

Contact Officer: Jenny Bryce-Chan

## **KIRKLEES COUNCIL**

### **GROWTH AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY PANEL**

**Monday 14th August 2023**

Present: Councillor Yusra Hussain (Chair)  
Councillor Tyler Hawkins  
Councillor Susan Lee-Richards  
Councillor Harry McCarthy  
Councillor John Taylor

Co-optees Jonathan Milner

In attendance: Councillor Graham Turner, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for  
Regeneration  
David Shephard, Strategic Director for Growth and  
Regeneration  
Naz Parker, Service Director for Homes and  
Neighbourhoods  
Hannah Elliot, Head of Assets and Development

Apologies: Councillor Zarina Amin  
Chris Friend (Co-optee)

#### **1 Membership of the Panel**

Apologies were received from Councillor Zarina Amin and Chris Friend (Co-optee).

#### **2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

##### **RESOLVED:**

That the Minutes of the panel meeting held on 3 July 2023 be approved as a correct record.

That the Minutes of the Ad Hoc Regeneration Scrutiny Panel held on 6 March 2023 were noted.

#### **3 Declaration of Interests**

Councillor Yusra Hussain, Councillor John Taylor and Councillor Susan Lee-Richards declared that they are members of the Housing Improvement Board.

#### **4 Admission of the Public**

All items were considered in public session.

## **5 Deputations/Petitions**

No deputations or petitions were received.

## **6 Public Question Time**

No questions were received from members of the public.

## **7 Damp, Mould and Condensation**

The Panel considered a report on the current situation with regard to Damp, Mould and Condensation in Council Homes. Naz Parker, Service Director for Homes and Neighbourhoods, introduced the item, advising that this is a major issue being faced both locally and nationally, and the report being presented to the Panel aims to show how the service is responding to cases of damp and mould in Kirklees.

The Panel was informed that last winter the government put a lot of attention on this issue, and at that point in Kirklees, there were eight hundred open cases of damp, mould, and there has been a growing number of damp and mould and condensation cases being reported into the service.

Hannah Elliot, Head of Assets and Development, provided a summary of the approach being taken to address the issue regarding damp, mould and condensation in Kirklees. The Panel was informed that in November and December 2022, a rapid review of the council's approach to damp, mould and condensation was undertaken, and a report setting out the issues and an action plan to address these was produced. The review and action plan identified three main areas for improvement: communication, data and intelligence, and process.

In January 2023, a task and finish group was formed with officers from across the council, with the aim of delivering changes to the short-term approach to damp, mould, and condensation with a focus on dealing with, and resolving the current caseload. The number of cases relating to damp, mould and condensation were still high and increasing and by October, there will be a seasonal increase according to historic trends. All the work that has been carried out to date has been around dealing with the existing caseload, putting in systems and processes and gathering information and intelligence to use to help to better understand how to deliver and target services in future.

The review identified the need for a more streamlined approach to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of damp, mould, and condensation services, and this is being addressed through short term changes to processes and service delivery to support management of current cases.

There is now a dedicated IT system, where all relevant information about damp, mould and condensation is brought together in one place. All officers in Homes and Neighbourhoods and Kirklees Direct have access to this system and have received guidance on how to use it.

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Details of all contacts with residents relating to damp, mould and condensation are recorded in the system along with other data to help improve the response. In addition, there is a dedicated Single Point of Contact (SPoC) made up of officers from Housing Management and Assets who deal with all incoming calls about damp, mould and condensation. Information held in the system is being used to triage and categorise cases.

Contract management discussions with the external mould treatment contractor have identified issues that have contributed to the backlog of cases. For example, they experience high levels of no-access visits.

The Panel was informed that an additional piece of work that has been running in parallel, is redesigning the whole of the system for delivering and responding to damp and mould, and the current piece of work around the backlog is still ongoing.

The team are reviewing and refocusing that action plan effectively on a weekly basis to ensuring a response to the situation and to events that are happening in people's homes. The Panel was advised that the current concern is being able to clear the backlog and was directed to the appended report which showed that the number of jobs that needed to be carried out on a weekly basis versus the number that are actually undertaken are quite different. The number of jobs completed weekly vary considerably for both the external and in-house contractors however, the average completed is half of that required. The project team are urgently looking at options for additional capacity to deliver mould treatments to bring case numbers down to a manageable level.

Officers are looking at the action plan in terms of what it is going take to get a reasonable number by the beginning of October, looking at in House capacity. Work is also being undertaken with the existing external contractor around what they can do in their capacity as well also looking at what other options that might need to be taken in order to get the work dealt with and responded to.

So that is the current process around backlog in terms of the future planning. The intention is that from October this year, so our current contract with our external contractors expires at the end of September.

The Panel was informed that the current contract with the external contractors expires at the end of September, however, there is an option to extend for a further year.

