

## **Minutes of the Housing and Safer Communities Select Committee**

**Monday 20<sup>th</sup> November, 2023 at 6.00 pm  
In Committee Room 2  
At the Council House, Dudley**

### **Present:**

Councillor A Davies (Chair)  
Councillor S Bothul (Vice-Chair)  
Councillors J Cowell, T Creed, P Drake, I Kettle, K Lewis, J Martin, C Reid,  
D Stanley and M Webb

### **Officers:**

K Jones – Director of Housing and Communities, M Lyons – Interim Lead – Compliance and Building Safety, A Maqsood – Head of Housing Strategy (Directorate of Housing and Communities) and K Malpass - Democratic Services Officer (Directorate of Finance and Legal)

---

### **18. Opening Remarks of the Chair**

In view of the recent membership changes, the Chair welcomed Councillor C Reid to her first meeting of this Committee.

---

### **19. Apology for Absence**

An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor D Bevan.

## 20. **Appointment of Substitute Member**

It was reported that Councillor D Stanley had been appointed as a substitute Member for Councillor D Bevan, for this meeting of the Committee only.

---

## 21. **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor J Cowell declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to Agenda Item No. 6 (Quarterly Housing Performance Report – Quarter 1 (1<sup>st</sup> April – 30<sup>th</sup> June, 2023)), Agenda Item No. 7 (Tenant Satisfaction Measures – Tenant Perception Survey) and Agenda Item No. 8 (Customer Engagement and Involvement) as a Council tenant.

---

## 22. **Minutes**

Councillor J Cowell referred to Minute number 14(m) – Corporate Quarterly Performance Report – Housing and Communities Directorate – Quarter 1 (1<sup>st</sup> April – 30<sup>th</sup> June, 2023), line two stating that the word Tenant be deleted to read Housing Board.

### **Resolved**

That subject to the above amendment, the minutes of the meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> September, 2023, be approved as a correct record and signed.

---

## 23. **Public Forum**

The following questions were raised by a member of the public who was unable to attend the meeting due to health issues.

- (1) In referring to the minutes of the meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> September, 2023, which referred to the Tenant Housing Board and Dudley Housing Board, clarification was requested on what the Board was now called?
- (2) What was happening to high-rise forums? There did not appear to be a group that focused on the needs of high-rise properties.

- (3) In referring to information contained in the Quarterly Corporate Performance reports, the number of properties awaiting investment decisions had increased from 50 to 95 properties. A number of questions in relation to the matter were raised, as follows:
- (a) What was happening to those properties?
  - (b) What was required to bring the properties back into use?
  - (c) Out of the 95 properties awaiting investment decisions, what type of properties were they? The significant financial implications relating to the properties for the Local Authority was questioned as they were in high demand so why were they being held back?
  - (d) What had been spent on properties awaiting investment decisions over the last 20 years.

### **Resolved**

That the Director of Housing and Communities be requested to provide a written response to the member of the public.

---

24. **Quarterly Housing Performance Report –Quarter 1 (1<sup>st</sup> April – 30<sup>th</sup> June, 2023)**

A report of the Director of Housing and Communities was submitted on the Housing quarterly performance figures following the presentation of the Quarter 1 Corporate Quarterly Performance report submitted to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 19<sup>th</sup> October, 2023.

The Director of Housing and Communities indicated that the report provided progress against the delivery of the corporate key performance indicators (KPIs) and a service improvement plan of actions which provided Members with the opportunity to discuss performance directly relevant to the work programme of the Committee.

Dashboard summaries highlighted four corporate quarterly measures for Housing and Community Services, one highlighting “on or exceeding target” with the other three highlighting “below target”. Further information was included in the appendix to the report submitted to the meeting.

In terms of PI 1191 – Average re-let time for standard re-let, it was reported that the average re-let times for standard voids had decreased from 60.23 days in Quarter 4 2022/2023, to 49.26 days in Quarter 1 2023/2024, compared to 61.7 days for the same period last year. The positive progress had been driven by an ongoing review of the end-to-end void process, however, there had been a slight impact on void turnaround times as a result of the ongoing stock condition survey. Properties that appeared empty, but still had a legal tenancy agreement in place, required a mutual agreement or Court order to end an agreement and figures for this type of property had not been included in the void figures.

