

# **Housing Services and Property Services Panel Meeting 1 August, 2023 – The Stray Room, Harrogate Civic Centre**

**Attendance: Staff - Lucy Tyne (Tenant Involvement Officer); Stephen Wilson (Neighbourhood Services Manager); Lorraine Larini (Head of Homes and Places); Paul Boreham (Housing Safety Manager); Paul Cole (Capital Planned Works Manager); Ian Howard (Repairs Manager)**

**Involved Tenants - Pauline Lockley; Barbara Rickards; James Jenner; Teresa Fox; Chris Hesketh; Arnot Wood; David Thomas**

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

1.1 Barbara welcomed all to the meeting and ran through introductions.

1.2 Apologies for absence had been received from- Lesley Peplow.

## **2. Minutes of the meeting held on 9 May, 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 void inspections was requested, Lucy explained that her and James had viewed a couple of properties on Dene Park and will be sending the updated log book with the minutes.

2.2.2 Barbara asked if Jim Clemens had yet been replaced, Lorraine said the post hadn't been advertised as other officers are taking on his work load until the structure is looked at.

2.2.3 David queried if there was any progress with the window and kitchen contracts. Paul confirmed that the contracts have gone through and they are hoping to have them mobilised by September.

**Action:**

2.2.4 Barbara asked Paul if he could give an update on the app he discussed during the last meeting. Paul said he spoke with the developers and at the moment they do not have the option to put the software on a computer, it will just be on smart phones for the time being. However they are looking into this.

### **3. Property Services update – Lorraine Larini, Head of Homes and Places**

3.1 Lorraine announced that as a result of consultation for heads of service roles – she has been appointed as Head of Homes and Places effective from 1<sup>st</sup> of August. She explained that the role is similar to her previous role however she is now looking after the wider council that has housing stock rather than just Harrogate.

3.1.2 David asked about the council's provision of workmen and how they will cover this huge area. Lorraine agreed that this is an important question and structuring the team to meet that need is a priority, this will take time due to the process that needs to be followed.

3.1.3 David asked Lorraine about the team she has around her to aid during this time. Lorraine explained that her team in Harrogate is very strong and she is getting to know colleagues in Richmond and Selby more and more. She also added that a benefit of NYC is their central service team that can offer help in strategy and policy.

3.1.4 Chris asked what our current housing stock is now we are NYC, Lorraine confirmed that it is around 8,500.

#### **3.2 Paul Cole – Capital planned works manager**

3.2.1 Paul began with an update on the kitchen and window contracts, this has been one of the biggest challenges the team has faced. Now the contracts are in place, a programme of work can be put together to start replacing the kitchens and windows in our properties.

3.2.1 Paul went on to describe the works that are been done on void properties to improve EPCs. The team have found that it is most beneficial to carry out these works whilst the property is empty. He used an example of a finished retrofit property in Ripon that was an EPC F. The team inputted measures to improve ventilation and insulation and it now has an EPC of a high B. The team are taking advantage of ECO grants for these properties.

This programme of works is ongoing and the retrofit contractor has looked at around 290 properties so far - bringing back information to the council to inform us in what we need to do to improve EPC's.

3.2.2 The team have installed 6 environmental sensors within properties where they currently have issues, these sensors will allow them to identify causes and plan programmes of work to improve things.

3.2.3 David asked what kind of budget we have for these types of improvement works. Lorraine said the money is from the capital improvement budget that is supplemented by grant funding. Paul explained grant funding can be hard to get for social housing but we are managing to get some.

3.2.4 Paul then explained that eventually the team would like to be doing this work with fully staffed in house teams and not contractors.

### 3.3 Paul Boreham – Housing Safety Manager

3.3.1 Paul began with updating the group on some training that is taking place within the team - as of Friday they should have 8 newly trained HHSRS practitioners. These people will be able to enter a property and carry out a HHSRS inspection. This will raise the safety standards across the housing stock but there is a lot of work to do.

3.3.2 He went on to explain that the team are doing some active engagement around disrepair claims. They are dealing directly with the claims and working to reiterate to tenants that they need to come to the council directly with claims rather than going to legal firms.

3.3.3 Steve asked where the team were at with improving fire systems at sheltered schemes. Paul stated that this is with procurement at the moment. Works have started at Blossomgate with fire stopping works completed, and as soon as procurement complete works will be rolled out across the schemes.

3.3.4 Chris queried what the process was if a smoke alarm in your property continuously sounded. It was confirmed that if a resident believes their smoke alarm isn't working they need to report in the usual way as a repair and it will be treated as a priority.

