



**RESIDENT SCRUTINY FORUM
(RSF)**

Report for Tenancy Service

Difficult Access - July 2021

Resident Scrutiny Forum Members

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RSF Chair		
Executive Management Team (EMT) Signatories		

INTRODUCTION

The Resident Scrutiny Forum (RSF) have now started on the long job of Scrutinizing Tenancy Services, we decided to break Tenancy Services into smaller Departments this way we felt we could concentrate at one subject at a time.

We decided firstly to look at the issue of Difficult Access and the issues this may cause.

We have spoken to the Contractors which are used by South Essex Homes so we could understand any issues they find and how they deal with them.

Working alongside, Tenancy Services Teams to help resolve any issues found, and therefore, in the long run reducing the Departments time and the Financial Costs to South Essex Homes.

Unfortunately, we were unable to Benchmark at this time due to the COVID Restrictions.

We hope by reading this Report, our Recommendations will help to make the most of the Services provided.

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METHODOLOGY

The Resident Scrutiny Forum (RSF) undertook the following Activities to enable its investigation into the issues around Difficult Access.

The RSF will conduct ZOOM meetings with Top Management from Tenancy Services of South Essex Homes.

Questions and Answers were sought and answered by:

Paul Davey Tenancy Services Manager - Appendix 1
Nicola Powell Tenancy Services Assistant - Appendix 3
Nadine Gould Anti-social Behaviour - Appendix 4
Lloyd Williams Contracts Manager and Project Surveyor - Appendix 6
Kevin Hazelwood Assistant Director Operations (Property) - Appendix 7
Ashley Seymour Fire Safety Doors/Windows - Appendix 9
Jan Tate Leaseholders - Appendix 10

The RSF also held ZOOM meetings with Contractors for SEH.

Westley Wallis Aaron Services - Appendix 2
Sam Lake Re-Gen Rewiring Contractor - Appendix 5
Ade Onileyen Morgan Sindell - Appendix 8
The RSF would also like to see any Correspondence which is sent out to Residents for the process from booking the First Appointment and for any other Corresponding Letters for any Difficult Assess.

FINDINGS

The RSF held various ZOOM meeting with Senior Management from Tenancy Services to gain insight of the Procedures which are taken to deal with Difficult Access.

First letters received from Aaron Services which showed **Letter 1 sent to Residents to say that their Gas Safety Check is due.**

It gives a provisional Appointment which Residents can change if not convenient.

If Aaron have the Residents contact email address or phone number then they either send an email or a text message to the Resident as a reminder if an appointment has been made.

If Aaron does not hear back within 7-14 Days, then Letter 2 will follow.

Letter 2 is worded a bit Firmer, expressing the importance of this to be completed by Law every year.

If still no response within the time frame it will then be passed back to SEH who will then send **Letter 3**.

If again no response from Resident **Letter 4** is posted by hand by the Tenancy Officer explaining that Court Action will be taken to Gain Access to carry out the works.

RSF were advised that Aaron has a 74- Day window to complete a Gas Service in a property.

Maybe this is far too long to complete. Maybe just Letter 2 is needed from Aaron and if no response then passed back to SEH to deal with?

Gas Service Checks, are of vital important, and this is Recommended by Law to undertake these checks, so maybe this needs to be put in Bold Letters on the Tenancy Agreement.

It is the same for any other works to be carried out, maybe a tougher approach is needed by SEH as the Gas and Electrics which are two of the vital 'BIG SIX' Tools to any Property and Safety is of the Utmost of Importance.

Maintenance Team Leader also explained the difficulty they have, is that Fire Safety does not have Legal Power options.

This area should have Legal Power Options as Fire and Safety is of the Utmost Importance to Save Lives.

RSF were also advised that, NON-ACCESS on Fire Safety has had setbacks during the Lockdown and the figures have reduced from 180 non-accesses to 11 non-accesses.

The remaining 11 non-access are still on-going after TWO YEARS.


WHY HAS THIS TAKEN SO LONG?

These Properties are now in the hands of Tenancy Services in order for South Essex Homes to obtain a Court Order to gain access.

THIS SHOULD HAVE BEEN DEALT WITH WITHIN THE TIME STRUCTURE.

