

Property and Tenancy Standards Panel
Wednesday 18 June 2025
14.00 – 4.02pm Latton Bush Centre

ATTENDEES:

Tenants-

Celia Candy (CC), Jane Steer (JS), Lucy Cooper (LC),
Selina Ellis (EL), Frank Feldman (FF).

Harlow Council –

Zulfi Kiani-Mackintosh (ZKM), (Chair), Wayne Mitchell (WM),
Nicole Parker (NP), Nathan Kitteridge (NK), Emmanuel Nortey
(EN), Kelly Rees (KR) Bob Purton (BP)

HTS-

Debbie Hardy (DH), Shakeel Khan (SK)

1.	Welcome and Apologies	
	No apologies received.	Noted
2.	Minutes from previous meeting & matters arising	
	Minutes of previous meeting were agreed. It was noted that responses had been provided to questions raised at previous meeting regarding estate inspections (regarding the number of jobs picked up last year, referred jobs, and outstanding jobs). JS advised that the responses, and information provided in general, did not fully address the questions and lacked sufficient detail.	
3.	Repairs Policy	

	<p>BP provided a verbal update to the Panel in relation to the revised Repairs Policy in preparation for the policy being referred for Cabinet sign-off in September. It was agreed that the draft policy would be circulated with the minutes.</p> <p>BP advised that there had been some legislative changes which related to damp, mould and compliance issues, which had required review.</p> <p>BP set out the amendments made which had a clear emphasis on fire protection and tenant safety, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • annual fire door inspections • a strengthened approach to fire detection and alarm systems. • a commitment to using technology for enhanced safety. • a revised 'no access' process • target of 100% of stock surveys to be completed by Christmas 2025 • policy changes aligned with broader tenant safety objectives. <p>BP and ZKM advised that suggestions were welcomed, as part of the engagement process.</p> <p>JS raised a concern regarding no access processes and enforcement measures, in relation to letters sent to residents who are dyslexic/ partially sighted. JS noted that in such cases, failure to ensure that letters</p>	

	<p>had been sent in correct font size, or in a way that could be read by tenants, would be a defence to any court action. It was accepted that this was an issue, but should be assisted by identifying support needs through the tenancy audit programme. WM also advised that such issues should be identified through equality impact assessments prior to any court proceedings being issued.</p> <p>FF asked whether battery-operated smoke alarms are sufficient to use. BP advised the new alarms will exceed regulations, but that the council cannot force leaseholders to use them. It was noted however that we will try and offer encouragement to leaseholders. BP advised that he would find out when Potter Street were on the programme of works.</p>	BP
4.	Update on the Landlord Survey – Tenant Satisfaction Measures for 2024-25	
	<p>ZKM set out the key findings of the report.</p> <p>749 responses were received (611 online and 138 postal). ZKM advised that the process of gathering this information had been different for this year, with an online survey, along with a postal service option for any residents who wished to use this. A key driver for this change had been the high cost of a fully postal survey, which had previously been the method used.</p> <p>It was noted that a major benefit of this change had been that the council had received many more</p>	

	<p>responses from a wider age range, and that this had been more indicative of the demographic of our tenants.</p> <p>In particular it was noted that in previous years, only about 3% of 30-49 year olds had responded, while for this year, this had increased to 40%.</p> <p>It was also suggested that the change in collection method had been a major factor in the reduction in satisfaction, which had been noted in the report.</p> <p>It was also suggested that, due to the change in collection method, next years results would hopefully allow for a more accurate comparison.</p>	
5.	Update on Building Safety Engagement Strategy	
	<p>ZKM explained the background to the creation of the High-Rise Building Safety Engagement Strategy working group, and the Strategy itself.</p> <p>ZKM explained that the strategy will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the information provided to residents regarding Building Safety (BS). • confirming which decisions would be subject to consultation. • how consultation would be conducted and how feedback would be collected. • Plans for residents who require assistance during fire emergencies in flat blocks are already in place. (PEEP's - Personal 	

	<p>Emergency Evacuation Plans)</p> <p>It was noted that the PEEP format does not require information to be stored regarding residents with children, as this was not prescribed by the Regulator.</p> <p>LC raised concerns regarding this, but NK explained that the information to be kept was dictated by the Regulator/ Government and not by Harlow Council. It was noted however that the councils strategy was a living document and would evolve over time, and would take into account any changes that may be introduced by the Regulator.</p> <p>It was noted that the Leasehold Panel was also scheduled for that evening, where the strategy would be discussed before then being presented to the Housing Standards Board. ZKM will then explore how the strategy will be finalised and outline the process for doing so.</p> <p>JS asked how many residents would be affected by the strategy. This information was not to hand, but WM noted that this could be provided.</p>	
6.	Estates walkabout	WM
	<p>JS asked for this to be added to the agenda on a regular basis.</p> <p>JS stated that the documents and information provided were not fit for purpose as they were too detailed and not in a suitable format to allow for proper consideration.</p>	

