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Report of: *Mick Crofts*
Report to: *Cllr Paul Wood*
Date of Decision: *4th October 2021*
Subject: *New Landlord Commitments*

Is this a Key Decision? If Yes, reason Key Decision:- Yes No

- Expenditure and/or savings over £500,000
- Affects 2 or more Wards

Which Executive Member Portfolio does this relate to? *Housing, Waste Management and Highways*

Which Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee does this relate to? *Overview and Management Scrutiny Committee*

Has an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) been undertaken? Yes No

If YES, what EIA reference number has it been given? *951*

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

If YES, give details as to whether the exemption applies to the full report / part of the report and/or appendices and complete below:-

*“The (**report/appendix**) is not for publication because it contains exempt information under Paragraph (**insert relevant paragraph number**) of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).”*

Purpose of Report:

To brief Executive Member on the draft Landlord Commitments, and on how these have been developed. To then seek his approval for the housing service to formally adopt these Commitments.

Recommendations:

That Executive Member approves the adoption of the Landlord Commitments proposed in this report.

Background Papers:

- Appendix One: Proposed new Landlord Commitments and associated performance measures
- Appendix Two: Communications and Consultation Plan.
- Appendix Three: Customer Survey.
- Appendix Four: Feedback report for the Customer Review Group.
- Appendix Five: Survey used to consult with Customer Review Group
- Appendix Six: Outcomes of the consultation with the Customer Review Group

Lead Officer to complete:-		
1	I have consulted the relevant departments in respect of any relevant implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist, and comments have been incorporated / additional forms completed / EIA completed, where required.	Finance: <i>Karen Jones</i>
		Legal: <i>Stephen Tonge</i>
		Equalities: <i>Louise Nunn</i>
<i>Legal, financial/commercial and equalities implications must be included within the report and the name of the officer consulted must be included above.</i>		
2	EMT member who approved submission:	<i>Mick Crofts</i>
3	Executive Member consulted:	<i>Cllr Paul Wood</i>
4	I confirm that all necessary approval has been obtained in respect of the implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist and that the report has been approved for submission to the Decision Maker by the EMT member indicated at 2. In addition, any additional forms have been completed and signed off as required at 1.	
	Lead Officer Name: <i>Vicky Kennedy</i>	Job Title: <i>Operational Team Manager</i>
	Date: 9 th Sep 2021	

1. PROPOSAL

- 1.1 The Housing and Neighbourhoods Service currently has a set of Customer Standards, which relate to its services as a landlord to its tenants and leaseholders. These were developed in partnership with tenants and leaseholders back in 2012 and cover the following key ‘themes’:
- Cleaner, Greener, and Safer
 - Customer Service
 - Income Management
 - Maintenance and Repair
 - Access to Housing
 - Getting Involved
 - Sheltered Housing
- 1.2 Over the years these Standards have lost their impact and visibility. There is very little awareness of them amongst tenants and staff alike, and no direct link is made between the Standards and our performance measures. We deliver and measure much of what the Standards cover, but this is done irrespective, not because of, the Standards.
- 1.3 A recent report from the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS), undertaken as part of our work in 2019 to develop a new Engagement Strategy, echoed this fact. It made the recommendation that the council housing service should “Develop, with tenants and leaseholders, a clear set of service standards for all the key landlord services”
- 1.4 A similar recommendation was also made by our tenant scrutiny panel Challenge for Change as part of their most recent review. Their report stated that “the [council housing] service must update the current Customer Services Charter”
- 1.5 It is essential if we are to deliver an efficient, high standard housing service that we are committed to achieving the things that matter most to our tenants and leaseholders. Also, it is imperative that targets are set to ensure that we are measuring our performance of those elements in a transparent and accessible way.
- 1.6 Alongside all of this, the Government recently published its White Paper “A Charter for Social Housing Tenants”. This outlines the areas which the government believes social landlords should focus on and which – following extensive consultation nationwide – they believe to be of most importance to social tenants.
- 1.7 All of these factors have led to us now undertaking a review of our Customer Standards, along with the performance measures which underpin them. We have done this review in close consultation with tenants and leaseholders, and the new proposed Landlord Commitments and associated performance measures – attached in Appendix One - are entirely based on what they have told us matter to them the most.

2. HOW DOES THIS DECISION CONTRIBUTE?

- 2.1 The Council has just announced its new “Our Sheffield One Year Plan”, and our proposed Landlord Commitments – and the way in which we have developed them – support much of what is included in the Plan.
- 2.2 In its introduction, the Plan refers to the Council’s key focus on ‘...genuinely listening to people’s views’. The draft Landlord Commitments are based entirely on what tenants and leaseholders have told us are their main priorities and what they most want us to deliver. They are a direct

response to their needs and expectations. By also introducing a clear set of publicly-reported performance measures to underpin them, it will ensure that our service remains focused at all times on delivering what our customers want.

