

## DRAFT

### Housing Services and Property Services Panel Meeting 14 May 2024 – Stray Room, Harrogate Civic Centre

**Attendance: Staff - Lucy Tyne (Tenant Involvement Officer), Carl Doolan (Head of Housing and Landlord Management), Sarah Thompson (Tenant Involvement Manager); Lorraine Larini (Head of Homes and Places), Donna Jobling (Housing Standards Manager (Direct Delivery Contracts), Michael Woodhouse (Housing Standards Manager (Compliance & Capital Contracts), Ian Bury (Housing Standards Manager (Repairs)**

**Cllr Phillip Broadbank**

**Involved Tenants – Barbara Rickards, Lesley Peplow, Carol Lawson, Michael Fenwick-Scott, Arnot Wood, Chris Hesketh, Gary Bridge, Sue Eddleston, David Thomas, Kim McBride**

#### **1. Welcome, introductions and apologies.**

- 1.1 Barbara welcomed all to the meeting and ran through introductions with tenants and officers.
- 1.2 Apologies for absence had been received from- Teresa Fox
- 1.3 Lucy explained that since the restructure, 'property services' no longer go by that name, Lorraine's team are now known as the housing standards team. Whilst this panel is still operational its logical to alter the name. Housing standards panel seems like a good fit.
- 1.4 Lucy informed the meeting that there isn't an officer from housing growth in attendance today, they will be at next week's panel meeting. If anyone has any questions specifically about Jenny Kerfoot's report in the minutes from 13<sup>th</sup> February Lucy can take them to the housing growth team for the meeting next week.

**Action:**

## **2. Minutes of the meeting held on 13 February 2024**

2.1 The minutes had been previously circulated. 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.

2.2.1 Chris raised that he did not agree with the minutes were a correct record– Lucy will speak with him about this and add to the minutes.

## **3. Housing Standards Update.**

### **3.1 Lorraine Larini – Head of Homes and Places**

3.1.1 Lorraine began by explaining that the restructure for her teams have been approved – she now has 6 managers reporting to her. The 3 officers joining her today, Paul Boreham and Paul Cole make up these managers, leaving 1 post left to be filled. She added that Ian Howard, who the group have met several times, is still working for NYC as a part of the repairs team. These managers are all very busy recruiting to team leader posts and operational staff. The aim is to grow the teams quite dramatically, meaning the council can offer a better service and lessen reliance on contractors.

3.1.1 Lorraine confirmed that the council have received grant funding for the decarbonisation project. This funding will be matched and over £3 million will be spent on updating the lowest EPC rated homes in order to meet the minimum standard of an EPC C by 2030. The team will have 12 months to do first 75-100 properties.

3.1.2 Lesley asked if these properties will just be in Harrogate, Lorraine confirmed that the properties will be located across the region.

3.1.3 Gary asked how the team have identified the worst rated homes. Lorraine explained that more than 60% of the councils home have a valid EPC rating, from those the team have identified 75 properties that will be the starting point. Lorraine shared that her team will be carrying out a rolling programme of stock condition surveys, to get through every property will take time. Lorraine added that if your property has an EPC rating you can search for it on the GOV website.

3.1.4 Chris shared with the group that he has worked on a retrospective analysis of the previous decarbonisation pilot that he volunteered to be a part of. Chris shared his view that the failed

project was a waste of time and resources and wanted to know how the team plan on making sure these mistakes don't happen again with this new project. Lorraine explained that the previous decarbonisation pilot was initiated by Harrogate Borough Council, the data wasn't available to make it successful. In order to obtain this grant money, a clear business plan needed to be submitted. This has been done.

Chris asked if this business plan is available to view. Lorraine confirmed that it isn't at the moment but reassured Chris that tenant engagement is a key priority within the plan. The team will ensure that lessons are learnt from the previous pilot and the upcoming project to enable them to bid for further waves of funding.

3.1.5 Sarah asked Lorraine what sort work the team will be doing to upgrade EPC certificates. Lorraine explained that the team will be taking a fabric first approach, looking at the walls of buildings, roofs, insulation. The average properties EPC is currently sitting at a D, for our council properties, the average is slightly better. The 75 properties that works will begin on make up a small portion of low EPC certificates within our stock. They are E, F and G.