RECOMMENDATIONS

	ISSUES	RECCOMENDATIONS	SOUTH ESSEX HOMES Response/Actions/Comments	TMESCALE DEADLINE	RESPONSIBLE
1	New Tenancy Agreements	Gas and Re-wiring Services are Recommended by LAW to undertake these checks. Therefore, this needs to be in Bold Letters in the Tenancy Agreement	Revised tenancy conditions to include that SBC/SEH agents will force entry to undertake activities which we consider necessary health and safety work, such as gas servicing, fire door servicing, electrical testing (list not exhaustive). To check with Legal at time of revising TCs that this clause can be included as 'fair' contract term	Commence Process Jan 2022 (6-month process due to formal process - notice of variation, tenants right to respond etc)	Nicky Powell

			required warrant for 3 out of the last five years. 		<u>Powell/Paul Davey</u>
4	Make the most of opportunities to gain access (coordinate any outstanding health and safety works)	Use gas warrant process to do any other urgent work such as electrical testing, window restrictors and fire door service at the same time	Have started to do this by linking in Fire Door Tech Team in to gas warrant process for hard to access door services. Agree need to do this more. Difficult access temp post to be appointed to draw this together between all teams who need access for various health and safety/urgent activities.	tbc	Paul Davey
5	Gas Service time scale	74 - day window for Gas Service in a property is far too long	This allows two attempts to be made and the difficult access process to be implemented should access be denied by the tenant. The MOT system does mean that no time is 'lost' on	<u>n/a</u>	Aaron Service – Westley Wallace

			CP1 certificate though		
6	Difficult Access	For any other works to be carried out maybe a tougher approach is needed by South Essex Homes as Safety is of the Most Importance	Publicise cases where we've had to get injunctions. Also see Recommendation 1 and actions re tenancy conditions.		Comms Team (lead Simon Putt)

	ISSUES	RECCOMENDATIONS	SOUTH ESSEX HOMES Response/Actions/Comments	TMESCALE DEADLINE	RESPONSIBLE
7	Gas Safety Checks	Works outstanding: Doors and Windows Fire Safety Check because of non-access. This area should have LEGAL POWER OPTIONS.	Unfortunately, there are no quick legal options other than warrant process through magistrate's court which is available for gas certification. We are processing injunctions for Door Servicing refusals that		Tenancy Team (Nicky Powell)

		<p>Works outstanding for two years, on Fire Safety are NOT acceptable under any circumstances. This SHOULD HAVE BEEN dealt with within the time structure.</p>	<p>have been outstanding for two years plus, however in the majority of cases, referred to tenancy, tenants are allowing access before papers for proceedings submitted to court.</p> <p>Access is monitored at monthly EMT Ops meeting.</p> <p>Gas servicing specifically monitored by ADs of Property and Housing Services (monthly meeting)</p>		<p>EMT</p> <p>Sarah Lander and Kevin Hazlewood</p>
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CONCLUSIONS

It was recognized that doing a Report on Tenancy Services would be a mammoth task as it would cover so many areas within the Tenancy Sections.

With this in mind we, The RSF, decided to undertake Difficult Access as our first Report in a series of Reports within the Tenancy Services umbrella.

With this Report now completed we would like to acknowledge the People who have helped us make this possible and in the making of this Document have made a difficult process seem almost effortless in its completion.

Having conducted all our interviews via ZOOM we would like to thank all the various Heads of Departments and others of various Grades within the different Companies such as:

Paul Davey – Tenancy services Manager

Westley Wallace – Aaron Services

Nicola Powell – Tenancy Services Assistant

Nadine Gould – ASB Manager

Sam Lake – Re-Gen Re-wiring Contractor – Advised correspondence would follow but none received

Lloyd Williams – Property Services Project Surveyor

Kevin Hazelwood – Assistant Director Operations (Property)

Ade Onileyen - Morgan Sindell - Advised correspondence would follow but none received

Ashley Seymour – Maintenance Team Leader Estate Services

Jan Tate – Leaseholders

RSF next Report will cover – Successions - Deceased Tenants

TENANCY SERVICES MANAGER

Paul Davey

Date Report Drafted: JULY 2021

Date Report Agreed: OCTOBER 2021

EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM

Mike Gatrell, Mario Ambrose, Beverley Gallacher, Sarah Lander

Signature: *Diane Nicholls* Date: *19th July 2021*

Diane Nicholls – Resident Scrutiny Forum Chair

Signature _____ Date _____

Mike Gatrell – Chief Executive - South Essex Homes

Signature _____ Date _____

Mario Ambrose – Executive Director - South Essex Homes

Signature _____ Date _____

Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX 1

Interview with:

Paul Davey

Tenancy Services Manager Tenancy Services Team
South Essex Homes

In February 2021, we conducted a ZOOM meeting with Paul and he gave us details of his role as Tenancy Services Department Manager. His Tenancy Officers cover areas including:

- New Sign-up
- Breaches of Tenancy
- Deceased Tenants
- Successions & Assignments
- 9 Month Visits
- Fraud
- Anti-social Behaviour
- Mutual Exchanges
- Terminations of Tenancies
- Breaches of Tenancy
- Tenants Rent Accounts
- Safe Guarding
- Estate Walkabouts
- Raising repairs
- Tenancy Audits
- General Enquiries through Call Centre
- Re-housing – from Verifying Shortlists up to and including Sign-ups, completing Core Log forms
- Letters for Gas Safety Inspections, visit properties, Apply for Warrants and compile witness statements
- Monitor Homeswapper for Mutual exchanges
- Create Anti-social Behaviour Cases, Risk assessments
- Manage Garage lettings and finances

- Carry out all Post arrangements and scanning on to CIVCA including Assigning an officer
- Voids – work with Contractors ensuring properties meet standards in a timely manner
- Collate all paperwork e.g., Gas & Electric Certificates and Energy Performance Certificate (EPC)
- Work with Energy Suppliers to ensure Power is supplied to property
- Non-Access
- Non-Compliance
- Electrical wiring or re-wiring works
- Accessing properties with absent tenants in cases of flooding damage
- Complying with Housing Act 2004 & Health & Safety for Councils (HSC) Health & Safety Executive (HSE) Guidelines

We advised Paul that it had been suggested we look at all areas of 'Difficult Access' within Tenancy Services, Paul agreed. He and Sarah Lander were in discussions on re-assessing this area due to the time it takes to deal with the issues and the large number of resources used to cover the multitude of areas.

Paul and Sarah had discussed whether, Resident Scrutiny Forum panel would agree to come on board with them to work through and implement ways of covering these. Paul also stated that the RSF panel could work alongside the work being carried out through the Government New White Paper, where it states that some Health & Safety checks should be undertaken more frequently.

New Fire Safety guidelines coming in with the White Paper and the checks undertaken, which is one per year but it may go to two a year and if that the case it would majorly increase the amount of work, we will have to do.

Non-Access and Non-Compliance needs to be looked at in a more resource specialist way, for example for our Gas Services access we use the Environmental Act and the Housing Act 2004 to allow us to get a Warrant to gain access. We can't use that for every type of gaining access, it is only the criteria of a Gas Service that it can be used for.

These changes will change needs to access going forward are; Fire Safety, Asbestos Surveys, Electrical Testing, Rewiring Work – this comes under Planned Maintenance works and we can't force entry on this, we have to try all means

Possible and collect evidence of attempts being made to gain access but we can get a Warrant eventually.

Quick access for example; water is leaking into or flooding an underneath property Tenancy Agreement allows us to gain Emergency entry but we try not to use that but we will if the tenant is not at the property at the time the access is needed

Due to lockdown and people shielding has been even more difficult to gain access to properties. We had to change the way we did things, for example, Gas Services we used Health & Safety Executive (HSE) given guidance from the outset to help us gain entry. The Courts were not sitting so that process was not there for us to use.

We are now, gradually, being able to get these jobs done although we still have to be careful how we manage them due to some residents still being worried and vulnerable.

HSE advice was to document and photograph every contractor's card and letter's being put through the door, log all calls made and any contact made. The Courts are now sitting but they are a long way behind and we are working closely with them.

Summery

Difficult Access covers such a wide area of things we need to put together a new Process and Policy put into place that allows officers to understand what their responsibilities are in these areas, also it is not clear what is expected from Contractors and from my point of view this is the frustrating.

The process from Fire Safety probably could be managed across all the Organisation and Contractors with regards to gathering and documenting information. By reviewing the Process and Policies we are hoping to make the initial process simpler and quicker and more understandable and clearer for residents, staff and contractors. We are considering having a set member of staff to undertake all the Legal side and dealing with the paperwork, documents and witness statements needed for the Courts to issue Warrants and Injunctions. The various ways we communicate with residents to gain access need to be reviewed as part of this process as well.

New Sign Ups

We are now able to speak to potential new sign-up residents before they sign. This way we can assess any areas they may possibly need support in place to enable them to manage and maintain their tenancy.

The levels are rated as GREEN, YELLOW and RED. Green being just a low level of support needed, yellow being medium support needed and the red rating will need more major support tailored to their needs.

Communications

The library of letters we use need to be looked at because they are out of date and not suitable any more. The lockdown has made us use different ways and means to communicate between us as staff, contractors and residents. Are there any better ways or means for us to communicate with residents?

Appendix 2

Interview with:

Westley Wallace

Contracts Manager, Aaron Services

GAS SERVICING

Aaron is given a 74-day window to complete a Gas Service in a property.