	<p>NK advised that all information provided was relevant and needed to be included. WM also noted that some issues with the formatting could be a printing issue, when using larger font, rather than a content issue.</p> <p>It was noted that the sheet showed the properties 10-11 Netteswellbury Farm as having communal heating, even though these were individual properties so would not have communal heating. EN advised that he would investigate this.</p> <p>An issue was raised regarding use of Tort Notices, as the document referred to a notice being served in a case where it was stated that this was not applicable. This issue had already been raised and resolved.</p> <p>LC raised a question regarding responsibility for communal gardens. NK advised that the Council does not routinely maintain these and therefore doesn't charge residents for this. The hope is that residents will collectively maintain the areas for their enjoyment but unfortunately for some blocks this doesn't happen. Where this is the case, once the Council is aware we will write to the block and ask them to tidy it, if this doesn't work we will intervene with a one off clearance and then write to the block asking them to maintain it moving forward. Unfortunately some blocks are visited every year as no one looks after them and it is not enforceable.</p> <p>LC advised that she would like to see the maintenance contract for HTS. It was noted that this may be available via a Freedom of Information (FOI)</p>	<p>EN</p>
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	request, but some financial details may be withheld.	
7.	Temp Accommodation	
	It was agreed that this would be discussed along with the Housing Performance KPI's item.	
8.	Housing Performance KPI'S	
	<p><u>HTS Performance</u></p> <p>SK went through the performance report for HTS and answered any questions at the meeting.</p> <p>It was noted that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tree inspections had fallen short of target due to staff shortages . • Urgent repairs fell slightly below target in April. 27 jobs missed the target. But currently, HTS are back on target. • The Customer Service Report had identified that complaints had increased last year. Key issues were identified through the report about the need for more resources for roof works. • The volume of complaints are currently lower, with a reduction from 70 a month to 40. • Stage 2 complaint escalations are now being addressed with a new process. 	

- Councillor enquiries had also increased which mostly related to dumped rubbish reports.
- Plaudits are now being recorded differently.

Harlow Council performance

WM & NK went through the performance report for Housing Services and answered any questions at the meeting.

WM advised that:

- In relation to overall percentage of income collected the end of year target of 98% had been exceeded, with 98.5% being recovered which was a strong performance. It was also noted that this had been a 53 week year, which brought specific difficulties, but the target was still met.
- While Former Tenant Arrears target had not been met, it was noted that these were historically low levels for Harlow Council. It was also noted that performance in this area had been impacted by a number of properties which had been returned to the council with very high levels of arrears.
- Target for garage arrears had also been met, although it was accepted that performance remained linked to the dates on Direct Debits

and monthly standing orders were received. It was also noted however that we have less garages this year than previous years. This years target had now been reduced from £20,000 to £18,000.

It was noted that temporary accommodation arrears had been an issue for most of the year, with an increase of 60% of temporary accommodation this year, which has led to a larger amount of arrears. This increase had been unforeseeable as it was not possible to predict demand for temporary accommodation. The target had now been increased significantly, and reports would be provided to the Panel in relation to performance in this area moving forward.

WM advised that the Rent Team was working closely with Housing Options to seek to improve performance in this area, where this was within the councils control.

NK advised that the void turnaround times had increased in the past year. Reasons were provided within the report narrative but were largely due to an increase in the number of weekly voids being received, and a larger than usual number of properties being returned due to tenant deaths. The standard of the voids has also been poorer, meaning there is more work to get these back to a fit state to be re-let. The historical refusal of decent homes works (i.e. kitchens and bathrooms) by elderly tenants was discussed as an example. Work is

	ongoing with HTS to reduce the total amount of voids that there are and there is a process review ongoing with HTS to change the way voids are managed which should also help to reduce the turnaround time.	
9.	Current Consultation	
	None	
10.	AOB	
	ZKM advised that the latest minutes from the Sheltered Housing Panel had been provided to the group. He noted that hopefully we will receive these going forward.	
11.	Communicating with tenants	
	<p>JS raised concerns that some HTS staff did not know what a Tenant Representative was. She also stated that officers within the Supported Housing Team had advised that they had no knowledge of what tenant reps are.</p> <p>It was noted that there had been a number of changes within Supported Housing, but that WM had been in liaison with the new Supported Housing Manager, and the Supported Housing Team would soon be moving to join the rest of the Housing Management team in the Harlow Civic Centre which would assist in ensuring consistency in such issues.</p> <p>JS again noted an issue with a letter she had</p>	

	<p>received from HTS, noting that the font was too small. DH advised that the letter had been revised since then and that this may have been a formatting issue. JS was concerned that this did not meet the requirements of the Consumer Standards and needed to be addressed.</p> <p>JS also noted that there were minutes missing on the Harlow Council website and had contacted ZKM to investigate. JS said she was awaiting a response from the Communications Team which she had not received. ZKM clarified that the issue was due to the incorrect date being on the minutes, not that they were not uploaded. This has now been corrected and updated.</p>	
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