In terms of PI 1899 – Rent loss, the KPI was linked to PI 1191 above in that the quicker void properties were brought back into use, the lower the rent loss associated with the void. The cumulative rent loss in Quarter 1 2023/24 was 2.28% which equated to £338k, of which £311,555 was attributable to routine voids. The reduction of average re-let times had a positive impact on void loss which had been evidenced by the reduction of rent loss attributed to routine voids from 70% to 65%. The remaining rent loss of £247,043 in Quarter 1 2023/24 was made up of £119,219.62 due to improvement programmes in sheltered stock or decanting people to facilitate them, £19,243.43 attributed to properties used for decanting or held for future decant, and £108,580.04 attributed to ninety-five properties awaiting an investment decision. A report would be submitted to a future Cabinet meeting outlining recommendations on the disposal of homes currently held pending an investment decision.

In referring to PI 2027 – Satisfaction on how anti-social behaviour complaints were handled, it was reported that whilst figures had increased through 2022/23, satisfaction with anti-social behaviour (ASB) complaint handling had decreased in Quarter 1 2023/24. The target of 70% had been set as a stretched target and was almost 10% higher than the benchmarking median of 60.7%. When compared to the benchmarking median, the Quarter 1 2023/24 performance was only marginally lower at 59.8%, however, the Quarter 1 2023/24 performance was lower than throughout 2022/23 which was an area of concern and required further consideration.

Following the review of the ASB service in 2022/23, initial issues relating to staffing levels and processes within the service had been addressed leading to improvement in customer satisfaction. However, following reduced staff resources due to successful promotion and development opportunities and sickness absence, the service had again been impacted negatively on customer satisfaction. A full review of staffing, systems and processes was now being undertaken and would lead to improvements being observed moving forward. Progress on improving service delivery and customer satisfaction would be included in the report on Community Safety and Anti-Social Behaviour Services programmed for 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 2023.

Following the presentation, Members were given the opportunity to ask questions and make comments and responses were provided, where necessary, as follows:-

- (a) Councillor J Cowell expressed concern that the key performance indicators (KPIs) outlined in the report submitted referred to the Quarter 1 period, which had been provided and discussed at the meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> September, 2023. Whilst acknowledging that the figures related to Quarter 1 from the period 1<sup>st</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> June, 2023, the Director of Housing and Communities indicated that performance information had been presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 19<sup>th</sup> October, 2023 and given the number of concerns raised, it was considered that Members of the Housing and Safer Communities Select Committee be provided with a further opportunity to discuss areas that required improving. Members were advised that Quarter 2 KPIs would be submitted to the Committee on 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 2023.

- (b) In referring to PI 2027 – satisfaction – the way anti-social behaviour complaints were handled, Councillor J Cowell indicated, that whilst acknowledging the rationale of transferring the lower-level anti-social behaviour (ASB) cases to the Housing Team, concern was expressed at the historic high levels of staff turnover within the service, which could negatively impact the potential for improvement. In responding, the Director of Housing and Communities explained the logic relating to the restructure and being more proactive in effectively dealing with low-level ASB and neighbour nuisance issues. Members were advised that following the recent restructure of the Directorate of Housing and Communities, a number of staff within the Anti-Social Behaviour Service had successfully obtained a position within the Housing Management Team which provided a range of expertise and knowledge into front line Housing Services. In responding to a question raised by Councillor J Cowell in relation to concerns regarding the changes taking place within the Directorate of Housing and Communities and the likelihood of impacts on tenants, the Director of Housing and Communities indicated that the Housing Management Team was fully resourced and staffed, however, the Service would be monitored frequently to maximise improvement opportunities.
- (c) In responding to a question from Councillor I Kettle, the Director of Housing and Communities indicated that whilst the service had not encountered any staffing issues, the challenges relating to recruitment was acknowledged. It was noted that specific skills and expertise were essential in certain roles within the Local Authority to ensure services were delivered in line with customer expectations. Significant competition within the employment market was acknowledged, particularly as officers' salaries within the Authority were lower in comparison to neighbouring Local Authorities and private sector organisations.
- (d) Councillor D Stanley complimented the Director of Housing and Communities on the successful recruitment of a specific officer within the Anti-Social Behaviour Team.
- (e) Councillor C Reid referred to the high level of ASB in Wolverhampton Street and surrounding areas and queried the level of responsibility of Housing Officers and at what stage Police involvement was requested.

