

GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL
HOUSING, ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING

Monday, 15 May 2023

PRESENT: Councillor B Clelland (Chair)

Councillor(s): T Graham, A Geddes, D Burnett, F Geddes,
H Weatherley, H Kelly, J Turnbull, S Dickie, V Anderson,
P Maughan, A Wintcher, S Gallagher, P Burns and D Welsh

APOLOGIES: Councillor(s): K Dodds

CPL63 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

RESOLVED:

- (i) The minutes of the last meeting held on 13 March 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

CPL64 HOUSING PERFORMANCE QTR 4

The Committee received a report providing an update on housing performance results at the end of quarter 4, 2022/23.

Appended to the report was a breakdown of key performance indicators (KPI's) comparing performance against targets for 2022/23 for information.

It was reported that to ensure that the suite of HEHC KPI's remain relevant, a review will be undertaken of those KPI's to be monitored from 2023/24. It was noted that the review will reconfirm continued reporting on the Tenant Satisfaction Measures published by the Regulator of Social Housing. It was stated that any recommendations arising from the review would be reported at a future meeting of the Committee.

The Committee questioned the impact on tenant satisfaction regarding environmental services provided by the Council such as grass cutting. Officers advised that this service is to receive a significant financial investment to support and improve services; it was also noted that there would be further investment to support the management of Council estates and fly tipping prevention/enforcement.

A query regarding emergency repairs was raised; the Committee sought clarity on what qualifies as an emergency repair. Officers advised that an emergency repair is where catastrophic damage has occurred; it was highlighted that these repairs must be remedied/made safe within 24 hours. The Committee were also advised that the Council's website lists information on how repair requests are categorised.

The Board discussed the information appended to the report and noted that domestic abuse resulting in homelessness is reducing; officers advised that teams continue to have a proactive approach to support those who are victims of domestic abuse to enable them to relocate. It was acknowledged that there are some instances whereby a victim of domestic abuse will return to their prior address and partner which is a common occurrence for those in a cycle of abuse. Officers stated that all cases are taken seriously and assessed individually to identify the best solution for the tenant and to prevent homelessness.

The Committee questioned why so many Council properties remain vacant; a subsequent query was raised asking whether mould and damp issues in Council properties was responsible. The Committee were advised that there are currently 600 void properties which services are working hard to reduce; it was noted that the repairs backlog has had a knock-on effect on voids in addition to the challenges with the recruitment and retention of trades. Officers advised that damp and mould issues are being addressed as they arise but that this is not the primary cause of the high number of voids.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the report.
- (ii) The Committee agreed to receive a further update of KPI's at a future meeting.

CPL65 BUILDING SAFETY UPDATE / HOUSING COMPLIANCE UPDATE

The Committee received a report providing an update on the current position of building safety performance.

From the report, the Committee received updates in relation to fire risk assessments (notably in high-rise blocks) and updates to the Building Safety Act 2022 and amendments to fire regulations from the Fire Safety Act 2021.

It was reported that the rolling programme of asbestos surveys and inspections is on target; it was also highlighted that key risks found to date include asbestos containing materials in poor condition being found during invasive fire risk assessments in the basement of Melbourne and St Cuthberts Court high-rise blocks. The Committee were advised that these areas have been restricted until remedial action is completed.

The Committee noted that work to investigate potential unsafe asbestos containing materials in the roof spaces of 403 butterfly properties is in progress. It was stated that a design commission was raised for sealing off the lofts at these properties in early 2022. It was reported that whole house destructive testing and stripping-out has been completed on a pilot property which has informed a wider design commission that will reduce the risks associated with the asbestos, support the delivery of future major investment work, and reduce disruption to residents through repeat visits.

Updates on electrical safety, gas safety and water safety were provided within the report. The Committee were also advised that the Council has 1712 known cases of

damp mould and condensation that are in progress of resolution. Officers advised that 1228 have been reported since November 2022 with 1143 cases resolved to date.

The Committee questioned how the Council manages asbestos risk in schools; the Committee were advised that schools are on a 5-year rolling programme for asbestos surveys with some receiving annual surveys.

The Committee expressed concern that many the butterfly properties referenced in the report have been purchases through right to buy and that those owner-occupiers may not be aware of the potential asbestos hazard in their home. Officers acknowledged this feedback and advised that only a minority number of these properties would need remedial works.

A question was asked regarding the Council's ongoing recruitment of trades and apprenticeships; it was noted that some vacancies are now live with additional vacancies to be advertised in the near future. It was also highlighted that a recent advert for an apprentice electrician had received a massive response.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the updates in the report.

CPL66 TENANT SATISFACTION SURVEY 2022

The Committee received a report on the results of the Tenant Satisfaction Survey 2022.

It was reported that a total of 1086 tenants had responded to the first overall satisfaction question with the response rate then varying with each subsequent question. Appended to the report was the full results for each question.

It was noted that headline results show that overall satisfaction with services provided by Gateshead Council is at 44%. It was also noted that overall satisfaction with housing services in Gateshead has been in decline 2015. The Committee were advised that this reflects a social housing sector wide trend, particularly with providers with large urban stock.

The Committee also received an overview of the drivers of tenant satisfaction; it was noted that repairs and maintenance, tackling anti-social behaviour and environmental issues are key drivers of satisfaction.

The Committee were advised that in May 2023 the results of the survey will be published online and that a newsletter will be sent to all tenants setting out the Council's response to the results and the actions being taken. It was also highlighted that a series of engagement events will also be taking place across local communities over the summer which will provide an opportunity for informal feedback on the response to the survey results.

An update on customer contact was provided; the Committee were advised that a question had been added to the survey that asked how Gateshead Council (as a

landlord) are to deal with. Highlighted in the report were the key themes identified from the comments left by respondents, this included the importance of:

- Getting through on the telephone – still the most commonly used contact method.
- Resolution at first point of contact.
- Prompt follow up to an enquiry if required.
- Good customer service skills.
- In addition to the satisfaction survey the Resident Influence Panel commissioned a scrutiny review of customer contact last year and that is now complete.

The Committee also noted that in addition to the satisfaction survey the Resident Influence Panel had commissioned a scrutiny review of customer contact last year and that this is now complete.

The Committee queried whether the introduction of hybrid working across some Council services had contributed to the negative response from tenants about not being able to get through to staff on the phone. Officers advised that most teams, particularly those in repairs and maintenance are always in the office; it was also noted that recruitment and retention of staff for customer service roles in repairs had been a challenge.

The Committee were also advised that changes to the way repairs and maintenance queries and requests are managed should have a positive impact on tenant satisfaction in the future.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the update provided.

CPL67 CUSTOMER CONTACT SCRUTINY REVIEW

The Committee received a report on the outcome and recommendations from the recent customer contact scrutiny review. Two tenant representatives were in attendance to present the findings.

The Committee were advised that the results and recommendations of the report should be viewed alongside the feedback and insight from the Tenant Satisfaction Survey. It was highlighted that the results of each both support the case for re-designing our approach to dealing with customer contact.

The recommendations of the report were supported by the Committee and acknowledged by officers.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the report.

CPL68 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received the annual work programme report for 2022/23.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the information in the report and endorsed the provisional work programme.
- (ii) The Committee noted that further reports would be brought to the meeting to identify any additional issues which the Committee may be asked to consider.