Aaron Services, give themselves a 60-day window so it allows time for delays or any problems.

There is a 4-stage process:

South Essex Homes Letter 1 – Sent by Aaron advising resident their Gas Service is nearly due. It provides all the information explaining why this has to be carried out and gives a provisional appointment date and time. The letter gives various ways the resident can make contact to rebook if this appointment is not convenient. If we have any contact details of the resident, we will send them texts', emails or call, a week and then a day before the appointment.

South Essex Homes Letter 2 – If there is no response to letter 1 from the resident within 7 – 14 days another letter is sent to them by Aaron. This letter is worded a bit firmer by expressing the importance of this to be completed by Law every year. This will also have an appointment date and time and advise that if this is not convenient the contact details are included for them to rebook. Again, we will send them texts', emails or call, a week and then a day before the appointment.

We are able to book the appointments on our side up to 30 days, if we have had no response from the resident and not gained access in that time frame, we then have to pass the details back to the Tenancy Services Team to take over.

Letter 3 – South Essex Homes will arrange a timed appointment, which they book in a number of blocks of slots with the Tenancy Officer and an Aaron Service Engineer to call at the address. If no access is gained at this visit letter 4 is put through the letter box by the Tenancy Officer.

Letter 4 – If no access is gained on the previous visit, this letter is put through the door by the Tenancy Officer advising the resident that Court Action will be taken to gain access to carry out the works. It also advises the resident of the process and the fact that they will have to pay the Court Charges incurred.

Tenancy Services Team works with the Legal Team to apply for a Warrant. They always try to get through all these processes before the service expiry date.

Examples of reasons why resident is not allowing Gas Service to be completed:

The resident does not use the boiler so thinks the service does not need to be carried out.

The resident is always at work.

The boiler is working alright so does not need a service.

The resident is vulnerable and will not allow anyone in.

There are a number of residents that do not use their boilers, if they have emersion heaters on other means of hot water and heating supply, they see no need to use the boiler.

We have some boilers that have not been used since the day they were fitted.

A small number of residents don't want to have any work done because of the upheaval involved.

We usually managed to gain access to 90% of the properties on the first letter; it's been a different year this year because of the lockdown.

We use the general PPE equipment but we will wear the full suits and equipment if the residents feel safer that way.

We do check at the door before entering how the resident feels about us going in and also if the resident has had COVID or any recent symptoms COVID.

Some properties have had to be cleaned or deep cleaned before we can go into them to carry out the work.

We Service upwards of 200 properties a week. This year has been particularly hard for the Tenancy Services Team and us due to the lockdown and the delay in getting Warrants as the Courts were not working.

If Tenancy Services Team have to take over the process it is very time consuming for them, with all the paperwork side of it they have to do to get to the Warrant stage.

We do have a small minority of properties that we find every year we have to have Warrants served on them to gain access.

We do have occasions where we all, as agencies, try to get into the property together and undertake the work needed to be done.

Appendix 3

Interview with:

Nicola Powell

Senior Tenancy Services Officer

Tenancy Services

South Essex Homes

In February 2021, we conducted a ZOOM meeting with Nicola and she gave us details of her role as Senior Tenancy Services Officer. Her areas included are:

- Rents up to Notice stage – includes letters, visits, contact, making arrangements, Direct Debits, Standing orders, verification of universal credit and homeless prevention interviews. Updating Iworld
- Terminations of tenancy – includes sending and filing termination paperwork, preparing and serving NTQ, prepare/serving Torte notice, advertising the property, updating Iworld/Civica
- Tenancy Sign ups – arrange and book sign-up and undertake full sign up with resident, which may involve assisting with benefits/universal set up.
- Anti-social behaviour – case management, letter, calls and visits, set up or attend professional meetings, use legal tools available i.e., injunctions, mediation, ABC and court paperwork (includes gathering and typing up witness statements. Listening to noise recordings to gather evidence.
- Dealing with successions and assignments – prepare, check and complete all paperwork necessary
- Dealing with breaches of tenancy – overgrown gardens, fence disputes etc
- Tenant Improvement applications
- Dealing with deceased tenants affairs
- Mutual exchanges – liaise with other organisations, prepare and check all paperwork, prepare and arrange necessary checks and then complete deed of assignment
- Fraud – investigate cases and work with SBC fraud team to support any reported allegations of fraud – take appropriate action to recover property where fraud found

