

Minutes of a meeting of the Housing and Homelessness Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee) on Thursday 16 December 2021

www.oxford.gov.uk



Committee members present:

Councillor Bely-Summers

Councillor Fouweather

Councillor Jarvis

Councillor Linda Smith (Chair)

Councillor Wade

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Stephen Clarke, Head of Housing Services / Director Housing Companies

Wendy Hind, Tenant Involvement Officer

Simon Warde, Tenant Involvement Manager

Stephen Gabriel, Executive Director for Communities and People

Bill Graves, Landlord Services Manager

Richard Wood, Strategy & Service Development Manager

Tom Hudson, Scrutiny Officer

Also present:

Councillor Diko Walcott, Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing, Housing Security, and Housing the Homeless

Tenant Ambassadors (3)

24. Apologies

Councillor Lizzy Diggins tendered her apologies.

25. Declarations of interest

None

26. Housing Panel Work Plan

The Panel **AGREED** the proposed work plan subject to the addition of a detailed action plan in response to the Tenant Satisfaction Survey results as part of the report on the Council's readiness for the Social Housing White Paper report in February.

27. Notes of previous meeting

The notes of the meeting held on 04 November 2021 were **AGREED** as an accurate record.

28. Tenant Satisfaction Survey

Bill Graves, Landlord Services Manager, presented the report on the results of the Tenant Satisfaction Survey and the Council's response to the Panel.

The Tenant Satisfaction Survey was the first undertaken by the Council since 2015. Given the period since the previous survey and the low response-rate to the previous survey the Council had undertaken a census of all tenant and leaseholders. Normally, the Council would then compare its performance with peers, but few comparators had undertaken surveys since Covid, with those who had seeing significant variability in satisfaction. The Council's own reduction to services and repairs was likely to have acted as a dampner to satisfaction.

In headline, 85% of respondees were satisfied with the Council's service. Below that, however, there were a number of issues, including

- satisfaction with the Council as a landlord
- satisfaction with the standard of the home
- tenant's views listened and acted upon
- satisfaction with the outcomes of anti-social behaviour

In addition to the numerical data provided, over 1700 comments had been provided as part of the survey giving a rich seam of information for the Council to understand the concerns and issues of its tenants and leaseholders. Members of the Housing team were in the process of following up comments made by those who gave permission to do so to discuss and seek to understand more. This information would continue to shape the improvement plans developed.

The key area for improving satisfaction related to the repairs service, which was the primary source of both satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The Council had been working with its repairs provider, ODS, to improve communications with customers around repairs, and undertaking immediate post-job satisfaction surveys. Those tenants providing a score less than a seven out of ten would get a follow up call to understand more about how the service could have been improved, with the feedback for individual operatives tracked to understand and improve issues detracting from their level of service. This survey was being developed with the input of both the Tenant Satisfaction Team and the Tenant Ambassadors. Technological systems and new supply chain approaches were enabling greater efficiency of existing staff to undertake work. The new portal, through the QL system, would enable tenants to report, view and track repairs. A proactive schedule of revisiting homes which had reported damp and mould to check on the adequacy of the previous work had already begun.

Results showing dissatisfaction with the quality of homes were of a deep disappointment to the Council and at present it was unclear what was driving the dissatisfaction. All Council homes met the Decent Homes standard. Understanding this was a priority for the Council. In the meantime, the Council was planning to invest £51m over the course of the forthcoming Medium Term Financial Plan, with a further £8.7m to improve energy efficiency. The extension in the Social Housing White Paper of responsibility for improving the local area also meant further investment in the Great Estates programme.

Communication between the Council and tenants was being invested in. The White Paper made it an area on which it was necessary to report, and it was clear that

although a minority, younger tenants showed greater dissatisfaction in this area, indicating improved means of communication were necessary. The new QL portal was anticipated to support this. Vulnerable tenants would be visited in person.

A disconnect between tenant expectations over anti-social behaviour outcomes and what the Council could reasonably do did lead to some unhappiness. Even when the Council did successfully stop the anti-social behaviour further, draconian measures were expected by tenants. In addition, Covid had made it much more difficult to manage anti social behaviour, with lockdowns increasing the incidence by perpetrators and reducing the tolerance by victims. A new ASB policy had been launched, as well as visits by the ASB team, to address this as far as possible.

At a strategic level, the Council was looking at to improve service levels and outcomes, including the Service Integration Project, and a Customer Experience Change programme, and an externally undertaken service delivery review to consider the shape and remits of the teams providing services to tenants with a view to making improvements.

Following the presentation, Councillors made a number of comments and raised a number of questions. Repair and disabled-adaptation time was raised as an issue. It was recognised that with Covid things had been challenging for repairs, but the key issue was to ensure that repairs were reported. Many times complaints of repairs not done had no repairs listed as being requested in the last 18 months. A delay of more than a month should be escalated. Larger-scale disability adaptations would require a request from an occupational therapist first. These could take some time to fulfil, with design, planning applications and building all contributing to the overall time taken.

