



Tenant Services Management Board

You are requested to attend a meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board to be held in The John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton on 20 September 2016 at 18:00.

Agenda

- 1 Apologies.
- 2 Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 15 August 2016 (attached).
- 3 Public Question Time.
- 4 Declaration of Interests
To receive declarations of personal or prejudicial interests, in accordance with the Code of Conduct.
- 5 Verbal Update on DLO Relocation Project. Report of the DLO Project Manager (verbal).
Reporting Officer: Richard Brown
- 6 Report on Improving Tenant and Leaseholder Satisfaction. Report of the Project Manager (attached).
Reporting Officer: Martha Dudman

Bruce Lang
Assistant Chief Executive

22 February 2018

Members of the public are welcome to attend the meeting and listen to the discussions.

There is time set aside at the beginning of most meetings to allow the public to ask questions.

Speaking under "Public Question Time" is limited to 4 minutes per person in an overall period of 15 minutes. The Committee Administrator will keep a close watch on the time and the Chairman will be responsible for ensuring the time permitted does not overrun. The speaker will be allowed to address the Committee once only and will not be allowed to participate further in any debate.

Except at meetings of Full Council, where public participation will be restricted to Public Question Time only, if a member of the public wishes to address the Committee on any matter appearing on the agenda, the Chairman will normally permit this to occur when that item is reached and before the Councillors or Tenant Services Management Board Members begin to debate the item.

This is more usual at meetings of the Council's Planning Committee and details of the "rules" which apply at these meetings can be found in the leaflet "Having Your Say on Planning Applications". A copy can be obtained free of charge from the Planning Reception Desk at The Deane House or by contacting the telephone number or e-mail address below.

If an item on the agenda is contentious, with a large number of people attending the meeting, a representative should be nominated to present the views of a group.

These arrangements do not apply to exempt (confidential) items on the agenda where any members of the press or public present will be asked to leave the Committee Room.

Full Council, Executive, Committees and Task and Finish Review agendas, reports and minutes are available on our website: www.tauntondeane.gov.uk



Lift access to the John Meikle Room and the other Committee Rooms on the first floor of The Deane House, is available from the main ground floor entrance. Toilet facilities, with wheelchair access, are also available off the landing directly outside the Committee Rooms.



An induction loop operates to enhance sound for anyone wearing a hearing aid or using a transmitter.

For further information about the meeting, please contact the Corporate Support Unit on 01823 356414 or email r.bryant@tauntondeane.gov.uk

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Tenant Services Management Board Members:-

Mr A Akhigbemen

Councillor C Booth

Councillor R Bowrah, BEM

Mrs J Bunn

Mr D Galpin

Mrs J Hegarty

Mr K Hellier

Mr I Hussey

Minutes of the Meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 15 August 2016 at 6pm in The John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton.

Present: Mr R Balman (Chairman)
Mrs J Bunn, Mr D Galpin, Mrs J Hegarty, Mr A Akhigbemen, Mr I Hussey, and
Councillor Bowrah.

Officers: Terry May (Interim Assistant Director – Property and Development), Simon Lewis (Assistant Director – Housing and Community Development), Martin Price (Tenant Empowerment Manager), Rachel Searle (Housing Development Project Lead), Julie-Ann Gordon (Housing Development Project Officer) and Emma Hill (Democratic Services Officer).

(The meeting commenced at 6.00pm)

1. Apologies

Mr K Hellier, Councillor Booth and Councillor Beale

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 25 July 2016 were taken as read and were signed.

3. Public Question Time

No questions received for Public Question Time.

4. Declarations of Interests

Mr R Balman, Mrs J Bunn, Mr D Galpin, Mrs J Hegarty, Mr I Hussey, Mr A Akhigbemen declared personal interests as Taunton Deane Borough Council Housing Tenants.

5. Report on Performance Indicators Quarter One 2016-17

Members considered the Performance Scorecard Summary previously circulated, concerning the Housing and Communities Quarter Three performance Scorecard and a verbal update on the performance of the Repairs Service.

Looking at each section of the performance scorecard for Quarter Three, the figures and percentages as follows:

- Managing Finances (housing) - There were 1 measure of which 100% were Green, 0% were Amber, 0% were Red and 0% were N/A.
- Service Delivery (Satisfaction) – There were 4 measures of which 75% were Green, 0% were Amber, 0% were Red and 25% were N/A.
- Service Delivery (Decent Homes) – There were 1 measure of which 0% Green, 100% Amber, 0% Red and 0% were N/A.
- Service Delivery (Operational Delivery) – There were 6 measures of which

33.3% were Green, 33.3% were Amber, 33.3% were Red and 0% were N/A.

Below was a summary of the main points from the update provided on the Quarter Three Performance Scorecard:

- Submitted to the Board Members was a revised and refined performance scorecard for Housing and Communities.
- The responsibility of the individual Corporate Aim/Priority was split between the Assistant Director for Housing and Community Development and Interim Assistant Director for Property and Development.
- Generally, there had been good performance on HRA Income Collection as well as some of Satisfaction measures.
- Looking at HC4.4 Service Measures for Disabled Facility Grants (DFG), the information provided was incorrect and related to the General Fund. The HRA data was better and the service was delivering installation within 31 weeks.
- To improve this delivery time for wet room installation for DFG, the HRA were intending to tender for fixed price contracts to cover all installations, rather than tendering for each individual installation. This would take six weeks of the process.
- Looking at HC4.1 Service Measure for Housing Stock, there had been issues capturing data for relets time. The data was collected the staff who entered the properties once void and improvement were being made to VOIDS service. The Assistant Director responsible had completed a service reshuffle and with the new structure there would hopefully, would allow Board Members to see a truer service performance.

During the discussion of this item the following points were made:-

- In response to a question asking why was the data from quarter three of Corporate Aim HC2.7 was missing, the Board Members were informed that had been reported to the Board at the time but the Office could not remember the precise reasons. It had something to do with performance data being corrupted during that quarter.

Resolved that the officer's report be noted.

6. Verbal Update on New Top Ten Performance Indicators

The Tenant Empowerment Manager gave a verbal update concerning the revising of the Top Ten Performance Indicator Summary presented to the Board Members following every quarter.

Historically, the Board had reviewed and revised the summary list presented to them ever so often. The Chairman and Tenant Empowerment Manager felt, it was time to complete a review of the summary.

The Board Members were requested to review the full list of performance indicators on the scorecard for Housing and Communities and to check if there any changes that they felt were needed as the Housing and Communities Performance Indicators had been revised and reduced so Members might wish to do the same.

The summary of indicators was the selection of areas which the Board felt were most important or of interest to tenants.

The indicators were published in the newsletters and on the Council's website to report the services performance at the end of each quarter.

During the discussion of this item the following points were made:-

- The Board reviewed and had a brief discussion regarding the current summary of performance indicators. They decided that there were no changes required at the moment and the current list should stand unchanged.

Resolved that:-

1. The Officer's report be noted.
2. The Top Ten Performance Indicators should remain unchanged.

7. Exclusion of Press and Public

Resolved that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item because of the likelihood that exempt information would otherwise be disclosed relating to Clause 2 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act, 1972 and the public interest in withholding the information outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information to the public.

8. Confidential Report on Development Update

The Board considered a previously circulated confidential report from the Housing Development Project Lead, concerning the performance of current Housing Development Projects. The report identified the progress of the Key Project Activities for two Housing Development projects within Taunton Deane.

Resolved that the Officer's confidential report be noted.

