

Housing Services and Property Services Panel Meeting 7 November, 2023 – The Council Chambers, 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 - Barbara Rickards; James Jenner; Chris Hesketh; Carol Lawson; Arnot Wood; David Thomas; Michael Ellenor; David Morgan;

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, Teresa Fox, Michael Fenwick Scott; Richard Hinson; Colin Vince.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 1 August, 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 David raised the issue for people who don't have access to the internet not being able to find out about tenant involvement. Lucy explained that the way in which we reach current and new tenants is being discussed.

2.2.2 David asked for an update on the void inspections. Lucy and James explained that they had recently seen a finished project in Dene Park. The property had been adapted for a disabled tenant and looked very good. They are waiting to see a property finished on Newby Crescent.

Action:

2.2.3 David asked for an update on councillor attendance to meetings. Lucy explained that democratic services had not replied with a group of councillors that they recommend being invited however Cllr Monika Slater and Cllr Philip Broadbank have contacted Lucy and asked to be invited to meetings.

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

3.1 Lorraine explained that it had been a very busy few months in property services. A main priority is to work as quickly as possible to get new structures in place in order to create new teams. The timetable for this is to hopefully go out to consult staff in December, structures can then start to take shape in new financial year.

3.1.2 Lorraine then went on to give an update on the decarbonisation work. As mentioned in previous updates the pilot scheme originally for HBC was paused, a main reason for this was so the team could bid for central government funding.

This is now possible and there is £80 million available; we will be placing a bid to be awarded some of this. Lorraine explained that the funding that we bid for – the council need to be able to match. The £2.3 million that was allocated to the pilot is what we will match our funding bid with. The bid has to be in around February time so hopefully an update should be possible during the next quarter of panel meetings.

3.1.3 David asked how many councils are applying for funding. Lorraine didn't know as this information isn't available yet. She did add that you are only eligible to bid if you have not done so before.

3.1.4 Chris asked if the £2.3 million that was allocated for the pilot scheme is ringfenced and asked how the bid money will be spent. Lorraine explained that it is not ringfenced, but it is allocated for this purpose. It is estimated that if the council get this funding the team will be able to upgrade around 150 properties. She also explained that the government usually give around 2 years for the funds to be spent but this can change.

3.2 Paul Cole – Capital planned works manager

3.2.1 Paul began by explaining that he is heading up the decarbonisation works and carrying out business as usual work in void properties. His team have completed multiple properties that now have sensors working inside them. They are working very well and able to show us if the work we have put in to update these properties is working.

3.2.1 As Paul has described before, void periods are longer than what the team would like. This is due to staffing levels but also because of the upgrade works that are going in to them at void stage.

3.2.2 Paul gave an update on staffing. He reported that recruitment is going well and that he is trying to increase the void team so reliance on contractors isn't necessary. He has successfully recruited 1 new starter and there are also 2 candidates with 2nd interviews coming up. These 3 individuals are all multi skilled operatives.

3.2.3 Chris asked about the updates at 2 Dene Park, specifically about the heating system – Paul confirmed that it's a gas boiler. Chris asked if all refurbishments are fit with fossil fuel boilers. Paul explained that each heating system is considered on a case by case basis, dependant on the property. Chris also asked if they are using triple glazed windows, Paul confirmed double glazed is used.

3.2.4 Paul went on to talk about the planned works contracts. The kitchen contract is fully up and running, works have been allocated and are successfully moving forward.

2 window contractors are appointed. One has started works and the other has recently signed the councils' terms and conditions.

Steve asked if when there are two contractors working on the same programme, do they offer the same price? Paul confirmed that they do.

3.3 Paul Boreham – Housing Safety Manager

3.3.1 Paul gave an update on work around despair claims, he explained that the council are now very successful with challenging these. We currently have 5 outstanding in Harrogate, and all of these have been challenged.

3.3.2 He updated the group on HHRSR inspections. These are ongoing in properties and as a result of the restructure the team should be carrying out more of these in a more efficient fashion.

