

Executive Member Response To Decent Homes Scrutiny Review

**Date Recommendations agreed by Scrutiny Select Committee:**

Housing Select Committee, Thursday 30 January 2014,  
amended and circulated final report on Friday 31 January 2014

**Date responses should be made by:**

An Executive response on behalf of the Executive Portfolio Holder for Housing should be received  
by Monday 31 March 2014

**All actions have been allocated to Mike Haynes who will delegate internal responsibility regarding responses on behalf of the Executive Portfolio Holder for Housing.**

**Recommendations:**

**Executive Response:**

1. That officers consider ways of providing improved monitoring of works throughout the process.

It is suggested that our Contractors should provide increased presence on site with two staff trained in resident liaison being present throughout the period of works. Officers to ensure scheme based staff double up during periods of intense works (such as Decent Homes programme) and that an SBC Project Manager attends on a daily basis.

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| <p><b>2.</b> That officers consider the current communication with tenants prior to and during works to see where improvements can be made to the current processes.</p>   | <p>Communication with tenants was reviewed as a result of feedback from Members during the Scrutiny review. Changes were made during the current programme – tenants receive visits prior to works commencing to explain the process and during works to ensure all is in order. Feedback from the Sheltered Housing team and from residents is that there has been a marked improvement in communication and consequently greater awareness of what is happening.</p> |
| <p><b>3.</b> In an attempt to manage expectations, officers consider ways in which they can ensure that Tenants are made aware that carrying out Decent Homes works such as providing new kitchens, bathrooms, rewiring, new boilers and central heating systems will be disruptive.</p> | <p>At the pre-works visit tenants are advised of the disruption that can occur. Visits are made throughout the works programme to seek to ensure that tenants are being inconvenienced as little as possible, but also as a reminder that these are disruptive works. Complaints are dealt with on site and as they occur to avoid undue worry and concern for tenants.</p>  |
| <p><b>4.</b> That subsequent Decent Homes works at sheltered schemes should involve two Resident Liaison Officers and two Scheme Managers to improve resident liaison.</p>   | <p>As noted in <b>1</b> above, staff now double up when major works programmes are being undertaken at sheltered housing schemes whilst the contractor has two staff trained in resident liaison on site at all times.</p>   |
| <p><b>5.</b> That a log book for resident's comments should be introduced when carrying out Decent Homes works in Sheltered Accommodation Schemes and that this should be reviewed on a daily basis by the Scheme Managers for feedback to the Project Manager.</p>                      | <p>Tenant comments are now logged and discussed with the SBC Project Manager on a daily basis. As noted in <b>3</b> above, complaints are dealt asap after being received..</p>  |
| <p><b>6.</b> Provision of an 'easy to understand' instruction guide (with practical assistance) for tenants regarding new equipment including heating systems and extractor fans should be provided.</p>   | <p>Our contractor is developing an easy to use guide in readiness for the completion of works at Gladstone and Shaftsbury; the two schemes where we are currently undertaking Decent Homes works.</p>  |

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| <p><b>7.</b> That, where appropriate, there should be daily sign off list for trades working in a property.</p>  | <p>A daily sign-off list is now in use at each property or scheme, covering both works to an individual house or flat, and communal works.</p>  |
| <p><b>8.</b> That the role of Sheltered Housing Wardens during Decent Homes works be reassessed by officers with a hope that this would lend additional support to the Wardens. The Housing Select Committee is of the view that expectations regarding the liaison role of the Wardens must be realistic.</p> | <p>The role of all staff involved in the Decent Homes programme has been re-assessed, paying particular attention to that played by non-technical staff, such as scheme wardens/managers. SBC Project Managers, who have a technical expertise, have been instructed to ensure they explain all works in straightforward terms to staff who do not have a technical background. The comments of Committee Members re 'expectations regarding the liaison role of the Wardens must be realistic' have been taken on board in this regard.</p>  |
| <p><b>9.</b> That Housing Officers ensure that the contractors and the Resident Liaison Officer (RLO) are present when tenants are given the option to choose between conduit or chasing, which is signed off by the contractor and the RLO.</p>   | <p>On further interrogation of our database it became clear that the flat at Pitt Court had previously undergone a re-wire, resulting in conduit being run across walls as opposed to being chased-in or in conduit hidden behind curtains. Following comments by Committee Members we have now reviewed our approach to all re-wires, be they part of a Decent Homes contract or not. We have recently employed a qualified Building Surveyor and will be taking on additional qualified staff over the next few months to ensure we have the capacity to undertake more pre and post-works inspections to ensure this situation does not arise again.</p> |
| <p><b>10.</b> That the Clerk of Works for the BMO to carry out a site visit on the Decent Homes works carried out on Pitt Court that was completed under the previous Decent Homes contact and provide feedback on the completed works.</p>  | <p>This has now been undertaken and a report provided. As mentioned above, this scheme had a re-wire prior to Decent Homes works being undertaken, and it was this which resulted in the majority of the problems. Wates are to re-visit the scheme and change some of the conduit they fitted, whilst the BMO's electricians will correct all other problems. A post-works inspection will be undertaken by the BMO Clerk of Works.</p>  |
| <p><b>11.</b> That Members support officers in pursuit of setting up a social enterprise with trainers such as North Herts College/Ridgmond Training or other interested training providers to provide apprentices to carry out decoration works.</p>  | <p>This is on the Housing work-plan for 2014/15. The Housing Portfolio Holder has a keen interest in this subject and has asked to be kept informed of its progress. Officers will also update the Chair of this Committee at a future Chair's briefing.</p>  |

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| <p><b>12.</b> That the legacy elements introduced in the Decent Homes Contract continue as a feature of future capital works programmes.</p>   | <p>Member's comments with regard to this matter are welcomed and noted. Officers will build into any future procurement the need for contractors to leave a positive legacy.</p>  |
| <p><b>13.</b> That officers revisit the EIA for Decent Homes with a view to refreshing the document using the new SBC template and procedure to ensure that the appropriate protected characteristic groups are addressed (Disability and Age) by 31 January 2014.</p> | <p>The EIA was refreshed prior to 31 January 2014, as requested by Members. No additional works in this regard were noted following this re-refresh.</p>  |
| <p><b>14.</b> That officers continue to monitor 10% of the tenant profiling information sheets that the contractors currently undertake before carrying out Decent Homes works and report back to Members on this process.</p>   | <p>The comments of Members in this regard are noted. Officers will report back to Members on this matter at a future meeting of this Committee, as requested.</p>   |
| <p><b>15.</b> That officers report back to Members on the learning derived from responding to tenant's comments on their Customer Satisfaction Surveys as detailed at paragraph 3.6.2 in the report.</p>   | <p>The Council is currently reviewing its management of the complaints service it runs. The input and suggestions from Members with regard to this matter are welcomed, with the Council wide review providing an ideal opportunity for these to be fed into the process, and for improvements in the management of negative comments to be rolled out across the Council and not just for Decent Homes projects. In addition to the Council wide activity, Officers will be redesigning the Decent Homes satisfaction survey forms to use on any new contracts which are let, including future Decent Homes works.</p> |