

Housing Sub Committee

Monday, 22 November 2021

Present: Councillor A Newman (Chair)
Councillors John Hunter, M Thirlaway, J Walker, K Barrie,
M Green, J Mole and S Phillips

Apologies: Councillors L Darke, A Percy, E Parker-Leonard and
Westwater

HO15/21 Appointment of Substitute Members

There were no substitutes reported.

HO16/21 Declarations of Interest

Councillor M Thirlaway declared a non-registerable personal interest in Item 5, Empty Homes, as his father works for North Tyneside Council.

HO17/21 Minutes

Agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 October 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

HO18/21 Empty Homes

The sub-committee received a report and presentation in relation to the new Moving-In Standard. The update was focused on the process used to sign off quality checks for empty properties and the process used if new tenants had concerns once they had moved into a property.

On 22nd March 2021 officers provided an update to Housing Sub-committee on the Empty Homes review and the impact that the Covid pandemic had on the service. Officers had provided details on two workshops conducted in February and March 2021, where both tenants and Elected Members conducted a thorough review of the Empty Homes Standard. The review concluded that the quality of some of the Authority's empty properties needed improvement and the service was carrying out too many repairs for new tenants.

The tenants and member review group had recommended that the Housing service:

- Implement a new robust post inspection process
- Have a bigger focus on per-termination inspections
- Improve the level of redecoration for new tenants
- Support tenants with rubbish/furniture disposal
- Improve the cleanliness of the communal areas

A report was then presented to the Cabinet Member for Housing on 5th March 2021, where additional funding was approved to specifically improve the decoration standard of empty homes. Further progress had been made which included:

- Re-drafting of the Moving in Standard to include common new tenant repairs
- New robust 100% quality inspection by Team Leaders
- 20% sample quality inspections by Repair Co-ordinators
- Recruitment of 4 new painters to join the team
- Commencement of a communal cleaning project review
- Commencement of exit surveys for tenants with a view to how they are supported to remove waste

Members were informed that, in order to ensure the quality of empty homes, an inspection would be carried out by the cleaning team and a quality inspection conducted by the Team Leader. This included the condition of guttering/pipes, windows and internal doors, along with a number of other checks. A number of independent quality inspections would also be carried out on properties to provide assurance of standards. Around 20-30% of properties would be selected for a quality assurance check. Of those checked, around 90% would meet the standard. Where the standard was not met, which tended to be due to minor issues, the property would be handed back to the repairs team for more work before allocation.

A reduction had been seen in the number of repairs for new tenants, though at 2.4 repairs per tenant, this was still seen as high but moving in the correct direction. The target for 2022/23 was for the average number of repairs of 1.9. It was noted that a new ICT system for customer satisfaction would be procured but would not be in place for 14/15 months. In the interim a system using satisfaction cards had been devised which was a quick and easy way of gaining feedback. The focus of customer satisfaction had been on Housing Responsive Repairs, Gas Servicing, Housing Planned Repairs and Aids and Adaptations. Overall, tenants seemed to be generally very happy.

The sub-committee was informed that between April 2021 and October 2021, £72,957 of rechargeable repairs occurred (from 430 properties). Collection recovery was low and a large proportion of the charges were around property clearance. It was noted that most tenants seemed to leave some furniture or rubbish in the property. An exit survey suggested that tenants would clear the property themselves, however, this was not the case. A focus group would be established to explore options around addressing home waste removals.

The Chair thanked the officers for the report and information shared.

It was **agreed** to note the contents of the report and presentation.

HO19/21 Crime and Disorder Priorities

The sub-committee received a report highlighting its role in relation to scrutinising crime and disorder issues and in preparation for a meeting with the Police and Crime Commissioner.

The Housing Sub-committee had been designated the Council's crime and disorder committee since its establishment in June 2014. The requirement for the Council to have a scrutiny committee designated to scrutinise crime and disorder originated from the Police

and Justice Act 2006.

The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for Northumbria had been invited to attend the meeting of Housing Sub-committee on 24 January 2022 to give Members an update on the delivery of the Police and Crime Plan and an outline of current key initiatives.

Police and Crime Commissioners were elected to make sure that local police meet the need of the community. The PCC was the voice of the people and held the police to account. Their aim was to cut crime and deliver an effective and efficient police service within their force area.

Appended to the report was a copy of the Police and Crime Plan for 2021-25. Members were invited to highlight any areas contained in the Police and Crime Plan that they would like to discuss with the PCC. Members agreed that low level crime, anti-social behaviour and domestic abuse were three topics they would like to discuss with the PCC.