The Director of Housing and Communities explained the various stages of ASB referrals from Housing Officers dealing with low-level ASB, to cases being transferred to the Police and Court system. Reference was made to the role of Housing Officers which required them to be visible and recognisable to tenants, placing them in an ideal position to deal with low-Level ASB cases more effectively and in a timely manner. Cases that were considered more complex or continued to escalate were referred to the ASB Specialist Team for appropriate negotiation, mediation or legal action, which may involve collaborative working with the Police should matters escalate outside the responsibility of the Local Authority. Complex ASB cases were referred to the Court for appropriate legal action as a last option in cases where the Local Authority and Police had exhausted all options available to them, however, extensive evidence was required prior to the Court system being involved.

- (f) In responding to a question from Councillor C Reid, the Director of Housing and Communities indicated that Members and tenants would not need to contact the ASB Specialist Team directly. Housing Officers would be required to deal with any reported incidents in the first instance and refer to the ASB Specialist Team should the matter continue to escalate. Should Members or tenants be dissatisfied in the way Housing Officers were dealing with a case, complaints should be made to the appropriate Housing Team Manager to review the incident and consider whether more specialist intervention was required.
- (g) Councillor D Stanley and Councillor C Reid expressed their disappointment at the void turnaround times given the number of people waiting for properties in the Borough. It was queried whether there was scope to speed up the re-letting process to enable properties to be made available in a more appropriate timeframe, given the significantly lower void turnaround times in the private section. Concern was raised in relation to void properties that remained empty due to the asset being used as storage, and it was considered that it would benefit the Local Authority financially should consideration be given to using storage organisations rather than losing rent on a property.

Whilst it was reported that void turnaround times varied depending on property type, the Director of Housing and Communities acknowledged that significant improvement was required in that specific area. A more collaborative approach was required with all services involved in the void process to reduce delays. Members were advised that whilst a property may appear empty, in some cases, a legal tenancy agreement was still in place which must be ended by mutual agreement or through the Court process before it could be turned around and relet. Whilst more work was required to reduce void turnaround times, progress had been observed compared to the same period last year due to the ongoing review of the end-to-end point void process. It was considered that targets had not been reached during Quarter 1 due to the significant work being undertaken around the stock condition survey (SCS) for all assets in the Borough.

- (h) In responding to questions raised by Councillor A Davies in relation to next steps following the completion of the SCS, the Director of Housing and Communities indicated that the current KPI targets for the average re-let times had been agreed in February 2022. Targets for 2024/25 would be considered in the near future with the aim to reducing targets further. Whilst it was anticipated that further progress would be observed moving forward, it was acknowledged that this would take some time but the service was confident that the improvements identified would rectify historic issues. The Interim Lead for Compliance and Building Safety reported that whilst there had initially been delays delivering the required improvements due to the work around the SCS, it was envisaged that following surveys being carried out on all Council assets, it would provide important data on properties in relation to condition and planned maintenance/repair work when a property became vacant moving forward.

The Interim Lead for Compliance and Building Safety reported that every void was being considered in a strategic manner and addressing the long-term viability of properties as assets became vacant. A more robust approach had been developed which had identified a significant number of void properties that required considerable investment and were beyond economic repair. Housing standards required improvement and assets identified as not being suitable for customers were disposed of, however, in order to maintain stock levels, the income generated from the sale of void properties would allow properties to be purchased from the open market which were readily adapted to aid the additional needs of some of the Council's customers.

- (i) Councillor D Stanley queried the reasons why properties were being allowed to go into disrepair and requiring significant investment to bring them back into use. It was considered that home checks should be carried out frequently to identify any maintenance/repair work in homes which should be carried out immediately to ensure the quality of the property remained satisfactory.

The Interim Lead for Compliance and Building Safety indicated that properties identified for disposal would be replaced by better quality accommodation. Intelligence had highlighted that some customers securing a tenancy with the Local Authority were short-term due to the condition of the property. The lack of historical investment in properties could be attributed to customers refusing access to properties to carry out assessments and required maintenance/repair work over a significant period of time. It was reported that historically, access, maintenance and repair work refusals had been accepted, however, the Local Authority had now adopted a no refusals policy to ensure the Council's assets were appropriately maintained moving forward.

- (j) Councillor J Martin queried whether there were any alternative market solutions to improve the service around void properties rather than disposal.