The work being undertaken around redesigning the process, is also looking at how the future service might be delivered whether this be in-house, through an external contractor or a combination of the two. That work is ongoing with the intention that by October there will be a new delivery model.

The Panel was informed that to aid a successful redesign of the damp, mould and condensation processes, is that residents are consulted to understand their experience of the current approach, and take forward a coproduced redesign to effectively respond to their needs. The purpose of the redesign will be to move away

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from the historic approach of being reactive, to add more accurate diagnosis at the start to where frontline staff would triage the issues earlier.

In response to the information presented the Panel made comments and asked a number of questions including some of the following:

- There has been mention with regard to the additional support that will be provided to frontline staff that will help with them triage, to enable them to effectively deal with calls. It might be useful share some of that learning material or training material with the staff within MP's offices as they are often the first contact.
- The report makes mention of a 3 year wait for a decant for specialist works, 3 years is a long time are you able to specify the reasons, and for those waiting to be decanted, were there interim mitigants in place to support the tenants?
- Is the learning being shared with the housing associations to encourage similar processes? Could Kirklees Direct also gain access to the learning and training due to being first ports of call?
- Could the council make use of local trades to help with the market constraints and capacity?
- The report states that the week ending 12 May saw the highest level of abortive or cancelled visits at 46, are there any reasons behind them?
- As exiting contracts were due to expire in September 2023, would the council renew on a short term basis or had an alternative decision been made?
- Regarding damp, mould and condensation, what level of re-referrals were the council receiving?
- Learning from the responses from residents and building heat maps, has it identified geographical areas of higher vulnerability?
- Was there an option during the contract renewal to ensure the contractor complies with the councils data requirements and systems?

Hannah Elliott provided a response to the question and comments made by the Panel. In summary, Hannah Elliott stated that she welcomed the suggestion to share training materials with the MP's office and other registered providers. Naz Parker highlighted the council was a member of the West Yorkshire Housing Partnership, which allowed access to joint training materials and the ability to share information both ways. The Panel was further advised that officers recommended an e-learning training package become mandatory training for any officer that speaks or visits residents, including Kirklees Direct, to successfully diagnose issues at the first instance.

The three years decant was an example of one very specific case, and is not a normal wait time. As part of the work, officers are looking at the entirety of the

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decant list, ensuring the process is correct. The other challenge around decants included the fire safety remediation program that required the council to move priority groups out. A panel had been set up to prioritise decants based on vulnerability, health, health risks and more.

With regards to the contractors, the Panel was advised officers would look at the local market alongside the in house capacity and other external contractors.

Responding to the question with regards to the cancelled visits, Hannah Elliot explained that officers do not always know the reason. Officers would make three calls or attempts to visit, however if a tenant has not cancelled, officers would expect them to be home. A follow up letter is made for those cases where officers have failed to make contact.

The current contract is due to expire at the end of September, with an option to extend for one year. Officers are in discussions with the contractor as to how they wish to proceed and looking at the model as a whole to decide if the council delivers via an in house service, external contractor, or a combination approach. The discussions are planned to finish by the end of August.

Naz Parker advised that the first priority was to ensure the council was responding to, and dealing with the damp, mould, and condensation due to the health impacts and risks. Following review of asset management, officers would start thinking about the investment into the decarbonisation initiative and various methods of ventilation. At the present time, there was not a full understanding of all the solutions and technologies available and whether the housing revenue account can afford to invest in all of them.

Hannah Elliot highlighted the single IT system where the information was held and the dashboard, in the corporate system, which can generate heat maps and details on repeat cases, job numbers and details on a location. It was also connected to other data such as public health and poverty, which all brought together allowed officers to see the trends develop that the previously could not identify. Naz Parker added the team works with health colleagues to look at incidents such as respiration issues in the district, cross referencing with the damp, mould, and condensation data.

There was a lot of work ongoing with the contractor to get access to information as previously the council had not asked for information in the way it does now. Discussions moving forward to set the terms of a new contract or contract extension was key. Having access into the contractor systems was essential for those taking calls, in order to provide updates to residents, as well as for officers in terms of intelligence to help them to understand. Any contract discussion moving forward had those requirements.

**RESOLVED:**

That Naz Parker and Hannah Elliott be thanked for providing a report on Damp, Mould, and Condensation.

## 8 Tenant Safety in Council Housing

Naz Parker, Service Director for Homes and Neighbourhoods, introduced the agenda item, which was a recommendation and commitment from the Ad-Hoc Residential Housing Stock, Health and Safety Compliance Scrutiny Panel's work. The Panel was informed that the report would focus on the 'big six' in terms of building safety: Fire, Asbestos, Legionella, Lifts, Gas and Electric. When the stock transferred into the Council, there was not a programmed approach to building safety, there is now inspection programs and reinspection programs and those are now in place and working very well.

