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KIRKLEES COUNCIL

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

Tuesday 26th October 2021

Present: Councillor Elizabeth Smaje (Chair)
Councillor Susan Lee-Richards
Councillor Amanda Pinnock
Councillor Anthony Smith
Linda Summers

10 Membership of the Panel

Apologies were received from Councillor Harpreet Uppal and Kevin McAllister.

11 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 21st September 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

12 Interests

No interests were declared.

13 Admission of the Public

All items were considered in public session.

14 Deputations/Petitions

No deputations or petitions were received.

15 Public Question Time

No questions were received.

16 Terms of Reference

The Panel's Terms of Reference were submitted, for information.

17 Fire Safety Champions - Update

Michelle Anderson-Dore, the Head of Partnerships - Homes and Neighbourhoods provided an update in respect of the recruitment of the Fire Safety Champions (FSC).

She explained; the objectives of the role, the aim to have one champion (a tenant or leaseholder) for each of the high-rise, six-storey blocks and the Retirement Living Schemes (RLS), and the results of the recruitment process to date.

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

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- In response to a query about how the champions would engage with the other residents in their block and how the Council would support them in doing this; it was explained that the Fire Safety Engagement Team undertook patrols on a daily basis and were highly visible, the champions would also patrol the blocks accompanying the team and/or the housing officers so that they would become familiar to other residents. The role was suitable for people who liked to, and found it easy to, engage with others but was also prepared to provide challenge and question when necessary. It was stressed that this was an additional method of encouraging and reinforcing the key messages about fire safety, it was not a replacement for the formal process. In addition, the champions would be introduced in the relevant newsletter and the role promoted. They would be assisted to become familiar with other tenants and provided with continued ongoing support.
- The aim was to get one FSC per block but, if unable to recruit for any particular building, the Tenants and Residents Associations and 'Street Voices' could act as a back-up arrangement.
- The RLS all retained independent living officers and the FSCs would be expected to walk the same routes as these officers to become familiar and to help reinforce the messages around health and safety compliance. They would be on-site all the time and could therefore pick up concerns, such as if communications and messages were not clear, and relay them back.
- It was acknowledged that there were a lot of vulnerable people in the RLS and any support necessary to undertake the role of a FSC could be discussed with interested individuals. There was flexibility if someone felt unable to undertake all aspects of the role. In respect of the possibility of tension with peers, it was explained that the FSCs were not intended to enforce but to keep the Council updated if they noticed any issues; this was a voluntary role and first and foremost these individuals were residents.
- It was noted that tenants/leaseholders' views on the role could be ascertained at the December meeting when representatives were to be invited to attend. It was suggested that a Fire Safety Champion could also be invited to attend to speak about their experience of the role.

18 Role of the Social Housing Regulator

Naz Parkar and Eric Hughes presented a report on the role of the Regulator for Social Housing in respect of ensuring that Registered Providers were meeting their statutory obligations as set out under the regulatory framework. This included information in respect of the regulatory framework, the Regulatory Standards and the approach to intervention and enforcement.

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

- It was confirmed that there was a co-regulatory approach which placed responsibilities on the Registered Provider as well as the Regulator.
- There were currently two aspects of involvement with the Regulator; the high-rise issues, where the Council had self-referred in February 2021; and the broader compliance review which had been shared in order to maintain the approach of openness and transparency. The Regulator was satisfied with the approach and that the Council was aware of the issues and that these were

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being addressed. Dialogue would continue until the Regulator and the Council were satisfied that all programmes were being delivered at pace and in a timely manner.

