

**Councillor Arthur Coote,**

**Portfolio Holder for Housing and Equalities**

**Report to Council, 16 July 2024:**

**Procurement Progress:**

We're making excellent progress in our procurement strategy to replace our joint venture with Uttlesford Norse Services Ltd (UNSL), which concludes on 31 March 2025. I'm happy to report that we're on target with our timeline:

1. We have completed the pre-procurement phase, securing Cabinet endorsement for our strategy and issuing the required Section 20 Notice to leaseholders.
2. We have completed the document preparation phase, crafting a comprehensive 300-page service specification that aligns with our strategic objectives and all relevant legislation. This includes the technical questions that will be asked pre and during the tender exercise
3. We have published the tender on 15th July 2024, with evaluation completion set for 9th October 2024.
4. Cabinet approval for contract award is scheduled for 30th October 2024.
5. Mobilisation will commence in January 2024, with the new service set to go live on 1 April 2025.

We will be employing a 40/60 price to quality ratio in our evaluation to ensure service excellence and has discussed before the evaluation process will include officers, members and tenants

**Transformation and Strategy Development:**

Separate from but complementary to the procurement process, we've made significant strides in our transformation efforts:

We've engaged two transformation consultants with expertise in social housing and asset management who are working very closely with the interim Director of Property Services. Our priority is to ensure a seamless as possible transfer to the new contractors. Their work includes:

a) A Comprehensive review of current working practices, focusing on:

- Workflow efficiency - Reviewing Processes and Procedures and amending them to be "fit for purpose" for the new operating model.
- Resource allocation with the new client team based in UDC. Understanding the skills and requirement for the new model, the creation of Job Descriptions and creation of training packages as required
- Review of new compliance monitoring systems to ensure we are able to properly capture health and safety compliance information for each of our properties and at all times have an up to date record of inspections and remedial works carried out.

b) Development of a data-driven asset management strategy:

- Utilising the recently completed stock condition surveys we will be implementing condition-based maintenance approaches which will enable us to plan for the future and understand when components require replacing and build the budgets to enable us to deliver the work
- Aligning our de-carbonisation objectives with our stock investment requirements

c) Creation of new job descriptions for the client team:

- Emphasis on contract management skills
- Competencies based
- Focus on data analysis and strategic decision-making capabilities

In conclusion, we're making strong progress across all fronts - procurement, transformation, and current service delivery. We remain committed to a smooth transition that will deliver excellent property services for our residents.

## **Housing**

### **Compliance with the new Regulatory Standards for social housing landlords**

Following the passage of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023, the council is carrying out a self-assessment to test its compliance with the new regulatory consumer standards. All providers of social housing, including housing associations and local authority landlords will be subject to a regulatory inspection to test whether they meet the requirements. The inspections are being planned by the Regulator of Social Housing within a four-year inspection cycle, although the Regulator will also inspect landlords outside of the cycle where specific concerns have come to their attention.

The self-assessment process will begin in July 2024 and a further update will be provided to Members on any gaps in compliance identified. It should be noted that 'compliance' now extends further than health and safety matters and covers most of the services delivered by the Housing Property and Operations Teams, and some of the service provided by the Communities Team, the latter being in relation to anti-social behaviour involving council tenants.

The council has also recently submitted its self-assessment against the statutory Complaints Handling Code to the Housing Ombudsman. Before submission this was scrutinised by the Housing Board, Tenants and Leaseholders Panel and Cabinet. Some areas of non-compliance were reported, and a new officer Complaints Handling Improvement taskforce has been set up to swiftly address these areas of non-compliance. One of the new statutory requirements is for all landlords to have a Member Responsible for Complaints and I was duly appointed by Cabinet into that role.