

Response to the Tenant Scrutiny Panel Review - Tower Block Refurbishment Programme

Introduction

This paper is in response to the TSP (Tenant Scrutiny Panel) report on the Tower Block Refurbishment project. It considers the recommendations and observations presented, with an aim to either provide clarity on those observations or feedback on the recommendation.

Firstly OCC (Oxford City Council) would like to acknowledge all of the hard work and dedication the TSP have put towards this review. We admire the TSP for focusing on this project, due to its size and complexity. We also appreciate that this will have been a steep learning curve, although hope that the panel has found this both rewarding and informative.

It has been OCC's aim to help facilitate your review through the support of the Tenant Involvement team, as well as provide you access to both the information and staff you have requested. Our desire is to be transparent and make sure that we continue to work in partnership.

The Head of Housing and Property Services is very supportive of tenant led scrutiny and was eager to read through your report. From doing so, he arranged a meeting with a number of staff from his department to discuss your findings. Following that, OCC listed all your observations and recommendations requiring acknowledgement and provided a formal response. The details of which can be found in the section below.

This review along with its observations and recommendations is welcomed and is seen as an opportunity to engage fully with tenants to work together over the provision of their services.

Recommendations & Observations

TSP Recommendations & Observations	OCC Response	Timescale
<p>1.1 The panel would like to note that the initial financial cost of refurbishment started at £12 million, through £15m, to £18m and finishing at the final contract value of £20.1 million was confusing, also the first justification for the project lifetime being 30 years after refurbishment could not be cost effective.</p> <p>Further clarity sought on the rising cost of the project & why OCC specified a '30 year' life span.</p>	<p>The project was born out of a number of issues raised through the day to day maintenance of the building and feedback from housing management. As with any project, the scope is likely to increase in the initial stages as further investigations take place to define the works.</p> <p>Because of the scale of the works and the costs associated with accessing the building to carry out the works OCC took the decision to deal with all works in one go. This is more cost effective in the long run and helps us make sure we can continue to provide high quality accommodation that meets modern standards of safety and energy efficiency.</p> <p>Buildings are typically profiled over a 30 year life. The life of each component varies but the life span of each element is used to assess the overall cost effectiveness of the works and predict future replacement works.</p> <p>In reality the condition of individual components are assessed when they reach the end of their theoretical life and will not necessarily be replaced at that time if they are still in serviceable condition.</p>	N/A
<p>2.1 TSP want to commend the appointment of a Resident Liaison Co-ordinator</p>	<p>We agree that the appointment of a Resident Liaison Coordinator has been valuable. OCC will consider appointing a Resident Liaison Coordinator on future projects, where there will likely be a significant impact on residents.</p>	N/A This will be reviewed on a project by project basis.

<p>2.4 Special consideration should be given to elderly and disabled residents and if they feel the need for a chaperone they should be given the chance to reschedule visits. Similar consideration should be afforded to residents who have a poor understanding of the English language.</p>	<p>With regards to special consideration for elderly and disabled residents, this already forms part of the procurement process and will be included in future projects.</p> <p>Fortem also carried out individual profiling visits at the start of each block to assess who might need additional support throughout the project.</p> <p>We additionally also take into account individual requirements where possible and we benefit from the Resident Liaison Coordinator being in post to assist with this process.</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>3. The TSP would like reassurance that residents will be fully informed on how to use new heating and updated water system efficiently.</p>	<p>We can confirm that the resident's eligible for the new heating and hot water system have been fully instructed on how those systems operate. A communication strategy surrounding this is in place including follow up visits and all residents receive a laminated instruction sheet advising how to correctly use the systems. This information will also be supplied to any incoming residents to the blocks to make sure they are fully aware of how each element operates and feel confident in how to use each system properly.</p> <p>We will source a copy of Fortem's instruction sheet and provide it to the TSP.</p>	<p>9th May 2017</p>
<p>6.2 Although we were advised that the exterior of the windows could be cleaned from inside the flats safely we have doubts that some residents will feel confident to undertake this task. We strongly recommend that OCC take responsibility for cleaning all windows as well as the cladding.</p>	<p>Residents will be given the key to remove the window restrictor once the mast climbers have been removed and the balcony is completed. Guidance is given and residents are shown how to safely rotate the windows for cleaning.</p> <p>All residents will be advised to keep the window restriction block in place for their own safety and a disclaimer will need to be signed by the resident when handing over the restrictor key to make sure they understand fully how to operate the window and that they are responsible for the safety of their household.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>

<p>6.3 One of the contractual conditions is cleaning the cladding every two years otherwise it will lose its function by accumulating fungus, according to the contractor. Therefore the confirmation that OCC will take this responsibility and that there is a budget for it, is essential.</p>	<p>We are able to confirm that as part of the project, Fortem have installed abseiling mechanisms on the roofs of the tower blocks.</p> <p>We will add both the cleaning of the cladding and all windows as appropriate into our planned maintenance programme.</p> <p>We will take the responsibility as the building is ours to maintain and we will budget for it appropriately in accordance with current practice. We will update the TSP at the appropriate time.</p>	<p>TBC</p>
<p>7.1 It is imperative that the community cohesion issues have to be looked into with focus, high priority and care.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">22</p>	<p>Resident engagement has been encouraged at all stages of the project; from the initial consultation, newsletters and throughout the refurbishment works.</p> <p>There is a social value commitment linked to the contract of works which Fortem are fully committed to fulfilling.</p> <p>We will source a copy of Fortem's Social Value achievements and provide it to the TSP.</p> <p>We would encourage and support a TRA (Tenant & Residents Association) if enough residents wished to have one and they were committed to running it. We are however unable to force community cohesion.</p>	<p>9th May '17</p>