- There had been extensions to timescales due to issues in appointing a suitable contractor for remediation works but this had now been resolved. Some of the high-rise work was to be done by the in-house teams and the pre-contract service agreements were being discussed with the contractor for the low-rise fire safety works. These works would commence between March and April 2022 and there was confidence that the new timetable could be delivered.
- Although the 'low-rise' buildings of six-storey and below were not currently in scope it was anticipated that they may become so in the future. The programme could be shared with the Panel when available.
- There were six tenant representatives on the Housing Advisory Board (HAB). The opportunity to undertake this role had been promoted through the regular newsletter and a text had been sent to all tenants when the recruitment went live. There had been an excellent response with more than fifty tenants making contact. From the applications made, a long-list of fifteen had been identified and six high-calibre candidates appointed. One of the six had since been unable to take up the place. It was considered that there was a reasonable mix of age, gender and ethnicity and that they would effectively hold the Council to account and have a positive influence on future decision-making. Induction and training had been provided and the Board had now met three times on a formal basis. Currently the meetings took place on a bi-monthly basis. A review would be undertaken after six months and feedback had already been received to suggest that meetings be focussed on single topics. In addition to the tenant representatives, the Board also included four independent co-optees chosen for their particular professional expertise and experience.
- The term of office would be two terms of three years but this would be managed to try and ensure that there was an overlap and not all tenant representatives reached the end of their term of office at the same time.
- The Board was undertaking 'deep-dives' into each of the four standards. There was also a need to identify key decisions and ensure the Board had sight of these and that there was pre-decision scrutiny including the tenants' voice; a process for this was to be established.
- In respect of the structure and the relationship between the different bodies it was explained that the Building Safety Advisory Board (BSAB) reported into the HAB but the communication between these bodies was two-way as appropriate. There was a link between the BSAB and the Corporate Safety Assurance Board and then to the Health and Safety Oversight Board onto Executive Team and into Cabinet.
- The HAB had worked with the Tenant Participation and Advisory Service (TPAS) to ensure transparency and good practice in the recruitment. The Tenant Advisory and Grants Panel (TAGP) also fed into HAB but also had a regular place on the BSAB agenda in case they wished to escalate any issues or concerns.
- In terms of other tenants raising concerns; for high-rise and six-storey tenants these could be fed in via the Fire Safety Engagement Team and there was a standing item on the agenda of TAGP which could then feed up to the BSAB. Tenants and Residents Associations (TRAs) could also feed into the TAGP.

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- It was noted that the engagement strategy would be discussed at the meeting of the Panel in December; there was a wish to understand how the flow of information would be ensured and the role of the housing officer in this process.
- It was expected that, as a result of the review of the White Paper, the Decent Homes Standard would be revised and would include a focus on a significant number of health and safety issues such as damp and mould, excess heat or cold, physical environment and domestic hygiene. The Council had been working towards meeting these anticipated new requirements for some time. It was possible that additional resources may be required as a result, there were also resource requirements arising from the big six compliance issues, together with the low- carbon, green agenda. These would all be considered as part of the thirty-year Housing Revenue Account Business Plan.
- The current Decent Homes Standard was a basic standard. The Council had piloted an 'Enhanced Lettable Standard' targeted at the most vulnerable residents. The Council's Asset Management Strategy now included investment in cyclical and life cycle replacement. Work was also planned to address fuel poverty including investment in retro-fit to decarbonise the housing stock. The Council aspired to be an excellent social landlord.
- The enhanced lettable standard was welcomed and the damp workstream certainly needed to be addressed.
- In terms of cyclical maintenance of communal areas, it was recognised that this had suffered at the expense of the 'your home your place' approach but the Asset Management Strategy was being reviewed with a view to re-introducing cyclical maintenance programmes. This was an important issue to address as it had an impact on health and safety.
- In terms of environmental legislation and standards it could not be said that the stock conformed currently in terms of two-way ventilation, heating and cooling but investment was being made into retro-fitting. Recruitment was being undertaken for a Principal Designer to plan and design the Council's first Passivhaus scheme. The Authority was engaging with the Government in relation to the social housing de-carbonisation fund to facilitate moving retro-fit works from a pilot scheme to mainstream. As part of the remedial works to Buxton House the feasibility of switching the heating to ground source heating pumps would be explored.

The request for the programme for the low-rise works be shared with the Panel when available was noted.