

NOTICE OF MOTION – CLLR T AZIZ – INVESTIGATION INTO NEW VISION HOMES

Executive Summary

At its meeting on 8 April 2021, the Council referred the following Notice of Motion to the Executive.

Councillor T Aziz

“Over the past few years, New Vision Homes has repeatedly shown itself to be unable to deal with housing issues in the properties they manage.

We all know of the NVH tenant who tragically took her own life in 2016 after battling mental and physical health issues exacerbated by the regular flooding of her home over 13 years,

In recently The Housing Ombudsman judgement criticizes severe Maladministration in case case where an elderly resident is left without heating or hot water for 3 years and council failed to take any appropriate action to resolve the situation and council has been fined £6000.

Thus, in light of some of the unacceptable failures in maintaining council properties, this motion calls for a thorough investigation into the causes of the failures, conducted by the chair of the O&S committee and a select cross-party panel appointed by the chair of O&S. This investigation will:

- I. Analyze the root causes of the failures.
- II. Hear from officers and portfolio holders, and
- III. Recommend steps going forward to ensure such events do not occur again.”

Officer Comment

“Housing Services are destined for significant changes over the next year with the aim of improving the Council’s offer to tenants and leaseholders. The current contract with New Vision Homes (NVH) will end on 31 March 2022. At its meeting on 11 February 2021, the Council resolved to bring Housing Management and Asset Management services back in-house and to directly procure Housing Repairs and Maintenance works and services through third party contractors from 1 April 2022.

There is a considerable amount of work required to implement this change and ensure a smooth transition next year. This includes procuring 25 contracts for the services currently provided by NVH, ranging from core services, such as, Responsive Repairs and Maintenance to small one-off contracts, such as, sprinkler system servicing and car park barrier servicing. The priority for officers is the Responsive Repairs and Maintenance contract, as this has the greatest impact on residents and continuity of service is vital. The specification for Responsive Repairs and Maintenance contract has been written with the resident at its heart, with the aim of delivering a high quality service that is easy to use and accessible to all. All political groups have been invited to input to the specification to ensure we get the best possible service for our residents.

Over the next year, officers will continue to regularly monitor NVH’s contract performance through a suite of KPIs. NVH and its sub-contractors have maintained their services throughout the pandemic (when many other landlords have reduced services) and NVH staff have also assisted the Council in its wider Covid-19 response, including making welfare calls and surge testing. We know from feedback from tenants and leaseholders (most recently, the survey in August 2020) that

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there are areas for improvement. These include resident involvement and engagement; repairs and maintenance; communication and tackling anti-social behaviour. These are all identified as priorities in our Draft Housing Strategy.

Officers cannot discuss individual cases. However, officers can confirm that the actions required by the Housing Ombudsman have all been complied with and lessons have been learned from this case, both by New Vision Homes and the Council. Where severe maladministration is found, the Housing Ombudsman automatically refers the landlord to the Regulator of Social Housing. The Regulator has conducted its own investigation and concluded it had “found no breach of our standards at this time and will be taking no further action”.

It is important that the Council continuously looks to develop and improve its services and it has welcomed the Regulator’s review and feedback on its landlord function. Both officers and Members now need to devote their time and efforts to shaping the Housing Service from 2022 (when the NVH contract ends) to ensure that the identified improvements can be delivered on. This forward-looking focus is what will make the most positive difference to tenants and leaseholders and any further investigations will detract from this.”

Background Papers: None.

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