9. Confidential Report on New Scheme Proposals.

The Board considered a previously circulated confidential report from the Housing Development Project Lead, concerning the new development schemes within Taunton Deane. The report identified and detailed potential new Development Schemes for Council Housing within Taunton Deane.

Resolved that the Officer's confidential report be noted.

(The meeting ended at 6.35pm)

Declaration of Interests

Tenant Services Management Board

- Declared a personal interests as a Taunton Deane Borough Council Housing Tenants;
 - Mr R Balman
 - Mrs J Bunn
 - Mr D Galpin
 - Mrs J Hegarty
 - Mr K Hellier
 - Mr I Hussey
 - Mr R Middleton
 - Mr A Akhigbemen

Improving Tenant and Leaseholder Satisfaction

A report outlining recommendations for change to the Housing and Communities Service at Taunton Deane Borough Council



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Foreword

This piece of work was requested due to decreasing levels of tenant and leaseholder satisfaction. Therefore, the tone of this report is unavoidably negative at times. However, it is worth mentioning that a high percentage (around 80-85% on average) of tenants continue to feel that they receive good value for money and there have been reports of exemplary service.

For example, satisfaction was very high with the advice and support service we provide around finance and benefits. Further consultation with tenants also confirmed that tenants also value the wider support services that we fund through the Housing Revenue Account, such as mental health and employment support.

Regarding the Repairs and Maintenance Service, tenants reported a 91% satisfaction rate for the attitude of the DLO Operatives and 88% satisfaction rate for 'minimising dirt and mess' whilst completing the works.

On an individual level most staff are working hard to do a good job. However, the organisational culture can be quite negative and at times derogatory towards our tenants and this naturally reflects in the service we provide.

The purpose of the foreword is to recognise the good practice that exists across our service, and acknowledge that whilst this report inevitably focusses on the negative aspects of our service delivery, there are still many staff striving to do an excellent job every day. It is worth stating that the focus has always been on identifying the issue and finding a solution for the customer, and not looking to blame or find fault with individual staff members.

Executive Summary of Recommendations

The results of the Tenant and Leaseholder STAR Satisfaction survey and further investigation by the Project Manager revealed that there were 5 areas of concern and the headline recommendations are outlined below.

There is an overall recommendation that a new position is created to drive these changes and improvements; a **Customer Services Improvement Project Manager**. There is a lot of work to be done but it requires dedicated time and determination. Initially this would be a fixed term post, for a 12 month period. The work can be completed without this new post, but it is my view that this would not bring about the timely improvements that we and our tenants are looking for.

It is recommended that we appoint a dedicated Project Manager to spend a period of 6 months to review the current **Grounds Maintenance** contract. This individual would need to establish what work is required on the land that we own and work with tenants to establish their priorities. This role would also include overseeing the transfer of the contract to GIS, setting up tighter contract management procedures, and improving our communication of the schedules to tenants and leaseholders.

Terry May, Assistant Director for Property and Development, and the team from IESE are already undertaking a full review of the **Repairs and Maintenance Service**, including the current restructure of the Property Services Team. Many more actions are expected to come out of this review which will be detailed in the Property and Development Directorate Improvement Plan, including the possible development of a new Standard and Five Year Neighbourhood Plans.

All our **Service Standards** need to be reviewed and aligned with our new Customer Access Strategy, and they require a renewed emphasis on customer care. We also need to ensure that these are agreed with tenants and communicated effectively.

Our **Feedback, Compliments and Complaints** process has been recently reviewed and is generally suitable. However, it is suggested that it be reconsidered with a fresh emphasis on early resolution and customer care. In line with the messages coming out from the Housing Ombudsman Scheme, housing related complaints must be viewed as extremely valuable as housing plays such a central role in people's lives. Overall we should have a process that:

- Ensures that where we have done something wrong we say sorry without defence;
- Allows frontline staff to make gestures of good will;
- Trains and empowers frontline staff to seek creative, early solutions; and
- Ensures that the formal complaints process is used where necessary and is simple, clear and consistent

Customer service was a big issue for tenants and they felt there were many areas for improvement. These recommendations have been categorised as follows.

Quick Wins – there are various campaigns and changes to our current way of work that are recommended. These are all little or no cost options, but would require significant effort and leadership. In brief they are:

- Renewed emphasis on our communication standards.
- ‘No negs’ campaign – a culture of challenging colleagues when negative or derogatory comments are made.
- Unconditionally positive – ensure that we are positive and helpful from our very first interaction, with staff and colleagues.
- Same day service – wherever possible enquires should be resolved and tenants should be contacted by the end of the day.
- Stop clicking send – a reduced reliance on email, encouraging staff to deal over the phone or face-to-face with colleagues in order to reach resolutions quicker.

Training and Investment – these options will require more financial investment and will take place over the longer term. In brief these are:

- More support and training to be given to staff in order to empower them to make quicker decisions without the need to confirm with managers.
- Increased challenge where poor service is identified, both informally in a team setting and formally using one-to-one’s and appraisals.
- Formal Customer Service Training for all levels of staff throughout the Housing and Communities Directorate.
- A much greater investment and presence on social media to ensure we are allowing tenants to use this as a preferred method of communication, but are also able to manage what is being discussed about our service online.

Strategic Management – these suggestions are intended to ensure that our service is customer-focussed from the top. In brief they are:

- More consistent approach to estate management across the entire stock, regardless of whether they are in a One Team working area.
- Ensuring that our systems and processes are continually reviewed to ensure there are no unnecessary steps.
- Our commitment to Customer Care must be reflected in our Key Performance Indicators, both at a strategic and individual level. This should be in line with our new behaviours-led appraisal system.

Full scale service transformation is considered within this report (page 19) but little detail is provided as this is being considered within the wider transformation programme. More detail will emerge, but in general this includes redesigning our website to include a tenant portal, a single number for ‘Deane Housing’, and a case management approach for more complex cases.

An implementation plan detailing suggested lead officers and timescales can be found in Appendix 1.

Introduction and context

Taunton Deane Borough Council currently own just over 5800 properties of varying tenure, including Sheltered and Extra Care properties. In 2015 the Housing and Communities Service conducted their biannual STAR Tenant and Leaseholder Satisfaction Survey. The survey was sent out to 2851 tenants, 1300 of whom replied (approximately 23%). The report that followed showed that among those 1300 tenants there had been a significant decline in tenant and leaseholder satisfaction with certain areas of our service which are detailed in this report.

A Project Manager was asked to further research and prioritise the areas of concern, and work with tenants and staff to develop some recommendations for service changes and improvements. The Project Initiation Document can be found in Appendix 2.

Before the key findings of this report are laid out it is worth considering the wider social context, particularly concerning tenants overall well-being and how this may impact their interaction with our Housing and Communities Service. The current and on-going economic pressures cannot be ignored and the impact on individuals, communities, and the Local Authority must be recognised. For example, 34% of tenants reported experiencing high levels of anxiety, and 14% of tenants reported feeling dissatisfied with their lives in general, twice the UK average. These percentages are fairly concerning and may be reflected in the levels of satisfaction with our service. It also demonstrates that whilst the financial climate means we must continue to drive for pragmatism and efficiency we must also ensure our service is increasingly understanding and empathetic.

Finally, we must acknowledge how important housing is to people and how it impacts upon every other aspect of their lives. Consequentially it is an extremely emotive issue and as a landlord we must remember this when we interact with tenants.