3.3.3 Paul confirmed that he will be commencing fire risk assessment in communal properties shortly.

Ian Howard – Repairs Manager

3.4 Ian started with some positive news on recruitment, 4 new multi skilled operatives have been successful. Recruitment is still ongoing to fully staff the team. He reported that there is a backlog of work, and the team are working very hard to get through it. The team are focusing on quality, and they are receiving lots of good feedback.

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

4.1 Steve began by explaining that there is a big area of restructure to take place. All of the neighbourhood services team are to attend a meeting on Friday where Carl will be giving an update on the timeline. It is thought that the new structure will be available by December and the structure will be in place by April. This means that the teams are still carrying some vacancies until the implementation of the structure.

4.1.1 Steve confirmed that the new allocations team leader, Debbie, is in post, she has taken over and all is going well. We are also halfway through the allocations policy consultation.

4.1.2 David asked about staffing in the allocations team – Steve confirmed that the team are 2 officers short.

4.2 Steve explained some work that is currently ongoing. As part of the restructure Carl Doolan is looking at current policies and ways of working. He is currently looking at reviewing income collection and anti- social behaviour policy.

4.3 Steve updated the group on the TSM survey. It was confirmed that this has gone live using a company called Acuity. Lucy added that it is a sample survey, and we are sending it out in 3 modes – email, post and telephone. So far it has just gone out via email and we have had over 900 responses.

4.4 Steve shared that the annual report is ready to be sent to print. Lucy commented that this year's annual report didn't have as much tenant input as she would have liked, this is due to it being the last HBC one created and it needing to be a lot smaller.

4.5 Steve shared with the meeting that we will be retiring at Christmas time.

4.5 Lucy explained that she had spoken to James Tuck regarding empty homes – He reported that, the number of empty homes in the Harrogate district as of 23 October is 245, a reduction from 258 at the end of Q1. Further stability in the housing market over the

summer has improved the turnover in sales of empty properties and slightly lowered the list. The Empty Homes Officer has also been working with some of the very long-term empty properties to remove any barriers to getting them occupied again.

Properties continue to be targeted through monthly letters to the owners of empty homes to establish contact and offer assistance where possible. The CPOs previously approved by Cabinet also continue to be processed. A property that had been empty since 2012 which the Council recently bought has just completed a sale to a community group. They are looking to renovate the property and let it out.

5. Performance Information Report

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

5.2 Steve explained that how we collect data and report it, is changing. The performance indicators that we reported on will be reconsidered and will model what the regulator requires of us.

5.2.1 Lorraine added that there are centralised teams looking at data we hold and how we can use it. She also reported that North Yorkshire Council have subscribed to housemark (used for benchmarking) this means we can see how we compare to other local authorities and providers.

5.2.2 Barbara echoed the need for benchmarking and commented that she felt this was a very positive move in the right direction.

6. Any other business

6.1 Chris had been in contact with Yorkshire Water and wanted Lucy to share with the group that he had been told that since May this year they no longer carry out proactive maintenance on external stop taps, just deploy reactive responses. Chris feels this is wrong and shared more about his view.

6.2 Lucy mentioned an organisation called Four Million Homes that provides free training to social housing residents. She has a meeting with the development lead next week to see how we can get involved. In the meantime, I will pass on the details, you can sign up to training sessions online at any time. The sessions seem to usually be in Leeds but always in a very central location.

6.3 Barbara raised that she believes there is a problem with communication between the council and tenants particularly in relation to repairs. Lorraine explained that she can take this

feedback and any specifics from Barbara away. Paul also explained that it is important that this information is passed to them, as regular meetings are held to discuss 'failure points' and how the service can improve.

Lorraine explained that the team are also working towards making communication channels, like the website, more easily accessible and easier to navigate.

7. Date of next meeting

7.1 The next meeting would be announced when the schedule for next year is made.

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