3.1.6 Chris asked if any external air source heat pumps will be installed during the project. Lorraine explained that this detail is not yet known. The team will work on a case-by-case basis and heat pumps will not be necessary or appropriate for all properties.

3.1.7 David asked if a contractor would handle maintenance throughout the project. Lorraine confirmed that the team were looking at specialist contractors to install and take on regular maintenance of appliances. The aim is to also enhance training within the team.

### 3.2 Ian Bury - Housing Standards Manager (Repairs)

3.2.1 Ian introduced himself to the group. He previously worked for Selby District Council before recently been appointed to his current role for NYC. He is learning more about the stock in Harrogate and Richmond and their ways of working. A main priority it to recruit to vacant positions.

3.2.2 Ian talked through the structure for his team, it had increased across all elements. He now has team leaders in post, it's now time to develop the teams to ensure proactivity and customer focus. Ian added that recruiting to posts in the repairs team can be difficult but there has been some success from recent advertisements. There are still 9 vacancies to fill within the maintenance team.

3.2.3 David asked what trades the team were short of in Harrogate. Ian explained that the team are needing electricians and joiners. He explained that he is trying to be more proactive in advertising jobs and make sure NYC is an attractive place to work. Ian shared the reality of how it can be difficult to compete with private companies who pay higher wages than those that a local government can offer.

3.2.3 Sue asked if there are a shortage of plumbers meaning jobs can't be attended to. Ian confirmed that we are not in position where job cannot be attended to due to staff shortages.

3.2.4 Referring to the staffing structure that Ian passed around - Lesley asked what the difference was between a single skilled and multi skilled trades person. Ian used the example of a joiner to explain this. A single skilled joiner will hold a qualification in joinery. However, a multi skilled joiner will have qualifications in joinery and others trades or disciplines. A multi skilled operative would be able to carry out multiple repairs across disciplines in a property. The multi-skilled roles only apply to plumbers and joiners, these roles mean the council can offer different progression paths to staff which will aid retention rates.

3.2.5 Lorraine confirmed that there will still be apprenticeships in the improvement team (managed by Paul Cole).

3.2.6 David asked if the council are funding the apprentices to go to college or if they are being trained on the job. Lorraine confirmed it will be both. The apprentices sign an agreement that requires them to remain employed by NYC for a minimum term after training has been completed.

### 3.3 Donna Jobling – Housing Standards Manager (Direct Delivery Contracts)

3.3.1 Donna explained that she was recently appointed to manage a team responsible for the contracts involved with responsive repairs, the new build team, materials, and vans. As well as dealing with service level agreements held across the council.

3.3.2 Donna also manages a team of operational support staff, that aid in scheduling repairs and maintenance jobs as well as completing other administrative tasks.

3.3.3 Lucy asked if there is an ambition to have a dedicated repairs phone line for tenants. Lorraine explained that this hasn't been discussed yet but there is a project on going that's aim is to make it as easy as possible for a tenant to contact the council for whatever need they have.

3.3.4 Sue shared her frustrations with the new phone line. Lorraine explained that this is a common theme that has emerged, and this feedback is informing the above project. The model the council currently has is not perfect and it is going to be improved.

3.3.5 David asked if the customer service team can be trained to understand technical matters over the phone in regard to repairs. Lorraine confirmed that this can be feedback to the team.

#### 3.4 Michael Woodhouse – Housing Standards Manager (Compliance & Capital Contracts)

3.4.1 Michael explained that he has been in post since 1<sup>st</sup> May, but he did previously work for HBC since 2011. He had a range of roles during that time. He added that he does come from a housing background with experience in rent collection and working as an estate officer, he is very passionate about working with tenants.

3.4.2 Michael firstly explained the compliance side of his role and team. He looks after – gas safety and ensures gas appliances are serviced regularly. A part of this means ensuring all properties have a working carbon monoxide alarm that is tested. Compliance with these regulations safeguards residents from the dangers of gas leaks and carbon monoxide poisoning.

