

## **HOUSING & SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY PANEL**

Minutes of the meeting of the Housing & Social Care Scrutiny Panel held in the Executive Meeting Room, the Guildhall, on Wednesday 13 March 2024 at 4 pm

### **Present**

Councillor Raymond Dent (in the Chair)  
Graham Heaney  
Leo Madden

Trevor Lovett, Residents' Consortium representative

Steve Groves, Head of Building Maintenance  
Clare Hardwick, Head of Private Sector Housing

#### **1. Apologies (AI 1)**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Leonie Oliver, Sally Scattergood (Assistant Director, Housing), and Mark Broomer and Mandy Buxey (Residents' Consortium representatives).

#### **2. Declarations of Members' Interests (AI 2)**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **3. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 13 July 2023 (AI 3)**

**RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2023 be agreed as a correct record.**

#### **4. 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 Dent welcomed those present and asked if anyone had any comments or questions. Trevor Lovett had some observations as he thought problems with damp and mould were due to blocked cavities, war damage, degraded sand and cement, and rising damp. Polystyrene sheets were used as cavity wall insulation along with mineral fibre insulation and injected foam insulation; the latter took all the space between the brick work so there was no air and was not used any more. At one of the meetings in the review gutters and condensation were mentioned, but Mr Lovett believed some responsibility is with the tenants. He asked if mineral fibre, polystyrene sheets and cavity foam injection and breakdown of damp courses were mentioned at the meetings.

Steve Groves (Head of Building Maintenance) explained that the Damp and Mould Policy had been approved at the Housing & Tackling Homelessness portfolio meeting in February 2023. He agreed incidents with gutters and

cavities caused problems. Officers have had to clear out cavities in the past, remove insulation and re-insulate. The council has only installed blown fibre insulation. In line with the policy the council has started to record damp and mould on the database so it highlights to the council which properties or archetypes to focus on. The majority of damp and mould issues have been related to condensation. However, some types of properties were more prone to damp and mould, some of which the council had acquired and were typically pre-war and prone to failing cavities and rising damp due to their age. The policy also highlights resident education and officers were working on a video for residents.

It was highlighted that the new damp and mould policy emphasises that first and foremost the objective was for officers to survey the property within 14 days to understand issues with the building's fabric. He confirmed that part of the policy was about training all staff, not just those in technical roles, so that the damp and mould is reported as soon as possible so it can be investigated.

Clare Hardwick (Head of Private Sector Housing) noted that properties in the private rented sector suffered from much the same issues. Regardless of tenure issues were encountered. Education was key so the council emphasised the importance of "making every contact count"; if any council staff visited a property for whatever purpose they were encouraged to notice and report signs of damp and mould.

Councillor Madden noted these were good points. From his point of view, he wanted the review to show the journey a resident had been on and was disappointed there were not enough witnesses at meetings. He was concerned tenants were afraid to speak out about damp and mould. The issue of damp and mould was not going to go away so he would have liked to have met more people to know how residents identified and reported it. He had dealt with damp and mould during his years as a councillor and the cause was always considered to be condensation and residents advised to do things like open windows. The impact of damp and mould on people's health was now more recognised and not assuming that tenants were automatically at fault was a change in the right direction. Councillor Madden thanked Mr Lovett for his observations.

Councillor Dent agreed it was unfortunate that more residents had not been at meetings. He had talked to housing association and private rented sector tenants to encourage them to participate in the review but they were reluctant to even though the meetings were private.

In response to a question from Mr Lovett, Steve Groves said officers used bore scopes, data loggers, thermal cameras or removed bricks to examine cavities. Sometimes there were blocked cavities or there were problems stemming from when the property was built. It was noted that this year's very wet winter had caused problems. It was emphasised that whilst education was important, for example, around preventing condensation, the first step was to get surveyors out to inspect the property to see if any building fabric issues could be eliminated.

Councillor Dent thought the policy was going in the right direction as it aimed to identify problems early before rooms became unusable. It would make a difference but only time would tell. Mr Lovett personally thought the council had an enormous job on its hands and that many of the problems were caused by war damage or the way properties were built. He wished them well. He mentioned the death of two-year-old Awaak Ishab in Rochdale in 2020 which had led to the government taking action on damp and mould.

Councillor Dent thanked officers for their support with the review and said he looked forward to seeing how the policy worked out.

With regard to a topic for the next review, members noted that topics usually alternated between housing and social care themes. As the panel might comprise different members after the elections it was thought advisable to wait until the new municipal year before choosing a topic. Whatever the topic, it was important to consider the scope and what the panel wanted to achieve. Talking to residents might provide ideas for topics.

**RESOLVED that the Panel sign off the review and submit it to the Cabinet for consideration.**

The meeting concluded at 4.33 pm.

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Councillor Raymond Dent  
Chair