

Property and Tenancy Standards Panel
Wednesday 7th June 2023
14.00 – Latton Bush Centre

ATTENDEES:

Tenants-

Celia Candy (CC), Jane Steer (JS), Jo West (JW), Frank Feldman (FF), Hugh Hoad (HH)

Harlow Council –

Zulfi Kiani-Mackintosh (ZKM) (Chair), Nathan Kitteridge (NK), Wayne Mitchell (WM), Patsy Kehoe (PK) (Minute Taker)

HTS-

Shakeel Khan (SK), Debbie Hardy (DH)

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| 1. | Welcome and Apologies | |
| | Selena Ellis (SE) Gina Patten (GP) | Noted |
| 2. | Minutes from previous meeting & matters arising | |
| | ZKM asked if everyone was happy with previous? JS advised that there is still a bike under tarpaulin outside No 6 The Stow. NK to look into and update. | NK |
| | JS also pointed out that the drains outside 5 – 9 were still not done properly. SK to deal with. | SK |

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| 3. | Performance Update from Harlow Council and HTS | |
| | <p>SK presented HTS Key Performance Indicators (KPI) report for March. Advised that KPI for trees/routine works not met, highlighting difficulty in employing tree arborists. Action plan in place to address backlog. All Housing repairs are green within target.</p> <p>JS advised that there is nothing for disabled/separate timescales for disabled. SK advised that HTS prioritises service for residents with disability/vulnerability where it is noted on file however when there is no record then evidence needs to be provided to decide if disabled/vulnerable. JS asked what kind of evidence and where is this stored? The council need a better system to decipher who is disabled on record. SK advised to take doctors/medical letters into Civic, they will then email HTS with a request for priority service. HTS will then add an attribute to the main repair's system highlighting the need for priority service. SK reassured that HC will not keep detailed medical record but a simple approval for priority service so personal medical records are not shared.</p> <p>JS mentioned that HTS do not understand when</p> | <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> |

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| | <p><u>Councillor enquiries:</u> There were 45 enquiries in March mainly related to repairs. The report provides examples. JS, HH & CC advised that they cannot read the small print. ZKM advised if SK & DH send this to him, he will distribute in a larger font.</p> <p>HH asked for update on Greenhills roofing repairs next door. JS advised that lots of people with repairs outstanding, previous questions not done, drains not cleared, caretakers do not do their job properly, It needs to be done as dangerous underfoot. ZKM asked DH to look into this please. DH advised she will take up with Steve Evans.</p> <p>JS thanked NK for chasing jobs up, as they got done but there is a post leaning against the wall, plants obscuring it, can NK sort this.</p> <p>Health & Safety - SK discussed Health & Safety, no incident for 13 months and HTS achieved 3 million working hours without a reportable incident, which is a great performance.</p> <p>Right First Time Report - DH presented the Right First Time Report – 2,948 repairs carried out with 99.32% of repairs completed Right First Time. JW advised her neighbour had leaky guttering, water pouring out, she has reported it many times but nothing has been done. DH asked for the address. JW advised it is 51 East Park. DH advised that HTS priority is water ingress at the moment.</p> | <p>DH</p> <p>DH</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> |
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| | <p>managing temporary accommodation arrears cases continued to be court hearing delays, giving an example of an ongoing case involving squatters which had taken 9 months to get a hearing date. WM advised that a complaint had been made to the Court regarding the delay, and upheld, but the Court had refused to allocate an earlier hearing. WM advised that this is outside of the Councils control as dependent on court timescales. JS asked how many TA cases had been waiting with Court? WM advised that at end of year there had been 5 with around £16,000 arrears. JS asked if WM could bring figure next time. WM agreed to do so.</p> <p>WM advised that while the council are adapting the way they deal with temporary accommodation arrears, they require a Court order to remove occupants. . HH asked if it was due to tenants on benefits? WM advised that while some tenants do not claim benefits, which causes issues, issues can also arise where the Council discharges its homeless duty to applicants, following which the tenant may cease payments as they know they have to leave.</p> <p>JW asked if there are any illegal immigrants to house, and do we house them?WM advised that it is difficult to define illegal immigrant, but we do have some Afghanistan refugees in hotels. FF asked what is percentage of rent increase each year? WM advised 7% this year. WM noted cost of living pressures meanttenants were prioritising what they spent money on, and while Council continued to apply its “can’t pay/ won’t pay” approach, there seemed increasing numbers falling into the “can’t</p> | <p>WM</p> |
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| | <p>No of Garage Voids</p> <p><u>NK advised that team had met target at end of year, with garage voids reduced to 1924, against target of 1950.</u></p> <p><u>NK noted that the garage team was working well but that garage lets were down, as had let all the garages for which there was a demand. NK and Wendy Makepeace were now looking at garage areas where there was low demand to consider potential options.</u></p> <p>, Noted that a lot of this was down to the specific desire of what a tenant wanted, which was sometimes one specific garage or block close to house. JS said well done to Garage Team!</p> <p>4. Landlord Survey – BMG</p> <p>BMG is the Independent Company that carry's out the independent biennial Landlord Survey on behalf of Housing Services. 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 and to operational based and rather bringing this to meeting, to produce and bring a summary of the top headlines.</p> <p>Attached is a summary, a little high level but included in this is a Methodology, Overall satisfaction, Tenant involvement and empowerment, Repairs satisfaction, Major works, Your community, Garages, Anti-Social</p> | <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> |
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| | <p>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.</p> <p>However these have been re-introduces again as part of the new Tenant Satisfaction Measures and incorporated in the recent carried out survey, which then means we no longer can compare these results with the last few conducted surveys.</p> <p>However, on a positive note, we have been proactive in introducing the Tenant Survey Requirements set in the Government Publication a year early which now 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 now that this survey will be carried out annually rather biennially, also, as a Service, we need to ascertain whether we need to continue to send out a questionnaire of 60 questions or we reduce this as there continues to be a cost element to this which is a discussion to have with BMG.</p> | <p>Noted</p> |
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This High Level Summary has been to the Housing Standards Board and now taken to the Joint Property and Tenancy Standards Panel Meeting for us to review and look at whether further involvement is required. It has also been taken to the LSP for your information only to keep them aware.