- 9-month visits - arrange and carry out on all Introductory tenants to ensure that tenancy carried out satisfactorily
- Safe guarding referrals both Adult and children
- Estate walkabouts – schedule and undertake, which includes promoting
- Raising repairs
- Tenancy Audits
- General enquiries through contact centre

Assistants

Re-housing

- Create and Verify shortlists
- Contact people on shortlist, check circumstances the same and confirm who they are.
- Arrange and undertake the viewing
- Prepare paperwork for viewing, including letters
- Update Abrisas once accepted or refused
- Liaise with voids team to ensure safe to view and also when property will be available to let
- Create sign up paperwork for both mutual exchanges and sign ups
- Complete core log forms and input on to their system

General assistants

- Prepare letters for Gas safety inspections, visit properties, apply for warrants (includes witness statements)
- Monitor applicants on Homeswapper for mutual exchanges
- Create ASB cases and assign to officers, including risk assessments. Close ASB cases and undertake satisfaction survey
- Manage garage lettings and arrears
- Carry out all Post arrangements and scanning on to Civica, which includes assigning to an officer

Voids

- Work with contractors to ensure properties meet our standards and are completed in a timely manner
- Collate all paperwork from contractors i.e., gas paperwork, electric certificates and EPC
- Work with energy providers to ensure debt cleared from meters to enable power to property

General Non-Access Letter

Appendix 4

Interview with:

Nadine Gould

Tenancy Services Team
South Essex Homes

In March 2021, we conducted a ZOOM meeting with Nadine and she gave us details of her role within Tenancy Services.

If letter's 1 and 2 have not gained access then we send out

Letters Non-Access 3 which has a much stronger wording with regards to the importance of the Service. This will include a Certificate of Service stating how and when we have gained access.

Letter Non-Access 4 will be sent out with another Certificate of Service stating what and how we have tried to make contact and gain access.

Following that if we are still unable to make contact with the resident or gain access, we start the Legal Process and apply to the Courts for a Warrant to enable us to carry out the work needed. That's when we have the Pro-former. We have the hearing at the Court and providing they are happy we get the Warrant.

Most of the time residents will allow us into the property a few days before the Hearing Date to avoid paying the costs of a Court case.

These Warrants mostly cover just Gas Services as the other processes work differently.

We have a good success rate for gaining access before the Court Process date but we do have a few that have to be taken through it all and the costs are then deducted from their wages or any monies they have coming in.

We have a good team that work well together in this process.

Gas admin Week

- Go through pass back list. Call to make appts. Minimum of 3 attempts.
- If appt cannot be made the NA3 letters are typed up accordingly and posted recorded delivery. The iworld process is then initiated.
- Throughout the gas admin week, the spreadsheet is updated daily and calls continue to try and book in as many appointments as possible. Those that are shielding are highlighted on the spreadsheet and a comment is left advising **Tenant shielding** and **dated**. The spreadsheet must be updated with any **confirmed appointments** and **dated**.
- Book court appointments to court if and when we have dates and prepare paper work.

Gas Visit week

- Timed appointments are carried out by the engineer and upon completion of the visits; Aarons advise what properties they did not gain access.
- The Assistant then sends the NA4 letter after gas visits have been completed to the no access properties recorded delivery.
- Assistant to call the unsuccessful visits and back log of shielding tenants to book them in also to reduce the amount going to court.

Appendix 5

Interview with:

Sam Lake

Electrical Manager

Re-Gen (M & E Services) Ltd

Rewiring Contractors

In May 2021, we conducted a ZOOM meeting with Sam and he gave us details of his role as a contractor for South Essex Homes.

We try to book jobs in a month in advance and then the Friday before they are due to start on the Monday, we contact the resident to confirm it is still okay to do the work, the resident will say Yes and then when the guys turn up, they either won't let them in for whatever reason or they go out or just don't open the door.

Unfortunately, this happens a lot with our jobs and it is a difficult one.

For example: last Monday morning we have 5 properties booked in for rewiring and when the guys, 12 – 3 electricians, turned up they could not get into the properties or got no answer at the door but the Friday before all the residents confirmed the work could be started.

This resulted in them all not having any work with us for a whole week. They do work for other company's not just South Essex Homes and as they were booked in with us, they had no other work.

This is very frustrating and a waste of time and money for us and more so for the Contractors.

RSF question: Could you not have the Tenancy Officer come out with you to the property?

Sam - before COVID we would pass the information onto Lloyd Williams, who would then contact the area Tenancy Services Officer they then go through their route to contact resident and rebook.

Since lockdown Tenancy has said that there is not a lot they can do if a tenant refuses access at the moment, so it is a bit difficult and a struggle.

