

## **Housing Operations Board – EWG**

**31 July 2024**

**6:00 to 7:30pm**

### **Present**

Cllr Booker

Cllr Creese

Cllr King

Cllr Redpath

Dale Askew - TEG

Patricia Ayling - TEG

Alan Wood - TEG

Julian Higson – Joint Strategic Director Housing, Environment and Communities

Annalisa Howson – Joint Assistant Director for Housing

### **1. Introductions**

Cllr McShane welcomed everyone to the inaugural Housing Operations Board (HOB) and thanked them for their engagement and interest in housing services.

### **2. Apologies**

Cllr Akhtar

Cllr Brooker in part left 6:30pm

Pat Conroy - Tenant Engagement Group (TEG)

Dennis Hughes – Homelessness Representative

Ketan Petal - Homelessness Representative

Siobhan Kennedy – Homelessness, Advice and Allocations Lead

Meena Lota – Housing Insight and Improvement Senior Specialist

Gavin Luke-Deschanel- Complaints Resolution Officer

Hazel Craig- Waller - Housing Insight and Improvement Specialist

Lisa Holt – Housing Performance and Insight Officer

John Armstrong – Democratic Services and Elections Manager

### 3. Terms of Reference

Annalisa introduced why the Board has been established, with the aim to bring tenants and members closer to the housing decision making process. For the service to be open and transparent. To provide assurance the service is meeting regulatory and legislative requirements and share areas for improvement. Thus, giving the opportunity for stakeholders to hold the service to account.

Annalisa presented the terms of reference for Board discussion:

- Noted that the Board does **not** replace TEG or O&S.
- Noted that the Board may make recommendations and comments to decision makers.
- Agreed to have standing agenda items for Declaration of Interest and AOB.
- Agreed for meeting to be hybrid.
- Agreed to not live stream or record the meeting currently, to support open discussion. To keep under review.
- Agreed agenda, reports, and minutes to be published.

Julian suggested for the Board have an out of office meeting at least once a year – to visit homes, works, development etc

Dale raised concern about the backlog of works and queried costings following the fraud investigation. Confirmed that the Housing Improvement Plan includes Leaseholder services, and the Board may request for more in depth topics to be added to the workplan.

Cllr King asked on longevity of the Board. Annalisa advised that as long as Guildford had a housing service, she expected the Board to be in place.

#### Recommendation:

Board agreed the draft Terms of Reference with amendments/clarification to:

- Number of non-Executive members from four to up to
- include online option to attend meetings

#### Actions:

- Annalisa to update Terms of Reference
- Democratic Services to incorporate additional agenda items

#### **4. Introduction to Housing Service**

Annalisa shared that this is a pivotal time for housing locally and nationally.

Following the fraud investigation and self-referral to the [Regulator of Social Housing](#) (RSH) the service has developed a [Housing Improvement Plan](#) to respond to the SOLACE report recommendations and to address the failing identified in the self-referral.

She explained that nationally, there is a new era for regulation for all social housing providers, with the RSH introducing four consumer standards on 1 April 2024 for landlord services functions.

Noted the Housing Service has two strands for the Boards consideration – strategic functions (homelessness, allocations, enabling) and landlord functions (management maintenance and engagement).

She provided a few numbers for context – 5,200 homes, 2,300 applicants, 1,200 approaches.

Councillors advised that poor service issues with the housing service not solely due to the fraud investigation. Julian thanked members for the feedback, he explained that we recognise that there are areas of good service and areas for improvement. We need to give staff the opportunity and systems to deliver great services. The team want to do a good job, as seen by whistle blowing, and have been through challenging times. We are working with team to empower and support them with improvements but will take time to resolve system and IT issues. We acknowledge where we are, where we came from and where we want to be.

#### **5. Housing Ombudsman Annual Self-Assessment**

Annalisa explained that the annual self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman Service's Complaint Handling Code was a new requirement for all social landlords. We have met all the code requirements but must keep under review and ensure the policy is embedded in practice and that lessons are learnt from complaints for ongoing improvements.

Board members reinforced the need to ensure the policy is embedded in practice. Julian advised of the need for a culture change in way react to complaints. Working with Peter Stevens Interim Joint Assistant Director for Communications and Customer Service on system, process, and culture. We need to ensure comprehensive monitoring of complaints – not only numbers and time completed but confirm actions completed and satisfaction with case handling.

## **6. Housing Service Complaints Handling Performance Report**

Annalisa shared the report and noted the increase in complaints. This is to be expected given the fraud investigation and impact on services, and also due to the government's national [Make things right campaign](#). We also welcome complaints (as free feedback) and do not want residents to be afraid to raise issues. The report also includes area for improvement – suggested Board request an update in six months.

Patrica stated that TEG had reviewed the report and requested further details inc type of complaint.

Board discussion on fencing, record keeping, members enquiries, website and to reduce formality of process.

Annalisa confirmed that TEG can raise complaints for tenants, provided they have tenant permission to act on their behalf.

### **Actions:**

- Annalisa to request clarification on fencing requests
- Annalisa to ask Peter Stevens to consider Councillor access to complaints systems
- Annalisa to ask Communications team to review accessibility of online complaint form
- TEG to receive quarterly complaints report
- HOB to review six monthly complaints report

## **7. Forward Plan**

Annalisa shared draft plan and invited comments and future agenda suggestions. Annalisa recommended that the Board have *standing items*:

- Housing Improvement Plan Progress
- RSH Progress
- Performance
- TEG reports/ feedback

and *topics reports* as listed with additions of Allocation Policy, York Road HUB, TEG reports.

Agreed next meeting reports:

- Declarations of Interest
- Terms of Reference
- Housing Improvement Plan Progress
- RSH Progress
- Performance - Q1 report
- Void Report
- TEG feedback
- Forward Plan
- AOB

## **8. AOB**

Board members requested training on allocations process included in Councillor Training.

Pat raised question regarding support for service veterans. Julian advised have priority for housing. Cllr McShane advised of Armed Service Champion – Cllr Hives.

Cllr Creese questioned how addressing current voids. Annalisa confirmed that we are not in the position we want to be, as have a significant backlog of works, following end of contract and need to prioritise resources to ensuring the safety of tenanted homes. Julian confirmed that the in-house responsive repairs team have worked to relet some homes and a new contractor had been appointed to start in September. Discussion on impact of overgrown gardens, housing need and how to progress.

On a positive note, Pat advised that her new neighbours were very happy with the works in their new home.

Cllr McShane requested a communication plan for the Board.

Board agreed eight weekly cycle of meeting – Wednesdays at 6pm convenient for all.

#### Actions

Annalisa to request all member training session on Allocations – invitation to inc all Board members

Annalisa to request allocation information on ex services applicants be shared with HOB and Cllr Hives.

Julian to request team review long term void gardens

Voids report to next meeting

Annalisa request press release of first meeting with link to agenda and notes and open invitation to attend

Annalisa to request Democratic services set up series of meeting for the next 12 months.

#### **9. Date of Next meeting**

Proposed next meeting 25 September 2024.

#### **10. Close**

Cllr McShane thanked everyone for attending and looking forward to working with Board in the future. Close of meeting 730pm.