However, as you may recall, I also brought you an update on the Governments newly introduced Tenant Satisfaction Measure a couple of meetings ago. I can advise Housing are progressing and working hard to ensure all the business processes are in place to ensure the service and systems internally are ready by 1 April 2024 for us to be ready to begin working on publishing the first amount of data.

5. Tenancy Agreement Update

WM apologised for delay in updating panel on progress, following end of consultation process. WM advised that the draft agreements had been sent out in December, with the consultation period extended until February as a result of the postal strikes.

Following the end of consultation the variation had been approved by Cabinet in February with delegated authority given to the Housing Portfolio Holder to agree the final draft.

WM advised that some changes had been made following consultation, but that the Council was

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| | <p>seeking further advice in regard to one issue that had been raised prior to preparing report for Portfolio Holder. WM noted the importance of getting this right to seek to avoid need to review agreement again in near future.</p> <p>WM confirmed Panel would be updated when agreement had been finalised .</p> <p>HH stated that on rent statement/service charge there was a window cleaning charge but that he did not receive this service, and asked why he is paying for this? DH advised that for former sheltered schemes this charge applied to cleaning of windows in common areas only i.e in the common rooms. WM advised that there was a process for raising service charge queries if tenants did not believe they were receiving these services.. JW mentioned that the service charges are not itemised. WM advised that breakdowns of service charges were part of the annual rent increase letters</p> | Noted |
| 6. | <p>Universal Credit (Verbal Update)</p> <p>WM provided update on Council tenants who had claimed Universal Credit. 3391 tenants in receipt of UC at 2/4/2023 (38% of Council tenancies) with 65% of claimants showing arrears. Debt owed by UC claimants of £758,504, just over , half of total arrears owed. WM noted that , while some UC claimants still have high cases, these are in line with non-UC tenants, and the issue is that once arrears reach a high level, it takes a considerable time to clear</p> | |

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| | <p>arrears where an agreement or Court order is made for repayments. JW asked if council pay the court fee? WM advised yes, but that this is generally ordered to be repaid to the Council by the tenant. WM asked whether the Panel felt that this information was still required, as UC information had originally been provided due to concerns regarding the impact on arrears as a result of the way payments were made. Following changes being made to UC payment methods, there were no longer significant delays in payments being made, with payments of housing costs and arrears being aligned to claimants payment dates, and UC claimants levels of arrears were now lower than the average for all tenants. JS advised that while at the time the information had been useful, the Panel did not need UC update anymore and thanked everyone for their hard work.</p> | |
| 7. | <p>Nominations for the Housing Standards Board</p> <p>ZKM Carried out the process for nominations for the Housing Standards Board .</p> | Noted |
| 8. | <p>Estate Walkabout</p> <p>JS asked why have we only just received this? ZKM advised that it is on the website. NK mentioned that an article is normally placed in Harlow Times which referred to where the timetable can be found on the website. NK advised the timetable is normally finalised at the beginning of the year. ZKM has asked NK once the timetable is finalised, if he can</p> | |