Fire remains as the largest risk for the council, however there are strong mitigants in place to ensure safety in six storeys, retirement living schemes and the low rise blocks with a mixture of daily, weekly, monthly fire safety checks. There is CCTV at a 24 hour rate, particularly on the high rise, a waking watch on the high rise and a number of other mitigants.

Hannah Elliot, Head of Assets and Development, expanded on the details outlined in the report advising the Panel that progress had been made in relation to fire safety matters at high-rise blocks. Officers have focused on delivering programmes of fire safety works, inspections and re-inspections and developing longer term refurbishment and regeneration plans for these buildings.

There are some cases where work is outstanding mainly due to access issues, but also some due to contractual or delivery issues.

In terms of low-rise blocks, there is still more work to be done. The fire safety remedial actions for low-rise blocks was being developed into tender packages for issue in August 2023. These would close off the majority of known fire risk assessment actions currently outstanding. Works were expected to start on site at the beginning of 2024/25.

The Panel was informed that all of those buildings had mitigations in place, and officers regularly reviewed those mitigations and the safety assessment of the buildings. Tenant involvement is key in relation to safety and the Fire Safety Resident Engagement team works with residents, in the high-rises initially but now across all blocks to help understand their concerns and get involved in developing outcomes.

The team also works on person centred fire risk assessments with individuals that may have a vulnerability. The fire service also made referrals and officers would work with them where they found high risk in individuals or properties.

A survey and inspection programme is now in place, with arrangements for remedial works resulting from the results. Most arrangements are in place with some still needing development and improvements on delivery following risk assessments.

There was an issue with leaseholder properties whereby the council were not always able to fully understand the safety issues of these properties. As of March 2023, leases had been changed to enable better access to the information. A new piece of work has begun to ensure a better understanding of the safety aspect to leaseholder properties.

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Naz Parker further added that significant progress had been made on the high rises, by decanting, consultations, and changes to buildings such as installing sprinklers and external wall insulation.

In response to the information presented the Panel made comments and asked a number of questions including some of the following:

- Would leaseholders that need to decant slow the process on this site?
- With regards to Kirklees Performance Indicators (KPI) relating to residents responses, there are no figures and therefore unsure how many residents are communicating. Is it possible to receive figures?
- Are tenant resident associations involved?
- Are issues with regard to contractor issues captured in the system to reflect upon in the future?
- Escalation process, if a tenant identifies something that they believe to be a fire safety risk, are they going through the normal numbers or is there a different contact process for that and can this be shared with the MPs office and Councillors who are also points of contact?
- With regard to leaseholder properties, were these properties previously owned by the council and how many residents live in unsafe conditions as a result of leaseholder properties?
- How many buildings are at risk of the external wall insulation not being addressed?
- As with a House in Multiple Occupation (HMO), would it be possible for the leasehold properties to undergo a licensing process?

Hannah Elliot responded to the Panel's questions explaining that with regards to Buxton House, leaseholder decants could slow down the process, however discussions were ongoing. Naz Parker further advised that there were five leaseholder properties, and one of the leaseholders was not in the country thereby making contact difficult. Following the developments, Buxton House would provide a more attractive offer and integrate with the blueprint plans and improve on fire safety.

Hannah Elliot explained that during the engagement process, the Fire Safety Residents Engagement Team worked with individuals as well as resident and tenant associations.

In terms of contractors, officers always looked at lessons learned when projects are delivered, and learning in terms of delivery around how contractors are managed.

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The leasehold properties are owned by individuals within a Kirklees block of flats, while the council is the freeholder, therefore they are not the council's responsibility. The concern is that due to the leasehold property being in the council's building and proximate to properties that council does manage, it could have an impact on the safety of council tenants whilst being out of the council's control.

Harold Wilson court had external wall concerns, however, the contractor is now on site undertaking the works required. The works started at the end of July 2023, with the full building planned to have the external wall replaced.

Regarding licensing of HMO's, the Panel was advised that this was not possible as the leaseholder properties were previously right to buy owners or sold on since then. Any leaseholder that sublets the property, they would have landlord responsibilities and the gas safety checks would then apply to them. The issue remained that the leaseholder still does not have to pass on that information to the council.

**RESOLVED:**

That Hannah Elliot and Naz Parker be thanked for providing an update on Tenant Safety in Council Housing.

**9 Work Programme**

The Panel considered the work programme and the timescales for agenda items for consideration. The Panel agreed that an additional panel meeting would be required given the number of items expected on the panel's work programme. It was determined that an additional meeting would be held in October 2023, and items on the work programme moved to the new panel date.

The Panel also raised the issued for a potential site visit in respect of the regeneration of the town centres. David Shepherd, Strategic Director for Growth and Regeneration, advised that at this current moment, given the time commitment required it would be difficult for officers to accommodate site visits. The Panel suggested that a relevant cabinet member could undertake the site visit prior to the meeting being held, as requested, in Dewsbury.