- 2.3** The first chapter of the One Year Plan describes the Council's main priorities for its Communities and Neighbourhoods. The Council sets out its ambition for communities "...where everyone has a home they are proud of, which suits their needs...". Through the consultation undertaken in developing the new Commitments, we have gained a true understanding of what our tenants believe we should do as their landlord to help achieve this.
- 2.4** There are also a number of priority commitments made in this chapter to which our new Commitments directly refer and support:
- "Make it easier for our tenants to report issues and book repairs, ensuring the process.....is seamless"
 - "Continue to invest and build high quality, sustainable Council homes..."
 - "Improve safety and tackle antisocial behaviour..."
 - "Keep our neighbourhoods clean and tidy..."
- 2.5** The Commitments will also significantly contribute to our compliance with the requirements of the Social Housing White Paper as and when they are implemented. Compliance with these requirements will be mandatory, and proactive regulation / monitoring by the Regulator of Social Housing is planned.
- 2.6** The scope of the White Paper is wider than the areas covered by these proposals, and more work will be needed within the Service to ensure we meet the new regulations once they are confirmed. However, delivering on the new Landlord Commitments as described in this report will mean that we are already collecting much of the required tenant satisfaction and performance information – particularly around safety of homes, sharing of performance data with tenants, dealing with complaints, treating tenants with respect and good quality homes and neighbourhoods.
- 2.7** The proposed Commitments will also contribute to our compliance with the current Regulator of Social Housing Consumer Standards:
- The commitments covering the quality and safety of homes supports compliance with the Home Standard
 - Those relating to management of estates support compliance with the Neighbourhood and Community Standard
 - Those relating to how we treat our tenants support compliance with the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard.

3. HAS THERE BEEN ANY CONSULTATION?

- 3.1** At the start of the work to review the Customer Standards, a full Communications and Consultation Plan was developed. This was shared and agreed with senior managers, Cabinet Member and the Housing and Neighbourhoods Advisory Panel (HANAP). A copy of this plan is attached as Appendix Two.
- 3.2** Broadly, the consultation on this review was done in two phases. The first phase was centred around a customer survey, shared with as many tenants and leaseholders as possible. It was promoted through our regular tenant e-bulletin, social media, targeted emails and in new tenancy sign-up packs.

- 3.3** To ensure the survey was accessible to all, we ran it as both an online and telephone survey, with the questions being identical for both (a full copy of the survey is attached in Appendix Three). The survey ran for 8 weeks to give customers plenty of time to take part.
- 3.4** By asking demographics questions as an additional, optional part of the online survey, we were able to keep a check on the profile of our respondents. The key areas we focused on were age, ethnicity and postcode.
- 3.5** The spread of ethnicity and postcodes was broadly in line with our tenant profile, but it became apparent early in the consultation that our younger tenants were not fairly represented. We therefore asked ViewPoint, our partner organisation undertaking the telephone surveys on our behalf, to focus specifically on younger tenants. This greatly increased the numbers of younger tenants taking part and ensured their voice was heard.
- 3.6** As well as the telephone and online surveys, we also ran an interactive online workshop with our tenant-led Housing and Neighbourhoods Partnership Group, based around the same survey questions.
- 3.7** A detailed report of the survey outcomes is included in Appendix Four. In summary, the key priorities for customers which emerged from the survey are as follows:
- A good repairs service
 - Dealing with breaches of tenancy, including neighbour nuisance
 - Clean and tidy estates
 - Homes which are safe
 - Good quality homes
 - Sorting out complaints
 - Being able to get in touch with us easily
 - Being treated properly by our staff
- 3.8** Once phase one of the consultation was completed and the feedback analysed, the initial draft of the new customer standards was developed (renamed as “Landlord Commitments” as we felt this would be more meaningful to our customers). These were developed in liaison with the relevant Service Managers, along with a set of performance measures to underpin them. The draft was then shared with Cabinet Member.
- 3.9** As part of the original customer survey, we asked respondents if they would like to be part of a ‘Customer Review Group’ which would work with us later in the project. The role of this Group would be to look at the outcomes of the initial consultation, alongside the draft of the new Landlord Commitments, and to then give us their views on:
- The wording of the new Commitments – are they clear, understandable and relevant?
 - Do the new Commitments accurately and fairly reflect what customers told us in their survey responses?
- 3.10** This Review Group formed phase two of the consultation, and we initially had over 300 customers volunteering to take part. We shared with them the outcomes of the consultation and the draft Landlord Commitments (via the report attached in Appendix Four). We gave them a choice in how they could give us their feedback – as another online or telephone survey, as a paper-based survey or in an online focus / discussion group. 75 individuals took part in this second stage of the consultation.
- 3.11** Whichever feedback method was chosen by individuals, the survey questions asked of them

were the same. A copy of the survey used with the Review Group is given in Appendix Five.