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| | then send to him for him to distribute to all involved Representatives in future. NK has agreed this. | |
| 9. | Scrutiny Process – how and when (Discussion) | |
| | <p>ZKM mentioned that he was asked to add this by JS. JS mentioned that they don't know and ideas in advance, therefore cannot scrutinise.</p> <p>ZKM advised that it is not the role of the Housing Standards Panels to decide on what to scrutinise as this is the role of the Housing Standards Board and they send to the panel. JS mentioned that nothing has been done, we should look at the Harlow Times that we pay for, this is not good value for money, the closing of the cash desk at the Civic was good value for money and the closing of the toilets on the ground floor in the Civic, there was no consultation when these were removed, we can not go to the Civic for meetings now. ZKM agreed but mentioned these should be raised at the Housing Standards Board and are not in the remit of this meeting.</p> <p>WM advised that the cash desk & ground floor toilet were a corporate decision, and this is not for Housing. JS mentioned that Housing was mostly affected as residents go into the Civic Centre.</p> <p>HH mentioned that residents used to go into the Civic Centre for years, but they cannot now as no toilet or cash desk. ZKM explained the historic reasons to why scrutiny arrangements have been linked to the Housing Standard Panels and the decision that was</p> | |

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| | <p>made in conjunction with Reps to bring these to this Panel. With the previous arrangements, Housing would have had to have a separate Panel for Scrutiny, which they advertised for but once volunteers realised it was a non-paid role they no longer were interested. Also, as far as the scrutiny arrangements are concerned, tenant reps would not be able to be on both a Housing Standards Panels and Scrutiny Panel, we discuss on this panel, landlords should have a separate scrutiny panel. JS advised that this has not worked. ZKM advised that it was the decision made at the time and Reps were consulted.</p> <p>. ZKM again advised the purpose of scrutiny would be an adhoc function and it would be the Housing Standards Board that would decide on what needs to be scrutinised and to which Panel it would send this piece of work to be scrutinised, we have to be guided by processes. ZKM advised the Reps if they feel they would like to discuss these arrangements further, then it will need to be raised at the Housing Standards Board.</p> | <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> |
| 10. | Written Correspondence Issues | |
| | <p>JS stated that she was supposed to have 5 working days to look at the paperwork for this meeting but only gets it last minute, JS is very dissatisfied and was considering complaining.</p> <p>ZKM advised that the paperwork goes out first class and he always tries to get it out as soon as it is</p> | <p>Noted</p> |

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| | <p>ready, there have been postal strikes and delays to post which are out of his hands. However, to be more proactive, as soon as paperwork is ready now, moving forward, this could mean half of the paperwork may be sent out earlier when ready and the rest to follow on occasions to ensure Reps are given plenty of time to read the paperwork. ZKM asked other Reps at the group if they were also having issues in not receiving the paperwork in time, everyone else at the meeting advised paperwork for them was arriving on time.</p> | |
| 11. | Consultations | |
| | No consultations | Noted |
| 12. | Any other business | |
| | <p>JS mentioned that Sheltered Officers took credit for getting green bins at Nettesbury Farm, when in fact it was this panel that got them, she would like an apology, a written one. WM advised that he would pass on JS dissatisfaction.</p> <p>HH pointed out the importance of subcontractors/workmen showing identification at all times, this should be shown first time they knock at residents doors, there is an issue with senior management enforcing it. DH advised that this manager is no longer with HTS. DH agreed that all workmen should be wearing their identification but</p> | WM |

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| | <p>sometimes it can be dangerous for them whilst working. ZKM advised HTS to let subcontractors know this. SK mentioned that this was noted, and it was a valid point.</p> <p>JS advised that John Phillips, HTS Managing Director had left and been replaced.</p> | SK |
| | Next Meeting | |
| | 20 September 2023 beginning at 2pm in the Latton Bush Centre. | |
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