

LANDLORD SERVICES ADVISORY BOARD (EXECUTIVE WORKING GROUP)

19 October 2023

NOTES

Present:

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

35 Apologies for absence

None received. The Board was in full attendance.

36 Notes of the previous meeting

The Board agreed that the notes of the previous meeting were an accurate and complete record.

37 Smith and Byford Presentation

Daniel Neild, on behalf of Smith & Byford Ltd, addressed the Board and delivered a 6 month progress review.

Daniel addressed the challenges faced during the contract's initial mobilisation in February. Issues arose during the transfer of employees from the previous contractor, resulting in a lower than expected number of engineers. Additionally, compliance concerns and a high number of pending repairs added to the complexities during the contract's onset.

Daniel highlighted the progress made in performance since the contract's inception. The team had significantly reduced overdue tasks, achieving a 99.79% KPI success rate, surpassing the initially inherited backlog.

The Winter Plan was presented, emphasising improved resources, including a fully staffed contact center, multiple suppliers to tackle parts availability concerns, and increased efficiency in van stocks. Moreover, innovative measures like QR code self-appointment bookings, a safeguarding reporting system, and the imminent implementation of live chat for service requests were highlighted.

The Chair opened the floor for questions.

Members asked for clarification about expected call-out times for tenants. Daniel explained that call out times for 'P1 cases' (emergencies) were within an hour and completed within 72 hours (he noted that these cases were mainly gas or water leaks), and he further explained that 'P2 cases' would be completed in up to 28 days with a call out time of 5 working days. Daniel also noted that the out-of-hours team would attend cases within 24 hours, but certain cases would be prioritised. He further clarified that a 'P2 case' referred to an issue that does not relate to heating or hot water.

In response to questions around weekend availability, Daniel explained that there were working contractors on the weekend and therefore the service wasn't restricted to weekdays only.

Daniel explained that Smith and Byford would provide blow heaters to residents without heating within the arrangement to fix it. He agreed with the Board's suggestions to look at oil heaters or more energy efficient alternatives in future if someone was struggling to pay electricity.

Cllr Keen explained that, in her experience, some tenants may turn down gas services and asked if there was anything to make these appliances more efficient to reduce prices. Daniel reassured that engineers would give safety advice on hot water and regulating temperatures in such cases. He noted that some tenants would not use gas due to debt on their meters which will not get cleared. He noted that it was the contractor's responsibility to provide advice and signposting in such cases and explained that Smith and Byford would feedback to the Waverley Borough Council team if there were concerns about vulnerable tenants not using their gas.

Annalisa Howson, Housing Services Improvement Manager, added that the Housing Revenue Account Hardship fund was available for tenants who were signposted for safeguarding. She also confirmed that safeguarding concerns had been raised by Smith and Byford which the Waverley Borough Council Housing Team were able to look in to.

Daniel agreed to the Board's suggestions that Smith & Byford should work with the Tenants Panel to improve uptake in the QR code initiative. Annalisa also suggested that the Tenant Involvements team could promote this in the Tenant's newsletter *Homes and People* – and to further include tenant feedback about using the QR code.

Members raised concerns that fan heaters had high electricity consumption rates and some tenants may be reluctant to use them, particularly residents on key meters. Daniel noted that this would be a safeguarding issue – and this case would be prioritised. He further agreed to the Board's suggestions to consider alternative heaters such as oil heaters during repair periods.

Daniel clarified that when setting up an annual investigation review with a tenant, Smith and Byford would send a standard Landlord Gas Safety Record (LGSR) letter indicating that they will service in the AM or PM. He noted that tenants with busy schedules could choose slots in the morning (first call) before work, or a last call slot after 4pm which would avoid school rush hour. They could also accommodate servicing after 5:30pm in special circumstances.

The Chair thanked Daniel Nield for this presentation and attendance.

