

Housing Performance Panel

Minutes of the Quarterly Meeting

held on Thursday, 15 June 2023
from 1pm to 4pm via Zoom

Attendees: Cllr John Batchelor
Les Rolfe
Patricia Hall
Paul Bowman

By Invitation: Geoff Clark (SCDC – Service Manager – Tenancy and Estates)
Grace Andrews (SCDC – Data Quality and Improvement Team Leader)
Dave Armitage (SCDC – Resident Involvement Officer Team Leader)
Bronwen Taylor (SCDC – Resident Involvement Officer) – Minute taker

Apologies: Peter Campbell (Head of Housing) – Chair
Brian Burton
Eleni Koutso
Elaine Phillips (Mears)
Eddie Spicer (SCDC – Service Manager – Housing Assets)

1. Welcome and Apologies

As Peter Campbell had tendered his apologies, he asked Geoff Clark to Chair the meeting. Geoff Clark welcomed everyone to the meeting at 1.01pm.

Apologies were received from Peter Campbell, Brian Burton, Eleni Koutso, Elaine Phillips and Eddie Spicer.

2. Quorum

The meeting was quorate.

3. Minutes of previous meeting – 2 March 2023

The Chair referred to the minutes of the meeting held on 2 March 2023, which were approved by the panel.

4. Matters Arising from previous Meeting – 2 March 2023

4.1 Mears Group (Item 5.1)

1. Eddie Spicer advised that Mears had confirmed that when opting out of a survey, this prevented the tenant from ever receiving a survey again. He also advised that Mears were trying to obtain the data from the 3rd party company that they use.

Bronwen Taylor explained that as per the email from Mears, when a survey was sent to a tenant, they should just rather ignore it instead of opting out and this would ensure that they received future surveys.

Les Rolfe said that his understanding was that the opt-out function would be removed from surveys and should tenants not wish to participate, they simply ignored the text message which would not prevent future surveys from being triggered.

Paul Bowman said that it was an interesting email which had taken close to 13 weeks for Mears to respond to and that since the implementation of the contract, they did still not know how many tenants had opted out of the survey which was worrying and meant that we still did not know what the database was. He added that the tone of the third-party provider's email to Mears was basically saying "tough luck mate, it was only a little contract and it was too difficult for us to pull the data". He added that that was not the basis on which we said to Mears to collect our data on our contract with them. He said that we should push Mears to provide the database.

Geoff Clark asked Paul Bowman to revert back to Eddie Spicer.

Paul Bowman asked for this item to remain as unresolved on the agenda and that he would contact Eddie Spicer.

2. Eddie Spicer advised that about 15 packs were distributed from the Mears supply, as they were late arriving, and prior to that SCDC were supplying from our stock. About 100 of those were distributed, which means that there were a number still available for distribution as we enter the colder months this year.

Action by: Eddie Spicer

4.2 Proposed Meeting Dates for 2023 / 2024 (Item 8)

Bronwen Taylor sent out the meeting invitations for 2023 / 2024.

For noting.

5. Standing Items

5.1 Mears Group – Review of Quarter 4

As Elaine Phillips, from Mears, had tendered her apologies due to problems logging into Zoom, Geoff Clark asked if there were any questions arising from the enclosed report.

Geoff Clark referred to the Voids and said that they had seen a significant number of empty properties that required full refurbishments being new kitchens and bathrooms, heating and plastering, decorating and structural works in some, and this had an impact on the performance.

Paul Bowman asked why there had been an increase.

Geoff Clark said there was a programme to renew elements of those properties as they come to the end of their life by renewing heating systems, kitchens, bathrooms, etcetera with tenants in situ, however, some tenants did not want kitchens or bathrooms to be updated as they did not want the disruptions.

Paul Bowman said that this could have been an argument that could have occurred with anybody that it was interesting that there was a blip now.

Geoff Clark said that we had always had a number of properties in that condition that come back to us and we would have to analyse the data to see if it was increasing or if it was a blip that we had with a significant number over a short period of time. He added that if that were the case, it would affect performance as Mears only had a limited number of resources and they were using additional contractors to support them at the moment.

