

## Councillor Arthur Coote, Portfolio Holder for Housing

### Report to Full Council – Tuesday, 22 July 2025

## Property Services Update Summary

### **Axis Europe Contract Mobilisation:**

The mobilisation of the new maintenance contract with Axis Europe, effective from 1st April 2025, has been largely successful, though several challenges have emerged that require immediate attention. Key challenges include:

- **TUPE Staff Integration:** Some staff transitioning under TUPE are facing difficulties adapting to new operational standards, leading to inconsistencies in service delivery. Axis is keeping UDC updated on the actions being taken to address these issues.
- **Cultural Change:** There is a need for a cultural shift among staff to embrace new methodologies.
- **Performance Issues:** Some TUPE staff are struggling to meet contract expectations, with certain tasks requiring less than 30% of the staffing capacity.
- **Volume of Repairs:** A reduced volume of repairs has been reported, indicating previous job requests may not align with UDC's criteria. The UDC Customer Service Centre is working to ensure compliance with UDC's repairs obligations.

**Financial Implications:** The reduced volume of works and therefore the costs falling on the Housing Revenue Account (i.e. rent payers' money) may strain Axis's financial model, impacting service quality if not addressed promptly.

**Proposed Action Plan:** A comprehensive action plan is being developed, including:

- Performance Improvement Plans put in place by Axis for underperforming staff.
- Cultural Training Initiatives delivered by Axis to align staff with new operational standards.
- Enhanced communication through regular meetings and feedback mechanisms.
- A Job Raising Review to ensure future requests meet UDC's criteria.
- Robust Management of Work Variations to adhere to contractual requirements.
- Continuous Financial Monitoring of overhead costs.

### **Context**

The activity figures for recent years – under the previous repairs and maintenance arrangement – showed that Uttlesford was out of line with other landlords in various respects. For example, the average number of repairs raised in Uttlesford from April to June 2024 was 2,874 compared to the same period in 2025 under the new arrangement, the figures have reduced to 1,745. This is why we were so naturally keen in moving to the new arrangement in which UDC took the calls from tenants and raised the job

orders to ascertain to what degree this was a factor of our housing stock, or else whether there was another cause, such as a tendency to not do jobs well first time and require repeated visits, or even a trend of 'job inflation' in the number of orders raised. We will continue to monitor this performance closely.

### **HRA Asset Appraisal:**

An HRA asset appraisal with leading independent surveyor firm Savills is underway, assessing the condition and value of our housing stock. The first draft will be presented to UDC on **11th July 2025**, providing critical insights for future planning and investment. This includes future options for the empty Parkside and Alexia House. Members will be updated in due course.

### **Asset Management Strategy:**

The Asset Management Strategy is 90% complete, focusing on effective management of housing stock. Key elements include:

- Development of 5, 10, and 30-year investment plans.
- Ensuring compliance with Decent Homes Standards.
- Incorporating sustainability initiatives.
- Engaging residents in the decision-making process.

### **Next Steps:**

- Monitor Axis Europe's performance and implement the action plan.
- Prepare for the HRA asset appraisal presentation on **11th July 2025**.
- Finalise the Asset Management Strategy for Cabinet approval.

## **All Housing Services**

### **Compliance with regulatory standards for housing**

Members will be aware that the council as a Registered Provider of Social Housing, must comply with a set of comprehensive Consumer Standards. There are four consumer standards covering:

- Repairs and quality and safety of the home,
- Involving tenants in scrutinizing and shaping our services, making it easy for tenants to contact us and give feedback, including complaints
- Allocating homes and managing tenancies fairly
- Providing safe and well managed neighbourhoods

The Regulator of Social Housing uses different ways to assess whether we are meeting these standards. We must publish information about our services, our performance and how well we manage complaints. We must carry out an annual tenants' survey and report on certain activities through statutory Tenant Satisfaction Measures.

All registered providers with more than 1,000 homes will also have a Regulatory Inspection and we will be given 6 weeks' notice of this. The outcome of the inspection will be published and if we are not compliant with the standards we will be put on an improvement notice.

The housing team has been carrying out a detailed self-assessment against the standards and collecting evidence of compliance. We have also been preparing for inspection. We are commissioning a mock inspection from an independent company which specializes in this. We expect this to take place in September/October 2025. This will include reviewing all our evidence of compliance and carrying out mock interviews.

### **Resident engagement strategy**

A new strategy is being developed, which has been co-created with the Tenants and Leaseholder Panel. Our aim is to encourage as many people as possible to get involved in commenting on, scrutinizing and shaping our services. As well as the Tenants and Leaseholders Panel we now have a scrutiny panel where the tenants decide which service they review and their findings will be reported back to housing board, with recommendations for service improvements. We also have tenants who have signed up to being sent documents such as policies, and giving their feedback without having to leave their homes. We are also providing tenant and leaseholder panel members with laptops and training so they can make the most of being online and engage with us in this way, as well as attending meetings in the traditional way.

### **Tenants census**

Another key piece of work has been around understanding 'who lives behind the door' of our housing properties. This is so that we can make sure we are taking account of any disabilities, vulnerabilities or communication preferences when we design or deliver services. For example, we need to make sure that residents can contact us in a way which is easiest for them. Another example is being aware of any health issues which require us to prioritise repairs etc.

So that we can get this done as quickly as possible, we have commissioned an external market research company which specializes in social housing. We are running the survey in July and August. When we get the information, it will go straight onto our IT system and can be shared with our contractor and other teams in the council, including revenues and benefits, which uses the same system. We are putting in place arrangements to keep the information updated.