Methodology

As mentioned in the Foreword, the underlying principles for this piece of work have always been to remain solution focussed and customer focused. Little time has been spent dwelling on concerns around specific individuals, but instead spent trying to understand the wider issues around organisational culture, behaviours and processes. Furthermore, despite being a member of staff, I have tried to continually put myself 'in the customers shoes' when considering the issues to try and ensure the solution is one that works for tenants not just the organisation.

Initially I spent time analysing the data included in the report to understand where levels of satisfaction were significantly low and identifying any trends and correlations. In brief, the data suggested that the following were the key areas of dissatisfaction:

- Grounds Maintenance – specifically grass cutting
- Repairs and Maintenance Service – specifically 'time taken before work starts,' and 'getting it right first time.'

- Getting hold of Taunton Deane Borough Council – specifically ‘getting hold of the right person,’ and ‘helpfulness of staff.’
- Tenants feeling listened to and involved. This includes a lack of knowledge about our service standards.

A strong correlation was identified between levels of dissatisfaction with the repairs and maintenance service and dissatisfaction with Taunton Deane Borough Council as a whole, suggesting this is an area of specific concern.

To a slightly lesser extent, issues were raised about satisfaction with their local neighbourhood, with the main concerns being around car parking, rubbish and dog fouling, and noisy neighbours. However, despite the diminishing resources and service cuts that have been implemented over the past few years, the level of satisfaction with neighbourhoods has remained consistent.

Overall this left 39% of the tenants surveyed saying they are happy enough with the service provided to them that they would recommend us to friends and family. A further 31% of tenants were passive, with the remaining 31% classed as detractors who are likely to be negative about Taunton Deane. When converted into a Net Promoter Score and compared with HouseMark figures, this leaves Taunton Deane Borough Council with an average score of 8, placing us in the bottom quartile.

After analysing the report, I spent time with staff and tenants to establish whether the statistics were providing a picture that was consistent with their individual views and experiences. Overall this has concluded that the list of priority issues was accurate and reflected the frustrations felt by staff and tenants. Consequently the Project Board was set up consisting of the Project Sponsor, Simon Lewis, Assistant Director for Housing and Communities, and Project Manager, Martha Dudman, along with significant individuals relating to these priority issues.

- Grounds Maintenance Contract Review - Phil Webb *
- Repairs and Maintenance Review - Terry May
- Feedback, Compliments and Complaints Procedures - Martha Dudman
- Service Standards Review - Angela Summers & Stephen Boland
- Customer Service - Martha Dudman
- Leaseholder Engagement – Claire Thackray

** There have been some staff changes since the commencement of this project.*

Whilst each workstream would produce its own actions and recommendations, some overarching themes and ways of working were agreed by all.

- **Stakeholder Engagement** – the involvement of tenants, staff and leaseholders is crucial throughout this process. Responsibility for this was held by Martha Dudman (staff), Martin Price (tenants) and Claire Thackray (leaseholders).
- **Financial Restrictions** – the current financial situation of the HRA account will ultimately guide some of what can be achieved throughout this process,

and consequentially the expectations of all stakeholders must be managed accordingly.

- **Communication & Publicity** – ensuring that all stakeholders are kept up-to-date with progress and recommendations will be crucial to retaining interest and support for the project.
- **Procurement** – the Council's procurement of services or systems must keep in mind the specific needs of the Housing and Communities Service to ensure they are fit for purpose and support the delivery of good quality customer service.

As work continued on each of the workstreams, regular consultation and testing was done to ensure that the conclusions being drawn remained reflective of tenant's views and priorities. The Project Manager and workstream Leads regularly attended the Tenants Forum, Sheltered Housing Development Group, and Tenants Services Management Board. This also included a week of more intense consultation during May. We held Tenant Consultations in the three areas of East Taunton, North Taunton and Wellington. Overall the turnout was very low. This may be viewed in one of two ways. Firstly that most tenants are happy with the services they are receiving and did not feel the need to come to speak with us. However, whilst talking with the tenants at the sessions there were several comments that they had invited other tenants (neighbours, friends, family) to accompany them and their responses suggested that the reason they had not attended was because they did not see the point. They feel that we have routinely over consulted, over promised, and under delivered. Whilst this cannot be assumed to be reflective of our entire tenant population, it did come across quite strongly as an issue and perhaps reflects a feeling of apathy among tenants about our services.

I spent a lot of time researching best practice and trying to learn as much as possible about other organisations and improvements they have made. On a local level, I spent time with Homes in Sedgemoor, Knightstone Housing Association and Yarlington Housing Group. Online research and attending various conferences also allowed me to gain an insight into best practice across the country. In general, these organisations are a few years ahead of us in their change process so I was able to learn a lot from them. Much of this learning is reflected in the recommendation laid out below.

Grounds Maintenance

The current Grounds Maintenance contract for Housing and Communities owned land has been in place for over 15 years with very few amendments. Tenants were very vocal about their issues with the quality and quantity of our grounds maintenance work, particularly grass cutting. Our Leasehold Officer has reported a significant increase in complaints from leaseholders about the level of grounds maintenance service they are receiving. Both tenants and leaseholders also reported a lack of communication on our part regarding the schedules and contract content.

After much discussion with the appropriate Officers it appears there are several main courses of actions that are required.

Moving to GIS

Currently the contract maps are in hard copy. This is not only cumbersome but means that the file cannot be easily accessed or amended. Therefore it is recommended that this is uploaded to the GIS system. The Asset Management Team can assist with this work. It will take some time and incur some costs, although it is not anticipated they will be very high.

Back to basics contract

As the contract has not been renewed for so many years, the consensus is that this is an opportunity to start again. This would mean look at all the maps and agree, with tenants, what is required within the contract. This can then be priced and compared with the present budget and establish whether it is sufficient or not.

As part of Terry May's work around developing a Repairs and Maintenance Service Standard, he is drafting a document that will be used as a starting point for further discussion. However, the emphasis of the review should be to look for new innovative, flexible solutions and more creative and efficient ways of delivering the contract.

As part of this process there needs to be a strong emphasis on ensuring the contract management and monitoring criteria are significantly improved. To ensure that the contract remains relevant and achievable it must be regularly reviewed and challenged where necessary.

Communication

Tenants frequently stressed that it was important to them to be informed about the grounds maintenance schedules for their areas. They want to know what they can expect and be able to monitor whether or not the work is completed sufficiently. Terry is looking at the possibility of Five Year Neighbourhood Plans which would include a variety of information, but at the very least we need to ensure that tenants know what they can expect over a 12 months period by way of Neighbourhood Maintenance Schedules.

Project Manager

Both of these pieces of work would require some dedicated time and resource. Therefore, it is recommended that a Project Manager is allocated time to conduct this work for a fixed term period, possibly 6 months in the first instance.

Repairs and Maintenance

The Repairs and Maintenance Service, which now sits within the Housing and Communities Directorate, was highlighted as one of the priority areas for improvement in the STAR Satisfaction survey. A strong correlation was identified between levels of dissatisfaction with the repairs and maintenance service and dissatisfaction with Taunton Deane Borough Council as a whole.

Feedback from tenants can largely be summarised into them wanting a more efficient but also more human service. They are widely accepting of a move to the use of more modern technology, however there is still a demand to be able to speak to a person. Overall tenants felt like there was a lack of common sense being used and that it didn't always feel like the work was logical, as if staff were being forced to following a plan rather than using common sense to solve the problem. They also felt that there was lack of concern about how poor service was impacting their lives. Whilst individual staff often took the time to apologise for mistakes or missed appointments, there was no strategic acknowledgment of this failing and subsequently no improvement to the service.

