

**RESIDENT SCRUTINY PANEL MEETING  
MINUTES  
Tuesday 25 April 2023 at Monson House**

**Present: Members**  
Abdul Kader (AK)  
Adam Field (AF) via Teams  
Alex Tuckwell (AT)  
Kirsty East (KE)  
Kevin Dodds (KD)  
Natalieann Leadbetter (NL)  
Paul Evans (PE)  
Sue Masters (SM)  
Steve Hill (StH) via Teams  
Teresa Godden-O'Callaghan (TGO'C)

**In attendance**  
Sarah Holden (SH), Resident Scrutiny Manager  
Helen Charles (HC), Assistant Director of Customer Experience  
Elsbeth Brown (EB), Head of Contracts & Compliance  
Katherine Parker (KP), Independent Chair  
Amanda Mankelow, (AM) Resident Scrutiny Administrative Assistant (Minutes)

<b>1. Welcome &amp; apologies for absence</b>	<b>Actions</b>
1.1	KP welcomed everyone stating it was a treat to see them in person.
1.2	Apologies were received from Valerie George (VG).
<b>2. Declarations of interest</b>	
2.1	None.
<b>3. Minutes of last meeting (Tuesday 28 March) &amp; matters arising</b>	
3.1	KP welcomed AK to his first meeting. SH asked if he was ok to wait for introductions once EB and HC had joined to save doing them twice, which he confirmed he was.
3.2	SH asked StH if he was happy with the community safety recommendations which had been sent out, he confirmed that he was, stating he had been going to suggest an amendment but on reflection had decided not to.
3.3	It was confirmed that VG had been given the opportunity following the last meeting to give feedback on the recommendations before they were finalised.
3.4	SH advised that she had had a recent conversation with Eleanor Randall, community safety manager, confirming that TCH does have CCTV in some of its blocks. PE confirmed that it had made a big difference in reducing problems where he lives. He advised that TCH had also handed out leaflets to residents on certain issues.
3.5	It was confirmed that residents experiencing domestic violence were able to arrange for TCH to call back at a specific time to protect their safety.

3.6 SH advised that the management response was currently being put together and she expected to be able to share this with the panel, either later this or in the following week.

3.7 It was noted that all panel members had been invited to give feedback on the community safety recommendations before they were finalised, following the last meeting.

3.8 AM advised that consent remained outstanding for the SharePoint site from a small number of panel members.

#### **4. Actions against previous recommendations**

4.1 SH advised that a copy of previous recommendations from earlier reviews had been circulated so the panel are aware of the progress being made against them. She stated that many were centred around the website which was currently being rebuilt.

4.2 AT asked what had happened to cause the website to go down. SH explained that her understanding was that the website was designed in a way that the software effectively expired.

4.3 SH asked that the panel look at the spreadsheet of recommendations and advise of any comments.

All

#### **5. Management response & board meeting on 18 May**

5.1 As previously noted, SH stated that the management response on the community safety recommendations was currently being put together. She advised that SM would be presenting to the board in the room they were currently in and that StH would be joining remotely. SH advised that it would likely be a short event which would be over by 5.30pm.

#### **6. AOB**

6.1 SH explained that Elspeth Brown, Head of Contracts & Compliance, who has overall responsibility for damp and mould at TCH would be attending the meeting later. She asked the panel to think about what questions they might want to ask her.

6.2 AT asked when the damp and mould policy which had been circulated prior to the meeting, had come into operation. SH confirmed that it was very recent. TGO'C advised that there used to be a leaflet given out instructing residents to deal with the problem themselves.

6.3 It was noted that the government had withdrawn funding from Rochdale Boroughwide Housing, following the high-profile death of Awaab Ishak due to damp and mould. AT asked how the removal of funding helps. It was noted that it may be a political move. TGO'C acknowledged that housing associations are 'not for profit' but suggested that the government needs to be seen to be doing something. She stated that she knew people who have been suffering with damp and mould issues.

6.4 KD joined the meeting at this point.

6.5 NL raised the point of liability for damp and mould issues, for instance if there was a leak that hadn't been fixed properly.

6.6 TGO'C asked about this year's TPAS conference, her and AT expressed an interest in attending. SH advised that the date would be shared with them.

SH/AM

**7. Date of next meeting on Teams (Tuesday 30 May 2023 6 – 7:30pm)**

7.1 The panel had already been made aware of the date of the next meeting.

**8. Presentation by Elspeth Brown, Head of Contracts & Compliance about TCH's approach to damp & mould, followed by Q&A**

8.1 EB and HC joined the meeting.

8.2 KP thanked them for joining. Everyone introduced themselves.

8.3 A slideshow was presented and this was shared on screen.

8.4 EB explained that damp and mould was now a much bigger part of her job than it used to be.

8.5 She went on to say that the Housing Ombudsman's 'Spotlight on damp and mould' which came out in autumn 2021, indicated that residents were treated as being at fault with damp, mould and condensation, and made 26 recommendations for housing associations to change their approach from reactive to proactive.

8.6 EB stated that TCH was now starting to move away from the previous method of simply issuing leaflets and information packs, with the approach now of landlord and residents working together to solve problems.

8.7 She advised that when the coroner's report on the death of Awaab Ishak was published residents across the sector became more worried and TCH's requests for help spiked. EB went on to say that TCH does recognise that all people create moisture, particularly families living in flats. In addition, some properties are pre-disposed to the problem.

