

To: City Executive Board

Date: 17th. December 2014

Report of: Housing Scrutiny Panel and Tenant's Scrutiny Panel

Title of Report: Oxford Standard

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To present the recommendations of the Joint Panel member and tenant Scrutiny Panel on "Oxford Standard" to be included and delivered through the Asset Management Strategy and Action Plan.

Key decision No

Scrutiny Lead Members: Councillor Smith and Celia Matthews (tenant)

Executive lead member: Councillor Seamons

Policy Framework: Housing Stock Asset Management Strategy and Action Plan

Recommendation(s): In the body of the report.

Introduction and Background

1. Oxford City Council owns, lets and manages about 7,800 houses. All income and expenditure related to these properties is managed within the Housing Business Plan created when the Council withdrew from the national subsidy scheme.
2. In order to effectively maintain this significant asset for the benefit of current and future residents a stock condition survey has been undertaken with the aim of informing the production of an Asset Management Strategy.
3. The Asset Management Strategy is broad ranging but will have at its heart the standard to which properties are maintained and how this

standard is implemented over time. Currently works are planned to achieve and maintain the Decent Homes Standard set by the government in 2000. This is Standard is not ambitious and tenants and councillors wished to go beyond this and consider what an “Oxford Standard” might be.

4. A Panel of Scrutiny Councillors and Tenants have considered what the Oxford Standard should be. The report below outlines their findings and recommendations. The Panel wish to see the Oxford Standard embedded in the developing Asset Management Plan and a clear and “Action Planned” commitment to delivery.

Methodology

1. The Panel used a mixture of desk top reviews and consultation to form their views and recommendations. The review was conducted over a relatively short period so the Panel was not able to explore all the areas they wished to.

Consultation

2. Two consultation phases where undertaken the detailed outcomes from which are attached.
 - *Phase one* – Survey asking tenants to prioritise the following five key areas of work ‘new bathrooms’, ‘new kitchens’, ‘environmental improvements’, ‘security’, ‘heating & energy efficiency’. The surveys were carried out through face to face interviews on the doorstep over a seven day period and by including the same questions in this year’s STAR survey.
 - *Phase two* – Two open tenant consultation sessions in the Town Hall. This used the same key areas as above but focused on the detailed specification of what should be included in the works. In addition tenants considered waste & recycling and an ‘other’ category.

Desk Top Reviews

3. The Panel were provided with:
 - Extracts from the results of the current stock condition survey organised around the same works and geographical areas as the consultation.
 - Information from other social housing provider standards.

Conclusions and Recommendations

4. The Panel agreed to make recommendations in the following areas:
 - Definition of a standard
 - Deciding on priorities
 - Delivering the Standard
 - Setting General principles

5. The Panel recognises that the recommendations below will have budget implications, some of which the Panel has been able to consider. The Panel however wishes to argue firmly that the extra investment they outline is both of value to the quality of the asset and a necessary investment in tenants homes.

Recommendation 1

To include the Oxford Standard in the developing Asset Management Plan and provide a clear and “action planned” commitment to delivery.

Defining the Standard

Recommendation 2

To include the following categories of work within the Oxford Standard:

- Bathrooms
- Kitchens
- Security
- Efficiency and Heating
- Environment

All these categories of works should include some degree of choice for tenants where this is possible.

Deciding on priorities

Recommendation 3

That the following works are included in the Oxford Standard across the categories recommended. The Panel recognise that the view they have taken of best practice, within social housing providers, has been limited by time and therefore wish to propose this Standard as a minimum. This work should be carried out to programme regardless of condition.

Bathrooms

- OCC will give you a choice of a shower or bath.
- OCC will offer a bath grab rail to all households.

- When installing a new bath OCC will always install a shower fitting over the bath.
- OCC will give you the choice of having either a glass panel or curtain rail fitted over your bath.
- OCC will install height adjustable shower heads.
- OCC will always fit an extractor fan in your bathroom?
- OCC will tile all walls (top to bottom) which are adjacent to the bath and shower
- OCC will give you the choice of mixer taps being fitted (where feasible)
- OCC will plan to replace your bathrooms every 20 years.

