

Berneslai Homes Customer Services Committee 15th August 2024 – Meeting Summary:

Protests in Barnsley

The Committee received a verbal update on the ongoing far-right protests, which had recently taken place in Barnsley and the region. They were advised that a zero-tolerance approach is being taken for employees, tenants, and housing applicants involved in the protests. Support is being made available to vulnerable tenants and joint work is taking place between Berneslai Homes and BMBC Safer Neighbourhood Services regarding community safety. Pre-planned contingency arrangements have been put in place to ensure the Call Centre is not affected, allowing telephone calls for repairs to continue and preventing disruption to services for tenants.

The Committee expressed support for the approach which is being taken.

Customer Insight and Engagement Update

The Committee were informed of a communication oversight, with involved tenants not being advised of a change to the approval route for Berneslai Homes' Customer Insight and Engagement Strategy 2024/2027. Therefore, it has been agreed to pause the Strategy being presented to BMBC Cabinet. A meeting is being arranged with Berneslai Homes, BMBC and involved tenants to discuss any concerns they may have. The Tenants Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) are also being contacted for their views following the smart review of the service to share with wider involved tenants. Assurance was given that the pause will provide a better opportunity to ensure the Strategy is fit for purpose.

A presentation was given to Committee, which outlined the positive achievements within Quarter 1 (April – June 2024) in terms of strengthening the tenant voice. 22 tenants had joined the vulnerability themed Customer Panel in June, which raised awareness around Berneslai Homes' Vulnerability Protocol and approach if something does not look right. This ensures tenants within our communities are aware of the information and support available from Berneslai Homes and other services and are able to help each other live safely in their tenancies.

The Committee noted the update on the Customer Insight and Engagement Strategy 2024/2027, and expressed their appreciation of the approach being taken to ensure that tenants are fully engaged in the approval process of the Strategy.

Damp & Mould Action Plan Quarterly Update

The Committee received a comprehensive presentation on the Damp and Mould Action Plan, which highlighted trends and key actions completed and in progress. Innovative approaches being implemented in this area of work were outlined, particularly around the training given to some involved tenants, which helps them differentiate between damp, mould and condensation.

As the autumn/winter is approaching, assurance was given that communication to tenants will commence at the end of August to provide helpful information in preparation for the change of season. Tenants are also being signposted to the support which is available.

The Committee noted the presentation and appreciated the ongoing work in respect of damp and mould.

2024/25 Quarter 1 Complaints Handling and Learning Report

The Committee received a report which summarised the complaint handling and learning for Quarter 1 (April – June) 2024/25. The report provided assurance that the approach is fully aligned with the Complaint Handling Code and that the Complaint Policy has been implemented. Stage 1 complaints are being managed more effectively with additional resources, leading to quicker responses despite a high volume of complaints. Any escalated service requests are dealt with quickly and it was agreed to include the analysis of service requests in future quarterly reports to determine if issues are being resolved at the earliest opportunity. Assurance was given on the continued progress in improving the complaint handling service, in particular the strengthening of governance oversight for complaint handling and learning. From a tenant perspective, there were concerns regarding communication to ensure that they are kept updated on repairs. The relocation of Berneslai Homes' Partner (Construction Services) supervisory and managerial staff to Gateway Plaza Offices will enable closer working arrangements within the Repairs and Maintenance Team, which will improve service planning, delivery and complaint resolution.

Committee were informed of the positive compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Services' (HOS) Complaint Handling Code, the on-time submission of the self-assessment to the HOS. Continuing amendments to the IT system were acknowledged together with the residual risks that will continue to be monitored. It is the intention of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel to undertake a scrutiny exercise during Quarter 2 (July – September) to consider customer feedback from the complaint handling survey to establish if Berneslai Homes are learning from feedback.

The Committee noted the report and the continued positive progress in improving the complaint handling service.

Quarterly Performance Report Quarter 2024/25

The Quarter 1 (April – June 2024) performance information was presented and discussed. The report covered information in respect of the 38 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), rag status, key strengths and areas of focus for the Quarter. 8 KPIs had met or exceeded targets, with 6 narrowly missing targets, and 7 not achieving targets. Key performance highlighted was in relation to 100% compliance across all 5 Building Safety Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) and strong rent collection performance. Performance targets are set based on allocated budgets within the management fee allocated to Berneslai Homes by BMBC. Areas of focus included the proportion of emergency and non-emergency repairs completed on target and void rent loss. Disappointment was expressed in relation to the reduced call handling performance which had recently seen improvements, however, recognition was given to the implementation of the Repairs First System, which had had a disruptive effect on the reduced performance levels. Close attention will be given to this area moving forward given the importance to customers as a main point of access to services.

The Committee reviewed the Quarter 1 performance report, recognised strengths and areas for improvement, and the actions being taken to address concerns.

Neighbourhood Services Performance Annual Report 2023/24

The Committee received the Neighbourhood Services Performance Annual Report 2023/24, which provides an update and assurance to the Committee that service delivery aligns with the agreed specification standards of the Service Level Agreement with the Council's Neighbourhood Services. Key areas highlighted from the report were in relation to the slight increase in satisfaction with the neighbourhood as a place to live and grass maintenance, as per the 2023 Annual Star Survey. Rubbish and litter remain the most problematic issues, followed by car parking and dog fouling. Proactive measures have been taken to improve satisfaction levels, such as monitoring void gardens, inspecting communal areas and garage sites, and introducing bespoke calling cards to thank tenants for maintaining their gardens. Involved tenants have supported the design of the calling cards and the proactive approach to void properties and are happy to support the improvements needed.

The Committee were assured that service is in line with the agreed specification standards and noted the performance information which showed good partnership working and changes in approach following tenant involvement.

Annual Report to Tenants

The Committee received a draft of the Annual Report to Tenants 2023/24. The report has been developed with the involvement of 8 engaged tenants who participated in a Project Working Group. Constructive feedback from this Group contributed to the collaborative working and co-designing of the report which ensured the tone and content of the report were suitable and understandable for other tenants and stakeholders. The report includes a mix of case studies to encourage more people in similar situations to seek necessary support. It will be published on Berneslai Homes' website and promoted through Berneslai Homes' social media channels, bitesize news posts, and the tenants' monthly email newsletter. This will also be received by Berneslai Homes; partners and Elected Members. Recommendations from the previous year regarding wider distribution of physical copies and promotion using Barnsley Council's digital screen network have been implemented again this year. A limited printed version will be distributed in locations such as Independent Living Schemes, Community Centres, Libraries, and TARA meeting points.

The Committee approved the draft Annual Report for publication in September 2024 and expressed their satisfaction with the content and presentation of the report, noting its positive tone and useful key information. Committee extended their thanks to the tenants involved in the Project Working Group for their positive and constructive feedback.