The Interim Lead for Compliance and Building Safety indicated that alternative market solutions available to the Council which would allow assets to be retained by the Local Authority were currently being investigated. There were a number of models available such as ownership models, models where the Local Authority worked collaboratively with an outside private organisation but ultimately the housing stock would be retained within the Council's housing portfolio or sold to the open market, however the sale of housing assets to the open market was not an option the Local Authority would like to consider. The preferred option would be to work collaboratively with a private sector housing provider who would manage some of Dudley's housing stock. A number of options were available and were currently being explored and a report on available options on how to manage housing stock more effectively and any financial impact would be presented to a future meeting of the Committee.

- (k) Councillor J Cowell expressed concern that the models being explored would result in increased rent for Council house tenants, which was considered unacceptable as council housing was considered a "last resort" accommodation, when customers were unable to afford private sector housing. The Director of Housing and Communities acknowledged the concern raised, however, indicated that they were committed to protecting Council tenants, keeping rent low and affordable whilst providing opportunities to meet customer housing needs and aspirations.
- (l) Councillor D Stanley referred to the potential challenges relating to the budget ringfenced for Housing in the event of increased interest rates due to the significant debt charge associated with the Council's housing stock.

## **Resolved**

That the Quarter 1 Quarterly Housing Performance report covering the period 1<sup>st</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> June, 2023, and the comments made by Members, be noted.

---

## 25. **Tenant Satisfaction Measures – Tenant Perception Survey**

A report of the Director of Housing and Communities was submitted to provide an overview on the introduction and implementation of Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM), examining specifically the Baseline Tenant Perception Survey 2023 element of the research, which was attached as an appendix to the report submitted to the meeting.

The Director of Housing and Communities and Head of Housing Strategy referred to the requirements of the social housing landlords in England in providing good quality homes and services for tenants. TSM's had been developed to:-

- Make landlords' performance more visible to tenants;
- Help tenants hold landlords to account; and
- Point the Regulator to landlords that might need to improve services.

Following a consultation exercise during 2022, it had been agreed that there would be twenty-two TSM's, covering five themes namely, keeping properties in good repair, maintaining building safety, respect and helpful engagement, effective handling of complaints and responsible neighbourhood management. Ten TSM's would be measured by landlords directly and twelve would be measured by landlords through carrying out tenant perception surveys. TSM's were outlined in the report submitted to the meeting. The Regulator had provided clear guidance on how perception surveys should be undertaken and published comprehensive technical documents to ensure a consistent approach was taken by social landlords.

Social landlords would be required to record measures during 2023/24 and submit a report to the Regulator at the end of the financial year where performance would be benchmarked and published to enable tenants to view how all landlords were performing.

The Local Authority commissioned Acuity Research and Practice (Acuity) to carry out a procurement exercise on baseline and actual Tenant Perception Surveys. The baseline results would be included in Quarter 2 2023/24 with the actual results being included in Quarter 4 2023/24. The Baseline Perception Survey was conducted through telephone contact between 3<sup>rd</sup> July and 12<sup>th</sup> August, 2023, which had proven to be a more popular method with tenants. An analysis of the Baseline Tenant Perception Survey was included in the report submitted to the meeting with the full report being attached at Appendix 1.

The Baseline Tenant Perception Survey provided a valuable starting point for understanding tenants and key areas of improvements for Housing and related services.

Following the presentation, Members had the opportunity to ask questions and, make comments and responses were provided, where necessary, as follows:-

- (a) In referring to the complaints procedure, Councillor J Cowell expressed concern at the lack of engagement officers had with complainants. It was considered that complaints would be addressed more effectively with improved communication techniques. In responding, the Head of Housing Strategy acknowledged the concern raised and indicated that improved strategies were an essential requirement to ensure that the service was delivered effectively. Historically, complaints had been dealt with in line with Council policies and procedures, however, a more modernised approach was required, which had been identified following the recent Tenant Perception Survey which had been carried out. It was acknowledged that the working relationship between the Local Authority and the Housing Ombudsman had improved significantly which had created learning opportunities which had been adopted to improve efficiencies. A Learning Group had been established to consider complaints received during a period of time to ascertain any underlying themes that may not have been identified by dealing with individual complaints.
- (b) Councillor J Cowell expressed concern around the proposal to introduce a service charge for the maintenance of communal areas. Reference was made at the lack of communal maintenance in various locations of the Borough and indicated that should charges be introduced, it was essential that the service was being provided.