Tenants reported significant concerns around the standards of our contractor's work and that this was regularly at a much lower standard, both in terms of quality of work and customer service, than our DLO staff. Therefore, we must implement tighter contract management and seek better assurances that our contractors work to the same standards that we would expect of our own staff.

Consequentially the service is undergoing an extensive review, led Assistant Director Terry May. Aspects of the service are also being analysed by the IESE team. Due to the vast nature of this review and the resulting actions, little detail is provided in this report. Terry is in the process of writing a separate Property and Development Directorate Improvement Plan which will contain all this information. As well as restructuring to the Property Services Team, he is also looking at developing a Repairs and Maintenance Service Standard and Five Year Neighbourhood Plans. This work is on-going and updates will be regularly provided by Terry and his team.

Service Standards

After some research it was found that whilst we had Service Standards for various aspects of our service, they were not well published and a great number of tenants, including those who sit on our tenant panels, did not know about them. It was therefore decided that Angela Summers would spend time evaluating our current standards, cross referencing them with the HCA Regulations, and working with various service managers to redesign them. This would include an increased emphasis on customer care and experience, potentially with a new Customer Care Standard or Charter. Her work will also include ensuring the standards are simple, easily interpreted, consistently formatted, and customer-focussed.

The Council's new Customer Access Strategy is currently being developed and Angela will work with the Corporate Services Team and managers from various departments. It was decided that it is important to get this document published before the standards are formally revised so that they will be in line with the Council's core principles.

Below is an outline of the standards that she will be working on.

Neighbourhood and Community Standard	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spaces, including management and maintenance 	<i>Tbc – possibly picked up in GM contract review</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ASB 	<i>Paul Hadley</i>
Home Standard	<i>Terry May</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of accommodation • Repairs and maintenance 	
Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard	<i>Martin Price</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer Service, Choice and Complaints • Involvement and Empowerment • Understanding and responding to diverse needs of tenants 	
Tenancy Standard	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocation and Tenure 	<i>Paul Hadley (ref: Landlord Customer Strategy)</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mutual Exchange 	<i>Tbc</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Register 	<i>Heather Stewart</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voids 	<i>Tbc</i>
Value for Money	<i>Tbc</i>
Rent Standard	<i>Lucy Clothier</i>

Feedback, complaints and compliments

The newly set out vision of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme (HOS) is 'Housing Matters: Fairness Matters'. Overall their message is that as landlords we must remember how central housing is to people's lives. Housing complaints are somewhat unique and this is the reason for the decision to keep the HOS separate from other Local Government Ombudsman Schemes. When a tenant raises what, on the surface, seems to be a fairly minor issue or complaint we must consider the potential impact that it may be having on that individual's life.

The Ombudsman's three dispute principles are:

- Be fair (treat people fairly and follow fair process)
- Put things right (at the earliest possible opportunity)
- Learn (from the investigations and the outcomes)

These are increasingly being adopted by organisations who are being recognised for excellent customer service and complaint handling. Early resolution is key, and staff a ground level should be empowered to be creative and resolve the issue at the earliest possible opportunity. A complaint only becomes formal if the tenant has expressed a dissatisfaction with the service and a) it has not been able to be resolved with early intervention, and b) the tenant wants to go down this formal route.

The three stage process that Taunton Deane has for formal complaints is fairly standard among the sector. However, there are two issues. Firstly, there is not enough emphasis on early resolution. Secondly, where the complaint becomes formal the process is not being consistently followed.

At a Capita Conference entitled Effectively Handling Complaints in Housing, several leading organisations gave presentations. What was striking about them all was that regardless of the size of their organisation they had some level of resource that was solely dedicated to the handling of complaints because they see them as vital to improving their service.

Say sorry and resolve

Complaints, whether formal or informal, provide a free insight into service failings and can be used to drive improved standards and efficiency. All the organisations that presented at the Capita conference reported substantial financial savings as a consequence of improving and streamlining their complaints handling procedures. There were some common themes:

- Where we have done something wrong, say sorry without defence
- Empower frontline staff to make gestures of good will
- Train and empower frontline staff to seek creative, early solutions
- Ensure that the formal complaints process is simple, easy to access, clear and consistent

As well as feedback and complaints that come to us voluntarily, we also need to rethink the way in which we survey tenants. We currently have a programme of

surveying tenants throughout the year, along with some reactive questioning. Best practice suggests that the most useful and meaningful data is gathered in the days following the service having been delivered. This reduces the impact of any subsequent interaction with 'The Council' affecting their feedback.

Social Media

It is recommended that we increasingly consider our presence on social media and the impact it has on our business. If research by similar organisations is to be believed then Taunton Deane Borough Council will be mentioned and discussed on social media daily. A significant proportion of this dialogue will be negative, and at present this is going unnoticed and unchallenged. Social media should be method of continuous communication, allowing us to connect with our tenants in a modern way.

Customer Services Improvement Project Manager

Our Housing and Communities Service needs to get to a point where complaints are viewed in a different light. It is recommended that we consider creating a new post of Customer Services Improvement Project Manager to implement the above. This role will not only allow some time and dedication to make the changes required, but will also demonstrate the Service's commitment to change and improvement. More detail about this post can be found in the section on Customer Service.

Customer Service

Customer service and care is essential to the running and the reputation of any organisation. It is the view of our tenants and leaseholders, and many staff that we have lost our focus with regard to customer care and can sometimes behave in a negative and unhelpful manner.

This loss of focus also seems to be affecting how we deal with each other. Whilst the focus of this report has been on improving the service that we deliver to our tenants and leaseholders, my qualitative research showed that we sometimes deal with our colleagues in a disrespectful and unhelpful manner. In some areas this has left teams fragmented and unhappy. In order to deliver a high quality of service to our customers we must also ensure that we understand and respect the role of other teams and be prepared to work more collaboratively and supportively.

Below is a list of recommendations based on suggestions made by staff and tenants, combined with best practice from a variety of organisations across the country.

Quick wins

The following list of quick wins should be considered as an entire package of actions. When combined these changes to the way we work should effect a change in mind set and culture that will improve the way we interact with each other and our customers.

The Way we Work

We need much stronger enforcement of our communication standards, including but not limited to;

- Ensure all phonebook entries are correct
- Correct email signature with all relevant contact information
- Open access and up to date use of Outlook Calendars
- Consistent and informative phone answering (name, organisation, 'how can I help?')
- When we are speaking with tenants, make sure we ask how they would like to be addressed, don't make assumptions.

Terminology

How we refer to tenants informs our view of them, i.e. do we call them tenants, residents, customers? These all have different connotations that should be considered. We also need to address our tenants in a manner that they are comfortable with. When we speak with a tenant we should ask how they prefer to be addressed and use this.

'No Negs'

There needs to be a clear message that making negative or derogatory comments about our tenants is not acceptable. All tenants should be discussed in a manner that is equal, professional, respectful, and empathetic.

Unconditional positive first response

When we interact with both our internal and external customers, the first response is key to the rest of the interaction. This should and must always be unconditionally respectful. It is not our role to make value judgements about our tenants and decide what level of service they should receive. Following on from this, there may need to be a fresh drive to ensure that phones are always answered. Whilst it is appreciated that we are all very busy, ensuring our tenants and leaseholders can contact us must be a priority.

Same day service

Whenever a tenant makes contact with the Council every effort should be made to reach a resolution by the end of the day. Where same day resolution is not possible, the tenant should be informed of this and a timescales for further communication should be agreed. In other words, enquiries are dealt with live and direct and remain the responsibility of the first receiving Officer until the point of resolution. Even where the knowledge and assistance of colleagues is required, ownership of the enquiry remains with the receiving officer. This ensures that the tenant has a single point of contact.

