

Councillor Arthur Coote – Portfolio Holder for Housing **Report to Full Council: 18th July 2023**

General Summary

I am sure Members will acknowledge, this has been an extremely busy time for our Housing team, with a particular focus on repairs and maintenance. UDC Has also welcomed Kerry Clifford, Assistant Director of Housing, Health and Communities who joined the Corporate Management Team in June. Kerry will be working with Simone, Housing Consultant, over the coming weeks to complete a thorough handover.

At the final meeting of the Scrutiny Committee before election, a scoping document was presented suggesting a review of the management of council housing. The Scrutiny Committee held on the 22nd June 2023 was asked to consider that the scoping document was not relevant due to events superseding it and to defer the review so as not to detract from the work taking place to rectify issues that had been identified. This approach was agreed and a report on issues and solutions will be put before Cabinet, most probably in September 2023.

As an update to the errors made in setting rents for the past two years, a letter will be sent to all tenants affected w/c 17th July 2023 and rebates will be issued during August. Officers have progressed work to develop a new rent setting procedure, putting in lines of defence to tighten up the governance, so that all rent changes and rents for new homes or those which are calculated when a home is re-let, are checked by senior, qualified officers before being finalised.

The Housing Team is also continuing to prepare for the new regulatory standards, which will come into force from April 2023. This includes a gap analysis against the Consumer Standards as well as a review of all existing policies and procedures. We are also preparing the publishable complaint handling self-assessment, as prescribed by the Housing Ombudsman and are also preparing our Housing Annual Report.

Tenants will shortly be asked to consult on the key themes that the Tenant and Leaseholder Panel have identified as being key priorities for the Tenant Engagement Strategy. Work to develop the strategy and a menu of engagement that will seek to broaden our depth and reach of tenant feedback will then commence. We will also turn our focus to scrutiny activities, asking residents to really look at how our services are delivered and make practical suggestions to improve them.

By the next full Council meeting, we will have developed a suite of new KPI's for our Housing Options service that will help us to update our Housing Strategy and to show trends, such as how many households we have on the transfer list, how many homeless applicants we have, how many families declare that they are overcrowded etc. With this data we will also progress a 'Rightsizing' campaign to promote movement within our housing stock and that of other registered providers, to make sure that residents are living in accommodation that is suitable for them and that which meets their needs.

Repairs and Maintenance

The stock condition survey completed by Savills has largely been completed with over 90% of homes successfully accessed and assessed. Where tenants have refused access, further visits will be attempted in the coming weeks by UNSL with enforcement action being taken where necessary. The council is using the data to inform a capital works and planned maintenance programme, prioritising those that do not meet the Decent Homes Standard or where we have identified severe cases of damp and mould. We hope to sign off the programme for 2023-2024 in the coming weeks. Work is now being scheduled for the 95 cases of severe damp and mould that the surveys identified and UNSL have been given a target date of the end of September for works to be completed. All properties have had mould washes undertaken to make them safe. Of the 525 moderate cases that were identified, UDC have appointed two temporary surveyors to scope the work that needs to be done and they have completed just over 100. Surveys will be sent to UNSL on a bi-weekly basis so that remedial works can be undertaken. Tenants have now been written to, thanking them for letting us in to complete the surveys and advising them that works will commence shortly.

Health and Safety compliance also remains a priority and our 'Safer Homes Officer' is reviewing our policies and operational procedures to ensure that we are delivering in this important area. We have secured four injunctions for non-access in relation to gas safety, with more scheduled for July. Work is underway with Dodds and UNSL to bring our gas servicing procedure forward and for the Housing team to intervene at an earlier stage where there are missed appointments or no contact.

Compliance at the end of June is shown below.

Compliance area	Performance		Comments
	No. expired	% compliant	
Electrical safety domestic	18	99.35%	The council was granted its first injunction with costs on 20 June – more cases are scheduled for July – and more court dates are starting to come through now. All outstanding cases are with the council's out-sourced lawyers. Already in July the figures for 5 years have dropped to 222.
Within 10 years (legal req.)			
Within 5 years (best practice)	240	92%	

Electrical safety communal areas within 5 years	0	100%	N/A
Annual gas service, domestic	8	99.59%	Two injunctions with costs were awarded on 20 June at court. Two further injunction hearings currently scheduled for July. All cases are with the council's lawyers and in various legal stages, including final legal letter/awaiting court dates.
Annual gas service, communal areas	0	100%	N/A
Fire Risk Assessments (FRAs) in date	0	100%	There are no high-risk actions outstanding from previous FRAs.
Water hygiene	0	100%	UDC is working with UNSL to identify and report on follow-up actions arising from risk assessments.
Lifting equipment	1	99.15%	Awaiting a replacement part – therefore poses no risk as cannot be operated.
Asbestos risk assessments communal	0	100%	There are no high-risk follow up actions outstanding from previous risk assessments.
CO and smoke alarms – additional regulatory requirement	Being verified	Being verified	Properties which are deemed non-compliant as identified during the stock condition survey – a number are legally compliant although not hard-wired. Site visits are in progress to follow up and these will then be

			reported on in future reports.
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More generally, a review of the Service Level Agreement between UDC and UNSL is currently taking place and work is ongoing with UNSL in areas of under-performance such as voids. UDC is losing significant income, due to the unreasonable lengths of time taken to prepare homes for re-let, with some empty homes standing empty for 50-100 days, for no acceptable reason. There is also concern with the quality of voids being returned to UDC and as such, every void is being inspected by the UDC client team before the council can accept the property back. The Assistant Director of Housing, Health and Communities is working at a granular level with the team to implement a new process chart of the key to key letting process and to introduce a new void tracker which will identify where the process is breaking down. From this data it is hoped that UNSL will be able to put measures in place to mitigate the issues.

An update on Reynolds Court; as previously reported, the development company, Lovell has been held to account for the identified failings in the fire safety provision and they have accepted liability and confirmed that they will compensate the council for costs incurred, including those related to the waking watch, which remains in place. Some items have been completed and for the remainder, Lovell are developing a time-bound action plan to deliver this. A deep dive into the issues will be undertaken once we are satisfied that all matters are resolved so that tighter governance arrangements can be put in place to prevent issues such as this happening again.

Following the issues at Reynolds Court, the council has arranged for inspections of other sheltered schemes to take place, to ensure that there are no similar issues elsewhere. However, it should be noted the Reynolds Court is unique in its structure, and as such, there is no reason at this time to have concerns – the first of these inspections has now taken place and no issues of concern were identified. The quality of fire risk assessments is also being audited by UDC's new Safer Homes (compliance) officer.

A new suite of repairs and maintenance KPIs has been agreed with UNSL to reflect a more robust approach. This will include damp and mould indicators, in line with the proposed new 'Awaab's law' and other requirements as set out in the Social Housing Regulation Bill.

End.