

HOUSING STANDARDS BOARD (HSB)

Minutes

15 May 2023

6.00pm – 8.00pm

PRESENT:

Committee Members

Cllr Alastair Gunn (AG) – Chair

Tenant & Leaseholder

Representatives:

Property Standards Panel:

Hugh Hoad (HH)

Tenancy Standards Panel:

Jane Steer (JS)

Leaseholder Standards Panel:

Annette Hogan (AH)

Officers:

Wendy Makepeace (WM)

Cara Stevens (CS)

Zulfi Kiani-Mackintosh (ZKM).

		Action
1.	<u>Welcome and Apologies</u> <u>Apologies:</u> Cllr Mark Wilkinson (MW), Cllr Matthew Saggars (MS), Selina Ellis (SE) <u>In attendance:</u> Cllr Simon Carter.	Noted Noted
2.	<u>Declaration of Interest</u> None	Noted
3.	<u>Minutes of last meeting and Matters arising</u> Minutes were agreed.	Noted

	<p>HH has ask why even though he had raised two items under the AOB prior to the meeting and received responses at the last meeting, these were not recorded in the minutes. ZKM explained in previous meeting minutes these were not recorded on the minutes but if the Board wants these recorded moving forward then they can.</p>	ZKM
4.	<p>Cabinet Work plan 2022/23</p> <p>The work plan was noted.</p>	Noted
5.	<p>HSB Work plan 2022/23</p> <p>The work plan was noted.</p> <p>JS has asked that as the Business Plan delivery has Andrew Murray's (AM) name against it and as he is off long-term sick, will we continue with this item. CC assured JS that this item will remain on the HSB Plan and continue to be updated.</p>	<p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p>
6.	<p>HRA and Capital Programme Outturn Quarter 3</p> <p>AG reassured the HSB that Housing have been having conversations with Finance who have now been given dates for the HSB and assured Housing they will prepare Finance Reports for the HSB. AG was thanked by the Representatives for arranging this and sending out the reports.</p> <p>JS advised that the copies of the reports previously sent in the post were not of large font. AG has asked for an action point to be raised to ensure large print is sent out to JS in the future</p>	<p>Noted</p> <p>ZKM/JP</p>

7.

Gas Safety

HH advised that along with Leaseholders and the updating of the new Tenancy Agreement, as the gas Boiler is the responsibility of the Council, surely the Council should also check all gas appliances with the property, including cookers and gas fires and any additional cost could be recharged to tenants.

AH introduced herself as a responsible Leaseholder, who has her boiler, gas cooker and gas fire checked because she cares for others.

JS also advised that sometime ago, Gas Fires were removed from Tenant properties, even though Tenants weren't advised at the time that this was optional. We are not aware whether, for those Tenants who decided to keep their gas fires, whether the Council is still servicing them. JS asked as a Council, whether Housing is aware if these are gas fires that have been turned off because they are not safe.

AH advised that when she was a Tenant before she became a Resident Leaseholder, her gas fire was taped because it was condemned for not being safe.

WM advised that gas fires are included in the current scope. The point of entry of all gas that supplies for all appliances is checked as part of the annual service and void process.

