

LANDLORD SERVICES ADVISORY BOARD (EXECUTIVE WORKING GROUP)

20 July 2023

NOTES

Present:

Cllr Paul Rivers (Chair)
Terry Daubney, Waverley Tenants' Panel
(Vice Chair)
Cllr Jacquie Keen
Cllr Alan Morrison
Cllr John Robini
Chris Austin, Lucas Field Residents Group
Robert Stratford, Waverley Tenants Panel
Sally Purcell, Waverley Tenants Panel

Apologies:

Danielle Sleightholme (Co-optee)

In attendance:

10 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Danielle Sleightholme.

11 Notes of the previous meeting

Terry Daubney, Vice Chair and Leader of the Tenant's Panel, asked for clarity around the re-let period. Andrew Smith, Executive Head of Housing, confirmed that the re-let period starts when the tenancy legally ends.

Matt Alexander (Housing Operations Manger) responded to the following matter's arising from the notes of the previous meeting;

1. Gas safety software – The Board requested more information about what the software does, when it was picked up and whether it was initiated by us or the new contractor.

Response:

"We purchased TCW earlier this year. This was initiated by WBC. Prior to the introduction of this software, it would be a manual task of Compliance Officers to check certificates which was both time-consuming, less accurate due to human error and only a percentage of all certificates would have been checked. In summary, this is a software package that extracts and analyses ALL certificates (not just for gas but ALL the Compliance areas) based on parameters and current regulations, and would then deem if compliant or not. The certificates are then stored in one location and easily accessible, if and when required. Where the software deems a certificate noncompliant, this could be for numerous reasons, i.e. incorrect date, no signature, incorrect address or readings, information out of set parameters. These would then be rechecked and investigated by the Compliance Officer and/or Contractor if necessary.

We can then use this information to quickly and accurately understand performance KPIs, create statistics and a dashboard for monthly/weekly/daily checks where

considered appropriate.

Gas has been installed onto the software and we are working to ensure this is accurate. Electrical certificates are a work in progress; the initial issues have been identified but we are reliant on our contractors to assist with the ratification. Lifts will go on next and then the remaining Compliance areas will follow.

It has had its challenges with the sheer number of certificates, but the Compliance Team are working through these and we feel that this will ultimately be an incredibly useful/critical tool for Compliance.”

2. The Board sought further clarification on capped gas.

Response:

“As a general rule (or certainly now going forward) we won't actively cap any tenanted property unless a health and safety risk is identified. For example, where we could not complete a service and certificate due to debt and tenants are being difficult with access. This will be on a case-by-case basis and will be communicated with the tenant.

Otherwise, the only properties that will be capped will be void properties.

It has become apparent during this Gas review that we do have a number of tenanted properties that are capped (historical). These have been identified and the Compliance Team in conjunction with the Housing Management Team are investigating and working with the tenants to ascertain the reasons for this.

We do have a small number of tenants that adamantly do not want to use gas.

These, again, will be investigated individually and discussed on how to proceed with these going forward (perhaps a signed letter confirming this is their instruction). But the capped gas will still be checked annually, and welfare checks will be carried out on a regular basis, particularly in the winter months. Ideally, we still want to provide gas and it is still there if required – it would just be a case of reconnecting.

For note, Capped properties should still be checked annually and welfare checks should still be initiated especially in the winter months.”

Danielle Sleightholme, Tenant’s Panel Co-optee (in writing) requested follow up on the Re-let Review and Decant Policy queries that arose from the previous meeting. Annalisa Howson (Housing Service Improvement Manager) advised that these 2 items were in progress and noted on the Forward Plan. She agreed that there were decants that had raised issues and concerns but these were being looked at forensically to identify lessons learned. Discussions with tenants had been sought and Tenant’s Panel involvement is to be arranged.

12 Declarations of interest

13 Housing Services Damp and Mould Policy

Steph Aves, Special Projects Officer, presented the Damp and Mould Policy to the Board, to be formally adopted by the Co-Portfolio Holder for Housing (Services & Operations) in the meeting to follow.

She noted that the policy was created in response to statutory guidance issued in the Housing Ombudsman Service Spotlight report in October 2021 and the Regulator of Social Housing, in a report entitled Damp and Mould in Social Housing: Learning the Lessons, 28 June 2023. The Policy was also formulated in light of disrepair claims in terms of damp and mould. She noted the introduction of a damp and mould tracker, which requires that within 6 months of remedial works and 12 months there will be a follow up. A case management IT system is also in the

process of being set up to assist with achieving these actions. Timescales will be highlighted in the accompanied Procedure policy, which is to be shared with the CEG and Tenant's Panel imminently.

Matt Alexander also advised that specialised training would be rolled out for technical officers and contractors with Mould Consultants. He noted that they were also in the process of acquiring additional resources to ensure that inspections were carried out and specialist resources to assist with inspections. Additional feedback will be brought to the Board at a later date. Matt also noted that stock condition surveys had identified a number of homes with damp and mould, which were being dealt with as part of the damp and mould implementation programme.

Cllr Robini referred to page 4 of the Damp and Mould Policy, specifically under 'Redecoration'. He asked for more information and clarity on the following extracts from the Policy: "will consider how best to assist vulnerable or disabled tenants with redecoration" and "damage due to disrepair, the obligation is on the landlord to both repair and make good including any redecoration." Steph Aves explained that disrepair damage referred to the instances where the Landlord has not carried out their obligation to maintain the property, such as damaged rendering leading to damp and mould. She clarified that re-decorating of properties was assessed on a case by case basis but it was made clear that work would not be left unfinished or undecorated if the tenant is unable to do so themselves. She explained that redecoration was part of resolving damp and mould.

