

Housing Standards Panel Meeting 15 August 2024 – Council Chambers, Harrogate Civic Centre

Attendance: Staff - Lucy Tyne (Tenant Involvement Officer), Carol Reynolds (Tenant Involvement Officer); Sarah Thompson (Tenant Involvement Manager); Paul Cole (Housing Standards Manager, Improvements); Lesley Fargher (Housing Delivery Manager, Small sites)

Involved Tenants –Lesley Peplow, Carol Lawson, Chris Hesketh, David Thomas, Kim McBride, Teresa Fox, Colin Vince

Action:

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies.

1.1 Lucy welcomed all to the meeting, went through housekeeping and ran through introductions with tenants and officers.

1.2 Apologies for absence had been received from- Barbara Rickards, Arnot Wood, Richard Hinson, James Jenner

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 14 May 2024

2.1 Chris objected to the accuracy of the previous minutes and gave the following statement.

“The previous minutes are yet again not accurate, please note omitting, sanitising & adding to minutes with a intention to undermine is not acceptable, along with a constant lack of democratic process, due diligence, accountability & transparency, to which a retrospective analysis has identified & exposed many root cause issues by analysing housing minutes from the now last 30 involved tenant housing panel meetings dating back to March 2017 to which urgently needs to be addressed & corrected asap.
6.4 needs deleting and reprinting correctly as follows.

Chris explained he had carried out a retrospective analysis from a volunteer and now involved tenant perspective of the 2022 failed HBC Decarbonisation project, to which analysed Involved tenant housing panel meetings in the relative period from November 2021 to the present time to which identified and exposed many failings including the appointment of the current "adhoc" chair, outside democratic guidelines to which needs addressing & correcting asap.

Any replies by the landlords representatives should be delivered in the appropriate manner & using the action section accordingly not by adding or sanitizing comments in an attempt to undermine.! My one question for the present [IT] officers, the North Yorkshire Cabinet & RHS is as follows;

What is the use of an operating Agreement/terms of reference that can be drawn up without challenge, signatures or accurate dated records between two parties, that is not required to be reviewed or updated that can ignore any relevant regulations guidelines printed 24/7, to which includes the appointing of landlord appointed chairs & ad hoc chairs as & when it chooses, to which current & previous records expose "no attempt" to change the totally undemocratic process that keeps tenant panels at arms length by controlling the narrative and exposes that previous & current tenants are "involved" in name only via a near constant tenant voice suppression agenda. Please explain how this is a democratic process".

Lucy explained that she thought she had already altered the minutes based on Chris' last corrections, but she will check and speak with Chris about this.

2.2 Kim shared that he is part of the steering group for the new strategy. Emma from YD Consultants has worked with the steering group and created a draft strategy, he has a copy, if anyone would like to see this.

2.3 Kim asked about carbon monoxide alarms in Selby, Paul explained that its now law that all properties with gas should have an alarm. Paul said this should be the case in Selby and there are ongoing programmes actioning it.

3. Housing Standards Update

3.1 Paul Cole, Housing Standards Manager (Improvements)

3.1.1 Paul started by building on the update given to the group at the last meeting, he confirmed that he now has a new team, and they are working under a new structure. The team are looking at this as a brand-new start and a new way forward.

3.1.2 Paul now covers the whole improvement team across North Yorkshire, a large part of his role is managing voids. He explained that the ambition is still to take back work from contractors by using inhouse maintenance teams. The council want to work with professionals within the community.

3.1.3 The idea is to have trade operatives in each area, these teams are currently growing, a lot of roles are now career graded meaning applicants can enter at a lower level and work their way up the

gradings. Pay scales have also been rescaled meaning the pay has improved for these roles. The team have been advertising and working through the recruitment process, adverts have attracted quite a good number of applicants. The Harrogate area has more staff than last reported. Paul also added that team leaders across all 3 areas are also now all in place.

3.1.4 Paul explained that the void standard will be changing so the council have 1 standard to work towards across the whole council.

3.1.5 Paul began covering the Selby area last October, he added that there is a lot of investment needed. He explained that in the last 3 weeks there has been a small in-house team put together so improvement works can start. This team will be growing and taking on trade staff who will be developing within the council.

3.1.6 Paul also covers the Richmond area, there isn't as much stock here but there will also be an inhouse team built to lessen the reliance on contractors going forward.

3.2 Paul commented that the restructure has already had a very positive effect. KPI's have seen improvements and as staff numbers increase, turnaround times will improve too.

3.3 Paul moved on to mention the update on the Social Housing Decarbonisation fund – the council have been successful in the bid and the tender process is complete, once the team have the outcome of the tender and sign off is given, the contract can be mobilised. Paul explained that 75 properties need to be completed by March next year. 62 of these have already been surveyed – there is a mix of voids and tenanted homes, across the borough.