Fortunately, we do have quite a few properties we are able to get into so some works are still being carried out. We do have a lot of work to cover with South Essex Homes.

It would be helpful if the tenant was a bit more responsible and not turn away the contractors.

RSF - According to the Tenancy Agreement we all have to sign, it states that they have to give access to their property for any works that need to be carried out, so it is hard to understand that the resident can refuse and there not be some sort of Order or Financial consequences for their refusal. After all, if they owned a Private Property, they would have to pay for the contractor's time that they had wasted.

We do understand that there is a lot of upheaval in rewire, but surely from a Health and Safety point of view that should over rule the thought of a bit of mess.

Sam – Some properties will have the cavity within the walls we can use and we do try to keep it all as neat as we can and only use trunking if we have to. The properties are different so we have to deal with each one as we do it.

Another issue we have is the condition that some residents live in, for whatever reason and we have to make sure we are all covered and protected when doing the work. We would then contact Lloyd Williams and advise him of the conditions, he would follow it up with the Tenancy Services Officer. We have had an incident where we have had to contact the Police because we were worried about the treatment and welfare of a residents' daughter. Some properties are infested with Fleas before we can go in, we have to be all suited and covered up. We do come up against a few challenges but we have a good team of guys that work round it as best as possible. We have had to pass on a few jobs if they are too bad, such as needles and any dangers to my guys.

Appendix 6

Interview with:

Lloyd Williams

Contracts Manager and Project Surveyor

South Essex Homes

In June 2021, we conducted a ZOOM meeting with Lloyd, he gave us details of his role as Contracts Manager & Project Surveyor within South Essex Homes.

Lloyd manages the Contractors used by South Essex Homes; these are:

- Thermoshield - New windows
- Re- Gen - Re-wiring
- Pilon - New Kitchens and New Bathrooms

After 3 failed access attempts are recorded a Disclaimer Letter has to be signed by the Tenant concerned.

Cleanliness is sometimes a big problem and this is duly noted and reported in case the Tenant is vulnerable and needs special help.

Keith Walkin joined the Team from April 2021 and will be taking over the Contracts for Kitchens and Windows.

Appendix 7

Interview with:

Kevin Hazelwood

Assistant Director Operations (Property)

South Essex Homes

In 2021, we conducted a ZOOM meeting with Kevin and he gave us details of his role as Assistant Director Operations (Property).

I am responsible for delivery of the Investment Programme associated with maintaining our Decent Homes standard as well as works related to improving Health & Safety.

We are currently focusing on the Compliance Regimens as we prepare for the new Legislative Requirements of the various changes within the Government Social Housing White Paper.

One aspect that can create slippage in Programmes is the ability to Gain Access to homes to undertake essential Health & Safety testing and Inspection works.

Access to Properties

We should focus on the Big Six, Gas, Electric, Fire, Water and Health & Safety.

Properly worded correspondence should always be used and mitigating circumstances should always be taken into consideration such as: Mental Health, Dyslexia, etc.

Generally Council Officers should be warranted so they can get Injunctions direct from the Court.

The wording in the Letters should be incorporated into the Tenancy Agreements for all Tenants and it should be Crystal Clear on all Access Needs. The Law is not very clear on what is considered to be Reasonable Access.

Water Tank Testing

Another aspect that is often forgotten about is the need for regular testing of water in large tanks for Legionnaires Disease, especially in Sheltered Housing

Electrical Testing

At present Electrical testing is not a Statutory Requirement by Law. This process should take about five hours to complete and it is also a very important process.

Asbestos Testing

This is only required in the Communal Areas but Officers do advise Resident on all other areas.

The Gas Servicing Tender is up for renewal and it is hoped to combine both services together to make it easier for all concerned.

Appendix 8

Ade Onileyen

Property Service

Morgan Sindell

RSF spoke to Ade via ZOOM in May 2021. He explained to us the process from Morgan Sindell point of view.

Usually, people either email us or text us with repair reports. They do have the option to say not between this time and that time or after that time or not school times and we will book them in for a convenient time for them but obviously within our times.

Getting access to properties comes and goes. Sometime we have no problems then other times, people won't answer the door. They will book appointments; our engineer goes to the property and gets no answer. The engineer phones them and they say, oh I have just come out for some shopping.

We try to send text message alerts to remind residents of the appointment. When the engineer is on the way to the job, they will contact the resident to say they are on the way.

During the lockdown we had a lot of positive calls and we were getting access to properties. Now the Lockdown has been lifted it has come back again and we find they are going out at appointment time.