The Director of Housing and Communities acknowledged that some tenants had raised concerns relating to the condition of communal areas. It was reported that housing providers were legally able to apply a service charge to homes with shared facilities or open areas that required maintenance that contributed to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). Proposals had been approved as part of the 2022/23 budget setting process and would be revisited with a view to introducing a nominal service charge from 2023/24. Further consideration was required to ensure that the scheme adopted was fair moving forward, which would provide tenants with the opportunity to hold the Council to account should services not be delivered effectively. More work was required to ensure that the right level of service was delivered with improved opportunities for tenants to engage with the Council and provide feedback. Members were assured that should service charges be introduced moving forward, services would be delivered across all housing with communal areas.

- (c) Councillor J Cowell referred to the additional areas of concern raised by customers, outlined on pages 59 and 60 of the Appendix submitted. The level of concerns raised were troubling and improved strategies were required to enhance service delivery and improve customer perception.
- (d) Councillor D Stanley referred to the level of performance carried out by contractors and indicated that it was essential to review all service contractors to ensure that the level of service was being delivered consistently across the Borough. Frequent concerns had been raised by constituents regarding the process for utility repairs/maintenance and appropriate annual service requirements of facilities, which had left vulnerable people without heating and hot water, which was considered unacceptable. In responding, the Director of Housing and Communities reported that a review was currently being undertaken of all external contractors with a view to adopting a new contract management arrangement to improve the level of service offered and provide tenants the opportunity to engage more effectively with contractors.

The Interim Lead for Compliance and Building Safety acknowledged that underperformance of some external and internal contractors was a concern and various improvement techniques had been adopted to address the ongoing issues. Whilst it was acknowledged that performance improvements had been observed with the Council's heating contractor, further improvements were necessary, particularly moving towards the winter period, however, assurances had been provided that additional resources had been secured to ensure that there was adequate staff to cover the increased demand expected for the service. Incidents of poor performance from contractors had not been referred to Senior Officers and Members were encouraged to contact the Interim Lead for Compliance and Building Safety to provide further information of incidents for investigation and appropriate action.

- (e) In responding to a question from Councillor C Reid, the Interim Lead for Compliance and Building Safety acknowledged the concerns in relation to the service provided within the remit of Green Care and confirmed that the services provided were from Council resources. Discussions were ongoing with Green Care colleagues to review service requirements and identify improved strategies to ensure a more consistent service was provided.

Councillor D Stanley referred to the historic arrangements of the Green Care Service when the Borough was divided into five townships, however, problems occurred when the areas reduced to three townships creating additional pressure on officers to manage a larger area of the Borough. There was a proposal to increase the townships back to five which would significantly improve the service moving forward. Members were reminded that a number of employees covering some of the Green Care Services were employed on a casual basis, as and when the service was required.

- (f) Councillor T Creed referred to the current arrangement the Council had with specific suppliers to provide materials to carry out replacement, repair and maintenance work in properties. Concern was raised at the lack of suppliers that officers could approach to restock materials in vehicles, which had caused delays to programmed work. It was considered that should more local suppliers be offered contracts to supply materials for the Council, it would significantly improve efficiency. The Interim Lead for Compliance and Building Safety indicated that a review was being undertaken in relation to housing maintenance to identify improvements and efficiencies with a view to assessing and agreeing a more attractive cost arrangement. The requirement to use central stores provided the ability to retain appropriate material on vehicles, control the cost of materials, guarantee that materials were available when required and to prevent potential fraud.
- (g) Councillors T Creed and P Drake referred to the lack of communication between officers and Councillors as it was noted that it was difficult to contact appropriate officers, particularly during periods of staff leave and sickness. Frequent complaints were also received from members of the public unable to contact Housing Officers. A number of queries were raised in relation to the level of staff employed across the service and whether employment bases were local, as well as concern in relation to officer response times to Councillors.

The Director of Housing and Communities referred to the presentation provided to Members at a previous meeting of the Committee on key priorities of the Neighbourhood Model that had been developed to reconnect and engage with tenants more effectively. Members' concerns were acknowledged in relation to the lack of communication and assurances were provided that all Housing Officers would predominantly be visible in communities and understanding tenants' concerns and delivering the service expected by customers with a view to reducing Councillor enquiries, complaints and improve satisfaction. The Service would continuously review the Neighbourhood Model to ensure that key aspirations were delivered in line with customer expectations and any feedback from Members would be welcomed.

Posters detailing photographs and central contact numbers of Housing Officers covering each area of the Borough were available online and copies would be re-circulated to Members of the Committee.