Paul Bowman said that conversations he had had with other tenants over the years were that the standard of repairs was not done to the standard that a homeowner would expect and therefore at the end of a tenancy, one would see the bad repairs. He asked if Mears were putting right things that they had not done correctly in the first place.

Geoff Clark said that a great deal of council stock was old, although they were being updated internally. He referred to the Stock Condition Survey which would give us more information about the individual condition of the properties and where we would need to invest and spend our resources. He added that we were trying to work through voids as quickly as possible.

A discussion on advertising and refurbishing properties was held.

5.2 Repairs Contract – Performance Review Joint Working Group

Geoff Clark referred to the report included in the pack for noting.

Les Rolfe said that it was a standard meeting and the only problem was that the meeting in May 2023 was cancelled at very short notice. He added that both he and Patti Hall had raised queries with Eddie Spicer, to which they had not had answers yet.

Geoff Clark referred to some of the previous thoughts about the Mears contract and asked if this working group was an opportunity to raise these issues.

Patti Hall said that she felt it was important to raise issues with them because as she said before, they would soon relapse back to how they used to be.

Les Rolfe agreed with Patti Hall and said that the working group was a separate meeting to the performance panel, as it was just Mears and it gave them the chance to question things that did not make sense.

Geoff Clark asked if another meeting date had been set.

Les Rolfe said they were set for the first Thursday of every month.

5.3 SCDC – Review of Quarter 4 Performance Data

Grace Andrews went through a presentation on the Performance Data for Quarter 4, highlighting the key indicators that had either improved, declined or been maintained, as follows:

- Housing Options and Advice – maintained
- Homeless preventions – slight decline
- Average relet times – for the quarter was 26 days which was an improvement from quarter 3
- Best performing landlord (average = 31 days) – 45.9 days
- Satisfaction with response repairs – average = 92% for the quarter – improved from last quarter
- Rent Arrears – top performing = 2.04%
- Proportion of homes with a valid Gas Safety Certificate – top performing = 100%

5.4 SCDC – Review of Quarter 4 Complaints Data

Grace Andrews went through the Complaints and Compliments Data for Quarter 4 as follows:

- 29 complaints received – less than in quarter 3
- 91% digitally with 57% via the portal
- Responded within deadline = 85% – decline on last quarter
- Year to Date complaints – 56% related to repairs and maintenance
- 34 compliments received – year to date

Grace Andrews said that she believed that complaints had not increased due to the Ombudsman code, although there had been some effect.

Paul Bowman asked if the 91% digitally complaints were all received via email and the portal.

Grace Andrews said that they were either through the portal or various South Cambs email inboxes.

Paul Bowman then asked how the complaints received by Mears were treated.

Grace Andrews said that if Mears received an official complaint, they would send them through to her and she would log them.

Paul Bowman asked how many had been received to date since October 2022.

Grace Andrews said that there had not been many. She added that they had fortnightly internal meetings with SCDC officers and Mears where they looked at what complaints were still open and what progress had been made to ensure that we were on track with all open complaints.

Paul Bowman said that in respect of tenant involvement, he felt that there were some areas that they knew nothing about or were not involved in any way at all. He added that they did not have as much input or direct meetings with Mears, since the implementation of the new contract almost 9 months ago, as they did when they were on the TPG and he hoped that it would be looked at in future.

Geoff Clark suggested that Paul Bowman, Eddie Spicer and Dave Armitage get together to look at the current arrangement that was in place for monitoring the contract and for ways to get more tenant involvement.

Patti Hall said she agreed with Paul Bowman and if Mears were not watched, they would slip into their old ways.

Paul Bowman said that believed that there were frantic set of emails going backwards and forwards to get answers to 13-week-old questions that were asked the day before the previous meeting. He added that it was not acceptable and he was not blaming Eddie Spicer, but this was exactly as it was 6 or 7 years ago with Mears, dragging their feet every time they were asked a question and it needed to change. He asked where they were today for this meeting.

Geoff Clark said that Elaine Phillips had problems with Zoom, however, he would provide this feedback to Eddie Spicer.

Les Rolfe said that Mears would regularly arrive at a TPG meeting with a written script, read it all out and ask that questions not be asked as they did not know the answers.