Kitchens

- OCC will consult with tenants on layout of their kitchen and facility spaces to fit specific appliances as requested.
- OCC will provide you with a choice of a 1 ½ size sink.
- OCC will install an extractor fan in your kitchen.
- OCC will hard wire carbon monoxide detectors.
- OCC will hard wire smoke detectors.
- OCC will plan to replace your kitchen every 15 years.
- OCC will provide provision for both an electric and gas supply for your cooker.
- OCC will offer a charged for service at the time of planned works to connect appliances.

Security

- OCC will install window locks to all accessible windows.
- OCC will gate (key provided) our side and back alleys.
- OCC will be responsible for the installation and maintenance of the fencing to the side and rear of your homes to a standard agreed with tenants.
- OCC to ensure that all front doors are of high quality and secure.
- OCC to ensure that the locks to front doors are of a high standard.
- When replacing front doors OCC will ensure they have a spy hole.
- In consultation with residents OCC will look to improve the lighting in the shared areas to blocks of flats.
- In consultation with residents OCC will look to improve lighting at the front and rear entrance doors of your home.
- In consultation with residents OCC will look to improve the communal areas leading to your building.

Heating and Energy Efficiency

The Panel did not have enough information in this area to form firm views but note the Council will be setting specific targets for energy efficiency within the stock. Measures may include:

- Installing solar panels that provide hot water or free electricity (where feasible).
- Installing wall and loft insulation to the current government standard.
- Ensuring that all properties have double glazing that meets modern standards.
- Replacing windows and doors together.

The Panel are happy to endorse these but wish to see targets set for energy efficiency and a more detailed action plan outlining how these targets will be achieved.

Environment

The Panel wish to make this an essential part of the Standard but didn't feel they had enough data to define the standard. In particular they were conscious of the link with the Great Estate Funding. They would like to see more consultation and a solution for estates built around a blue print for the whole area rather than responsive investment based on issues and complaints

The Panel note and generally support the following actions but want to see more consultation to provide a lasting environmental standard:

- More parking provision you (where feasible).
- Improved external lighting around homes.
- Secure the bin storage area (where feasible).
- Secured storage areas for prams/buggies/strollers, bikes, mobility scooters etc.
- Improved pathways to and around homes (limited to Oxford City Council land).
- Increased numbers of dog waste bins available in neighbourhoods.
- Improved shared garden areas.
- Windows which tenants are able to clean safely.

The Panel additionally recommend that a Tenant Panel is set to further consider this work.

Deciding on Priorities

Recommendation 4

The priority for delivering the Oxford Standard should be decided by a combination of significant pockets of disrepair (identified with the stock condition survey) and the views of residents. The Panel was conscious that respondents to the surveys were not necessarily representative geographically so would recommend that more work is done on an area by area basis to determine local priorities.

Recommendation 5

Works should be packaged together so that more efficient outcomes for residents and the Council can be achieved. For example:

- If we replace windows then doors should be done at the same time (if needed) to give optimum benefits.
- If the heating is to be replaced or upgraded we should consider insulation and other connected repairs at the same time.

This should be a fundamental part of the planning process

Delivering the Standard

This links with the section above.

Recommendation 6

Delivery of the Oxford Standard should be on an area by area basis with good communication both within and outside of the area so that all tenants can easily access information on when, where, how and why. The Panel would like to review the proposals for this communication.

Recommendation 7

Individual tenants should not be able to “opt out” except in very exceptional circumstances. If there are difficulties these should be recognised and support offered so that the work can take place. Properties should be maintained for both the present and the future.

General Principles

Recommendation 8

As the Panel considered their recommendations a number of principles were voiced that can be found in the recommendations but the Panel wanted to put these in one place for clarity.

- Homes should be maintained for the present and the future so opt-outs from repairs should not be allowed except in very exceptional circumstances. .
- Difficulties of individual tenants should be recognised and support offered.
- Optimum result for residents for the work commissioned
- The “like for like principle” should be removed
- Allow “choice” for tenants where ever possible
- A joined up approach to delivery

- Improved communication plans for tenants on what, where, when and why. Timescale for delivery of the Oxford Standard is available for each area.
- The quality of work should be of a high standard judged both by the Council and tenants.

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