

# LANDLORD SERVICES ADVISORY BOARD

27 October 2022

## NOTES

Present:

Terry Daubney, Waverley Tenants' Panel (Chair)	Annie Righton
Cllr Paul Rivers (Vice Chair)	Andrew Smith
Austin, Lucas Field Residents Group	Annalisa Howson
	Jeanette Englefield
	Fiona Cameron

### 1 Apologies for absence

Councillor Jacquie Keen, Councillor Stephen Mulliner, Councillor John Robini, Councillor Michaela Wicks, Robert Stratford.

### 2 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations made.

### 3 Notes of the previous meeting

The minutes for the meeting of the 27 October 2022 were agreed by the Board.

Annalisa Howson Service Improvement Manager addressed the Board and provided a brief update on the follow up item from the last meeting. She noted the following.

Housing Fraud - Waverly Council were members of the National Fraud Initiative. The scheme matches electronic data within and between public and private sector bodies to help the council prevent and detect fraud.

Cycle spaces/shelters in Haslemere – There did not appear to be an impact on parking, the scheme was a long-term investment, the spaces are designed to keep cycles safe and dry.

No Mow May – The greenspaces within housing land curtilages will not be part of No Mow May. Surrey County Council are taking back the agency function for highway verge maintenance as of 1 April 2023. Therefore, Waverley will no longer be cutting the highway verges, spraying the weeds on highway areas and treating invasive weeds along the highway, this will all be done by Surrey County Council and their contractors. They will be cutting the grass at four cuts per year on urban verges and two cuts on the rural verges.

Voids and Carpets - The Voids team confirmed that the general policy is for outgoing tenants to clear their home including floor coverings. However, there is officer discretion to retain floor coverings, in exceptional cases, if they are in very good condition. Floor coverings will be included in the Relet review this winter/spring.

Responsive Repair - Kris Shipway and Annalisa Howson reviewed the case identified by Cllr Robini. The roof leak was responded to according to process and within timescale. Operatives made the home safe and sought to prevent further damage

while repair completed. The visits were made and permanent repair request before Cllr Robini's enquiry. Following the incident and recognising the challenge for 24-hour roof fixes, the team have invested in some new roof repair kits to manage any leak in the interim until a full fix can be arranged.

Senior Living Spyholes - The Compliance team confirmed that they would not retrofit spyholes to senior living individual flat doors. As this would compromise the integrity of the door and breach the manufacturer guarantee. Each scheme has a secure door entry system at the main door and all door replacement programmes include a specification for spy holes these include Rolston and Riverside (fitted), Faulkner (in progress) and Blunden (scheduled).

The Chair queried if the contractors had the correct equipment to pick up the grass and if that issue had been resolved. Annalisa Howson advised the Board that intension is for the grass not to be picked up, instead it is absorbed into the soil. Annie Righton confirmed that the contract stipulated that the grass is to be left but would look into the matter when the contract is reviewed. The Chair felt that about void carpets the council should move away from exceptional cases. Annalisa Howson noted that the council were committed to conducting a void review across the winter months and would consult good guidance on flooring/carpeted released from the Housing Ombudsman Service.

#### **4 Verbal matters arising update**

New roles and recruitment - Andrew Smith addressed the Board; he advised that since the last meeting he had taken up his new position as the Executive Head of Housing Services for Guildford and Waverley and would be even more involved with the Landlord Services Advisory Board. He advised that Hugh Wagstaff would be taking up a new role focusing on the Asset Management Plan. Andrew Smith expressed his wish to increase and develop relationships with the Tenants Panel and improve housing services. The Chair thanked and welcomed Andrew Smith in his new role.

Gas Heating - Heather Rigg Property Services Manager addressed the Board to provide an update on the Gas contract and preparations in place for over the winter period. She advised that the team were in the best place to respond should there be any emergencies, she added that the team held weekly servicing meetings with the contractor to gain oversight on resourcing and to identify any supply chain issues. Heather Rigg advised the Board that she and her team had met with Ian William's and David Brown, Senior Living and Careline Services Manager to discuss contingency planning.

The Chair suggested that a leaflet be produced to inform tenants on how to get the best from their heating. Annalisa Howson noted the advice published in the Waverly Homes and People magazine which suggested keeping home at a temperature of 18 degrees.

#### **5 HRA Business Plan Strategic Review Outcomes**

Annalisa Howson provided the Board with a presentation and an overview of the Waverley Housing Rent Account (HRA). She advised the Board that it was the vision and strategic priority from the Waverley Corporate Strategy to provide good quality housing to buy and rent for all income levels within the borough.

Annalisa Howson explained that the council owned, managed, and maintained over 4,800 homes through the HRA. She noted that it was a 30-year plan predominantly funded through tenants rent, some government grants and interest on investments. She also noted that the HRA is ringfenced for Landlord service and cannot be spent on anything else other than housing. Annalisa Howson took the Board through the financial breakdown of how every £1 of tenant rent money was spent in 2021/22. She noted that the biggest cost was financing the debt following self-finance regime. She recalled the National Housing Subsidy Regime, where 50% of rent went to central government and in 2012 Waverley Borough Council borrowed £193m to opt out of the scheme. She advised that this allowed the council to keep all of its own rent.