Concern was raised over the link between lower rates of satisfaction across the board by younger tenants and the suggestion was made that this may be due to overcrowding. Those respondees who assented were being contacted, which would begin to shed light on this trend.

Olga Siiddon, one of the tenant ambassadors highlighted the importance of the Tenant Involvement Team in communicating and engaging tenants, and sought clarity on the ongoing resources available to them. The work of the Tenant Involvement Team was praised for their award-winning work, though a difference between involvement and engagement was put forward. The Council needed to undertake greater engagement, meaning communicating with those who had had nothing to do with it for – in some cases – years. It was important to hear their views as much as it was to hear the views of those wanting to contribute in other ways also, those who were more involved. Staff resource created to undertake the additional engagement envisaged was being included within the draft budget and a new team established to cover the multiple areas where tenant engagement would be necessary under the requirements of the new white paper. Further provision was being made to extend the number of Tenancy Management Officers also in the draft budget.

A suggestion made by the Panel focused on the need to establish a specific identity for Landlord Services, which was distinct from just 'the Council'. This might help develop relationships with tenants at a lower, more accessible level, than the Council as a whole. Though definitely having benefits, it was also necessary to bear in mind that the Council as a whole was a landlord, and that Landlord Services did not deliver the entirety of the Council's landlord function. This question would be one which would be looked at as part of the external review.

The potential for geographical mapping of responses in order to identify problem areas and inform future capital expenditure was explored. Largely, the answer was yes, and

this would be fed into some work which also considered issues such as let-ability, repair spend and incidence of ASB to identify housing assets in need of greater investment. The Panel provided specific challenge over the 55% satisfaction rating on Blackbird Leys and looked to opportunities arising from the regeneration scheme for the area for solutions. Though the engagement work for the regeneration was not being undertaken by the Council but its development partner, Catalyst, these concerns would be passed on for inclusion within the engagement programme.

29. Housing Performance Q2

Richard Wood, Strategy and Service Development Manager, presented the Housing Performance Q2 report to the Panel.

Within homelessness services the overall context of greater pressure on the system was an important component, with the Covid-related eviction ban ceasing, the service had seen increased pressure arising from the private rented sector. Despite the pressures, KPIs were holding up well, with recognition given to the hard work of the homelessness team. Homeless prevention measures were continuing to be invested in and were shown through the statistics to be effective. The rise in pressure on the homelessness service put a direct pressure on temporary accommodation, but the team had increased the speed at which placements were found, thereby enabling the target to remain within range. The Council had received a one-off uplift to its homelessness grant from central government and was planning to direct the increase towards addressing the rising demand from the private rented sector. This would be through direct pecuniary support for tenants, such as support with rent arrears, but also greater support with debt, addition or difficulties finding jobs. There would also be investment in providing infrastructure to support better tenant-landlord relations.

Rough sleeping numbers were above target, at 27 vs a target of 17. Seasonal factors did play a part in this result, with Q2 historically showing the highest number of rough sleepers, as did specific situational factors, such as the end of the 'everybody in' programme. However, numbers remained roughly at the level of last year and more than 50% below pre-pandemic levels. Changing weather in Q3 and the progress made in supporting those leaving accommodation under 'everybody in', as well as forthcoming changes such as the re-opening of Floyds Row and the launch of the new county-wide approach to rough sleeping, were expected to reduce these numbers in time. It was accepted, however, that the overall rough sleeper numbers were a factor of multiple local and national causes, and that a future KPI which focused on the Council's own contribution to these figures would be preferable.

The Council's development of affordable homes was above target, with 68 homes being delivered in the first six months of the year, an increase on the pace of previous years.

The Council had recently submitted a bid to the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund to support its programme of improving energy efficiency for Council tenants.

The Panel was provided with an update to its previously-requested performance dashboard, reflecting the requirements of the Social Housing White Paper. This had been delayed owing to the fact that the Social Housing White Paper had gone out to consultation shortly beforehand and was therefore liable to change. It was expected that the dashboard would be implemented within the next quarter.

In response, the Panel sought clarity over Floyds Row – its place as part of the county-wide alliance against homelessness, its readiness to support those leaving YHA accommodation, and its overall purpose as a rapid assessment and short term accommodation centre. The lease for Floyds Row was expected to be finalised before the end of 2021, with space being available for use by February 2022 at the latest.

Performance against the affordable homes KPI was noted to be an improvement on previous years, though lower than would be needed to meet the Council’s four-year target. It was pointed out that the profile was not flat either within the current year or across the four years, and that completions rates were anticipated to increase significantly.

The report was **NOTED** and no recommendations were made.

30. Dates of next meetings

The Panel **NOTED** the dates of future meetings.

The meeting started at 5.00 pm and ended at 6.20 pm

Chair

Date: Wednesday 2 February 2022