3.4.3 The team also ensure domestic fixed wire testing happens on a regular basis. Domestic fixed wire testing assesses the condition of electrical wiring and identifies any faults or hazards.

3.4.4 Michaels team also ensure the council are compliant with asbestos testing, removal, and recording.

3.4.5 His team also look at fire safety, the fire safety regulations encompass various measures to prevent, detect, and mitigate the risk of fires in council housing. This includes the installation and maintenance of fire detection and suppression systems, as well as fire safety assessments and evacuation procedures. Compliance with fire safety regulations is essential to protect residents and property from the devastating consequences of fires.

3.4.6 Legionella is also included in these compliance regulations. His team are involved in ensuring legionella risk assessments and water management plans are in place and up to date to control the risk of Legionella contamination in council housing water systems.

3.4.7 Michael is in charge of ensuring that robust contracts are in place to ensure very high levels of compliance. Micheal explained that by prioritizing compliance, implementing planned preventative maintenance measures, and keeping accurate records, local

authorities can effectively manage council housing properties and uphold the highest standards of safety and quality of life for residents.

3.4.4 Michael shared that his aim is to involve tenants in contract meetings to give an insight into this and allow them to have an influence in decision making.

3.5 Sue asked if carbon monoxide alarms are only for those with gas in their properties, Michael confirmed this was correct.

3.5.1 David asked if the council are compliant with the maintenance of the alarms – Michael confirmed that at the moment the council very much are. He added that tenants need to be made aware of how important compliance measures are.

3.5.2 Kim shared with the meeting that compliance in Selby is not great. He added that once the batteries ran out in the carbon monoxide alarms, Selby district council would not replace them. In regard to electrical safety, Kim asked if the council are required to carry out electrical testing every 5 years, Michael confirmed this was the case. Kim shared that this hasn't happened in Selby to his knowledge. Michael offered to speak with Kim in regard to his particular property.

3.5.3 Chris asked who monitors and maintains the ground source heat pumps. Michael shared that a proactive approach has been taken with this. This contract has been spilt up in to 7 sections

1. Gas, Oil, all Electric, vented systems
2. Commercial Boiler Servicing
3. Boiler Replacement Scheme
4. Air Source Heat Pump
5. Ground Source Heat Pumps
6. Renewable Technologies Heating Replacement Scheme
7. Appliance Auditing - to conform to our legal obligations.

This is being procured presently. Chris queried if the council are still considering air source heat pumps in properties, Michael confirmed that they are.

3.6 Michael then moved on to discuss the capital programme. This is more around planned maintenance, for example kitchens, bathrooms, windows, and doors. These are things that can instantly improve someone's home. Again, Michael intends to involve tenants within these contract meetings so they can have a say things like tenant choices.

3.7 This led to Michael reiterating the role his team has in maintaining contracts. He explained how hard his team work to ensure the council have robust contracts in place to ensure a great

service is delivered. Michael added that things do go wrong but what is most important is how the council react to these things and put improvements in place.

**4. Housing Management and Landlord Services update – Carl Doolan (Head of Housing Management and Landlord Services), Sarah Thompson (Tenant Involvement Manager)**

4.1 Carl began with explaining how the service have been busy with the restructure, he mentioned that his area doesn't have the level of vacancies that Lorraine's team do but it is still a growth structure. Recruitment is underway, Sarah (the tenant involvement manager) is one of those appointments. He added that he has a great management team with a wealth of knowledge and experience.

4.1.1 Carl shared that as of last week, the council have 'self-referred' to the regulator of social housing for being non-compliant. This means that we do not currently comply with new regulatory requirements. There are lots of reasons for this. Ultimately, this is a positive step, it will allow the compliance gap to be lessened and improvements to be made.

There will be a letter going out to all tenants to inform them of this news, it will also have content around the TSM feedback.

4.2 Carl explained that lots of policy and procedure work still needs to be done to align areas and ways of working.

4.2.1 The ways in which we communicate with tenants also needs to be looked at, this will involve tenants themselves, the feedback from the TSM survey showed a low satisfaction score around communication. This needs to be improved for both involved tenants and the wider tenant base.