Keep our promises

Put very simply, when we say we'll call you on a certain day we need to make sure we make that call. Tenants unanimously reported that one of their major grievances is that staff say they will get back to them and they never do. When we deal with any customer of any kind, we should agree timescales and methods of communication and stick to them. Keeping the tenant informed, even where there is no specific update, is critical to improving satisfaction levels.

Stop clicking send

Both internally and externally email should be used as confirmation, not communication. With few exceptions email should be considered the last resort when it comes to communicating with a colleague or customer. Not only does this help to support the 'same day service' ethos above, but also encourages learning, support and respect among teams.

Learning Journal

An interesting tool that I have seen used by a few other organisations is staff learning journals. Staff use these to log day-to-day thoughts, reoccurring questions, examples of good practice, and any other issues they see fit. These are then used during 1-2-1s and team meetings to help share learning, identify patterns or issues, and celebrate achievements. When combined with a reduced reliance on email it can help to encourage staff to learn more about the roles of their colleagues and build a more rounded knowledge of our overall service.

Credit where credit's due

Where staff are noticed to be providing exemplary customer service, this should be acknowledged. To keep staff morale high and motivate them to continue to providing a high level of service staff should feel like their 'over and above' efforts are being recognised.

All of the above sounds simple, but when taken together they outline a big shift in culture for the service. That said, they are all considered critical to improving the frontline service that our tenants receive. They also all come at little or no financial cost. As with the complaints and feedback work stream it is recommended that some dedicated resource be given to embedding these changes. This would also fit within the job description of the Customer Services Improvement Project Manager.

Training and Investment

Support and challenge

Whilst we must stress that we will support and empower staff to make changes, we must make it clear that there is a new way of working around attitude and behaviours and that persistent failings against this framework will not be tolerated.

Customer Service Training

Caring for our customers is paramount, even if the outcome is not what the tenant was hoping for. It is recommended that training around customer services and care be provided to all Housing and Communities staff, including all levels of Management.

Option 1 – Mary Gober Institute

TOTAL £44,885

Option 2 – Carole Carpenter Training

TOTAL £28,000

Option 3 – Energize Learning

TOTAL £41,025

More detailed costings for these packages can be seen in Appendix 3.

Social media

Clearly many of our tenants still choose to communicate with us in the traditional ways (face to face and over the phone). But in this increasingly digital world we need to recognise the value and impact of social media, both a tool of communication but also as a platform for the reputation of our service to be managed.

Many of our younger tenants spend significant amounts of their time communicating through online and social media channels and by not having a presence we are preventing these tenants from accessing our full range of services in a manner in which they feel most comfortable. Organisations such as Yarlinton Housing Group and Knightstone Housing Association, along with many others who features at the Capita Conference on complain handling, have been able to demonstrate the value of this investment.

Therefore, the recommendation is that we seriously consider increasing our online presence, both by improving our website (something which is being picked up by the

IESE team) but also considering investment in other forms of online communication, including apps and social media.

Improved use of Academy

Many staff have reported that Academy has the potential to be used for a far greater range of tasks than at present. The information that is currently being input into the system is inconsistent and varies between teams and this needs to be addressed. Further to this the system could be used far more effectively for case management, ensuring that progress is recorded and reminders are sent to the relevant member of staff. It can send notifications to managers when actions have been missed and cases are not progressing as agreed. It should also help Officers to assist with tenants enquiries even when they are not managing that particular case, as all the information is easily to hand.

Strategic considerations

KPIs and Team PIs

Our service Key Performance Indicators have recently been streamlined which has been positive. However, it suggested that they be revisited to consider how we are monitoring our customer care standards and the quality of our complaints handling process, rather than the just quantity.

Regarding Team Performance Indicators, it is suggested that these be reviewed to ensure that customer care and early complaint resolution are featured heavily. It should be remembered that this requires staff to be well trained, supported and empowered.

Continual review

Challenge and change of systems and processes should be encouraged. Staff at all levels should be invited to challenge systems and processes that are not helpful or efficient, especially those which do not benefit the tenants. The Customer Services Improvement Project Manager will be key to overseeing this and acting on issues that are raised.

Estate Management

My research has shown that there are some inconsistencies when it comes to services provided and enforcement taken between the three One Team areas. This has left tenants feeling frustrated about their relationship with us a landlord and has left staff feeling unsure of their roles. This is resulting in some unhealthy criticism of colleagues in other teams and insecurity about the correct and expected way of working.

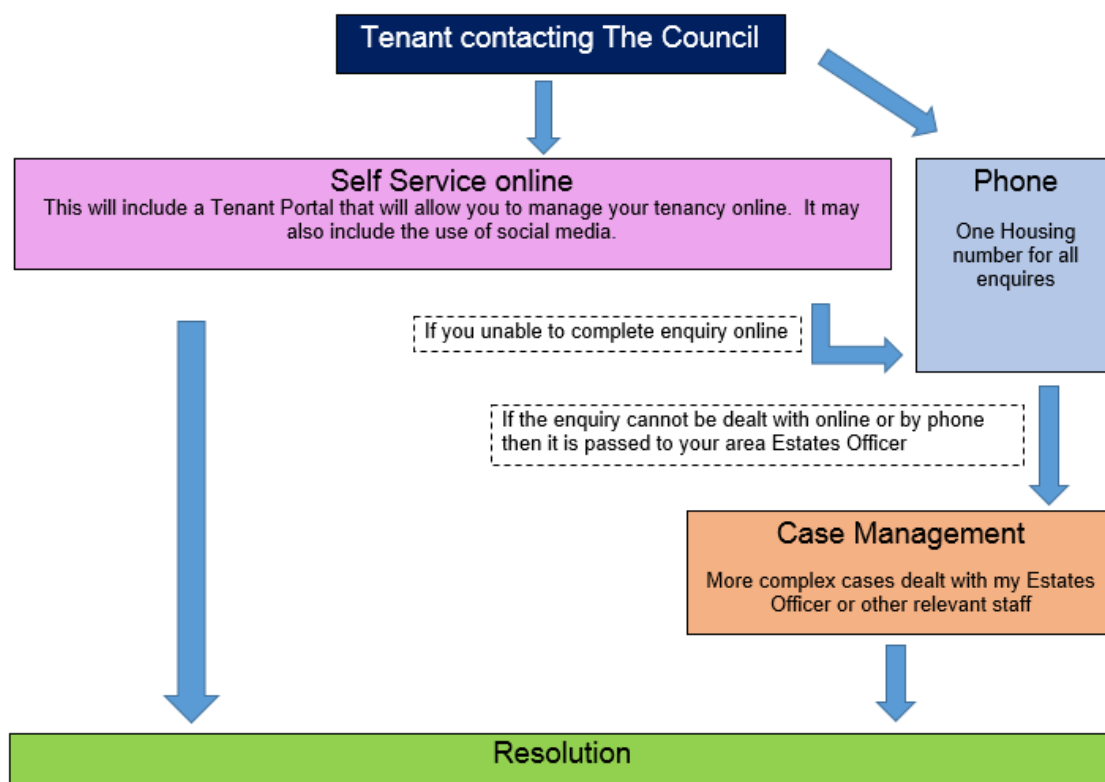
Therefore, it is suggested that a more consistent approach to estate management is agreed and adopted across the three One Team areas, and the rural housing areas outside of One Team boundaries. For example, a more consistent approach to the enforcement of certain tenancy conditions and rent arrears policies. Whilst it is accepted that that a certain level of discretion and professional judgement will remain appropriate, it is recommended that an agreed policy be adopted across the

Estates Management Teams to ensure a level of consistency, allowing both staff and tenants to feel more sure about their roles and responsibilities.