Annalisa Howson advised the Board that there were many challenges such as inflation costs, zero carbon and energy efficiency, keeping homes at affordable rents and to build new homes. She explained that it was those competing priorities which lead to the strategic review. She also noted the impact of inflation on services, the 1% rent deduction and the safety and decent homes priorities. Annalisa Howson expressed to the Board how important it was that the council always maintained a £2m m reserve. She used the presentation to describe the debt repayment plan, noting the current reserves of £7 million.

Annalisa Howson advised the Board that there was a new 30-year plan and the inflation assumption rate had been reset to maintain the reserve. She also noted that the sensitivity analysis had increased, there was a new proposed borrowing model and new homes appraisal scheme. Annalisa Howson explained that the assumption in model plan and the council aim to smooth out the inflation spikes over the next 30 years so that was not passed to tenants. Annalisa advised the Board that the proposal is to support the adoption of the Business Plan model which included maintaining at least a £2 million reserve, a strategy to borrow for new homes delivery and stock improvement, a commitment to carbon natural homes and to remove the garage portfolio.

The Chair responded to the presentation and welcomed the removal of the garage portfolio. He and the Board members confirmed that they approved the HRA Plan.

## **6 Housing Service Plan Mid-Year Progress Report**

The Board received a report from Annalisa Howson on the Housing Service Plan, she explained that it was a comprehensive plan that would be the driver for service delivery, she also explained that they were mid-way through the year and had been making good progress. Annalisa Howson noted the aims of the services and the completed green actions over the last 6 months. She explained that the pink action were items that ran throughout the year and were ongoing improvements, such as communications. Finally, she explained that there were 4 yellow items which were on pause whilst the new Executive Head of Housing Services settled into his new role.; and these included a review of the hybrid working scheme.

The Board queried central government cuts and if the council should consider cutting back or adjusting the budget. Annalisa Howson confirmed that the budget was made up of rent payments and the council should remain vigilant on central government policy which determine how much the council can increase rent and changes in housing benefit. She also expressed that she was hoping that there may be more money available from central government for building new housing and green initiatives. Candice Keet addressed the Board and advised that the

council needed to consider government impact such as inflation and increases in areas like energy cost, contracts, supplies and support for energy support schemes in the future.

Andrew Smith addressed the Board; he advised that the council were very aware that tenants would be feeling the financial pressures of increased energy costs as part of the cost-of-living crisis, and the council has a funds to help tenants. He mentioned the cost of living working group that was formed and chaired by the Leader of the council to help and support those who need assistance across the borough. Andrew Smith advised that firstly the budget must be robust, however there were other factors that the council are unable to predict. He added that the council do not know what the Chancellor will say in the Autumn Statement or what the government will do which will impact the way we want to deliver services.

The Chair responded to the report and welcomed comments. He and the Board members confirmed that they noted the progress made and had no further comments to make.

## **7 Work programme**

Annalisa Howson reviewed the work programme with the Chair and Board members, she confirmed that the items for the November meeting would be the Quarter 2 Performance Report, and draft HRA Budget 2023/24 and She informed the Board that she was also hoping to present an update on the Housing Asset Management Strategy.

## **8 Any other business**

### **Proposal - HRA Hardship Fund**

Annalisa Howson presented a briefing paper on the HRA Hardship Fund, she noted that there had been a review of the fund, which was set up earlier in the year to mitigate the impact of rising inflation and energy costs. She explained that it was suggested by the Board to increase promotion and ensure that the fund was spent. Annalisa Howson explained that other funds were also made available such as the Household Support Fund and tenants were not approaching until they are in dire circumstances. She advised the Board that the team had discussed ideas for being more proactive and identify the homes in the borough that are the most difficult to heat (through EPC and SAP ratings) and propose crediting rent accounts to provide something extra to help with energy bills.

The Board members thanked Annalisa Howson and welcomed the idea, they queried if those tenants identified as living in less energy efficient homes were aware. Annalisa Howson responded to the comment, she confirmed that new tenants would have received a copy of their homes EPC, but tenants would most likely not be aware. Tenants are able to request EPC information will be informed if identified as part of this initiative.

Heather Rigg addressed the Board and agreed with being proactive, her only reservation was the quality of the EPC's as they are based on SAP ratings which were subjective. She noted that this would be one area that the council would be looking at as part of the stock survey. She also noted that an EPC last for 10 years and there was not a proactive cycle in place to replace outdated EPC's.

Annalisa Howson explained that it was the team's suggestion to make payments of £200, she noted that after the payments, money would remain in the fund for other tenants. A query was raised regarding how the payments or deductions would be made and the communication to support the initiative. Annalisa Howson explained that rent accounts would be credited and that communications to support the initiative were a part of the work and proposal.

Proposal – To review the work of LSAB

The Chair addressed the board and discussed his suggestion to review the work of the group. He explained that this would look at the work the Board has completed to date, areas that were working and areas that required improvements for the next year. He advised the Board that it has been proposed that a meeting take place on 15 December to discuss improvements. Annalisa Howson also advised the Board that the review would also look at how the Board communicates its outcomes, shares information more widely, is more assessable i.e., social media and briefing notes.

## **9 Date of next meeting**

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 10am on 24 November 2022.