08/07/2020

Dear Partick Housing Association,

I am contacting you on behalf of Living Rent, Scotland’s largest tenants’ union. The purpose of this correspondence is to make you aware of some concerns we have over your level of commitment to the Scottish government’s Covid-19 hygiene guidelines for social landlords; and to give you the opportunity to submit a resolve. Given the role Partick Housing Association plays in providing and managing housing in the area, we trust that you understand the importance of keeping residences safe and clean.

With the severe risk to health posed by Covid-19, the need for a rigorous hygiene maintenance procedure has obviously taken on an acute urgency. It is imperative that social landlords respond to these material circumstances and meet the required standard as detailed by the Scottish government. You may already be aware of BBC Scotland’s coverage of this matter, which aired on Sunday.

We would like to take this opportunity to compare some of your policies and practices with the Scottish government’s guidelines, and highlight some subsequent realities faced by your tenants. The following account has been put together in consultation with Living Rent members who have tenancies with PHA.

The Scottish government’s ‘Advice and information for social landlords managing multi-storey and high-density flats during the COVID-19 health crisis’, makes clear the importance of ‘leaflets, prominently displayed posters and up to date information on landlords’ websites’, in order to keep tenants informed of hygiene protocol within their building. The guidelines emphasise that this information should be ‘regularly reviewed and updated’. It has been reported to Living Rent that this information has neither been made readily available to tenants during lockdown nor amid the recent easing of lockdown restrictions. Other than your ‘Communal Cleaning Service’ letter to customers dated 27th March, there have been no further updates. This is particularly concerning given that the official government guidance provides templates and materials for making posters and leaflets; something of great importance to your tenants with limited or no internet access. Your communication strategy on matters of hygiene has been inadequate, both in terms of the regularity of the updates and the accessibility of the information.

Despite this, you have managed to maintain correspondence with tenants on matters relating to the payment of rent. Clearly PHA has the resources to ascertain whether its tenants are likely to fall into arrears. The practice of providing vital health and safety information to tenants has not been treated with the same significance.

Further to Living Rent’s concerns over your communications protocol, we must highlight where your hygiene practices have themselves failed to meet the government’s Covid-19 guidelines. The government’s guidelines state the need for ‘enhanced, frequent daily cleaning focusing on ‘high touch’ surfaces which are in regular use’. By contrast, your own literature references *one* such ‘deep clean’, to be carried out at an unspecified time during the month of June. This hardly fulfils the *daily* requirements specified by the Scottish government.

Moreover, the guidelines state that ‘staff carrying out cleaning and litter removal work must be able to do this safely, with appropriate PPE’. We find this in contradiction with an account provided by one of your tenants, summarised as follows:

* The ‘deep clean’ took an estimated 20 minutes for the whole building.
* When the cleaner first entered the building, they were not wearing any PPE.
* The mop they used to clean the floors was already filthy.
* Although a further ‘deep clean’ was carried out following complaints, it was not of a significantly higher standard.

Your own online literature offers assurance that operatives will be wearing appropriate PPE. Thus, the ‘deep clean’ in practice was at odds with protocol as detailed both by PHA and the Scottish government.

Another of your tenants has informed Living Rent of an issue with refuse collection. The tenant notified PHA of a mix-up and subsequent bin shortage in the communal area, and your team advised that the matter would be raised with the council. When the council failed to make contact or replace the bin, the tenant contacted PHA to follow up, and was given the number for the council, which led to an automated message rather than a service provider. Given that PHA claimed to have already reported the issue, it is unclear why this somewhat redundant phone number was provided. With government guidelines stating that ‘litter and debris should be promptly removed [from communal areas]’, we are perplexed by the imprudence in your approach. The matter was not treated with the urgency it required, and resulted in your tenants seeking answers from the council themselves; to no avail.

Considering the glaring contradictions between your hygiene policy, practice, and the government guidelines, in addition to some troubling testimonies provided by PHA tenants, Living Rent would ask that you commit to an appropriate resolve. On the basis that your approach to hygiene protocol throughout Covid-19 has been lacklustre, we would invite reassurance from PHA on the following matters:

1. That PHA will maintain regular communication with tenants on matters relating to Covid-19 hygiene practices, using posters and leaflets as well as providing digital updates.
2. That your reintroduction of ‘normal cleaning’ (from July) will reflect that the government guidelines still require *daily* and *more* rigorous cleaning of high contact areas.
3. That operatives will use appropriate PPE, for their own protection as well as that of tenants.

In the interest of your tenants’ safety, it is crucial that these matters are resolved as soon as possible. For your reference, I have attached a link to the Scottish government’s guidelines, as well as one for your own Covid-19 cleaning policy as provided on the PHA website.

Can Partick Housing Association guarantee that it will adhere to the Scottish government’s guidance ‘for social landlords managing multi-storey and high-density flats during the COVID-19 health crisis’?

We look forward to your response.

Regards,

Danny Pilkington, Living Rent Member