	<p>As part of Building safety requirements, the Council continues to pursue Leaseholders for copies of compliance certificates.</p> <p>CC has also advised that this is not part of the Tenancy Agreement but more the scope of works. HH if there are no arrangements for this is the current scope of works, if I decide to install a gas cooker, will the Council have any objections and arrange myself to have the cooker serviced. WM advised the Council has not objections. Important to note that if a new supply to the kitchen was required this would require the tenant to submit an application through the tenant alteration process.</p> <p>JS advised along time ago gar cookers were checked as part of the gas servicing but cannot say when all this stopped. WM advised she would check with HTS and report back.</p> <p>AH advised that the Leasehold Standards Panel have been working with HTS about providing this as a service with a cost attached. Therefore if this service can be offered to Leaseholders then It could also be offered to Tenants.</p> <p>SC has advised that the Council carry out Gas Servicing which is 100%. If they do find a fault, it is still marked as the gas service completed. However, a job is raised to follow up for any faults or further repairs.</p>	WM
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	<p>Wendy to take this discussion topic further with HTS and report back to the housing standards board at the next meeting.</p>	
<p>8.</p>	<p>Landlord Survey</p> <p>Normally when BMG completes the Landlord Survey, it produces a details report, and in the past, we have been advised by Representatives that this report is to high level and detailed. Therefore, we have produced a summary of the top headlines.</p> <p>Paper provided highlighting Methodology, Overall satisfaction, Tenant involvement and empowerment, Repairs satisfaction, Major works, Your community, Garages, Anti-Social Behaviour and Moving Homes.</p> <p>National Government introduced its new Tenant Satisfaction Measures as well as a new format of how we ask the questions, for example, in the past Housing, in conjunction with Reps removed the options of neither satisfied and dissatisfied as it was a mutual feeling these were dead responses as at the time there was no longer a statutory requirement to produce a Landlord Survey but at Harlow we felt it was best practice to continue but in a different format. However, these have been re-introduced again as of this recent survey, which then means we no longer can compare these results with the last few conducted surveys.</p> <p>On a positive note, we have been proactive in introducing the Tenant Survey Requirements set in the Government Publication a year early which now</p>	

	<p>means, when we conduct the survey next year, and collate the results, we now have something to compare them with.</p> <p>Moving forward, this also means that this survey will be carried out annually rather biennially. This high-level summary will also be taken to the Joint Property and Tenancy Standards Panel Meeting.</p>	ZKM
9.	<p>End of Year Performance</p> <p>WM and CS went through the end of your performance, KPIs.</p> <p>AH has asked what the definition was for bed and breakfast (B&B), CS advised that B & B is emergency hotel accommodation with is different to temporary accommodation. There is a limited time that families can stay in B & B, which is 6 weeks. Housing is currently working with private landlords so that we can secure more private rented properties for applicants.</p> <p>JS stated that we should be expecting better performance from Tunstalls. CS advised that this performance measure is currently being discussed with Tunstalls. D despite the dip in performance no resident has suffered as a result, and no complaints have been received about the service to date.</p>	

	<p>JS congratulated on the target being met on rent collection.</p> <p>HH advised that it was amazing to see the rent collection being where it is especially in the current climate. HH asked how this had been achieved in such a challenging year. CS advised that officers have been building relationships with tenants over a number of years and have been consistent and supportive in their approach to income recovery and only taking enforcement action when necessary. The board has asked that the teams involved be given recognition for their hard work.</p> <p>AH also mentioned how good the service charge recovery has been and added how well the home ownership team have been working.</p> <p>SC raised Voids performance, with a number of properties that can't be occupied. WM is working with HTS to see how they can utilise the workforce more productively.</p> <p>SC advised that 41 Stackfield, which had been void for six months was recently let. It was a long-standing void. WM explained the process of excluded voids.</p> <p>WM confirmed that the staff strikes at HTS has affected performance.</p>	CC/WM
10.	Current Consultations	

	<p>JS raised the consultation relating to the tenancy agreement and advised that tenant representatives had not received an update on how this was progressing. CS provided an update on the new tenancy agreement and the progress of the consultation carried out, including the extended period required due to the postal strikes. CS advised that the responses received are currently being reviewed and updated, but no fundamental changes as a result of the consultation have been made. ZKM advised that a verbal update on the tenancy agreement was provided at the March 23 Tenancy and Property Panel.</p>	<p>Noted</p>
<p>11</p>	<p>Formal questions and answers</p> <p>Responses from CS</p> <p>Jane Steer Questions</p> <p>Q1. Sycous billing and poor understanding of payments:</p> <p>Following concerns raised by residents over the layout of their heating and hot water consumption statements, we worked with Sycous to have these redesigned so that they were easier to read and understood. Unfortunately, for some reason, the old statement design was used for the April statement. We have been given assurances from Sycous that the new design statements will be available from June 2023. If there are residents that have specific concerns over payments or direct</p>	

debit mandates, they should initially contact Sycous call centre and if then dissatisfied with the response, to raise an enquiry through Contact Harlow.

Q2 Why the heating costs have doubled:

Energy prices since last April, have on average increased by 220%. Harlow have now had to put the tariffs up for consumption to reflect these increases, in line with the new energy contract.

