

Property and Tenancy Standards Panel
Wednesday 26 October 2022
14.00 – Latton Bush Centre

ATTENDEES:

Tenants-

Jane Steer (JS), Celia Candy (CC), Jo West (JW), Selena Ellis (SE), Frank Feldman (FF), Bin Nguyen (BN)

Harlow Council –

Cara Stevens (CS), Emmanuel Nortey (EN), Wayne Mitchell (WM), Zulfi Kiani-Mackintosh (ZKM)(Chair), Lucy Collins (LC) (Minutes)

Visitor-

Damien Roach (DR)

1.	Welcome and Apologies	
	None	Noted
2.	Minutes from previous meeting & matters arising	
	JS asked if the residents of Netteswellbury Farm could have a green bin for gardening as, although they pay for a gardener in their Service Charge the gardening isn't getting done. The tenants are happy to do the gardening but need the bin – CS advised that	

<p>Supported Housing have confirmed that all sheltered schemes, including Netteswellbury Farm, will be receiving a green waste bin for use by all in the scheme. CS confirmed that all green bins have now been delivered to all sheltered schemes.</p>	<p>Noted</p>
<p>JS brought up the subject of the missing bollard outside the bin cupboard at The Stow which is allowing residents to get through the gap and park their cars outside the cupboard itself which restricts the Bin men being able to access and empty the bins – Confirmation was received on the 11 November 2022, that the new bollards have now been fitted.</p>	<p>Noted</p>
<p>JS reported that HTS had advised her that the repairs timescale is faster for vulnerable residents but only for internal works and not external. Can the time scales be changed, such as heating being stuck on and water leaks as both cost residents' money until fixed and with rising bills this is concerning? Response received as follows: In terms of the vulnerable category and where this is applied this was set out within the response given and heating was covered within the response. With regards to request for external repairs to be included would be assessed against the vulnerability of the resident and again this would depend on the vulnerability type and the repair being reported. It would not be possible to agree in general terms to all external repairs for vulnerable tenants being classified as a priority.</p>	

	<p>JS brought up the subject of the new company who are dealing with the meter reading and collection of payments for the district heating scheme. There has been some confusion with the final billing going out to residents – CS explained that Harlow Council are working with Sycous to check figures before final bills are sent, and 2 letters will be going out in the next few weeks – 1 for those in credit advising how this balance will be taken onto their new account and 1 for those in arrears with options to discuss this with Harlow Council on how to manage the debt. CS updated that Sycous started in April and have been holding surgeries in each scheme to support the residents through the transition, with 12 done so far and although some thought this would be a really difficult process it has been a huge success. In terms of collection performance, at the end of Q2 (September) of the 655 residents that now have new meters, 72 accounts are in credit, 382 had 0 balance and 201 have a small arrears but 75% of accounts in arrears have already entered into repayment plans.</p> <p>SE feels that Spencers Croft needs a one-way-system. CS advised that Park Authority investigate this. CS confirmed that a referral has been made to the Property Facilities and Projects for this proposal to be considered.</p>	<p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p>
3.	Performance update	
	Housing Key Performance Indicators (KPI) for August 2022.	

	<p>WM reported that Rent collection performance is tracking 2021/2022 figures, although the team are still dealing with backlogs from the pandemic and subsequent delays in Court processes. Harlow District Council give ample opportunity for tenants to work with us to pay rent.</p> <p>JS commented that HDC should be commended on their performance under the circumstances.</p> <p>WM reported that the Former Tenant Arrears has a challenging target for this year but expects to eliminate the gap by the end of the financial year.</p> <p>WM advised that Garage Arrears are on target. This depends heavily on Direct Debits but is tracking just under target for the financial year.</p> <p>WM commented that Temporary Accommodation arrears was another difficult area. The pandemic stopped HDC using Shared Accommodation and Court Cases also influenced delays.</p> <p>CS highlighted issues with voids over the pandemic and it is expected to take another 2 years to recover back to pre-pandemic target figures. In terms of allocations, whilst staff resources continue to be a risk, a recovery plan is in place which is monitored closely in line with performance figures. We are hoping to see noticeable improvements around the end of November. There are currently about 5300 people on the Housing Needs register, with 40 offers awaiting allocation. JS said HDC are doing really well.</p>	<p>Noted</p>
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	CS reported that HDC hold over 8,000 garages and 3,000 hard standings and has a current programme to make many of the smaller garages bigger. Due to the cost-of-living garages are being given up and many are allowed to be used for storage if the local authority approve.	
4.	Landlord Survey	
	ZKM talked through the Landlord Survey Update provided. ZKM is working with BMG and will take the updated survey to the Housing Standards Board. The aim is to get the questionnaire ready for 1 st mailing in December 2022.	
5.	Review of Tenancy Agreement - Update	
	WM advised that the Tenancy Agreement was last reviewed in 2012, so we are now undertaking a review to ensure it is still 'Fit for purpose' and to future proof to support both the tenants and HDC. Once a draft agreement is ready, this will be discussed with the Portfolio Holder, and then a task and finish group will be established with tenant nominees before the full legal consultation commences with all tenants. The aim is to get the agreement approved as part of the HRA business Plan in February 2023 to commence with effect from April 2023. JS and BN nominated themselves to the Task and finish group. Date to be arranged.	
6.	Review of the Tenant and Leaseholder	