38 Aids and Adaptations Service Review

Adrian Bryant, Repairs and Voids Manager, introduced the report and the action plan, with a few updates;

- The policy and process have been reviewed and are the team are now looking at legal obligations
- Officers are reviewing current processes, namely; lack of communication with Tenants throughout adaptation. A Housing Adaptations Support Group has been set up to inform tenants on A&A case until completion.
- Officers are in the process of carrying out Tenant Satisfaction Surveys, sent out to tenants we have had Aids & Adaptations carried out between Apr-Oct 2023 and in November they can feedback the results
- Officers are in conversations with suppliers and contractors – this will be promoted to tenants about the service
- There had been a lack of tracking identified by the team – therefore they have created a simple tracker to ensure cases are followed through all stages
- Officers are setting up reports to monitor cases and scheduling weekly update meetings with contractors to keep on top of cases.
- Action plan is in continual improvement.

In response to the Board, Ibiyemi Akoto, Compliance Manager, confirmed that the Council was in contact with social services teams and hospital outreach teams regarding Aids and Adaptions for tenants.

Danielle Sleightholme, Tenants Panel Co-Optee, noted that the case which triggered the review involved significant and unreasonable delays in dealing with an adaptation and asked for clarity about what had caused this. Andrew Smith, Executive Head of Housing, explained that it was due to a lack of communication and adherence to the policy. He further noted that the complaint came before the policy had been reviewed and the Action Plan has been set up. Andrew explained that the appropriate steps had been taken to avoid such cases in the future and it wouldn't be appropriate to go into more detail on this in public session.

Cllr Robini asked if there were any circumstances in which the Council would refuse an adaptation that Social Services were recommending due to insufficient funds. Adrian explained that the process would include dialogue with social services and the tenant, to decide whether the adaptation is suitable or if it is more appropriate to move the tenant to another property. Adrian explained that the current legislation is vague regarding reasonable adjustments and the legal team are currently looking into the Council's legal responsibilities within the policy.

A question was asked about Dropped Kerbs and whether the Council follows this up on a broad basis. Adrian explained that a request may come into the Council, but it would usually be on a public highway, which would be referred to Surrey County Council. Cllr Robini requested that Waverley Borough Council should have a formal arrangement in place with Surrey County Council to liaise regarding Dropped Kerbs. Adrian Bryant agreed to look into this.

The Board requested a review on the progress of the Action Plan in February 2024. Annalisa Howson noted that Officers were due to bring information about the Aids and Adaptations Survey back to the Board in November and was happy to schedule a review for February.

39 Senior Living Fire Alarm Upgrade - Contract Award

The Board noted and endorsed the proposals set out in the report.

40 Executive Head of Housing Update

Andrew Smith, Executive Head of Housing, addressed the Board and provided the following updates:

- There is now a fully resourced Compliance Team in place at WBC, which is key for ensuring tenants' safety and satisfaction.
- The Q2 Corporate Performance Report will be presented to the Board next month, and we are keen to see improvements in KPIs, specifically responsive repairs and voids. He noted that progress is slow but steady.
- A new Anti-Social Behaviour Officer has been recruited and will work with housing on neighbourhood disputes and anti-social behaviour.
- 3,304 out of the 5,170 Stock Condition Surveys have been completed and the consultants have had a good response. There is a good number of satisfaction levels.
- The Budget setting process is due to commence so we will be looking at that soon.
- Winter Housing Hellos will take place on 14th, 17th and 23rd November.
- He concluded by thanking the Housing team and the LSAB, rising to the challenges in place.

41 Work programme

Annalisa Howson, Housing Service Improvements Manager, noted the upcoming items due to be brought to the meeting in November;

- Re-let review update
- Decant Policy
- Retrofit Progress Report (this may be deferred)
- Aids and Adaptations Survey Feedback
- The Board expressed a desire to schedule a HRA Mid-year review finance training session in December to prepare Members to look at the HRA Budget in January

Cllr Rivers raised a point about the Decant Policy and questioned the use of the word "Decant" when talking about people and homes. The Board agreed to Cllr Rivers' point and would be open to suggestions for an alternative name.

42 Date of next meeting

The Board noted that the date of the next meeting would be Thursday 30th November 2023.