This also includes consistency of staff. Tenants expressed real frustration with the level of staff changes, particularly throughout the Estates Teams. They like to build a trusting relationship with their Estates Officer and it causes genuine distress and annoyance when they are frequently changed. Members of the Tenants Forum also told us that they felt our communication around staff changes was poor and they were often left uninformed which caused them embarrassment when dealing with other tenants.

Service Access Transformation

Structural changes and service transformation are being outlined as part of the work being undertaken by IESE, along with the new Customer Access Strategy and the on-going work around the early termination of our contract with South West One. Therefore, little detail is provided in this report as to how this transformation may look for the landlord service. In brief, the below is recommended:



Customer Services Improvement Project Manager

There are many work streams included in this proposal, and if they are to be implemented in an acceptable time frame they will need an Officer to drive the work. There is a necessity to rebuild our reputation and tenant's faith and confidence in our service. In a similar manner to Homes in Sedgemoor, a single point of contact for this work is considered the most efficient way to implement the change in a respectable time.

The key areas of responsibility would initially be:

- To direct and oversee the implementation of the work outlined in this report, with a particular emphasis on Customer Service.
- To direct and oversee a re-launch of the complaints procedures including a new emphasis on early resolution and customer care.
- To act as a single point of contact for all formal complaints.
- To work with the Transformation Team to ensure the Housing and Communities Directorate is represented and continues to be aligned with wider Council changes.
- To work with Terry May throughout the Repairs and Maintenance Review process to ensure the DLO teams are aligned with the wider Directorate.
- To lead on an increased social media presence.
- To continually review processes to ensure that they are customer-focussed and making improvements to our service wherever possible.

It is suggested that this post would be fixed term for 12 months in the first instance, with this being reassessed near the end of this period to decide whether this should be a longer term investment for the service.

Final comments

Ultimately our tenants, like any customer, want respect. Other factors are important, such as reaching a resolution and a feeling that they are getting value for money, but central to it all is that they perceive that they are respected by the organisation. We are here to serve our tenants and communities in a professional and consistent manner. We need to ensure that we are not making value judgements about the level of service they are entitled to receive but that we provide a high level of service unconditionally.

There is a will to improve but this must be harnessed, hence the recommendation for a Customer Services Improvement Project Manager. Our next STAR survey will be carried out in 2017, and it is very possible to have made some significant changes by then, especially concerning our standards of customer care and our feedback and complaints systems.

Investment in IT is clearly required across the entire Council, not just the Housing and Communities Directorate. However, the current situation seems to be that staff feel it is the poor IT systems that are driving poor service. IT and system failures will inevitably cause delays and frustrations, and it is recognised that significant improvements need to be made. However, we must avoid this having a negative impact on basic customer care. We are able to make choices about our own behaviour and being respectful, helpful and empathetic to our customers is necessary regardless of any system failures.

Appendix 1

Item	Lead	Timescales	Outcomes
Appoint a Customer Services Improvement Project Manager	Simon Lewis	In post by 01/08/2016	Dedicated resource to implement changes and service improvements in line with the timescales detailed below
Grounds Maintenance			
Appoint Project Manager (6 month post) & complete Project Brief	Simon Lewis	August 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A GM contract that is innovative, flexible, and efficient • Improved communication with tenants regarding the schedules for their areas • Increased tenant & leaseholder satisfaction with the GM work
Complete review of current contract, including moving the administration onto GIS.	tbc	New contract in place for 2017/18 financial year	
Repairs and Maintenance			
Review of the entire service is on-going. Improvement Plan and resulting actions will follow.	Terry May	On-going	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significantly fewer missed appointments • Reduced time taken before work commences • More repairs completed first time • Consistently acceptable standards across works completed by DLO staff and contractors • Improved communication with tenants about planned works
Service Standards			
Review of all service standards as detailed in this report, with a new emphasis on customer care	Angela Summers	Timescales yet to be established	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tenants and staff expectations are aligned • A set of standards that are consistent, concise and clear • In line with new appraisals system and Customer Access Strategy, standards that emphasis our commitment to high standards of customer care • Standards that are useful and used by both tenants and staff to ensure service standards remain high

Feedback, compliments and complaints			
Review current procedures with fresh emphasis on customer care and early resolution	Martha Dudman (MD)	October 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A feedback system that encourages early resolution • Fewer issues going through the formal complaints process • A feedback system that allows for learning and service improvement • Tenants feel their views are listened to and acted upon • Tenants feel valued and able to help shape the service
Complaints training for all Housing & Communities staff	MD	End 2016	
Programme of investment in social media presence	Tbc	In line with Transformation timeline	
Customer Service			
Deliver programme of 'quick wins' as outlined in this document <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Way we Work • Terminology • 'No Negs' • Keep our promises • Unconditional positive first response • Same day service • Stop clicking send • Learning Journal (optional) 	MD	Spring 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Back office functions are supporting staff to be efficient and effective • Tenants and Leaseholders feel the service they receive and the behaviours of staff are respectful, efficient and empathetic • A culture among staff to provide high quality customer service to all tenants • An appraisal and performance management system that supports the above • Improved tenant satisfaction and levels of customer service
Organise the delivery of Customer Service training to all Housing and Communities staff	MD / HR	Summer 2017	
Aligning changes with the new performance management system	MD / HR / All managers	On-going	

Programme of investment in our social media presence (as above)	MD	In time with Transformation timeline	
Work with Area Community Managers (ACMs) to make improved use of Academy system	MD	Summer 2017	
Establish an increased level of estate management consistency through agreed working policies, working with Housing Services Lead and three ACMs.	Stephen Boland	End 2016	
Review Service KPIs and team PIs to ensure they reflect an increased emphasis on customer care	MD / Simon Lewis	End 2016	
Continuous review of systems, procedures and policies to ensure they are efficient and deliver the best possible solutions for tenants and leaseholders	MD	On-going	

Appendix 2

Project Initiation Document		Version: 1
Project Title	Improving Tenant and Leaseholder Satisfaction	
Project Description & Goal(s):	<p>Understand the recent decline in tenant satisfaction and develop and embed actions and practices to ensure future service delivery leads to appropriate levels of tenant and leaseholder satisfaction.</p> <p><u>Objectives / Goals</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agreement of what satisfaction levels we want to deliver - Shared understanding of the key drivers / issues holding back tenant satisfaction - An action plan to improve service delivery in those areas where we agree tenant and leaseholder satisfaction must improve - A review of our approach to Customer Service with an action plan to improve this across the service - Implementation across the service to improve customer service and tenant and leaseholder satisfaction. - Efficiency re less non value work and complaints. <p><u>What this will achieve</u></p> <p>Improved levels of satisfaction that align with the levels of performance that we want to deliver</p>	
Target timescales:	<p>Start Date: January 2016</p> <p>Completion Date: July 2016 (Review Jan 2017)</p> <p>Key Stages:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Research (1 month) 2. Develop an Options Appraisal / Business Case (1 month) 3. Develop an implementation plan and work with ADs and Managers to drive and deliver this across the Service (3 months) 4. Review and refocus (6 months after implementation) 	
Project Background and requirements	<p>The project is required due to a significant drop in tenant satisfaction across a range of areas of the Housing Service. We have committed to councillors and the TSMB that we will put in place appropriate actions to address this.</p> <p>Key information includes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Star Survey - Other tenant satisfaction measures <p>Other context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Council currently working with Savilles on new HRA Business Plan. It's a good opportunity to assess where we want to pitch our service in terms of agreeing 'what good looks like' for TDBC Housing and tenant satisfaction and what level of service we can afford. - Anecdotally, tenant satisfaction falling across the country 	