Engagement Service - Update	
<p>(1) Context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extensive review carried out in 2015 by HQN – produced involvement strategy 2015-18 • Due to pandemic, did not carry out an external review, but did review strategy and model for engagement – new strategy 2020-23 was the outcome <p>(2) The objectives of this review are multi-faceted and includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An assessment of whether the aims of the latest strategy have been implemented and whether they have increased satisfaction • To ensure that your current involvement strategy aligns with the Council's Customer Service Strategy and overall Community Engagement Strategy and forms a golden thread • To assess the extent to which you are compliant with the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill – and what actions you need to take to ensure you are ready for its likely passage into an Act of Parliament. This not only relates to the revision of the consumer standards, but also the implementation of tenant satisfaction measures (TSMs) and the possibility of a 	

	<p>future inspection of your service KEY POINT – Harlow’s approach is tenure neutral so will look from leasehold perspective</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How you have responded – from an engagement perspective – to the various building safety requirements that have come about following the Grenfell Tower tragedy • To review your current communication tools and understand positive practice elsewhere in the use of communication tools, especially in e-engagement • To understand how you can better engage with traditionally hard to reach residents, including younger residents and, potentially, get them more formally involved • To review your approach to resident scrutiny to ensure it is delivering to expectations. <p>(3) Current strategy – six key aims of latest strategy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing opportunities for involvement • Increasing the numbers and representativeness of engaged residents • Improving the information and communications to all residents • Influencing strategic decisions • Holding Housing Services to account 	
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compliance with the RSH consumer standards <p>(4) What I'll be doing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desktop review of documentation • Attending formal meetings • Interviewing key people – councillors, colleagues, residents 	
7.	Consultations	
	None	
8.	Any other business	
	<p>JS asked how many issues are picked up and how many issues resolved when the Estate Housing Officers do their walk abouts. EN to respond.</p> <p>JS commented that the complaints procedure has been changed and disappointed that the panel were not consulted.</p> <p>CS advised that it was corporately changed by ombudsman/standards/regulations.</p> <p>JS didn't know about the Persistent and Vexatious complaint existed and hadn't received a copy of it.</p> <p>CS advised that it has existed previously and is used by HDC officers not residents.</p> <p>WM advised that in future any updates to this are passed on.</p>	<p>EN</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p>

	<p>JS asked why more than 1 person must report an issue with District Heating before it is investigated, even when it's been reported by a plumber. CS will take this back to HTS.</p> <p>JS asked why with more and more people on Water Meters that when there is a leak and water is pumping out that the tenant must pay for that even though they've reported it and waiting for HTS to attend. Can we make water leaks a higher priority or can the drains under sinks be made more robust as currently plastic and not good. CS will take this to Wendy Makepeace</p> <p>JS asked if HDC have considered notifying residents about Broadband Social Tariff. This is cheaper than standard tariff. A suggestion has been send to Communications for the Winter Edition of Harlow Times.</p> <p>JS asked if all employees have claimed all they can for Working from Home. TV money man Martin Lewis says many people aren't. CS advised that all staff have been made aware and it is on the HDC staff website.</p> <p>SE has photos of traffic issues and skip lorries causing estate issues. EN took the photos and will investigate this.</p> <p>BN advised that Veoila are leaving the emptied bins on pavements causing issues. CS advised this needs to be reported through to Contact Harlow when it</p>	<p>CS</p> <p>WM</p> <p>EN</p>
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	happens so it can be recorded and passed to Veoila to action.	
	Next Meeting – Wednesday 11 January 2023	