8.8 She stated that social housing regulation may include 'Awaab's law' in the future which will outline timeframes for housing associations to respond to cases.

8.9 EB told the panel that TCH has used its data to identify properties at greater risk and has been contacting residents who have not recently been in touch. The purpose is to ask if they have problems with damp and mould as they may not have reported it. She showed some graphs and confirmed that this new reporting information was developed immediately after the coroner's report.

8.10 She explained that those residents who have reported problems more than three times are highlighted in red as 'critical', EB stated she would welcome the panel's view on whether three is still too many times to be reporting issues before a more in-depth investigation about the cause takes place. KE asked whether that meant the issue had been dealt with three times. EB confirmed that this is where the same problem has been reported and dealt with and keeps recurring, she stated that in those cases, TCH has specialists it can employ to take a more comprehensive look at the property.

8.11 EB went on to explain that TCH's data also includes those who are particularly young, old or have respiratory conditions as priority factors. KD asked about the concentration of properties with problems in the Tunbridge Wells area shown on the map in the shared presentation, and whether this was simply down to the numbers of properties TCH owns there. EB confirmed that was correct.

8.12 EB advised of another housing association who was given bad press as they continually re-treated damp and mould without looking at the underlying cause of the problem. TGO'C stated that she felt to treat a problem twice and it recur

was enough for it to be classed as critical and be further investigated, EB acknowledged that this is the conclusion TCH are also beginning to come to.

- 8.13 AK asked about contractors resolving issues well in some areas but not others, stating that the map of levels and numbers of cases would show this. EB advised that TCH now has a dedicated team for damp and mould who will also fix obvious causes such as overflowing gutters.
- 8.14 EB advised that the Housing Ombudsman can get involved in stage two complaints about damp and mould across the sector. They also publish the results so TCH can see what lessons can be learned from other's mistakes.
- 8.15 AK asked if the data software can show how long a problem has been there. EB advised that there are other tools in the suite which show more of a breakdown and it would likely be a question of requesting this.
- 8.16 SM asked who fills in the information. EB advised that it is automated when damp and mould jobs are raised by the customer services team. EB stated it was new software so was still developing.
- 8.17 HC advised of some future damp and mould events where staff will be on an estate known to have difficulties. The purpose is for residents to come and talk to staff about these issues.
- 8.18 EB advised that TCH has learnt a lot from damp and mould problems coming to light and welcomes the enforced changes. She advised of the responsibility that staff have to report these under the 'don't walk by' instruction and advised that TCH will get lots of measures lined up over the summer in readiness for next winter.
- 8.19 SH asked what the damp and mould events would involve. EB advised that she has written to residents in areas where problems are known to make them aware of the event. Multiple repair agents would be present to assist residents with questions. She stated that skips would also be available for disposal of rubbish from sites. The panel were encouraged by this and thought it was a good idea. TGO'C advised that it used to happen but that it had stopped following covid. She acknowledged the need to gain confidence back as many residents feel that there is no point in raising issues with TCH.
- 8.20 AK asked about making adjustments in new homes to prevent the problem of damp and mould, such as low energy towel racks costing only a few pence to run.
- 8.21 EB finished her presentation and the panel continued with their question & answer session.
- 8.22 AT asked about the volunteering days that EB had mentioned. EB advised that members of TCH staff were using their "Peabody promise days" to volunteer to make calls to residents to find out if they have issues with damp and mould, similar to the welfare calls project which took place during covid in 2020.
- 8.23 HC added that there is a damp and mould co-ordinator in TCH and that all staff, regardless of role, will now receive training on damp and mould.
- 8.24 StH asked if there was a trigger for referring residents to health services if TCH feels that damp and mould is causing problems. EB advised that contractors have access to an app which they can operate through a silent button to report safeguarding or money support issues.

- 8.25 StH asked if there was a method of contacting all residents who may be trying to deal with damp and mould issues themselves. EB confirmed that leaflets had recently arrived which would be going out to residents. She also referred to the video on TCH's website which the panel had been able to see prior to this meeting. HC reiterated that TCH had tried to make it clear that residents can report problems but added that it was a big shift from the previous approach and that it would take time for residents to accept that message. SH asked how these leaflets would be going out. EB advised that contractors would have them and they would be included with tenancy starter information.
- 8.26 TGO'C asked what EB would want to see TCH do if money or resources were no issue. EB stated that she would like for every resident to know what TCH does about damp and mould, for all homes to be free of it and for all residents to feel safe. TGO'C felt that was a good wish and cited overcrowding as an additional factor when it comes to creating moisture.
- 8.27 KD left the meeting at this point.
- 8.28 SH asked what EB would like the panel to do in terms of research. EB asked to be made aware of other housing association's best practice and how they build trust. TGO'C advised that she is aware from people known to her that a clear trust issue exists, stating the need to be honest with residents and not over promise if something is going to take a bit longer to resolve. She advised that some residents feel that TCH doesn't care.
- 8.29 AK asked about the target for getting numbers of cases under control. There was a short discussion around the change of use of people's homes, since many began working from home. EB advised of Agility Eco, a new phone line which was advertised in the resident newsletter and with repairs operatives to give help and advice on energy.
- 8.30 KP stated that any further questions the panel had for EB would be passed through AM/SH.
- 8.31 KP thanked everyone for joining.

All