- Satisfaction linked to other issues such as tenant's own fulfilment
- Big changes recently in how we manage repairs (new IT such as OC interface; PDAs etc); plus new structure of repairs staff now part of Housing Service – and **a separate project**
- Other changes in how we are structured (e.g. One Team area focus)
- Will need to interface with **Repairs and Maintenance Project**
- The project should reference the HCA Regs / Standards on Customer Service (e.g. Tenants Leading Change case-study Amicus)
- At a corporate level the Councils are currently working with IESE on a new Customer access strategy, and considerations regarding SW1 contract and will influence our thinking on future customer service provision. The Project will need to reference this.

The project should lead to quantifiable levels of improvement through future tenant and leaseholder satisfaction surveys.

The Project Manager will potentially use a member of the tenants' forum board to support and challenge the process.

We have an opportunity to seek best practice from how other Councils and RPs apply accredited customer service approaches to their tenants

The project may identify wider recommendations on new technology / IT (such as case management platforms; mobile working technology) which will require longer term projects and solutions, in addition consideration will need to be given to the principle of a housing related call centre approach.

Project objectives & outputs:

1. Research: Review Star Survey and other satisfaction measures to understand key areas of focus to tackle and improve tenant satisfaction.
 - Understand key issues and what plans are in place now to address tenant and leaseholder concerns and assess whether these are appropriate.
 - Identify gaps and research best practice to propose new approaches to improve satisfaction
 - Review benchmarking and engage with HRA BP Review to propose appropriate future levels of tenant satisfaction that align with where we want to pitch our service
 - Identify key areas of service where customer service / comms / onward referrals are failing and affecting tenant satisfaction. Review Customer Service accredited models and consider cost/benefit for TDBC.
 - Review complaints
 - Repairs focus group
 - Staff focus group

	<p>2. <u>Appraisal / Business Case</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce a business case for Housing Briefing, to identify a costed range of options to deliver improved satisfaction that align with desired future performance levels. This will include proposals for a new approach to customer service. • Seek approval for preferred options to allow to move to next stage <p>3. <u>Implementation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project Manager to identify AD / Housing Manager / Team Leader responsibilities to implement and oversee delivery of service / process improvements and ensure these are embedded across services and teams <p>4. <u>Review and Refocus</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test new approach after appropriate timescale. Provide recommendations to refocus where required and ensure consistency of implementation
Success Criteria:	<p>Clear targets for tenant and leaseholder satisfaction Improved tenant and leaseholder satisfaction levels that meet targets</p>
Key Stakeholders / Project Customer(s):	<p>Tenants Leaseholders Housing Briefing Housing Forum / TSMB / Sheltered Housing Forum All Managers Housing and Communities staff Councillors One Team Co-ordinators Tenant Empowerment Manager</p>
Key risks (opportunities & threats):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Failure to deliver on the project will have a reputational risk for the Council and Housing Service - Opportunity to focus on what matters to tenants and improve their satisfaction and engagement with the Service - Risk of failure of teams to engage and work better across services (silo mentality) - Options may be unaffordable (IT, accredited systems etc) - Risk of failing tenants; possible H&S service failures if we are unable to improve - Increase cost from non value work. <p>A separate project risk register will be developed</p>
Key Assumptions:	<p>Agreed future targets for service will require an improvement on performance and tenant satisfaction</p>
Dependencies	<p>Solutions may have dependencies on other services that are unable to provide resource to support our requirements (e.g. IT, Finance)</p>
Project Manager:	<p>tbc</p>

Project Sponsor:	Simon Lewis	Project Board:	Housing & Communities Programme Board
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Project Team & responsibilities:	Who	What (role / work-stream)
Project Manager	tbc	Lead and Manage Project
Capacity to deliver	<p>The Project Manager will require 2-3 days a week for the period of the project. The PM will need excellent research abilities and organisational skills and be able to lead and influence people and implement change. The project may also require input from IT to assess options and propose solutions; and Financial input to consider cost / benefit. Some HR input may also be required if significant changes in working are needed.</p> <p>This is refined in much more detail in the Project Plan.</p>	

Project funding & target costs:	<p>Initial costs will be limited to staffing resource, primarily for the Project Manager.</p> <p>Further costs may be identified depending on solutions and will need to be assessed in terms of cost / benefit and ability to fund.</p>
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Project governance checklist	Name	Signature (approved / completed)
Project Plan completed (key milestones / work-stream action plans)		
Project risk management strategy		
Project risk register / issues log		
Communications plan (inc stakeholder analysis)		
Equality Impact Assessment		
Project dashboard (if required for reporting to 'RMT')		

Approval of PID	Name	Signature (approved / completed)
Project Sponsor	Simon Lewis	
Project Manager	tbc	
Portfolio Holder	Terry Beale	
Programme Manager	James Barrah	

Reporting process:	<p>Monthly 1-1s with Project Sponsor</p> <p>Regular Project meetings with supporting officers and relevant teams</p> <p>Monthly reporting to Housing and Communities Programme Board</p> <p>Approval at key stages through Housing Briefing</p> <p>Final approval through Scrutiny and Executive</p>
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Appendix 3

Option 1 – Mary Gober Institute

Stage one – Research and Design	
2 Days Research	£2500
2 Days Module Design	£2500
1 Day Design Preparation	£1250
Stage two – Delivery	
1 Day Delivery (20 staff per session)	(£3300)
X 10 groups	£33,000
Stage three – Managers Phase	
Preparation	£625
2 Days delivery (20 people)	£5000
	TOTAL
	£44,885

Option 2 – Carole Carpenter Training

Stage one – Design and Preparation	£2000
Stage two – Manager Delivery	
2 Day Delivery	£3500
(Residential recommended, so additional costs may be incurred if this is agreed)	
Stage three – Frontline Staff Delivery	
1 Day Delivery (15 staff)	(£1500)
X 12 groups	£18,000
Stage four – Evaluation	
2 Days with access to a cross-section of delegates	£1800
	TOTAL
	£28,000
Stage five – New Starters (recommended)	
2 Days per annum	£1500 pa

Option 3 – Energize Learning

Stage one – Diagnosis and Design

2 Days Research	£1950
Module Design and Sign-off	£9900

Stage two – Engage and Inspire

1 Day Delivery module 1 (frontline staff, 15-17 per session) X 12 groups	£15000
½ Day Delivery module 2 (frontline staff, 15-17 per session) X 12 groups	£7500

2 Day Delivery (Leaders and Managers)	£2500
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1 Day Delivery (Train the Trainers)	£1250
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Stage three – Momentum

On-going with Champions, managers and staff (approximately 3 days per annum)	£2925
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TOTAL	£41,025
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Minutes of the Meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 20 September 2016 at 6pm in The John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton.

Present: Mr R Balman (Chairman)
Mr A Akhigbemen, Mrs J Bunn, Mr D Galpin, Mrs J Hegarty, Mr I Hussey and Councillor Bowrah.