When we get no access, we call the tenant from site in case they are in the garden or asleep. If still no answer we put a non-access card through the letter box to say that we have been and it has the contact details for them to call us. We usually give those 2 – 3 days to get back to us, if we get no response, we will phone them again and if no answer we send them a letter to contact us.

Usually, it is the first appointment we get no access on and the second one we usually get access.

If the jobs are just little ones like a dripping tap or loose door, they just pop out but if it is something a bit more major, they will be at home.

I can send you copies of the calling cards and the letters we send out.

RSF, we class Gas, Electricity and anything to do with Health & Safety, to be priority and that residents are given far too long before any action can be taken to make these checks or repairs.

We fill the Tenancy Pack and tenants should be made more aware of the dangers to themselves and others if these checks/repairs are not undertaken as a matter of urgency. Firmer wording stating that residents are in a contract and part of that contract is to allow access for these sorts of works to be carried out.

Ade – Some council penalise the resident if they do not keep to an appointment. I think if they just pop out, they should have to pay a fine. We have found that residents just can't be bothered and go out, like if it is a nice day, then a couple of weeks later they will report the job again.

If the repair does not affect them or they have no problems residents just don't want to bother and it can take months and months to get access and that is usually when it then causes them a problem, then they want you there today.

We also find that residents just don't want us to go into the properties because they may be up to no good or subletting or hauding etc.

We also find that if someone in a flat has a bad leak and it starts to flood the flat underneath and underneath will not allow access; we can now get a Force Entry Order for emergency access in those situations.

Real emergencies can get the order the same day but if it is less important than we could be up to 28 days to complete the job.

Appendix 9

Interview with:

Ashley Seymour

Maintenance Team Leader

Estate Services

South Essex Homes and South Essex Property Services

In May 2021, we conducted a ZOOM meeting with Ashley and he gave us details of his role as Maintenance Team Leader within Estate Services.

Compulsory Fire Safety Inspections of Entrance Door & Windows

High Rise Blocks

South Essex Homes attempt to complete these inspections a block at a time.

Letter 1 - This is sent to all residents of the block advising them that the Compulsory Fire Safety checks on the doors and windows are due to be undertaken. The letter gives a start date and advises resident of a two-week period that the Maintenance Team will be on site. The letter also gives contact details for the resident to call if an alternative date is needed.

If any residents have not made contact once the team are on site, the technicians will door knock, ring buzzers, email and/or call resident if they have those details to try to gain access. If no reply they will leave a calling card confirming attempts and again giving contact details.

When the majority of the inspections have been completed, we will card all the properties we have not gained access to advising them to call Tenancy services.

We then advise Tenancy Services of the addresses we have not been able to gain access to and about 2 weeks after that Letter 2 is sent to the property.

Letter 2 – This letter is generated by the Legal Team and advises the resident of a pre-booked date and time for the Technician to attempt the inspection again and the importance of the Fire Safety Checks. Contact details are given if the date and time is not convenient.

This letter expresses the importance of the inspection and the consequences both legally and financially for the resident if access is not gained as soon as possible.

South Essex Homes send us a list on Monday mornings of the properties they are gaining entry to for the week, we then work closely with their officers and other services to enabling us to opt on and jointly work with them once access is gained.

Sheltered Housing

We have been working within some Sheltered Units, we have 100% success with them because we work with the Sheltered Housing Officer on duty and they can be a good go between for us and the residents.

Residential Fire doors have a 30-minute fire resistance time and the doors between the lobbies and stair wells are an hour.

Some tenants or visitors do cause damage to the Fire Doors, fights, drug use, alcohol, Anti-social Behaviour, Domestic Violence, etc., but as it is very difficult to prove who actually caused the damage we have to repair or renew. If Police have to force entry, we always have to replace the doors.

The difficulty we have is that Fire Safety does not have a Legal Power option. The only area to have that is Gas Services. Courts will give Warrants to gain access for Gas but nothing else. So, we and other safety services have to tag along together with them.

We have worked very hard to get access to properties to undertake the Fire Safety checks, COVID outbreak and lockdowns have made setbacks but we have gone from 180 non-accesses down to 11 properties. We have not gained access to these for 2 years.

These are now with Tenancy Services Team to resolve and attempt to gain Court Orders to gain access to.

Fire Doors are not just for the Safety of the Residents who live in the property, they are for the Safety of all Residents and properties on that floor and other floors around them. To compromise one door compromises everything else.

Appendix 10

Interview with:

Jan Tate

Leasehold & Right to Buy Officer
Specialist Income Management Team
South Essex Homes

In June 2021, we conducted a ZOOM meeting with Jan and he gave us details of his role as Leasehold & Right to Buy Officer.

