

Committee: Housing Board

Date:

Title: Council Housing Management Update

7th December 2023

Portfolio Holder Councillor Arthur Coote
Portfolio Holder for Housing and Equalities

Report Author Kerry Clifford
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Summary

1. At the final meeting of the Scrutiny Committee before the election, a scoping document for a review of Council Housing Management was presented.
2. The committee requested it be brought back to the first meeting of the new committee for consideration. Since that time, the situation has progressed, and much work has been done to address the concerns identified in the scoping document of March 2023.
3. At the Scrutiny Committee on the 22nd June 2023, it was recommended that rather than a full scrutiny exercise that would potentially detract officers from ongoing work to rectify areas where concerns have been identified, a progress report covering all areas requiring improvement would be acceptable and would offer assurances that these areas were being sufficiently addressed.

Recommendations

4. Housing Board notes progress to date on areas of concern and those still requiring improvement.

Financial Implications

5. There are no new financial implications at this stage

Background Papers

6. None

Impact

7.

Communication/Consultation	There has been, and will continue to be, communication and consultation with tenants affected by any of the issues identified within this report and to inform them of our on-going commitment to provide fit for purpose services that comply with legislation, particularly the new Social Housing Regulation Act 2023, and any of the Consumer and Economic Standards that apply to UDC.
Community Safety	There are no impacts in relation to the wider community.
Equalities	There are no specific impacts.
Health and Safety	Health and safety issues have been a key feature in the issues faced by the Housing service and continue to be of primary importance.
Human Rights/Legal Implications	There are potential legal implications as explained in the scoping document that the council should comply with the Social Housing Regulation Act 2023 as well as any of the applicable Consumer and Economic Standards and statutory guidelines set out by Government.
Sustainability	There are no specific impacts.
Ward-specific impacts	All Wards.
Workforce/Workplace	There are no specific impacts.

Situation

8. In August 2022 the council referred itself to the Regulator of Social Housing over concerns it may have breached the Home Standard with regards to some aspects of health and safety. Considerable work had been undertaken to address the issues and subsequent to the March Scrutiny Committee meeting, the Regulator wrote to the council to confirm that having reviewed the council's action plan and compliance data, it was satisfied the council was not in breach.

9. Health and safety remains a priority and our Safer Homes Officer has reviewed our compliance policies and procedures to ensure that we are delivering in this area. These are due to be reviewed by the Corporate Management Team in December 2023 and will then be consulted on with tenants and shared with the Housing Board in January 2023 before being formally adopted.
10. Since June we have revised our gas servicing and electrical check access procedure, bringing forward stages of the process with UNSL contractors and requiring the Housing Management team to intervene at an earlier stage where there are missed appointments or no contact. We have also engaged the use of injunctions to gain access to complete the checks and any remedial works that are identified. We have been successful in securing five injunctions to date with a further four applications in progress. This approach has meant that we have been able to access properties and identify property conditions issues and vulnerability that we were not previously aware of and for the housing officers to work with residents to address any issues.
11. Early in 2023 the council commissioned its own stock condition surveys, independently from UNSL as UNSL had not been completing them under the Service Agreement that was in place. The Council also commissioned subsequent damp and mould surveys (where damp and mould was evidenced as severe or moderate a result of the stock condition surveys). This was to accurately inform the Regulator of Social Housing as to how many cases of damp and mould we had identified in our properties, following the passing of Awaab's Law in February 2023. The stock condition surveys were also to evidence compliance with the Decent Home Standard, as well as to help inform future capital works programme. All category one hazards or non-conformity with the Decent Homes Standard are to be scheduled within year one and two of the Capital Works Programme. We are yet to sign off the Capital Works Programme for 2023/24 and 2024/25 as we are awaiting details of completed works and works in progress from UNSL and how that overlaps with our proposed investment programme. We continue to work closely with them to get access to this information and so we can inform our future programmes. This is not delaying urgent requirement for capital investment in homes and a sign off procedure is in place between UDC and UNSL for recommendations ahead of the whole programme being approved.
12. The Council has had to provide step-in arrangements and procure damp and mould contractors to complete mould washes and fogging as well as to scope remedial works on its severe and moderate cases. The step-in arrangements were made after UNSL were not able to procure and mobilise contractors to undertake this work by the deadline of the end of September, as notified to UNSL by UDC in June 2023. Contractors are currently mobilised and all severe and moderate cases should be completed by end January 2023. UNSL are responsible for carrying out any remedial works identified by UDC's damp and mould contractors and we are reviewing this on a weekly basis.

13. In response to void turnaround times not being met, with an average 55 days 'in works' against a benchmark average of 11-15 days, UDC has been working with UNSL to re-engineer the key to key void process and has given UNSL a 'tracker' document to be used so we can identify where the process is breaking down. This remains a work in progress but all voids are now being completed within 30 days and the backlog have been returned to us. Positively, the standard of work in voids being returned to UDC has improved, however the cost per void has risen to approx. £16,000 per property against an industry benchmark of £7000 for major voids.
14. In the meantime, UDC and UNSL have agreed a revised set of key performance indicators, across all areas of compliance as well as responsive repairs and tenant satisfaction. The KPI's will be reported at UNSL Liaison Board, the UNSL Board meetings as well as corporately.
15. UDC have agreed with Norse Group Ltd and UNSL that it is necessary to re-negotiate the terms of the existing Service Level Agreement and the Share Holder Agreement that exists between all parties. Heads of Terms were issued to UNSL by UDC on the 29th October 2023, requiring information and setting out expectations around the process, with key milestones. Decisions linked to the re- negotiation will require the oversight and approval of Housing Board and Cabinet at various stages before the commencement of possible remobilisation activities. A round-table negotiation took place on the 29th November 2023 and UDC will be updating Informal Cabinet Briefing as to the direction of the negotiations later in December.

Risk Analysis

16.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
The Council fails to have suitable arrangements in place to deliver safe and compliant homes under regulation and legislation.	2	3	Review of Service Agreement with UNSL and Norse Group. Clear step-in arrangements for service failure

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.