Harlow has however, negotiated the usual bulk purchasing discounts and have reflected these in reducing the increase in the consumption charge to £0.1553p per KwH which is an increase of 158%

In addition to this Harlow and Sycous have worked together to reduce the daily rate charges from £0.546p per day to £0.483p per day a reduction of 12% daily.

The increase in consumption levies are an unfortunate circumstance of the supply and demand issues which are pushing up wholesale energy prices. The increase in gas prices started at the end of 2021 and was down to increased global demands, however Harlow have managed to defer price increases until this financial year despite these circumstances.

As Sycous rightly advise, they do not set the tariffs, they are purely a billing and collection agent on behalf of Harlow Council and Harlow are

responsible for the setting of tariffs, we only set these rates based upon the charges we incur and not to make any profit from residents.

In addition, we are actively encouraging customers to contact Sycous to ask for a “fixed payment plan” which can be arranged regardless of whether they are on a DD or not.

The idea being that Sycous will look at their historic consumption, apply this to the current tariff and calculate a monthly charge to account for this. This then allows the customer to have peace of mind in relation to how much to pay per month regardless of the statement due figure. This should then allow the tenant to build up a credit during the summer period and allow for any peaks in costs during the winter period. For information, the average recommended monthly payment is between £80 to £100 per month.

In addition, there is a government Energy Bill Support grant that residents can apply for if they do not have a direct relationship with an energy supplier. The application is an online form, which residents will need to complete. Whilst we cannot complete the forms for residents, we can provide support with this and have already provided all residents with details that that they can share with their families and friends for assistance. We also attend to carry out a further door knock with this

information this week to ensure all residents effected have the details to make the application if they wish to.

From Hugh Hoad:

- 1) The Improvement works at the Hides saw the flower bed by the side of the road of the underpass removed of planting and filled with new growing soil will the contractor be told to replant at no further to the council or will it be left as a weed bed?

This matter has been raised with the Project manager to investigate and remedy.

- 2) What was the cost of work carried out in the cancelled Five acres scheme,, will the HRA be reimbursed with this sum and when can tenants expect to get the work in the scheme carried out on their homes?

Total cost = £476K

Cost of aborting Cosmur contract – includes site set up costs etc £191,221

Cost of materials already purchased, stored pending commencement of works£271,296

Repairs to 7 – 17 Five Acres, - includes tiles, gutters etc. £ 13,742

Total £476,259

- 3) Will leaseholder be able to stop any further schemes like five acres in future?

In answer to the point about Five Acres. All works are subject to Section 20 Leasehold consultation and through the NOI and NOE

stages of the process leaseholders are consulted. If the Council deem the works are required and evidence component failure/Health and Safety concerns, then works proceed. The route of appeal is then through the FTT (Leasehold Tribunal Panel).

- 4) Who will be given priority for new council housing, when will it be available, and will it be suitable of the disabled?

All properties that are HDC owned or where HDC have nomination rights, will be allocated via the councils Housing Needs Register, under the Allocation Policy. If applicants have specific mobility needs, then properties are assessed via the Essex Occupational Therapists to see if the properties are suitable and whether adaptations can be made.

- 5) What is being done to ensure the sheltered house schemes decommissioned in 2008 are kept in good repair?

All assets are treated the same and works prioritised/aligned to the Asset Management Strategy and principles of the Housing Investment Programme.

Tenant Rep: Jane Steer

1. Follow up from Estate Walkabouts – WM confirmed that currently the practice is to record all information on an individual data base which the Housing Officer monitors. Later this year the new Orchard

	<p>Asset Management system will be introduced, this is going to be revolutionary as it will allow officers to enter data live and officers will be able to develop performance reports to track and monitor actions.</p> <p>2. Lighting in Sheltered Units – WM confirmed that Cllr Swords had already raised the issue of the lighting within Netteswellbury Farm and that the matters raised were being investigated by the Electrical Engineer at Latton Bush. The issue of the lighting times has been raised with HTS.</p>	
	<p>Any other Business</p> <p>None</p>	

The Date of the Next meeting is Monday 26 June 2023 beginning at 2pm in the Latton Bush Centre