Cllr Keen explained that she was pleased that inspections would now look at the fabric of the building as a whole-house approach.

Cllr Morrison queried the volume of properties that have been identified with a damp/mould issue. Matt Alexander noted that, at this stage the stock condition surveys had found around 70 out of 1,000 (7%) of surveys identified a damp and mould problem. He further clarified that some cases had gone unreported and were identified during inspections. He urged that tenants report these cases to the Council.

The Board were satisfied with the Damp and Mould Policy and had no further comments to make.

14 Housing Services Fire Safety policy

Drew Roberts, Fire Safety Compliance Officer, presented the updated Fire Safety Policy to the Board, to be formally endorsed by the Co-Portfolio Holder for Housing (Services), Cllr Paul Rivers, in the consultation with the Executive Head of Housing, Andrew Smith.

Terry Daubney, Vice Chair and Leader of the Tenant's Panel made a few suggested revisions to the document, including;

- Clarity on the meaning of CDM (Construction Design & Management)
- Clarity on the meaning of 'bi-annual' in context of the Senior Living reviews.
- He recommended that a tenant representative is included in the safety inspections for the twice-yearly Senior Living Reviews

Drew Roberts agreed to amend the policy to clarify the meaning of bi-annual and CDM. He had also been in discussions with David Brown (Senior Living Manager) earlier in the week who had agreed to identify volunteer tenant representatives to accompany officers on the senior living inspections.

Chris Austin, Tenant's Panel Member, gave feedback on the Policy and explained that he felt it was mostly aimed at multi-storey properties, blocks of flats and Senior Living homes, but queried how the Policy would apply to individual houses and bungalows. He further queried how tenants would be made aware of this Policy i.e. will it be included in a pack at the start of a tenancy? Drew Roberts explained that the Policy is all-encompassing and does apply to houses and bungalows and he noted the landlord's responsibilities such as providing smoke detectors and carrying out gas and fire alarm servicing. Annalisa Howson, Housing Improvements Manager, noted that a synopsis/summary of the policy and fire safety advice is included in the Tenant's pack at the beginning of the tenancy. These resources are also accessible and available on the website for transparency. She informed Members that the weekly newsletter circulated to tenants often includes information on fire safety and links to policies. Hugh Wagstaff, Head of Housing Operations, further noted that the legislation informing this Policy had predominantly focused on blocks of flats and officers will take comments about individual homes and bungalows on board to make the Policy accessible and relevant to all. Cllr Keen advised that regular reminders for tenants to comply with fire safety policies and procedures should be sent via the newsletters.

Cllr Robini queried what would happen in a block of flats when certain flats are sold privately? Drew Roberts confirmed that legislation requires the Council to write to all occupiers in a flat block, so leaseholders would also get a letter on fire safety. He noted that the Council may have less control over the provision of smoke detectors but will follow up on whether leaseholders are required to have smoke detectors installed. **Drew agreed to provide further clarity after the meeting.**

The Board agreed to this policy with a few minor amendments mentioned above.

15 HRA Buy Back - Shamley Green

Hugh Wagstaff, Head of Housing Operations, introduced the buy back proposal set out in the report. In the meeting to follow, the Co-Portfolio Holder for Housing, Cllr Rivers will make the formal decision to delegate authority to the Executive Head of Housing to approve the final terms of the purchase.

Cllr Robini questioned the sum mentioned in the exempt annex which was allocated for works required to bring the property to a lettable standard. Hugh Wagstaff explained that this was an opportunity to bring the property to the highest standard including energy efficiency, and this sum indicated the highest amount that could be spent on refurbishment, although the full amount will likely not be spent. Works such as new a bathroom and kitchen will be needed. He advised that this will also be an investment into the property as it is unlikely further work will be needed for the foreseeable future.

The Board were satisfied with the proposals set out in the report.

16 Fire equipment servicing procurement

Drew Roberts addressed the Board and introduced the procurement of the new Fire Equipment Servicing contract with Sureserve Fire and Electrical Ltd for the period 2023 to 2026. To be approved formally by the Co-Portfolio Holder for Housing (Services and Operations), Cllr Paul Rivers in the meeting to follow.

He noted that relevant due diligence was taken in this procurement process and consultations with Fusion 21 and the assessment of their framework contractors found that Sureserve came out on top. In consultation with the Procurement Officer, it was agreed that the preferred route would be to directly award a new contract to Sureserve Fire and Electrical Ltd, under the same contract terms as before, via a framework that has already been competitively tendered at a higher contract value. The new contract would better reflect the reality of the cost of running the fire safety systems.

Chris Austin, Tenant's Panel Member, queried whether the over-spend could occur again under the new contract? In response, Drew Roberts explained that the contract value increase and amendment of the terms of the contract would ensure that these issues do not arise again in the future.

17 Feedback from CIH Manchester Conference

Annalisa Howson addressed the Board and provided a presentation update from the Chartered Institute of Housing National Conference, Manchester.

Cllr Rivers actioned that the presentation should be shared with the Executive.

18 Executive Head of Housing Update

Executive Head of Housing, Andrew Smith, noted that there is now a full compliance team in action managed by Matt Alexander.

He further informed the Board that there would be two Co-PFH for Housing decisions on the Executive forward plan to be approved over the summer. Decisions include; Buy-back for a 3 bed family home and Variation to the Gas Contract.

19 Work Programme

Annalisa Howson informed the Board that the following items are expected in the meeting to be held in September:

- Q1 Performance Report
- Responsive repairs and voids progress update with Ian Williams and contract manager
- Asset Management IT Solution procurement
- RSH Consultation documents

20 Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the LSAB will be held on 28th SEPTEMBER 2023.