In responding to a question from Councillor C Reid, the Director of Housing and Communities indicated that a number of fixed Community Hubs would be provided in the imminent future and located in various areas of the Borough, including a hub in Halesowen and one in Chapel Street, Brierley Hill, where tenants would be able to attend and raise issues with Housing Officers. Whilst it was accepted that Community Hubs could not be provided in all areas of the Borough, in communities where tenants were unable to attend any of the fixed Community Hubs, it was intended that surgeries would be held in public buildings at various locations within the Borough, including the Dudley Council Plus building for Central Dudley tenants and possibly using the main office of the Dudley Federation of Tenants and Residents Association (DFTRA). Members were advised that previously, residents had to attend the Council officers located at the Harbour Building in Brierley Hill, so offering Community Hubs within the Borough was considered progress. Frequent monitoring of the Community Hubs would be taking place to ascertain usage and consideration of changing locations should it be necessary.

Whilst it was acknowledged that opening times of Council buildings varied and providing resources to staff a building for the duration it was open was considered an inefficient use of resources. It was envisaged that drop-in surgeries be arranged initially at certain times of the day on numerous days with frequent reviews taking place to identify whether improvements were required.

- (h) In responding to a question from Councillor T Creed, the Director of Housing and Communities referred to the refreshed responsibilities of Housing Officers. Officers were required to communicate with Councillors and the community more frequently and deal with the day-to-day issues rather than working from a static location. Regular monitoring of work-related messages would be carried out with officers responding when they became available, and any concerns should be raised with Team Managers in the first instance for appropriate investigation and action.

- (i) In responding to a question from Councillor A Davies, the Director of Housing and Communities confirmed that on average Housing Officers were responsible for approximately 600 properties.
- (j) Councillor I Kettle queried the number of respondents to the Tenant Perception Survey. It was reported that 1001 customers had responded, however, on page 61 of the Appendix submitted, the number reduced to 12 respondents. In responding, the Head of Housing Strategy confirmed that the survey had been circulated randomly to a number of customers across the Borough. It was confirmed that the survey captured different elements of housing groups and whilst it was confirmed that 1001 responses had been received, only twelve customers in the category of housing for older people had provided feedback.
- (k) Councillor J Cowell queried when letterheads, e-mail signatures and other documentation would be altered as it was still recording the Harbour Building as the base location of the Housing Services and was causing confusion to customers. In acknowledging the comment made, the Director of Housing and Communities indicated that the PIMMS system was currently in the process of being updated by Human Resources (HR), however, due to resource issues in (HR) and the significant number of employees within the Directorate of Housing and Communities, the process had been delayed.

## **Resolved**

- (1) That the content of the report submitted to the meeting and comments made by Members, be noted.
- (2) That “Know Your Community Housing Officer” posters for each of the six areas of the Borough be re-circulated to Members of the Committee.

---

## 26. **Customer Engagement and Involvement**

A report of the Director Housing and Communities was submitted on an update on the Council’s approach to customer engagement and involvement, outlining progress to date, to provide Members with the opportunity to ensure that plans were robust, met customer needs and supported the delivery of high quality, value for money services.

In presenting the report, The Director of Housing and Communities indicated that in November, 2020, the UK Government published “The Charter for Social Housing Residents: social housing white paper”. The White Paper outlined new regulatory arrangements for social landlords, including local authorities. The Regulator of Social Housing (RoSH) would be responsible for a more proactive consumer regulatory regime that would strengthen the formal standards against which the Council was regulated. The requirements and commitments of the Charter that the Council would be judged on were outlined in the report submitted to the meeting. The Council would be implementing appropriate services and standards and performance measures in order to deliver the key commitments within the Charter.

A review of the Customer Involvement and Engagement Strategy was currently being carried out with the revised strategy being co-produced with key customers, partners and Members. The strategy would provide a robust framework for listening and responding to feedback from customers to continuously improve customer experience and satisfaction. All existing customer involvement groups were being reviewed to identify what services were already in place and any potential gaps with refreshed Terms of Reference being drafted for consultation. Proposals were being developed to establish an overarching Customer Involvement Board to oversee the delivery of the revised Strategy, to lead on the publication of the Customer Annual Report and to scrutinise performance against the RoSH consumer standards, TSM's, Ombudsman Complain Handling Code and other customer related activity.

The Council had engaged TPAS, a not-for-profit organisation to undertake a Smart Review of the Council's housing services. The process included a review of key documents and processes, together with listening to feedback from staff and tenants to capture and understand experience of resident engagement. Actions arising out of the review would be incorporated in the new Customer Engagement and Involvement Strategy.

