

Property and Tenancy Standards Panel
Wednesday 18th September 2024
14.00 – Latton Bush Centre

ATTENDEES:

Tenants-

Celia Candy (CC), Frank Feldman (FF), Jane Steer (JS), Jo West (JW) Selena Ellis (SE), Lucy Cooper (LC), Hugh Hoad (HH).

Harlow Council –

Zulfi Kiani-Mackintosh (ZKM) (Chair), David Carter – Councillor (DC), Wayne Mitchell (WM), Nathan Kitteridge (NK), Patsy Kehoe (Minute Taker).

HTS-

Gavin Jackson (GJ), Debbie Hardy (DH).

1.	Welcome and Apologies	
	Cheryl Hickey (CH) – Tenant, Shakeel Khan (SK) – HTS, Gina Patten – HTS.	Noted
2.	Minutes from previous meeting & matters arising	
	<p><u>Street Lamps</u> - this had been raised at previous panels, and reported to Essex County Council. It was confirmed that Essex County Council were responsible for prioritising works.</p> <p><u>Tenant representative training</u> - ZKM advised he had</p>	

	<p>contacted (HQN?) regarding arranging finance and was awaiting confirmation of available dates</p> <p><u>Consumer Standards/ Tenant Satisfaction Measures.</u> ZKM advised that Housing Assistant Directors (Cara Stevens and Richard Oliver) were meeting regarding these, and a gap analysis was being undertaken and that an update would be provide to the Panel.</p> <p>DH referred to being unable to identify issue with roof leak at 70 Orchard Croft which had been raised at previous panel – JS confirmed this related to a property, rather than a garage.</p>	<p>Ongoing Action ZKM</p> <p>Action DH</p>
3.	Estate Walkabouts	
	<p>JS advised that she would like a breakdown of the estates already visited on Estate Walkabouts, with details of the number of issues picked up in each estate and the dates for when works were to be completed.</p> <p>NK explained at the end of the year there would be information in easier formats, it will be compiled around end of October, and would be sent out to look at and discuss before next meeting.</p>	<p>Action NK</p>
4.	Energy Certificates	
	<p>JS asked what steps were taken by the council to improve energy ratings within properties where identified in an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC),</p>	

	<p>i.e to improve a properties rating from a C to a B.</p> <p>NK mentioned a number of methods the Council uses to improve EPC ratings including loft insulation improvements and installation of central heating systems where these are not present.</p> <p>NK advised that voids have an EPC undertaken and these improvement works will be undertaken whilst vacant but tenanted properties are visited when the EPC expires and the work carried out in situ. Larger improvements like cavity wall insulation are only done on a programmed basis. Some tenants resist improvements due to concerns over fuel poverty etc for example those who have storage heaters sometimes do not want us to install a gas central heating system as it is another meter they have to pay standing charge on and another bill they have to worry about.</p> <p>Housing Officers and TSO's will do their best to convince them however this isn't always possible and the Council doesn't at this point enforce these improvement works through legal measures. The Council applies for Grant funding for many of these improvements</p> <p>NK suggested arranging for Claire Battelley or Kelly Clegg from the Compliance Team to attend Panel to discuss programmes and properties - Panel agreed this would be helpful.</p> <p>JS asked what the situation was regarding radiators?</p> <p>NK mentioned that central heating system</p>	<p>Action NK</p>
--	--	------------------------------------

	<p>replacements would be on a programmed basis however individual radiator failures would be dealt with by HTS.</p> <p>JS mentioned sheltered complexes on communal boilers where the boiler has been renewed but they have not replaced the radiators so these do not provide enough heat.</p> <p>NK advised Housing Property Services Team would be able to arrange an assessment to check the radiators in situ have enough output to be able to heat the space they are in and if they aren't they will recommend upgrades or additional radiators.</p>	
5.	Vulnerable Tenants – Support for collecting large items and Housing Inspections	
	<p><u>Collection of large items</u></p> <p>JS raised issues regarding what assistance was available to vulnerable tenants when they needed large items collecting from the property. JS advised that some tenants were unable to move items from their homes, but Veolia would not remove items from within the boundary of properties, and would not collect Heavy Squad items from properties above ground floor.</p> <p>WM advised that this issue had recently been raised, following a case where tenant had been unable to move items downstairs for Veolia to collect. In that case, the issue had been raised to the Director for</p>	

