

HOUSING & SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of the meeting of the Housing & Social Care Scrutiny Panel held in the Guildhall on Thursday 13 July 2023 at 3 pm

Present

Councillor Kirsty Mellor (in the Chair)
Ryan Brent
Graham Heaney
Leo Madden
George Madgwick

Resident Consortium representative
Maria Cole

James Hill, Director of Housing, Neighbourhood & Building Services
Steve Groves, Head of Building Maintenance
Adam Hardwick, Assistant Director (Buildings)
Meredydd Hughes, Assistant Director (Buildings)
Sally Scattergood, Assistant Director, Housing

5. Apologies (AI 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Raymond Dent and Lewis Gosling. Councillors George Madgwick and Ryan Brent deputised for them respectively.

6. Declarations of Members' Interests (AI 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

7. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 22 March 2023 (AI 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 22 March 2023 be agreed as a correct record.

8. Review into "Response of the Local Authority and Landlords in the city to the issue of damp and mould in social housing and private rented housing" (AI 4)

Councillor Mellor welcomed those present and gave a brief introduction to the review.

In response to Councillor Brent's comment that the panel should focus on outcomes, James Hill advised the panel could assist Housing, Neighbourhood & Building Services (HNBS) in its approach to damp and mould and how it responds to damp and mould in its own housing stock. It could suggest changes in approach to other registered social landlords and the private rented sector. The panel needed to be mindful that in the background the government were scrutinising how landlords deal with damp and mould and further guidance may follow.

The panel agreed they wanted to hear residents' perspectives. It was harder to reach private sector tenants but officers said contact could be made via the Private Sector Housing team and tenants' forums. At a development session of the Health & Wellbeing Board that Councillor Heaney had attended the previous day it was noted that the cause of damp and mould was often attributed to tenants' lifestyles and the aim was to move away from that assumption.

Tenants could put their experiences in writing if they felt uncomfortable about attending a meeting. The panel thought it was sensible to have separate meetings for council and private sector tenants as the processes for dealing with damp and mould were very different in different sectors. Councillor Brent urged that tenants from all of Portsmouth's geographical area should be represented so that the review would show findings from the entire city.

Maria Cole suggested publicising the review via the minutes of the Residents' Consortium meetings as the minutes were seen by far more people than attended the meetings. Heidi Golder, Resident Engagement Team Leader, was the point of contact for the Consortium.

Councillor Madgwick asked if residents were aware of the process for reporting damp and mould. A resident at his surgery could not find information on the council's website on how to report it.

Officers said it was up to the panel if they wanted to talk to landlords and, if so, before or after they met tenants. It might be advisable to hear tenants' experiences first and then talk to landlords. Councillor Brent said the review should focus on good news stories as praise was just as important.

Councillor Madgwick asked how long tenants waited before reporting damp and mould. Some might wait until the situation was extreme. Councillor Madden said his first case as a councillor was damp and mould and the response every time was that the cause was condensation. It was unfortunate it took a child's death (two-year-old Awaab Ishak in December 2020 from mould related causes) for the government to act. He asked the following questions:

- How many tenancies had damp and mould?
- What is the attitude to tenants now and is it different from before?
- What happened when damp and mould came from an adjoining private sector property?
- What were the timescales? How long did it take to resolve problems from start to finish?
- How many people have to be rehoused because of damp and mould?
- How many have to be rehoused because of the state of buildings?

He asked if the training on regulating non-compliance in the private rented sector could be truncated so officers could be trained sooner. Officers explained half the team were currently studying and due to complete shortly and then more of the team would be put through the course from September. All regulation team members undergo Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) and enforcement training as part of their induction and

receive specific training in damp and mould and enforcing on this in line with the HHSRS.

Councillor Mellor said residents had told her they had been told it was condensation. However, tools and training for dealing with damp and mould were also important. Councillor Brent said people being listened to was key but expectations needed to be realistic so residents should not be told the matter would be resolved in two days when it could not.

The panel agreed the scoping document, whilst being aware it was a flexible document that could be adapted as the review progressed.

The meeting concluded at 3.24 pm.

Councillor Kirsty Mellor
Chair