Information on key customer communication strategies and events were outlined in the report submitted at the meeting.

Following the presentation, Members had the opportunity to ask questions and make comments and responses were provided, where necessary, as follows:-

- (a) In responding to a question from Councillor J Cowell in relation to the level of engagement with both tenants and residents, the Director of Housing and Communities indicated that there was a requirement to engage with both housing groups to ensure that the key obligations of the Customer Engagement and Involvement Strategy were met. It was noted that excluding customers would disadvantage the desired outcome of the Strategy and create obstacles when tackling issues that affect the whole community effectively.
- (b) Councillor J Cowell queried other than DFTRA and the Housing Group, what other involvement groups had been reviewed. Reference was made to the TPAS Smart Review of housing services, and it was queried whether individual Tenants and Residents Associations (TRAs) or the wider housing organisations had been approached. It was considered that communicating with tenants would provide a better understanding of the housing issues within the Borough.

The Director of Housing and Communities confirmed that all groups currently working with the Council were being reviewed, including the constitution of the Housing Board and the service level agreement (SLA) with DFTRA. It was acknowledged that it was an essential part of the Strategy to engage with customers to identify any gaps within the service that needed to be addressed moving forward to improve the services provided. Whilst TPAS had approached DFTRA as the representative body of TRAs, the focus was to encourage all customers to get involved and not just specific groups, to provide the service with a more community view.

- (c) Councillor J Cowell referred to the Safety Matters Event where approximately twelve customers attended. It was considered that around 50% of attendees were residents, and the themed workshops that focussed on communal areas, did not affect that group of people.
- (d) Councillor A Davies emphasised the importance of involving residents in issues affecting the Borough. He referred to cases where issues had arisen where private landlords had been approached and keen to rectify problems identified, however, a resident had resisted the need to pursue required resolutions. It was essential that the Council fulfilled its obligations and improve customer perception.

## **Resolved**

- (1) That the aspirations and commitments of the Housing White Paper and its impact upon the Council, be noted.
  - (2) That the activity in progress to review and refresh the Council's approach to engaging with tenants to improve customer experience and facilitate consumer regulation, be noted.
- 

### **27. Progress Tracker and Future Business**

In providing an update on the Action Tracker, the Chair indicated that all outstanding responses had now been actioned. He expressed his appreciation to all officers for the work carried out, however requested that responses were circulated promptly.

In responding to a question from Councillor J Cowell, it was agreed that responses provided to Members of the public be circulated to all Members of the Committee.

Councillor J Cowell raised concern in relation to the number of gas service appointments being cancelled at the last minute. It was an ongoing issue that needed to be addressed moving forward. In responding, the Interim Lead for Compliance and Building Safety indicated that tenant concerns had not been raised with appropriate officers. Intelligence received had been in relation to the lack of customer engagement with the contractor to arrange appointments. The Council adopted a sixty-five day access process prior to the expiration of gas certificates. Members were advised that the service had a robust approach to annual gas safety checks and numerous engagement methods were carried out towards the expiry of a certificate. The difficulty was the wide appointment banding times provided to customers and whilst consideration had been provided to reducing appointment banding times, it was not considered appropriate. Whilst it was acknowledged that improved communication between tenant and contractor was essential, the Interim Lead for Compliance and Building Services urged Members to contact him directly with any concerns raised by tenants for investigation and appropriate action.

Councillor C Reid referred to a personal issue within her ward regarding an infestation of bedbugs affecting a low-rise block of flats and whilst it was not considered an issue for the Council, one resident had a leak in his bedroom, however, the contractor had refused to access the property because of the infestation. The Director of Housing and Communities requested that further information be supplied, and appropriate action would be taken.

In referring to minute no 15(2), Councillor D Stanley indicated that it was not his responsibility to contact officers to provide further information, however, indicated that whilst personal contact details would not be provided due to data protection and the individual being a vulnerable person, the e-mail received regarding the matter would be submitted to the Interim Lead for Compliance and Building Safety for appropriate action.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That the information contained in the Action Tracker and Future Business for the Committee, be noted.
- (2) That responses provided to Members of the public be circulated to all Members of the Committee.

---

## **27. Questions Under Council Procedure Rule 11.8**

There were no questions to the Chair pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 11.8.

The meeting ended at 7.50pm

CHAIR