

Housing Task & Finish Working Group

Report to Economy & Place Scrutiny Committee: Thursday 21 September 2023

The Housing Task & Finish Working Group met on 19 July and 13 September. Good progress has been made. A draft report will be tabled at the next meeting of the Working Group, on 1 November, with the report being finalised on 29 November for submission to the Economy & Place Scrutiny Committee on 7 December. The Council Officers involved are comfortable with this timetable.

The Working Group has received written responses from the key providers of social housing in the Borough and met with Aspire on 13 September. The Working Group was unanimous in the view that the condition of the housing stock is much better than we were led to believe, when the group was set up, in response to concerns raised by some Councillors. The case cited by former Cllr Sue Moffat would appear to be atypical; unfortunately, that case cannot be investigated further, due to the absence of details, following the resignation of Cllr Moffat. Both the Working Group and Aspire thought it would have been useful to understand exactly what had happened in that case.

The Working Group's views on the need for a housing stock survey has changed, given the situation is significantly better than the group anticipated and there is a considerable amount of work in progress to enhance the quality of the housing stock, along with proactive measures to deal with damp and mould. Additionally, reporting mechanisms and response times to repair requests are being improved. Consequently, the Working Group are unanimous in their view that a Housing Stock Condition Survey should not take place before 2025-26 and noted that, given the last survey was undertaken in 2016, the next survey could possibly be delayed until 2026-27. [The Housing Stock Condition Survey 'lifetime' is 10 years maximum.] Clearly, with significant enhancement work being undertaken by the providers, in terms of energy efficiency and mitigating risks such as damp and mould, it makes sense to assess the condition of the housing stock once these improvements have been made; particularly, as such a survey will inform Borough Council policy.

Aspire agreed, at the request of the Working Group, they would be willing to give a presentation, via TEAMS (available for all Councillors), to enable Councillors to hear what progress was being made to improve their housing stock and their response times, along with information on the reporting mechanisms and the complaints escalation process.

A brief 'snapshot' report on the private sector will be included as an Annex for completeness: there are no obvious trends in terms of issues. However, concern was expressed that tenants may not complain to private landlords because of fear of eviction.

The proposed reforms in the White Paper have been considered by the Public Protection Committee; however, reference will be made to several concerns about particular aspects contained in the White Paper, raised by the providers (Wrekin and Aspire).

Robert Bettley-Smith

Chairman, Housing Task & Finish Working Group