<p>7.6 One recommendation we would make is that any future developments include community buildings which can be used by residents groups. They need to have rooms for groups, both large and small, so consideration should be given to more flexible designs where rooms can be combined together when needed.</p>	<p>We feel that there is already adequate provision throughout Oxford in relation to community facilities, such as community centres. We therefore do not agree with the recommendation of providing community buildings as part of the scope of works.</p> <p>All tower blocks are a short distance from accessible community centres, which can be utilised by residents if they wished. Where projects are likely to take place and have a significant impact on residents, we will promote the facilities that are already available within their community.</p> <p>In addition, the Tenant Involvement team widely promote and run training activities at community centres.</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>8.1 We were unhappy that respite space which were spoken about in the main Fortem office, did not materialise.</p> <p>We feel that respite facilities within the tower blocks, is not acceptable. We suggest that provisions must be off site.</p> <p>We also feel that good communication is vital and that OCC ensure that residents are aware of the level of noise involved.</p>	<p>We have made provision for such facilities; however, we have found that these have barely been used. We feel and from previous experience that residents do not necessarily want the complication of moving their daily belongings to temporary locations off site, just for a day.</p> <p>We want there to be an additional satisfaction survey after the works have completed at all tower blocks and there has been a settling period. To seek more feedback on respite facilities, we will include this within the survey and share anonymous outcomes with the TSP.</p> <p>OCC will do more to ensure that we are accurate and honest about the level of disturbance and at what stages of the project this is likely to occur. An example could be roofing works.</p>	<p>TBC – 2018</p> <p>N/A This will be reviewed on a project by project basis.</p>

<p>9.2 The caretakers have had to clear mess left by contractors. This issue needs to be resolved in any future developments as to who is responsible for this work.</p>	<p>We are grateful for the panel raising these concerns and we agree that greater emphasis should be put on checking the cleanliness of the block at the end of the day by contractors, to make sure the workload of the caretaker is not increased as a result of the works.</p> <p>We will build into our process regular inspection of the site to make sure proper levels of cleanliness are maintained.</p>	<p>N/A This will be reviewed on a project by project basis.</p>
<p>10.4 The public right of way issue should have been dealt with prior to the work on Evenlode.</p>	<p>It is regrettable that the adopted highway issue was not addressed during the feasibility stage.</p> <p>We are able to confirm that the necessary permissions are imminent and we do not foresee a delay to the works overall project timescale.</p> <p>This will form part of the lessons learned for future projects.</p>	<p>N/A This will be reviewed on a project by project basis.</p>
<p>10.5 At Hockmore Tower there is an on-going safety problem regarding the scaffold loading bay.</p> <p>New River Retail did not grant permission to use the South Elevation roof for storage.</p>	<p>The safety concerns raised regarding the loading bay at Hockmore will form part of the lessons learned.</p> <p>An agreement should have been in place with New River sooner to mitigate this issue from arising.</p>	<p>N/A This will be reviewed on a project by project basis.</p>
<p>10.6 A reported issue being outstanding is that of front doors not being fire compliant. Please confirm what action has been taken/has been agreed?</p>	<p>We discovered that additional works were required to the front doors making sure that they would comply with the fire strategy.</p> <p>We can confirm that Direct Service were then instructed to carry out the necessary remedial works to the front doors, which have now been completed.</p>	<p>Complete</p>

<p>10.10 We have not seen any manuals, documents and instructions to show that residents are fully aware of how to use the new facilities and what the procedures are in case of emergencies.</p>	<p>OCC requires clarity on whether your comments relates to emergencies repairs, or fire evacuation procedures.</p> <p>As per item 2.4, the resident's instruction packs cover all the new installations. There also has to be clear instructions for dealing with fires, strategy and escape communicated to all residents.</p>	
<p>12.1 We were pleased with the possibility of installing solar cells for the electricity and heating in the roof of Hockmore Tower.</p>	<p>We are able to confirm that solar panels have been installed to the south facing elevation of Hockmore Tower.</p> <p>The panels will provide energy to the communal areas of the tower block.</p>	<p>Complete</p>

Tenant Scrutiny – Next Stages

OCC take note that the TSP considers this to be an interim review and that the panel suggest there be final review on completion of the project.

Being that the refurbishment is a large scale project, OCC would like to offer some guidance on where focus may be best suited for the final stages.

- On completion of all works; the TSP to work with OCC on a final satisfaction survey. The TSP to sign off the survey, as well as analyse the results.
- OCC would like your opinion on Fortem's social value commitment and whether they have been satisfactorily met.
- OCC would like to know the TSP's views on the process of their review. This could include:
 - a) What lessons have been learned whilst undertaking the review and what would you like to implement in future reviews?
 - b) Summary of your feelings towards the refurbishment project and the value of carrying out this review?
 - c) What degree of involvement do you feel the TSP should have in a project and at what stage should you get involved?
 - d) Would the TSP find it beneficial to have a member join the initial Project Board, so they could follow the process through from start to finish?
This would be beneficial by providing a resident's point of view to the officers of the Project Board?

Conclusion

We hope that our responses have adequately covered the recommendations and observations of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel report.

In addition to this written response, we welcome the TSP meeting with staff from Property Services to present this response in person and answer any additional questions you may have. This can be arranged if requested.

Head of Service: Steven Clarke



Signed: _____