

## **MEETING OF THE COUNCIL**

**11 NOVEMBER 2014**

### **ITEM 7 – QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS**

#### **QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR J LEGRYS TO COUNCILLOR R D BAYLISS**

Why did the Housing Portfolio Holder remove regular internal and external inspections of this Council's housing portfolio, and has the lack of inspection created any breaches of relevant safety Regulations?

#### **RESPONSE FROM COUNCILLOR R D BAYLISS**

Internal and external inspections of properties are, and have previously been, undertaken in many ways.

Scheduled estate inspections were previously undertaken by the patch based Housing Officers and provided an opportunity for residents and ward members to work with staff to resolve local issues. In response to a poor audit inspection back in 2006, they were a means of raising the profile of the housing service on the ground on our estates.

In later years, attendance at the inspections was not normally high, with often only housing staff present, or for new issues to be only rarely identified during the inspections as the Housing Officer had usually identified the issues during their normal duties. The inspections therefore ceased in 2012. Each Housing Officer now spends approximately 70% of their time on their patch, and can identify and action issues without the need for a scheduled estate inspection.

Tenancy audits were previously scheduled on a five year rolling programme and were used to confirm that the property was occupied by the correct tenant and the property was in a reasonable condition. The continuation of these inspections was reconsidered as part of the review of the Housing Management structure as there was no identifiable benefit in continuing with this approach which was extremely resource intensive. It was decided staff resources should be freed up to focus on other priorities, such as minimising the impact on tenants of welfare reform.

During the period of completing the tenancy audits they did not identify any new unlawful occupiers or any properties which required immediate intervention due to their condition. This assessment continues to be undertaken during normal interactions with our tenants or in response to any concerns raised by local residents, ward members or partner organisation.

In addition to estate inspections, regular inspections of blocks are undertaken, for example sheltered schemes in order to assess the quality of the cleaning being undertaken by the external contractor, Servest.

Following the recent introduction of mobile working within the housing service, we now have an effective route through which staff based in the district can report matters as soon as they are identified, for corrective action to be instigated.

In their role as a landlord, the Council has not breached any safety regulations since our change of approach.

We have also over the last 4 years completed a detailed stock condition survey at nearly all of the Council's properties. This work was completed in three phases by our property condition consultants Savills, and provides the basis for our stock condition database. This is updated as a consequence of any alterations carried out through the Decent Homes programme, other planned & cyclical works or upgrades that occur through voids or responsive repair work.

We are shortly going to be reviewing our Asset Management Strategy beyond the completion of the Decent Homes programme, which may look at joining up our housing investment programmes, stock condition information and housing management services with other local and Council services on a neighbourhood basis.

It is important to remember that whilst the Council has clear responsibilities as a landlord, tenants themselves have a duty of care relating to their actions. So, whilst the landlord has responsibilities in informing tenants of health and safety issues, individuals must also act in a responsible manner and take personal care of themselves whilst in our properties.