- 3.12** A detailed report of the feedback from the Review Group is included in Appendix Six. Overall, the Review Group were extremely happy with the draft Commitments. 96% of respondents said they found them easy to understand, and 93% felt that they fairly reflected what customers had told us in Phase One. It was therefore agreed that no further changes to the Commitments were needed.
- 3.13** The most common comment made in the feedback was questioning how we would ensure the new Commitments are delivered, and expressing a concern that the new Commitments won't really make a difference to the service which tenants receive. It is clear that as a Service we need to be very open and transparent about how we are performing against these Commitments, and that we work hard to do what we say we will. Details of how we will ensure this happens are given in section 4.4 below.

4. RISK ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

4.1 Equality of Opportunity Implications

- 4.1.1** An Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken and no negative implications from these proposals were identified.

4.2 Financial and Commercial Implications

- 4.2.1** There will be a small cost to the HRA of publicising and 'launching' the new Landlord Commitments of approximately £1,500 to ensure that all tenants and leaseholders are aware of them. However, this cost will be covered by the existing communications budget for the service and so does not represent an additional cost. There are no other financial or commercial implications.

4.3 Legal Implications

- 4.3.1** Under the Housing Act 1985 (and the terms of its tenancy agreements) the Council has a legal duty to consult tenants on matters of housing management that may affect them. The Council must also adhere to the Regulator of Social Housing (RoSH) "Tenant Involvement and Empowerment" Standard to support tenants to shape policies, scrutinise service delivery, set standards and provide tenants with accessible, relevant and timely information.
- 4.3.2** This Report and its Recommendation complies and is consistent with these legal and regulatory obligations.
- 4.3.3** Furthermore, the Report demonstrates sound awareness of future related developments proposed by the Social Housing White Paper (SHWP) in relation to tenant involvement (namely the 7 measures set out in the proposed SHWP "Charter for Social Housing Residents") and the new RoSH Consumer Standards that will be issued to align with the provisions of the SHWP. Therefore, the Recommendation is also consistent with the anticipated change in the legal and regulatory landscape that will affect these new proposed Landlord Commitments and lays foundation for future compliance when the detailed provisions are produced and made available to the sector.

In summary, the Report and Recommendations are lawful and will remain lawful when the new legal and regulatory obligations of the SHWP come into force.

4.4 Other Implications

- 4.4.1** These proposals have significant implications for how we measure and report on our performance, and on how we enable customers to scrutinise our performance. It was clear in the feedback from the Customer Review Group that some tenants are sceptical as to whether these new Commitments will really make a difference for tenants, and whether we will actually deliver what we have committed to.
- 4.4.2** So, as described earlier in this report, as part of the work in developing the Commitments we also developed a set of Performance Indicators (PIs) which will underpin them. Work is currently ongoing to establish how these PIs will be routinely reported on – both to customers and senior managers. This work is yet to be finalised - but there will be open, honest and accessible reporting of our performance using a range of channels. This will include a dedicated Performance page on our website, regular posts on the Housing and Neighbourhoods Facebook page and regular reports to our customer engagement / scrutiny forums (eg. the Housing and Neighbourhoods Advisory Panel).
- 4.4.3** These PIs will include a range of customer satisfaction measures. Where relevant, the focus / wording of these will be consistent with those proposed by the Regulator of Social Housing (RoSH) in relation to the requirements of the Social Housing White Paper.
- 4.4.4** Although it should also be noted that our satisfaction measures are not intended to exhaustively cover all of those proposed by the RoSH. Our measures relate to what our tenants have told us matter most to them – these do align with a number of the proposed RoSH measures, but not all of them. Further work will be needed once the RoSH measures are confirmed to introduce additional performance / satisfaction measures outside of the framework provided by the Landlord Commitments.

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 5.1** The current Customer Promises could have remained in place, and no changes made to how we report publicly our performance. This would have meant staying with an out-of-date and out-of-touch set of standards which neither customers nor staff engage with. It would also mean our performance measures and performance reports remaining largely inaccessible and irrelevant to the majority of our customers.

6. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1** Adopting the new Landlord Commitments will be a clear statement to our customers that we are focused on delivering what matters most to them. They will also provide us with a framework on which to base clear, transparent and user-friendly performance reports to share publicly.
- 6.2** In addition, as described above in 2.5 – 2.7, they will significantly contribute to our compliance with many of the requirements proposed in the Social Housing White paper and also the current Regulator of Social Housing Consumer Standards.