4.3 Carl shared that there has been work around drafting an anti-social behaviour policy, how this will be ratified by governance structures is still to be confirmed. A consultation period needs to be thought out so tenants can have their say on the policy.

4.3.1 Cllr Broadbank asked Carl if he could contact him regarding some ongoing anti - social behaviour issues, Carl confirmed he could.

4.3.2 Barbara asked how many anti-social behaviour officers there are. Carl confirmed there are 3. He added that the structures are still a work in progress, seeing how they work in reality is important.

4.4 Carl confirmed that NYC are on track to move towards a single allocations policy by April 2025.



4.5 Lucy mentioned that the aim is, that in the future tenants will be more involved at an earlier stage of policy updating rather than just been informed at the final stage.

4.5.1 Sarah added there are quite a few other policies that need to be changed. The aim is to bring these to tenants to work on. In the future we would like to have a schedule of policy updates and service standard updates that involve active tenant input.

4.6 Lesley asked about a complaints policy. Carl added that NYC has its own complaints policy. Within housing, it is a requirement that we carry out a self-assessment against the framework published by the housing ombudsman. This self-assessment needs to be submitted by the 30<sup>th</sup> June, Vicky Young (service improvement manager) is co-ordinating this.

4.7 Chris asked if it was possible to give a breakdown of council homes in the area. Lucy confirmed she will give him this.

4.8 Carl shared that there will be a members scrutiny committee that covers housing and leisure. There is also a housing improvement panel currently made up of officers. A priority is to see a tenant scrutiny vehicle formed successfully and hopefully all 3 of these will be operating by the end of the year.

4.9 Kim asked if Carl would be considering a networking group. Lucy explained that we are part of a network with local authorities and other councils, and she will share details of it.

4.9.1 Chris asked where Sarah is based, Sarah confirmed she is based in Selby, but she is working across the areas. She currently manages 1 tenant involvement officer in Harrogate and 1 in Selby.

## **5 Any other business**

6.1 Barbara asked from April 23/24 how many properties have the council had to clear once the outgoing tenant has vacated and how much has this cost the council. Barbara also queried how much of this money has been recovered from tenants and/or family. Lucy explained that she has spoken to Reno about this, it would be very time consuming to collate this information at the moment, but he would estimate the council (in Harrogate) clear around 40 properties a year, with at least half of these following the death of a tenant. Around half a dozen more owing to evictions/abandonment and the remainder been rubbish left after the keys are handed back despite a pre-vacation visit being carried out. It's hard to gauge the cost to us but we do get a lot repaid through deceased tenants estates, pursuance by our income team and sometimes when the former tenant applies to us for rehousing.



6.2 Another question was received in relation to buybacks. Since January 24 to present these are the properties the council have bought back in the Harrogate area.

50 Gascoigne Crescent, Harrogate (Proposed Extension)
35 Norwich Drive, Harrogate
156 Newby Crescent Harrogate
4 Meadow Road Knaresborough

Lucy confirmed she will get this info from the other areas for the next meeting.

6.3 Lucy answered the questions around the void inspection group. She wanted to speak with Sam who is involved with void properties to check that this exercise could begin again given the context of the restructure. Sam has confirmed that she is happy to start this again. Lucy said that she thought the purpose of the exercise needed to be clearer. We don't yet have a void standard across the council, that should be what we are assessing the properties against when visiting voids. We can start this exercise again and feed into improvements we would like to make in tenant involvement. I will randomly pick 2 names to take part. We can then meet to discuss what we would like the purpose of the activity to be.

6.4 Chris explained that he has carried out a retrospective analysis of the 2022 failed HBC decarbonisation project, in his opinion this identified and exposed many failings including the appointment of the current chair, outside democratic guidelines to which needs correcting and addressing asap. Lucy confirmed that the chair will not be changing at this stage, this meeting may not exist in this form in a few months' time, so it doesn't seem logical to make these sorts of changes.

6.6 Chris mentioned the four million homes initiative who run meetings and webinars that he has attended. He added that they are positive and are a good example of how online meetings can work really well.

## **6 Date of next meeting**

7.1 The next meeting will be 13<sup>th</sup> August 2024

7.2 Barbara thanked all for attending and closed the meeting at 4pm.