	<p>Environment, and had been resolved by HTS removing the items following request from Housing. JS asked if HTS were doing the job, why should Veolia be paid?</p> <p>JS advised that when calling Contact Harlow to book bulky item collections, customers are told that they are required to leave the items in a certain place, otherwise it will not be collected. JS felt that this was discriminating against tenants who were physically unable to move the items, especially to boundaries downstairs. JS advised that some residents near her had phoned to request help in moving items from their garden, but were offered no help. Also some tenants could not afford cost of heavy squad removals (£33.00)</p> <p>It was noted that Veolias responsibilities were set out in their waste collection contract with the council, and that collections were subject to their risk assessments and insurance, which did not include entering properties. Items were therefore required to be left on boundaries for collection.</p> <p>WM advised that the council was aware of its duties to consider reasonable adjustments for customers who were affected by disabilities, and in cases where tenants were unable to move items themselves, they should speak to their Housing Officer or a Team Leader to consider what alternative options may be available.</p> <p>WM and NK advised that they would raise the issue with Contact Harlow to ensure that queries were put</p>	<p>Action WM/NK</p>
--	--	---------------------------------------

through to officers in these circumstances.

Where items were left in flat blocks or communal areas, and were considered a fire hazard, these would be addressed by use of Tort Notices in line with Housing processes. WM advised that in these circumstances, and where HTS were required to remove the items, Housing would recharge the tenant, where this was considered appropriate.

Housing Inspections – Vulnerable tenants

JS noted that the council was undertaking an increasing number of inspections of its properties, and wanted to know what additional support was available for vulnerable tenants who may not be comfortable with strangers wandering around their home, and how we would contact these customers in advance to ensure they were given the support needed.

WM advised that this was one reason why the council's tenancy audit programme was so important, as this would help in knowing our customers, and making us aware of tenants' specific support requirements.

WM noted that, in relation to tenancy audits, the letter that is sent out pre visit asks tenants to contact the Council if they have any questions regarding the process. The council would look to accommodate any support required i.e. if the tenant wished for a family member or friend to be present while the visit took place, or if they were more comfortable with a particular gender of officer carrying out the inspection.

	<p>JS asked if an article could be included within Harlow Times regarding this, highlighting that tenants can contact the council to discuss concerns they may have regarding visits taking place. WM advised that this would be considered for a future edition. It was also suggested that this was something that could be highlighted on quarterly rent statements.</p> <p>LC advised that the council did not always listen to customers and that this could be harmful for vulnerable people, including those who may have experienced abuse.</p> <p>WM advised that Housing Officers are aware of the importance of considering reasonable adjustments, and have received training in dealing with victims of domestic abuse, and that training has also taken place across the council.</p> <p>HH asked whether information regarding collection of large items could also be included in Harlow Times. It was considered this may not be appropriate as Harlow Times was sent to all residents of Harlow, and Housing could only consider requests made by council tenants.</p>	<p>Action WM</p>
6.	Annual Report	
	<p>ZKM mentioned that the Annual Report is for 23/24 has followed the Consumer Standards approach,</p>	

	<p>some new items have been added which includes Tenancy Support, Green Future, charts/diagrams and more colour. This report will remain a working progress project and may further change next year. Production of Harlow Times has changed and therefore the deadline dates were very tight and had to work fast as the report is to be published in the Autumn 2024 edition of Harlow Times instead of Spring edition of 2025.</p> <p>ZKM advised the aim is to make the Report less wordier and more pictures and statistical information and colour. Had to keep certain stuff in, tenant involvement and empowerment. Aim next year to make less wordy and more graphical.</p>	
7.	Housing Performance KPIs	
	<p><u>HTS Performance</u></p> <p>DH went through the performance report for HTS and answered any questions at the meeting.</p> <p><u>Housing Performance</u></p> <p>WM and NK went through the performance report for Housing Services and answered any questions at the meeting.</p>	
8.	Discussion around joint charring – Officer and A Tenant/Leaseholder Representative	

	<p>ZKM advised that this had been discussed at previous panel, and confirmed that the Council did not have an issue with chairing being shared. ZKM reminded the Panel however that whichever representative decided to take on the role of chairing would not be able to participate in the meeting as an attendee.</p> <p>It was agreed that at present there were insufficient tenant representatives to spare a representative to chair, but that this should be revisited after the local elections next year.</p>	
9.	Any Other Business	
	<p>JS stated that she had previously informed the council that her personal mobile phone number was not to be used to contact her, and that she should be contacted on her landline. Despite this council departments had been attempting to contact her on her mobile phone.</p> <p>JS provided a letter withdrawing permission for the council or HTS to retain her mobile phone number, WM advised that he would get this circulated.</p>	Action WM
	Date of next meeting – 8 January 2025 beginning at 2pm in the Blue Room at the Latton Bush Centre	