

Councillor Arthur Coote – Portfolio Holder for Housing **Report to Full Council: 21 March 2022**

Repairs and maintenance

Following on from my last report to Council, I can confirm that the stock condition survey for all council homes is nearing completion and the information collected will be used to create a new planned maintenance programme for 2023-24 and beyond. The programme will focus on delivering safe and warm homes for our tenants and our budget is being prioritised for this purpose.

At time of writing there have been just under 80 severe damp cases identified and the Council has procured an external specialist surveying company to visit these homes and identify the causes of the damp and mould, so that works can be arranged to resolve the problem. This will also involve housing management interventions to support the tenants through this process. This work will be undertaken alongside visiting homes where the tenant has reported damp and mould themselves.

In terms of health and safety compliance, the Council has now reported the externally validated performance to the Regulator of Social Housing, following the self-referral last year. The validated position is:

- Gas servicing, individual properties – 99.29% compliant
- Electrical safety, individual properties – 98.9% compliant within the statutory 10 year programme and 89.2% compliant within the best practice 5 year programme
- Gas servicing (communal areas) – 100%
- Electrical safety (communal areas) – 100% within the 10-year programme and 99% within the 5 year programme
- Fire Safety Risk Assessments – 100% compliant
- Asbestos Management – 62% compliant
- Water Hygiene – 81.9% - four properties are being taken off the shared tank system in March and then we will achieve 100% compliance
- Lift Safety – 98.1% compliant.

The Council is now waiting to hear whether the Regulator will serve a Regulatory Notice on the Council.

In recognising the much-improved position, it is important that this is maintained and that the Council continues to micro-manage UNSL and check that performance being reported by them is accurate. The Council is recruiting additional staff to carry out this work and building a repairs and maintenance client team, to oversee the service and ensure that Council tenants deliver the best possible service across the board, through strong contract management.

Reynolds Court, Newport

Lovell, the original developer, are on site to address the fire safety issues highlighted in my recent reports to Council. The Council has made it clear to Lovell that compensation will be required to cover any additional spend as a result of the issues identified and Lovell have accepted responsibility for the issues.

Complaints and Member Enquiries

The Council has published an updated tenant facing complaints policy. This is available on the Council's website. Work is ongoing to develop the new process for Member enquiries and this will be shared in due course.

New performance framework

We are finalising the new suite of housing KPIs for the new financial year. The Council will be taking a more robust approach to benchmarking performance against similar providers so that Members will be able to see how we are performing against others, as well as against the new statutory Tenant Satisfaction Measures being introduced from April 2023.

Rent and service charge setting.

Following the decision by Council to raise the rent by 7% and service charges by actual costs, tenants have now been informed by letter what they will need to pay from April 2023. This has generated a number of enquiries and the housing team has been responding, to explain the charges. The Housing Team will ensure that where tenants face hardship in these challenging economic times, as much support as possible is given, including referring tenants for hardship payments and/or to other agencies for help and advice.

In relation to rent overcharges as detailed in my last report to Council, work is ongoing to correct these and arrange either refunds or where tenants are in arrears, to credit rent accounts. Work will also be undertaken to correct housing benefit payments. The Council is waiting to hear whether any further action will be taken by the Regulator of Social Housing in relation to this, following the decision to self-refer.

Regulatory matters

The Housing Team is continuing to prepare for the new regulatory standards, which will come into force from April 2023. This includes reviewing services and governance arrangements.

In preparation for the statutory tenant satisfaction survey, the Housing Team will be working with tenants to help understand more about what tenants expect from its services, so the Council can learn from tenants and improvements can be made.

Members may also have seen or heard about the government's intention to require housing managers to have appropriate qualifications as part of the Social Housing Regulation Bill. This has been ramped up, in light of issues within the housing

sector, particularly about property conditions in social housing nationally. Government believes that housing professionals should be qualified in the same way that for example, social workers are and the expectation that officers will require a level 4 or 5 qualification, depending upon their roles and responsibilities. The Council is looking at what this means for its existing housing staff and the requirements will of course be included as part of any future recruitment processes.

Recruitment of Assistant Director, Housing, Health and Communities

This is ongoing following the first recruitment round, which was unsuccessful.