

LANDLORD SERVICES ADVISORY BOARD

26 May 2022

NOTES

Present:

Cllr Paul Rivers (Chairman)
Terry Daubney, Waverley Tenants' Panel
(Vice Chairman)
Cllr Jacquie Keen
Cllr John Robini
Cllr Michaela Wicks
Gillian Martin, Waverley Tenants Panel
Danielle Sleightholme, Waverley Tenants
Panel

Apologies:

Councillor Stephen Mulliner

In attendance:

Councillor Paul Follows,

Officers:

Louisa Cotton, Jeanette Englefield, Debbie Harding, Annalisa Howson, Heather Rigg, Annie Righton, Andrew Smith, Hugh Wagstaff, Joseph Warriner, Louise Fleming,

Waverley Tenants Panel:

Dave Maddams, Sally Purcell and Rob Stratford

1 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mulliner.

2 Notes of the previous meeting

The notes of the meeting held on 28 April 2022 were agreed.

3 Declarations of interest

Councillors Keen, Rivers and Robini; and Terry Daubney and Danielle Sleightholme declared non-registrable interests in item 6 as users of the Council's Garden Waste service.

Councillors Keen and Robini advised that they rented a garage from the Council and therefore would need to declared an interest if that issue was on a future agenda.

4 Introduction to the Rent Accounts team

The Council's Rent Accounts Manager gave a presentation to the Board on the work of the Rent Accounts Team and tabled rents data and monthly KPIs for the

year end March 2022. The Chairman thanked her for the presentation and requested that the slides be circulated to all Board members.

In response to questions from the Board, officers advised the Board of the work undertaken by the team to inform tenants of the support in place if they fall into hardship. The team was made up of experienced officers who focused on early intervention and assistance on budgeting, working with the Tenants Panel. Help was also available from Waverley Citizen's Advice. In the event that a notice has to be served, officers work with tenants over the course of a year to address any arrears and avoid an eviction. The Rent Accounts Manager explained the team had a vacant post that they had not been able to recruit to. Board members asked senior officers to ensure that recruitment and retention of staff is addressed.

The Board noted that officers were monitoring the situation with the cost-of-living situation and any Government announcements regarding financial assistance, working in partnerships with Citizen's Advice and charities. It was also noted that the Rent Accounts Team had performed exceptionally, considering the national average of rent arrears for social housing tenants was between 3-5% and Waverley's was below 1%. It was stressed that financial help was available for tenants to pay for food and fuel and officers would direct tenants accordingly.

In summing up, the Head of Housing Operations thanked the Tenants Panel for their work with the Rents Team and welcomed the work of the team. He advised that further consideration would be given to how to proactively recruit to the outstanding vacancy in the team or the possibility of a trainee post. There were other sources of funding available in addition to the HRA Hardship Fund and these would be used first before using that fund, which would be spent if needed.

The Chairman thanked the team for their work.

5 Tenancy consultation update and Tenancy Regulation Standard

The Service Improvement Manager gave a presentation on the tenancy consultation, which would feed into the revised Tenancy Strategy due to be considered by full Council in July and the proposed removal of flexible tenancies from September 2022 onwards. The Board were also updated on the Regulator of Social Housing's Tenancy Standard, with which all social landlords were required to comply, setting expectations for the letting of social housing in a fair and transparent way.

In response to questions, officers clarified the Government definition of affordable and social housing and highlighted the glossary of terms contained in the new Affordable Homes Delivery Strategy. The Board noted that the Social Housing Regulation Bill was due to be laid before Parliament and further details would be brought to the Board in due course. Officers also advised that the Council paid a subscription to Home Swapper and the service was used by tenants. This gave tenants mobility across the country and officers actively supported tenants to use the system, however officers were clear with tenants using the service that the properties must be accepted "as seen". Although the properties would need to meet a minimum standard, some would be in a better condition than others. Officers undertook to consider mutual exchange inspections as part of their budget planning process. Officers also supported tenants to use the website, which was fully accessible.

6 Waverley Tenants' Panel proposal - Garden Waste Collection

The Vice-Chairman gave a presentation on a proposal from the Tenants Panel that the Council's Garden Waste service is reviewed by the Executive, due to the current cost of the service being one of the most expensive in Surrey.

The Board agreed that consideration should be given to possible concessions for those on Universal Credit and the Head of Housing Operations agreed to draft a note for the Portfolio Holder to consider.

7 Head of Service - matters arising

The Head of Housing Operations gave the following updates:

- The Council's contractor carrying out gas safety certificates is currently failing to meet 100% target, which must be achieved for health and safety and compliance reasons. Appointments should be made 35 days before the anniversary date, to ensure access. However appointments made have been and cancelled. The Head of Housing Operations asked tenants for feedback on the contractor. A suggestion was made that those who routinely provide access could have appointments closer to the anniversary date. Current systems could not facilitate this but will be considered in the future.
- Fire prevention works had been completed at Riverside Court and decorating works were underway. Officers agreed to follow up on incomplete decorating and disabled access works.
- The stock condition survey was currently being scoped and a project plan would be brought to the Board for consideration in due course. Reports would also be brought to the Board on the Asset Review; Repairs contract performance; and satisfaction survey results.

8 Work programme

It was noted that the tenancy consultation findings would be reported to the next meeting. There would also be presentations on tenant involvement activities and the Q4 performance report.

It was also noted that the HRA Hardship Fund had not yet been set up, however officers were directing tenants to other sources of financial help. Details had been received from Surrey County Council on the continuation of the Household Support Fund and the Board would be updated in due course.

9 Date of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting would be held on Thursday 30 June at 10am and would be chaired by the Vice-Chairman.