Patti Hall agreed with Les Rolfe.

Action by: Eddie Spicer and Dave Armitage

5.5 Estate Inspections

Bronwen Taylor referred to the Estate Inspection summaries for April 2023, included in the pack, for noting.

Geoff Clark said that in terms of what had been reported, they appear to be regular issues that keep cropping up of which we were aware. He added that there was a benefit from doing these inspections.

Les Rolfe said that common issues were raised at every inspection. He added that the tenant inspectors looked at areas where SP Landscapes may not have been to with their trimmers or areas that the Housing Service Officers (HSO) did not get to on a regular basis.

Geoff Clark said that with the resources that we had, officers were unable to be on every single estate in the district as they spent a great deal of the time with a limited number of tenants. He added that these estate inspections were helpful as we did pick up issues that we may not see on a regular basis and they helped to improve the outlook of the estate.

Les Rolfe referred to the inspection at Girton and said that the 3 landscaping issues should already be on SP Landscapes schedule.

Paul Bowman said that they should have sight of the Service Level Agreement with SP Landscapes so that we knew exactly what they should be doing.

Les Rolfe said that we went according to the Grounds Maintenance (GM) maps and if an area was on a map, it should be dealt with by SP Landscapes. He said we should not be asking them to quote on an issue that they were already being paid for.

Geoff Clark said that the frequency of works was also dependant on the weather.

Paul Bowman agreed and said that the effectiveness of weed spraying was also dependent upon when it was done, for example, it was not effective at the end of the growing season. He also agreed with Les Rolfe in that we should not be asking SP Landscapes to quote on jobs that they should have already done. He said that the tenant representatives had no idea of what work they were contracted to do and when, since despite asking on many occasions, no-one had produced a Service Level Agreement for SP Landscapes. He added that the HSO advised that they could not get a schedule of works from them. He said that as we did not have the information, it made it difficult to make an assessment whether or not SP Landscapes were doing their job by the time the tenant volunteers arrived at the estate inspection.

Geoff Clark said that he was surprised that the SHOs did not know when SP Landscapes were going to be doing work. He said that they were doing 12 cuts in the growing season, the first cut being done in March and then depending on weather conditions, they would do the last one in October.

Paul Bowman asked for SP Landscapes to provide a schedule of the cuts due in the next 2 weeks and added that this information should be readily available.

Geoff Clark said that we used to receive and publish the schedules before COVID and he would ask them to publicise them again.

Les Rolfe said that when the HSOs were asked when estates were either last cut or when they were due to be cut again, they did not always know the answer.

Geoff Clark said that if he were an officer, he would make sure that he had that information before going on the inspection in order to pre-empt those types of issues being raised.

Dave Armitage said that he had requested a schedule of the proposed work from SP Landscapes prior to an inspection and they said that they were unable to provide it. He added that they provided a schedule of work that had already been done as opposed to upcoming work. He said he told them that it would limit the number of enquiries they would get, as when we were at the inspections and were asked when work was going to be done, we would be able to provide it.

Paul Bowman said that this needed to be resolved before the new contract was implemented.

Les Rolfe referred to the GM maps and said that there were not accurate and up to date.

Geoff Clark said that we would be recruiting a Lands Officer shortly who would have overall responsibility for managing all our land assets and this was a task that he would be asking them to look at.

Action by: Geoff Clark

6. New Matters

There were no new matters.

7. Any Other Business (AOB)

7.1 Sheltered Estate Team Leader

Geoff Clark said that Marianne Crozier, the new Sheltered Estate Team Leader, had started with SCDC and going out on site visiting the schemes that she was responsible for, and had been meeting with the various team leaders.

Bronwen Taylor advised that she would be joining the group at the upcoming estate inspection in Over on 22 June 2023.

8. Meeting Dates for 2023 / 2024

The Chair referred to the meeting dates for 2023 / 2024 as follows:

- 14 September 2023 (Zoom / venue to be confirmed)
- 7 December 2023 (Zoom / venue to be confirmed)
- 14 March 2024 (Zoom / venue to be confirmed)

9. Closing

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting ended at 2.15pm.