lucy explained that the purpose of showing the housing restructure was to discuss how it will affect tenant involvement. Lorraine will be attending meetings in the next quarter; she will be able to explain her new structure and by that time officers should be in post.

4.6 Barbara then asked what an FMS officer is. Susie explained this is a role specific to Harrogate-surrounding the financial system. Other localities do not have an officer with this specific role.

4.7 The meeting discussed how there is a lot of work to do once this structure is in place. The different localities are still working across multiple systems for different parts of the service. Once these systems are aligned it will be much easier for officers to work across the county.

4.7.1 Barbara expressed her concern that there might be mistakes once new systems are put in place. Susie explained that lots of testing happens on these systems before they go live. Although no one can be sure that zero mistakes will occur, we can assure you that all systems are rigorously tested.

4.8 David asked if there is money in the budget to cover the work around IT systems. Susie confirmed that there is, the HRA is ringfenced.

4.9 The meeting had a discussion around customer services and how tenants are still struggling to get through to who they need. Duncan suggested that each area have a dedicated repairs line. Barbara also commented that problems within customer services don't seem to have changed, the same complaints are being brought to meetings that were discussed quite some time ago. Lucy suggested that she talk with the managers in customer service and suggest they come along to a meeting. The group thought this was a good idea.

## **5. Scrutiny update**

5.1 Lucy will set up another working group to look at void properties.

### **5.2 Statement from Paul Cole regarding void works –**

Following on from my last update, I would like to provide you with a further update on our current void property situation. We are again still very much proactively addressing our vacant properties and have increased our internal workforce within the team with the help from the new build development team to help me bring the works on further. Our primary focus remains on ensuring that we elevate those properties that are of an energy performance of D, E, F & G to a C whilst they are void inputting all measures including any planned upgrades of kitchens, windows, and bathrooms whilst the property is undergoing these energy performance measures.

Since my last update, I have submitted a bid for the social housing decarbonisation fund to hopefully gain funding for 150 pilot property retrofit projects both in voids and tenanted properties across the borough. Results from the application are due shortly and in the meantime, I have gone out to tender for 2 suitable contractors to assist me with this work. This will see 100 properties improved in energy performance in Harrogate, 30 properties improved in energy performance in Selby, and 20 properties in Richmond.

We still acknowledge that implementing additional measures to improve the homes rather than quickly turn around properties to get them back for occupation is still worthwhile as it provides quality and energy-efficient homes, reducing future further repairs and maintenance as we get it right at the void stage.

In my last update again, I mentioned that we were in the process of installing environmental sensors as a pilot project to monitor the improvements made during and after the implementation of energy-efficient measures. I have now fully assessed the data from these and it is proving extremely crucial to each project both for the tenant and the council to understand the performance of the property once measures are in place. With this in mind, I have now expanded this across all projects that we are doing to ensure we capture essential data to provide feedback to the occupier and ensure that all the measures we have installed are improving the home's energy performance. Allowing us to monitor the home throughout the process and continually after gives us essential data that allows us to make any necessary adjustments and work with the occupier to ensure continuous comfort and affordability in the home.

Furthermore, as the restructure of housing unfolds we are still progressing with the expansion plan of our team to perform this work in-house with positive applications from tradespersons who want to join our team to assist in the refurbishment and maintenance of our void properties. This strategic move aims to continue to reduce contractor expenses, enhance control over installation standards, and, ideally, improve our turnaround times. Our long-term goal again has not changed and remains for this team to eventually oversee 95% of repairs and maintenance for NYC housing stock.

Finally, one of my long-term goals throughout our properties is to tackle the impact of mould and damp thus improving building fabric accordingly to tackle this situation so new and existing tenants have a comfortable and energy-efficient home to live in.

I trust again that this update offers everyone a clear and concise overview of our current position and as always we remain committed to providing further updates to keep everyone up to date with our plans to enhance our homes, continue to construct better ones, and importantly improve the services and comfortability for all of our tenants, whether new or existing.