When a Leaseholder buy's a property, this is completed via a Solicitor and the Leaseholders are made aware of all the rules, regulations, responsibilities and expectations that they are agreeing to comply with rules set by South Essex Homes.

New Leaseholders are given all the contact details, options and links available to them as a new owner to support and advise them as and where they may need.

Jan stated, that as there is more Legal and lifelong commitment of being an owner the Leaseholders are more likely to comply with the rules, regulations, responsibilities, expectations and obligations they are signed to.

Gas Safety and Services

Leaseholders are expected to send in proof of the yearly Gas Safety and Servicing undertaken within the property. If proof has been sent in on the safe installation of a new boiler, then the first Gas Safety and Servicing Certificate will be expected the following year.

Are these Certificates checked by South Essex Homes to make sure the checks have been undertaken by a reputable properly qualified Gas Engineer?

Jan Tate – Yes, every Certificate has the Gas Engineers Name, Company and their Corgi Register Number, we can easily check these are correct.

Letter 1 – This will be sent to the Leaseholder **3 months before** the Gas Service date is due.

Letter 2 - 28 days before due date we will try and telephone the Leaseholder to remind them Service is due or if already completed proof has to be sent to South Essex Homes records.

Letter 3 – Will be posted out to Leaseholder **7 days before** the due date advising them of the dates and actions taken to remind Leaseholder that the Certificate is needed. It also states that if the Gas Service Certificate is not supplied within the 7 days South Essex Homes will begin proceedings to obtain it on behalf of the Leaseholder and will expect the full costs paid back to South Essex Homes.

We have to have a copy of the yearly Gas Safety and Servicing Certificate on Record for all Leaseholder properties.

All Gas Services must be carried out by a CORGI Registered Engineer. We are able to check them out by their CORGI Register Number.

All other works in the property are the responsibility of the Leaseholder, so no involvement is needed by South Essex Homes.

If we have reports or complaints from neighbours, we are able to contact the Leaseholder to advise them of the issue reported and to remind them of their Leaseholder Contract Responsibilities.

Access

Jan Tate - If we have reports of a minor issue, e.g., a small water leak, we will attempt to contact the Leaseholder direct immediately, either by telephoning or door knocking. If we get no reply, we will leave messages stating the issues. We will also write to the Leaseholder.

Letter 1 – Will confirm the problem to the Leaseholder stating their **obligation and the possible consequences/costs** if this has to be dealt with by South Essex Homes.

We are not always contacted by the Leaseholder to confirm the works have been completed, but if we have a report that the issue has not been addressed by the Leaseholder.

Letter 2 – Advises the Leaseholder that South Essex Homes **require internal access giving the reason**. It will also state a proposed date and time, giving reasonable notice, that they will attend the property.

Letter 3 – Will be a **Notice of Intent to Repair**. Giving the Leaseholder procedure steps, costs and repairs charge they will be liable for if South Essex Homes have to step in and arrange repairs. Official information and photo documentation before and after the repair will also be supplied to Leaseholder.

Letter 4 – Will be left at property advising the Leaseholder that South Essex Homes have **had to enter the property to make the repair** and the leaseholder would have to collect the new door keys to get into their property.

Emergency Access

We have to attempt to contact the Leaseholder by all means possible, telephone, text; email and door knock to make Leaseholder aware.

Letter 1 – Is sent if no contact or incorrect details are held on file.

Letter 2 - Notice to the Resident/Tenant that we need internal access in conjunction withissue details stated.

Letter 3 – **Notice of Intent to repair**. We are able to go to the property with a locksmith to gain access.

Letter 4 – Notice of Repair Remedy- Force Entry Only minimal work is undertaken to halt the problem and the Leaseholder will be charged. Any damage caused to any neighbours as a result, will have to be paid via Leaseholder Insurance.

RSF - What if the Leaseholder is slow to pay any charges back to South Essex Homes?

Jan – Leaseholders have yearly estimated Service Charge Bills. If at the end of those years' costs the Leaseholder has credit due to less yearly costs, then we will take the costs out before the refund is issued and the Leaseholder is advised.

If the Leaseholder has no credit at the end of the year, we will add the charges into the following years' Service Charges.

RSF – We are aware that some leaseholders within the tower blocks have not been happy that they have had to have the Girder doors fitted as they were solid and let no light in as they have no glass panels. Is this true?

Jan – Yes, it is. They have been able to purchase the doors to their own design choice, but they have had to produce paperwork to prove that the Safety Standards and Guidelines have still been met.