### Ian Howard – Repairs Manager

3.4 Ian began by introducing himself and explaining that is he responsible for managing day to day repairs. His team are having problems with staffing at the moment so are finding themselves running behind on some repairs. He confirmed that an advert went live yesterday, and it had already had 6 applicants. He wanted to make it clear that he cares deeply about tenants, repairs and his staff, he asked the group to please raise any issues they find with the service so it can be worked on.

3.4.1 David asked about what staffing levels should be in the team, Ian explained at full staffing there should be 3 electricians, 2 plumbers and a joiner. There are 6 multi skills roles waiting to be filled as well as 2 labourers and 2 builders.

4. **Housing Services update – Stephen Wilson – Neighbourhood Services Manager**

4.1 Steve started by letting the group know that we now have a head of service, he is called Carl Doolan and has come from Hambleton. He has just begun his role and is gathering thoughts around staffing, structure and the way forward.

4.1.1 He went on to give an update around allocations - Kim Richardson has left now the council and Debbie Yates has been recruited as team leader of allocations. This is an important role that needed to be filled with the change to choice based lettings that will be coming up. Carl Doolan was given the task to lead on the review of the allocations policy, Steve has been involved in weekly meetings about this. In September there will be a 12 week consultation for stake holders and everyone on the waiting list to discuss changes.

4.1.2 Steve reiterated that things are still done differently across the districts within the housing service and new ways of working still need to be thought out. Carl will be visiting Harrogate in August and hopefully attending our Open Forum meeting.

4.1.3 Teresa asked if people currently on the housing waiting list will get individual updates on how the system will be changing. Steve confirmed that individual updates will be given as well as the in person consultation. He explained that the council are aiming to have 1 allocation policy by April 2025. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of August the draft policy should go to the executive.

4.1.4 Barbara voiced her concerns about this change and the possibility of having hard to let properties. Steve confirmed that there will be thorough consultation on this. He also expressed how this change was necessary as the council cannot have 2 allocation policies running side by side.

4.1.5 Steve finished by giving a brief update on staffing in that the team are hoping to recruit an allocation officer an income officer and a support officer. At the moment staff are getting to grips with using the new recruitment system.

4.1.6 Lucy explained that she had spoken to James Tuck regarding empty homes – He reported that, the number of empty homes has increased to 258 at the end of Q1. This figure now includes

properties that previously received an exemption temporarily removing them from the list. High interest rates and barriers around mortgages has led to some homes to remain empty longer than usual.

Properties continue to be targeted through monthly letters to the owners of empty homes to establish contact and offer assistance where possible. The CPOs approved by Cabinet at the end of Q3 continue to be processed with documents being prepared for the Secretary of State.

## **5. Performance Information Report**

5.1 It was explained that the figures for the performance information is not yet available for quarter one of 2023/24.

5.2 Steve and Lorraine explained that the way we report performance information is changing. The council are hoping to have something in place at the end of quarter 2.

5.2.1 Lorraine shared that at the moment they have only been asked to report on 1 KPI which is the % of urgent repairs completed within agreed service levels, this was over 92%.

## **6. Any other business**

6.1 Lucy had received a couple of questions in advance. Chris asked for an update on the decarbonisation pilot. Lucy explained she is working to get an update letter out to those involved in the pilot asap. Chris added that £2.3 million was allocated at the start of the pilot, it was confirmed that none of it had been spent. Lorraine explained that when the pilot was initiated it was a 2 year pilot that involved asking for volunteer properties. The properties that came through were not the right types of property - in that their EPC was often too high. Due to this the approach has had to change so we can work on properties with lower EPC's and improve them.

6.1.1 Chris asked if it was possible to provide a schedule of the works. Lorraine confirmed that an update letter will be sent to the original pilot volunteers to explain the change in approach but no schedule will be provided.

6.2 Lucy gave some information on councillor attendance to panel meetings – Harriet from Democratic Services gave this update - Daniel Harry (Head of Democratic Services and Scrutiny) has spoken to Andrew Rowe (Assistant director of housing) and we have been asked to wait until a standardised approach across the whole of North Yorkshire is agreed which will link into the wider tenant participation strategy.

I think Officers are keen for there to be a unified approach across the Council with regards to member engagement in tenant panels rather than just operating as we did formerly at HBC. Steve added that councillors and MP's are very active at the moment, the service are hearing from them all across the council.

6.3 Lorraine gave an update on the planon system, she said that planon is just 1 of many systems that is used across NYC and it's going to take a lot of work to migrate all the data on to 1 system. Operatives are starting to use tablets in the field so tenants will start to see the satisfaction surveys in this form soon.

## **7. Date of next meeting**

9.1 The next meeting would be held on Tuesday, 7 November, 2023 in the Council Chambers.

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