

Asset Compliance Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 22 January 2024 at Shire Hall, Warwick at 6.02pm.

Present: Councillor Phillips (Chairman); Councillors Barton, Boad, K Dickson, Dray, Falp, Gorman and Yellapragada (late arrival).

5. Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Hales.

6. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

7. Minutes

The minutes of the Asset Compliance Committee meeting held on 20 December 2023 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

8. Asset Compliance Plan Progress and Review of the Risk Register

The Committee considered a report from Neighbourhood and Assets which gave an update on the current position and progress made following on from an independent asset review.

Several appendices were attached to the report:

Appendix 1 – an updated highlight report covering the period 8 December 2023 to 18 January 2024 with the Action Plan;
Appendix 2 – a copy of the data compliance dashboard; and
Appendix 3 – the updated risk assessment.

The Deputy Chief Executive gave Members a summary of the conversation that had taken place with the Regulator for Social Housing the previous week:

- This was the third in a series of conversations that had taken place with the Regulator.
- The Regulator had made the decision not to issue a Regulatory Judgement against the Council, but would keep the case open for the time being for the following reasons:
 - progress made by the Council since its self-referral;
 - the Council had retained Pennington as its asset management consultant and they were experts in this area and would work with the Council for the duration of the Action Plan; and
 - the governance framework the Council had set up quickly, namely the Asset Compliance Committee and the governance compliance board which had given a level of confidence in what the Council planned to do.

The Deputy Chief Executive warned that the Council could not be complacent and was required to provide the Council's dedicated case worker at the Regulator for Social Housing with all the reports the Committee considered every two months and anything else requested by the Regulator. The Regulator reserved the right to change its position if necessary and issue a Regulatory Judgement if matters were not progressing as required.

The Committee's and the Compliance Board's role was to ensure that when there were challenges to meeting deadlines, the Project Team would be held to account and then this would be reported back to the Regulator. To ensure oversight and reassure the Regulator, Pennington had been invited to join the Compliance Board and the Council had undertaken to invite Pennington back when the Action Plan had been completed to independently validate the work and carry out a sign off which would mean checking that all actions had been completed and done properly. Pennington would be asked to make a report that would be considered by the Committee and the Compliance Board, before submission to the Regulator.

The Deputy Chief Executive noted that there were challenges ahead but the work done to-date had given a good start. The Council needed to ensure that it recruited and retained staff with the right skillset. The challenge was that staff with the right skillset were in short supply nationally. The two specialist leads already recruited for fire safety and building safety would be with the Council for a further nine months during which time a more sustainable structure would be created.

In response to questions from Members, the Deputy Chief Executive and the Building & Safety Lead explained that:

- The reason that the recommendations in the Action Plan tables in Appendix 1 to the report ran from 1 to 25 and then re-started from 1 to 7 was because the Council had matched its report to the Pennington report which rated different themes. This ensured that there was a complete crossover between the Pennington report and the Action Plan facilitating cross referencing.
- A conversation had been held with the asbestos consultant that had carried out the surveys and their qualifications and accreditations had been obtained which would be held on a master database. The results of the surveys they had undertaken had been requested and would be loaded onto the Council's ActiveH (Assets) system.
- The Building & Safety Lead had liaised with the Compliance Manager who held control over all compliance activities. He had also met with other key colleagues on 16 January and it had been agreed to draft seven new policies and procedures. The policies related to the six main compliance areas and would incorporate a new compliance and building safety strategy policy. The next meeting would be held on 12 February.
- Water safety had been evaluated as a medium priority.
- The Building & Safety Lead joined the Council shortly before Christmas and had focused heavily on the six main compliance areas of building safety, fire safety, heating safety, electrical safety, water hygiene and lift safety. He had asked the six compliance contractors to send in contract documents such as insurance, health

and safety policy, staff qualifications, organisation accreditations and access to their portals. The next task was to validate these and then transfer the documents onto the ActiveH database.

- There were only ten electrical safety inspection and tests overdue and this was because the Council had changed the inspection cycle to every five years.
- The Building & Safety Lead would ensure that at the next meeting of the Committee, an update would be given on asbestos safety and other items, (Members had mentioned asbestos, water and electrical safety).
- When Pennington had undertaken its assessment of actions required, it had rated both asbestos and water as medium priorities (to be completed within six months).
- Officers would provide details on how soon compliance information would be provided on housing acquired by the Council from the private sector at the next meeting. Members had expressed surprise that this information was not part of the exchange of ownership and had asked why this was.
- It was estimated that phase 1 of the Action Plan would be completed by 31 October 2024 contingent on no unplanned circumstances. Any extension to this timescale would require approval from the Committee and the Compliance Board.
- The Council needed to instigate a compliance structure and ensure sufficient resources to guarantee that it could maintain compliance moving forward. There was already an action to do this, and the Head of Assets was working on the necessary structure and then recruitment of staff would commence. The Council also needed to ensure that it would have the right level of oversight and governance as the project moved towards a close and moved into the next stage of maintaining asset compliance. In this respect there would be senior officer oversight and political oversight from Members.
- It was agreed that additional information would be provided on the Action Plan to indicate progress on the compliance structure to show what was being done. The Head of Assets would provide more details at the next meeting.
- A new Complaints Policy would be considered by Cabinet in February and a vacancy for a Council Complaints Officer had been advertised.
- Recruitment of staff was necessary because historically, the Council had not had all the necessary expertise in place and did not have the required capacity. More technical expertise in very specific areas was vital and many policies and procedures would need to be updated. The Project Manager post was to take pressure off the Head of Assets and the postholder would handle the administrative side of managing the project. Currently staff with technical knowledge were being asked to do this.

Members had received training provided by Pennington shortly before Christmas. The general consensus was that the training had been suitable in content and had covered all the areas required at that time. There might be a need for refresher training as the project progressed.

Members were pleased with the changes made to the report since the previous meeting. The Chairman asked Members to send any feedback /

comments they had on the Risk Register to Committee Services for collation. The Risk Register would be considered in more depth at the next meeting in February. The Chairman asked them to consider if they agreed with the risk ratings, both in terms of the likelihood and on the impact.

It was agreed that a short demonstration would be given to Members of the ActiveH system which was used to manage the housing stock. Officers would check if a demonstration could be given at the next meeting.

A change was requested to the Action Plan so that the commentary in the last column would tie back up to the action in the first column. More detail was requested to show progress on each action listed under a recommendation, (what work was left to do and how much had been completed). The report would be refined for the next meeting. Members required the actions and commentary broken down in more detail since the progress column only showed progress for the whole recommendation, not for each action as part of that recommendation.

Members noted that the colour coding on the Action Plan was not sensitive enough to distinguish which actions were on target and which ones had fallen behind.

The Chairman advised Members that the Chairs of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Audit & Standards Committee and the Asset Compliance Committee and relevant officers would meet to discuss cross-cutting themes such as the tenant engagement strategy to ensure that nothing would be missed and to avoid duplication of work.

The Chairman noted that there had not been full attendance at both meetings of the Committee. He asked the Committee Services Officer to find out why the Committee did not have an appointed substitute membership.

(Councillor Yellapragada arrived just after the start of this item.)

(The meeting ended at 6.50pm)

CHAIRMAN
26 February 2024