5.2.1 Duncan asked why the majority of the properties for the decarbonisation bid are in Harrogate – Lucy explained that the work had already started in Harrogate due to the previous decarbonisation pilot. Therefore, it made sense to build on this work with the new bid.

### **5.3 Update from Paul Boreham on disrepair claims**

Disrepair claims are still dropping in as we have recently been targeted, as a side note the latest tactic is to pretend to be council employees (please make sure you always ask for an ID).

We have a strong and robust system for dealing with these claims and are currently winning 90% of claims made against us, I am working hard to keep these cases from the court room as if they get that far and we

continue to win as we are, tenants who take out dis-repair claims will fall foul of the costs recovery process, the dis-repair company will pass on all lost case defence costs to the tenant and these can reach £10,000 and more. The real aim here is to have tenants who are not happy and have concerns to contact the council and ask for a condition survey. This is financially much safer, quicker (the dis-repair companies can take a number of months to simply raise the disrepair with us as the longer it's been going the more costs they can claim, remember they are not here to represent you but to make money for themselves)

As well as the HHSRS training completed last year we have just had some staff work through some damp and mould awareness as a city and guilds course which is raising our knowledge of the causes of damp and mould and the correct rectification methods. When we have finalised the housing restructure we are going to have a dedicated housing safety team who's principle function will be to get into all properties as we roll out full property condition surveys (bit like a house MOT). This is going to allow us to get ahead and become proactive towards approaching issues such as damp and mould.

It is expected that we will be running an element of tenant engagement connected with this team, what format that takes has yet to be decided, but is hoped to include things like how to recognise damp and mould and how to help with addressing it.

5.3.1 Duncan added that often a lot of damp and mould is due to tenants not been able to put on their heating on due to financial difficulty, that is obviously not their fault. Barbara added that Duncan's point is another reason to get the newsletter up and running again, it can include educational information that will help tenants in situations like this.

5.3.2 Barbara and Duncan were discussing the sensors in properties. Barbara shared with the group that an operative had attended her property in relation to the sensors. They surveyed every room and generated a very detailed report, she explained that they share this with you and explain it in a clear way.

5.4 Barbara also queried why the new doors supplied by the council don't have a safety chain on them. Lucy confirmed she would ask Paul Cole.

## **6. TSM Results**

6.1 Lucy explained that Denise Raine will be presenting the TSM Survey results in detail to tenants on the 26<sup>th</sup> March but she would share the broad picture today.

Lucy showed a report to the group and a number of discussions were had.

2,241 tenants took part in the survey, 600 by post, 595 by telephone and 1,046 online.

North Yorkshire Council overall satisfaction score was 70%

Some examples of higher end satisfaction for NYC were –

Tenants feeling that they are provided with a safe home (73%)

Tenants feeling like they are provided with a well-maintained home (68%)

Tenant been satisfied with the repairs service (73%)

Some examples of the lower levels of satisfaction are –

Tenants been satisfied with NYC's approach to anti-social behaviour (50%)

Tenants satisfied with NYC's approach to complaints handling (29%)

Tenants feeling that their views and listened to and acted upon (55%)

## **7. Tenant involvement budget**

7.1 A report summarising spend on the budget was shown.

7.1.1 Barbara asked about tenants sharing taxis and shared that in her view where possible taxis should be shared to keep costs down. Lucy agreed.

7.1.2 Richard asked about why hasn't there been any money spent on training this year. Lucy explained whilst we have been in this transitional period, training hasn't been appropriate. When we have a new tenant involvement strategy, a training programme will be put in place.

## **8. Any other business**

8.1 Barbara made a point about the Christmas meal, the lack of tenants attending and people cancelling last minute. Barbara wanted to share her view that tenants shouldnt be compensated with a something like the Christmas meal if they have not attended or contributed to meetings.

8.2 There was a discussion around levels of commitment and how this is very difficult to measure. Susie added that within the new strategy – there could be opportunity for differing levels of commitment. Tenants could be interviewed and selected to be involved with different offerings that require differing levels of commitment and time.

## **9. Date of next meeting**

9.1 The date of the next meeting will be 12<sup>th</sup> June 2024

The meeting was closed at 4pm