

Asset Compliance Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 22 July 2024 at Shire Hall, Warwick at 6.00pm.

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

8. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Hales and Councillor P Wightman – Portfolio Holder for Housing & Assets.

9. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

10. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 May 2024 were taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

11. Asset Compliance Plan Progress

The Committee considered a report from Neighbourhood and Assets. Following the independent asset review, the governance framework and action plan was underway in response to the recommendations. The report gave the Asset Compliance Committee an update on the current position and progress on the action plan.

Following the independent asset compliance review, a self-referral to the Regulator for Social Housing was made on the 9 November 2023.

As reported previously, the Regulator had determined not to record a Breach of the Standard at this stage but to require regular reporting on progress in meeting the Action Plan.

Meetings were being held to update the regulator on a bimonthly basis, the most recent being on 10 July 2024.

The two specialist leads, Fire Safety and Building Safety continued to provide specialist assistance based on the specific competencies required around these areas, and liaison continued with Pennington.

Consultancy with Pennington around data validation was now complete, and draft policies had been produced by Pennington and reviewed by officers. These had been approved by the Compliance Board and were under review by Asset Compliance Committee. Once approved, they would be taken to Cabinet. Warwick District Council (WDC) had moved on to agreeing procedures and process charts across Assets and Housing.

Appendix 1 to the report was the updated highlight report with columns to provide further context for the Committee.

With the self-referral to the regulator complete and the outcome known, additional regulatory information provided and specialist resources in place, the Compliance Action Team had:

- reviewed and updated the target dates in the action plan, all to complete within the original project time scale;
- set out estimated start dates for the recommendations that had not commenced; and
- further broken-down recommendations into more detailed tasks and milestones (this was an area also highlighted by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee)

These revised target dates were set out in the report.

Appendix 2 to the report was a copy of the data compliance dashboard.

As reported at previous meetings, from the Housing Revenue Account, £270,000 of resources were used for specialist consultancy support and additional technical resources covering asset compliance, fire safety and building safety. This ensured that the right skills, experience, and competence were available in the organisation to help drive forward critical and high priority actions.

During this year there would be consideration of what resources would be needed to sustain the improvements that were being made to ensure compliance was maintained. This was to ensure that 'kneejerk' structure changes were not made, and proposals recommended would be considered and sustainable

Appendix 3 to the report was the updated risk assessment. Since the last meeting of the Committee, the risks had been reviewed and none had changed in scoring. There had been a change to the wording of Risk 3 It was changed from *Progress to deliver the plan is slower than anticipated* to *Progress to deliver the originally agreed action plan is slower than anticipated*. The risk score remained the same.

Appendix 4 to the report set out policies to be reviewed by the Committee that had had assurance provided on them by both the Compliance Board and Pennington. These included the Asbestos Policy, Building Safety Policy, Electrical Safety Policy, Gas and Heating Policy, Lift Safety Policy and Water Hygiene Policy.

In response to questions from the Committee in respect of Appendix 1 to the report, the highlight report and Action Plan, it was explained that:

- progress over time was shown in the two percentage figures in Appendix one, with the top figure setting out where the project was currently at, and the one below showing where it was when last reported;
- in respect of the additional input required from Development Services for cladding on buildings, a full programme of work was being developed with the contractor and a PCA2 had been agreed, which had taken four weeks but resulted in a robust contract being in place;
- all recommendations were due to be completed by the end of October 2024, with Pennington due to review week of 29 July 2024;

- officers were confident that by 30 September 2024 contractors would be on board, including ensuring that WDC had procedures in place to hold the data, and see live data, rather than accessing through contractors;
- with key elements of work completed, the speed of progress was now increasing even with the regulatory judgement;
- in respect of Recommendation 18, procurement would be completed by 31 July 2024, but this would be followed by a few days of mobilisation before the contract would go live. However, it would be operational by the time of the next meeting of the Committee;
- communications with tenants were set out within the Communication Plan considered by the Committee in May 2024 additional communications would be shared with each tenant within a building before works commenced;
- the Communications Plan would be updated and brought to the next meeting of the Committee;
- in respect of recommendation 23, the low completion rate was due to the need to get the policy completed, and this should change by the next meeting of the Committee;
- 470 property surveys were to be completed and from each of these an action plan would be produced. Once the action plans were completed, there would be a need to look at resources, validation of results, and contractor performance to enable delivery of the plans;
- there was a Tenant Handbook which set out the responsibility for the tenant and the Council in respect of each property and what the Council could and would provide. However, this handbook was due to be updated;
- contractors had direct access to the asbestos register so they knew the latest report for each property before arriving on site. Protocols were in place if they identified asbestos on site that had not previously been recorded;
- looking at the overall housing function and responsibility, there was a case for a dedicated Housing Committee, due to standards required and value of money, repairs contract procurement around policy development, and assurance;
- the asbestos contracts and surveys covered all Council-owned buildings including garages;
- where asbestos was known or had been discovered, it had been managed in situ as that was often the safest approach, but where capital works were taking place which presented an opportunity to remove asbestos, this had been done;
- there was a standard response time for lift access and repairs however there was advice in each lift on what to do if a person was stuck;
- when the Head of Assets & Neighbourhood left the Council, the responsibility for actions would fall to the Deputy Chief Executive, as an interim measure, but there was an intention to appoint an Interim Housing Asset Manager to look at the action plan and future of service;
- the action plan work would continue with reviews by the Compliance Board. Pennington would provide a closure report at the end of their involvement and there would be continued regular meetings with the Housing Regulator;

- before the next Committee meeting, there would be a review of the role of the Compliance Board and the role of this Committee; and
- consideration would be given to regular independent audits or review of aspects of the service to provide assurance for the Council, but it was likely that an internal audit, in this specialist area, may well be undertaken by a third party on behalf of the Council.

In response to questions from the Committee in respect of Appendix 4 to the report, Policies to Review, it was agreed to ensure there was a clear definition of which buildings were covered within the Policies.

Officers also provided assurance that there was further work in progress to provide ongoing performance reports to Cabinet and the Senior Leadership Team.

Resolved that

- (1) the progress being made, be noted; and
- (2) the following Policies for Housing Revenue Account Assets, Asbestos Policy, Building Safety Policy, Electrical Safety Policy, Gas and Heating Policy, Lift Safety Policy and Water Hygiene Policy, be endorsed.

(The meeting ended at 7.09pm)

CHAIRMAN
24 September 2024