

Contact Officer: Sheila Dykes

## KIRKLEES COUNCIL

### AD HOC SCRUTINY PANEL – RESIDENTIAL HOUSING STOCK, HEALTH AND SAFETY COMPLIANCE

**Tuesday 21st September 2021**

Present:

Councillor Susan Lee-Richards  
Councillor Amanda Pinnock  
Councillor Elizabeth Smaje  
Councillor Harpreet Uppal  
Linda Summers (Co-optee)

In attendance: Kevin McAllister, Independent Advisor

Observer: Councillor Harpreet Uppal

Apologies: Councillor Anthony Smith

**1 Election of Chair**

That Councillor E Smaje be appointed Chair of the Panel.

**2 Interests**

No interests were declared.

**3 Admission of the Public**

All items were considered in public session.

**4 Deputations/Petitions**

No deputations or petitions were received.

**5 Public Question Time**

No public questions were received.

**6 Terms of Reference**

The Panel's Terms of Reference were noted.

**7 Regulatory Background**

Asad Bhatti, Head of Building Safety (Homes and Neighbourhoods) presented a report which set out the regulatory framework in respect of building safety and compliance, clarified what was required of the Council in each case, and detailed the work being undertaken to fulfil those requirements.

Naz Parkar, Service Director for Homes and Neighbourhoods and Eric Hughes, Head of Business Assurance and Transformation were also in attendance to respond to Panel members' questions.

Asad explained that the regulatory framework placed a duty on building owners to effectively manage all risks across all multiple occupancy buildings and, in doing so, to listen to and act on the issues and concerns raised by residents. He highlighted the Council's current position in respect of the following key regulatory areas:

- The Charter for Social Housing Residents (White Paper 2021)
- The Building Safety Bill 2020
- The Fire Safety Act (2021)
- Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government Consolidated Guidance Note (January 2020)

Questions and comments were invited from Panel members, with the following issues being covered:

- The Council had a number of three and four storey blocks but there were no five storey blocks in Kirklees.
- The assessment of the six storey blocks had been completed and assessment of the retirement living scheme accommodation was ongoing; it was noted that all these properties already had fire suppression. Following this, the focus would move to completion of the assessment of the 774 blocks with a communal access/egress.
- In response to a question about the recommendations of the White Paper in respect of the provision of smoke detection/carbon monoxide detectors and electrical testing, it was explained that detectors were already in place in buildings where there was a solid fuel appliance and consideration was being given to the introduction of detectors to all Council owned domestic properties. Electrical testing was already in place via a five-yearly testing regime. Efforts were being made to address the issue of properties where there were problems with achieving access.
- The Housing Quality Network (who had undertaken the complaints review) was a well-respected independent consultancy and it was considered that it had provided an objective view of the handling of complaints to assist in bringing about improvement.
- In respect of vacancies and staff turnover in the high-rise blocks, the vacancy management rate was running at the usual level. It was acknowledged that there were a number of new housing officers, but this had occurred over a period of time. The pandemic had caused some issues in terms of these officers being able to fully introduce themselves to tenants, but this was in process and the aim was to strengthen the connection with residents. In addition, a multi-disciplinary high rise engagement team had been appointed to respond to queries from residents and recruitment of fire safety champions for all blocks was underway.
- The feedback in respect of interest in the fire safety champion role had been positive and a further report could be provided to the Panel.
- Considerable work was in progress in relation to both digital and on-site communications and understanding the best ways to convey information. This included the development of animations to explain what we do and why. It was recognised that the success of programme relied on working with residents and achieving the necessary access to undertake inspections and remediation checks, and to carry out repairs. A dedicated Building Safety webpage was in

development and noticeboards and notices were to be revamped, alongside the update of the branding.

- In respect of the dedicated Building Safety function; a Head of Building Safety role had been established, a temporary fire safety lead had been appointed and recruitment was underway for a project officer in respect of asbestos, water and fire. The recruitment to the building safety manager roles had begun, with two posts being advertised initially. It was noted that there was a lot of competition for people with the relevant technical skills but it was anticipated that the team would be fully staffed by March 2022. The existing compliance team would also transfer to the Council.
- The use of the 'dynamic' risk assessment model meant that they would be left open to review, to allow them to be updated and evolve as necessary if there was a change in circumstances.
- In relation to assurance and tracking of both the statutory and compliance review actions, it was explained that this report provided the current status in response to the regulatory requirements. In addition, the Council had commissioned its own Compliance Review which had considered operational improvements and governance, in addition to the regulatory requirements, and this was dealt with in the next report on the agenda; it was acknowledged that some cross-over of the actions. The Improvement Plan picked up all the statutory requirements, but it was suggested that further work could be undertaken to align the actions and provide the Panel with an overview so that the actions could be tracked in one place.
- The £21 million set aside for remediation included everything in scope at this time including the Retirement Living Schemes and the low-rise blocks.

## **8 Compliance Review and Improvement Plan**

The Panel received a report in respect of the Compliance Review and Improvement Plan.

Questions and comments were invited from Panel members, with the following issues being covered:

- The dashboard was clear and helpful but did not include the relative priority of actions and it was questioned how the Panel could assess progress in that respect. It was explained that actions had been prioritised by due to start date. A lot of the actions had been high priority, so the programme had been managed to ensure the highest risks were dealt with first whilst commencing other streams of work in parallel. The dashboard aimed to provide assurance that the actions were being addressed and completed. A further breakdown could be provided.
- In terms of the third line of defence associated with the Compliance Review (establishing independent and objective assurance), internal auditors or other sources from outside the service would be used to validate the completion of actions. Each recommendation was tracked and formally signed off by the consultant and presented to the sponsor for approval, prior to being recorded as complete.
- The first, second and third lines of defence had been identified within the Quality Assurance framework. It was confirmed that responsible operational line managers had been briefed. In respect of policy and process, officers were working on this, including alignment with Council policies, and an update would be provided to the Panel in due course.

- A review of the Council's Housing Strategy document was substantially complete.
- In terms of the key issue of the tenants' voice; significant engagement had taken place over the preceding twelve months both at all-tenant level and specifically for residents of the high-rise blocks. Five, high-calibre tenant members were part of the Housing Advisory Board and discussions had taken place with them in respect of particular areas of interest. Engagement was also undertaken via communications and the provision of information on the progress being made on remediation works at specific blocks. No significant areas of concern had been identified through the communications channels from other tenants. As progress was made in the programmes of inspection, and understanding any issues that needed to be addressed, information would be communicated once a full and accurate explanation could be provided.

## **9 Meetings Schedule**

The schedule of meetings was noted, as set out below:

Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> October 2021

Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> November 2021

Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2021