3.3.1 Chris asked if there is a forward plan for this project, Paul confirmed there is, and the council are sitting in 'green' as the project is running successfully to the timescale.

3.4 Chris asked about the recruitment of apprentices, he asked if the council work with schools and colleges to attract young people wanting to get into a trade. Paul confirmed that the council does do this, in Harrogate for example they work with Harrogate college and several schools. Chris added that when he was at school, he went down a similar route, he worked and attended night school, Paul shared that he had the same sort of experiences and echoed how important it is for employers to be working with young people.

3.5 Chris asked if there is a policy for flueless gas appliances – Lucy confirmed she will ask about this.

4. Housing Delivery update – Lesley Fargher – Housing Delivery Manager (Small Sites)

4.1 Lesley introduced herself to the group and began to answer some questions that were asked by the group previously.

In 2023/24 – there were 364 rural new builds that were delivered across North Yorkshire.

There were also 88 properties added to council stock.

4.2. Lesley also shared with the group that there is an ongoing programme for the council to deliver 500 new homes across the county in the next 5 years as well as providing 90 more temporary accommodation units. The team are currently putting together a delivery plan to see how the geographical split of the homes will work.

4.3 Lesley then spoke about some ongoing projects within the team, there is an empty home project ongoing in Craven, as well as the potential of a new hostel in the Scarborough area. The team are also buying back homes in the Scarborough area.

4.4 In terms of completions from April onwards, there has been 0 in this first quarter but by the time the next meeting comes around, the team should have more news to share.

4.5 The group didn't have any other questions for Lesley.

5 Any other business

5.1 Lorraine couldn't be here today, but she did want to open up a discussion with the group around some questions.

As tenants, would you be willing to pay for additional services provided by the council, for things that the tenant is responsible for, for example, gardening and renewing lights, handyman type jobs. The group discussed this and there were a few points made -

5.1.1 Lesley shared that she doesn't agree with the council offering these services at a cost and she doesn't think she would opt to use this service if they became available.

5.1.2 Teresa shared that she thought it would be a good idea as it can take so long to find a trustworthy tradesperson to do a job. Other members of the group agreed with this.

5.1.3 Chris added that there are much bigger issues that the council should be tackling than this topic.

Sarah commented that Chris' point highlights that as a new council, the 'basics' need to be right first then we can build on offering new services and building more trust with our tenants and communities.

5.2 Lorraine also asked if the group could take a look at a previous damp and mould advice leaflet that used to be given to tenants, it will need to be updated. Do you think the advice is effective and it is written in an appropriate tone? A few points were raised.

5.2.1 Sarah also asked if anyone had experiences of reporting damp and mould.

5.2.2 Chris raised that he has damp and mould in his home, he is able to manage it by opening windows and wiping away condensation on a regular basis. He added that the problem is when someone who is not able to take these steps has damp and mould in their property. He said that giving generic advice is a good start, but it isn't relevant to everyone.

5.2.3 Teresa added that she raised concern about damp and mould in her bathroom, she received conflicting information about replacing her windows.

5.3 Paul used Teresa experience to highlight how important it is for tenants to give feedback, negative and positive. Paul also commented that as well as looking at what advice is given to tenants; the team are also looking at what is causing damp and mould in the first place if it is regarding the fabric of the property.

5.3.1 The group then discussed how new environmental sensors could help this ongoing work by identifying problems early on. Chris added that he does not think it is necessary for all properties to have a new sensor fitted.

5.4 Chris shared with the group that when he was a plumber, he spent so much time fixing faulty bathroom installations, in his opinion this is one of the root causes of damp.

5.5 Sarah shared that the council are consulting on an anti-social behaviour policy, there is an online survey (that is also available as a paper copy). This will be shared with tenants. Focus groups will also be held in a few locations across the area to gather thoughts and feedback.

5.6 Chris shared a statement with the group –
"Currently past and present available records indicate HBC and now North Yorkshire tenants panels have been just a complete waste of time & resources to which has simply fuelled democracy economy & environmental destroying cover up management facilitated by weak & badly scripted operating agreements/terms of reference to which

is the root cause of many serious & tragic social housing projects failures of the past & present, to which would have been prevented, had robust & foresighted procedures & process been built into [IT] housing operating agreements/terms of reference that would ensure all involved housing panel members have the opportunity to be proactively involved in its management & hold their landlords to account as per Regulator of social housing's consumer standards to which needs to be urgently addressed and corrected asap.

Just for the record a national case study of IT panels has been drafted to which identifies root causes and provides proposals for urgent consideration rectification & implementation asap."

6 Date of next meeting

7.1 The next meeting will be 5th November 2024

7.2 Lucy thanked all for attending and closed the meeting at 3:40pm.