Officers: Martha Dudman (Community Development Officer), Simon Lewis (Assistant Director – Housing and Community Development), Stephen Boland (Housing Services Lead), Martin Price (Tenant Empowerment Manager) and Emma Hill (Democratic Services Officer).

Others: Councillor Warmington

(The meeting commenced at 6.30pm)

1. Apologies

Mr K Hellier and Councillor Booth

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 15 August 2016 were taken as read and were signed.

3. Public Question Time

No questions received for Public Question Time.

4. Declarations of Interests

Mr R Balman, Mr A Akhigbemen, Mrs J Bunn, Mr D Galpin, Mrs J Hegarty, Mr K Hellier, Mr I Hussey declared personal interests as Taunton Deane Borough Council Housing Tenants.

5. Report on Improving Tenant and Leaseholder Satisfaction

Members considered report previously circulated, concerning the Council project to improve Tenant and Leaseholder Satisfaction within five highlighted areas of concern from the Council's STAR Survey.

Covered within the report provided was the detailed outcomes of the investigation into the five areas of the concern as well as the proposed action plans and recommendations. The workstreams within the project were as follows:

- Grounds Maintenance Contract Review
- Repairs and Maintenance Review
- Feedback, Compliments and Complaints Procedures
- Service Standards Review

- Customer Service
- Leaseholder Engagement

Each workstream had produced its own actions and recommendations as well as overarching themes and ways of working, which included Stakeholder Engagement, Financial Restrictions, Procurement, Communication and Publicity.

As work continued on each workstream, the project team completed regular consultation and testing, to ensure that the conclusions being drawn remained reflective of tenant's views and priorities.

Below was a summary of the main points from the report provided on the Tenant and Leaseholder Satisfaction project:

- Additional outsourced training for Customer Service review had come recommended by Yarlington Housing. Carol Carpenter had provided specific training on customer service practices. This was one of main areas of focus for the project.
- Another part of the customer service project was aligning our customer service standards with that of the main Council and Officers were working with the Assistant Director of Corporate Services to achieve this.
- The project team were reviewing the way that complaints were handled and processed as there was a tendency to follow the formal complaints procedure, rather than take ownership of the issue and if able to, resolve there and then. Officers were looking to change attitudes and empower staff to own complaints and resolve them as quickly as possible.
- If the Council was unable to for fill as request, precise and proper reasoning why must be given rather than an excuse. The Council needed to put in place proper standards and understanding of what we were able to do and what we could not.
- Another area of focus was, the review of the Grounds Maintenance contract. This was about reviewing the detail of the contract and drawing out the options how best to spend the money available.
- The options from this review would be brought from before the Tenants' Forum and TSMB for their opinions and feedback.
- We want to able to make it clear to our Tenants and Leaseholders want they could expect from the Grounds Maintenance contract, but also indicating what land belonged to the HRA and want did not.
- Project Team Officers had visited the Tenants' Forum and the forum had raised concerns that the STAR Survey due in 2017, and that it would not allow time for the changes to take place and take affect properly. So it was suggested that the STAR Survey be delayed until 2018 to allow proper time for the changes to bed in and giving more accurate feedback from Tenants and Leaseholders.
- It was also suggested that the Council look at and investigated the possibility of introducing a 'mystery shopper' exercise to test services including those that had undergone changes.

A copy of the Improving Tenant and Leaseholder Satisfaction report was attached to the agenda for the Board Members.

During the discussion of this item the following points were made:-

- Members raised concerns about when Tenants and Leaseholders tried to contact Officers or specific services within the Council that they were unable to contact them and were passed around a variety of other Officers and did not receive a solution to their enquiry. The Board were informed that what they had described was part of the customer service workstream within the project and it was about empowering Officers to take ownership of the customer's enquiry, then investigate and provide an answer to the customer by contacting them directly.
- In response to a question asking if the Project Manager was now in place, the Board were informed that the Project Manager was indeed in place and was Martha Dudman. Since this report had been written and published to the Board, several proposals and actions had been completed.
- In response to a question asking what the term GIS stood for and what it was, the Board were informed that it stood for Geographic Information System (GIS) and was a system designed to capture, store, manipulate, analyse, manage, and present all types of dimensional or geographical data (maps).
- The Board were informed that within the revised and updated version of this report, Officers had included a glossary of terms and acronyms.
- In response to a question asking if the tradesman and contractors left any kind of feedback form or card for the Tenants and Leaseholders to complete and post back to the service when the job was completed, the Board were informed that part of the project was reviewing how the Council captured and measured customer feedback as currently each service captured feedback in a variety of ways and mediums, which included feedback cards.
- Discussion took place about the inclusion of face to face meetings with Tenants and Leaseholders who had made complaints and concerns about services. The Board Members felt that arranging face to face meetings would allow and encourage early resolution to issues and also meant Tenants and Leaseholders would feel valued and listened to, rather than pushed from pillar to post and ignored. Officers agreed with the Board on this suggestion and stated that it was too easy to put complaints on the back burner.
- Members were informed that following research, Officers had discovered other housing services and associations were using more instant methods to resolve issues and complaints rather than using a formal procedure. Asking themselves, how could we solve this issue now?
- In response to a question asking if the Council would allow a small budget to make gestures of good will when resolving a complaint, the Board were informed that this was something they were investigating with the review of the customer service. Considering that occasionally it would be better to admit we got it wrong and apologise, rather than make excuses.
- In response to a question asking if within the specific IT and customer services training challenges, would there be areas looking at staff behaviour and attitudes towards Tenants and Leaseholders, the Board were informed that the Council had taken recommendations from Yarrington Housing on specific customer service training, which included correct conscious choice about staff and their behaviour and attitude. The Council were looking to provide unconditional positive service to Tenants and Leaseholders.
- Members suggested that the Council needed to empower staff to make judgement calls and make decisions to resolve issues and complaints without having to go through the management structure for permission for minor issues. The Board were informed that this was being considered but there would be some jobs and complaints that would require permission for supervisors and service managers.

- In response to a question asking if service managers and supervisors completed random checks on tradesman and contractors ensuring that they were where they should be, the Board were informed that this was indeed written into the grounds maintenance contract with Deane DLO but this was not necessarily completed as regularly as we had requested or desired.
- Members were informed that within the repairs sections, the location of tradesman was monitored through the electronic scheduling of their jobs and monitoring through PDA handsets.
- In response to a question asking if Officers had split the data from complaints from Deane DLO between contractors and DLO tradesman, indicating whether or not people were more or less dissatisfied with contractors completing work for the Council, the Board were informed that Tenants and Leaseholder had expressed more dissatisfaction with contractors than DLO tradesman. Currently, the Council was talking to all the contractors informing them we expect the same standard of work and customer service from their contractors as we did from the DLO tradesman's and staff.
- In response to a question asking if the grounds maintenance contact with the DLO was a fixed term or rolling contract, the Board were informed that the contract was originally fixed term but upon the contract renewal date, the contract was renewed without reviewing the contract detail. The HRA needed to review this contract and be more strict about enforcing what we expect from this contract. This did not necessarily mean a formal contract but HRA needed to have more overview and oversight. We were reviewing the contract detail to make best use of money available.
- In response to a questions asking had the Council considered the use of wild flower seed on areas of grass owned by the housing department, where appropriate instead of cutting, the Board were informed that the project team were looking at the best practices of neighbouring and other local authorities. With the wild flower areas, some Tenants liked the areas left to go wild, but other Tenants hated it and felt it looked untidy.
During the review of the contract, the project team would be looking at different ways to use the land of HRA to either make the most of money available but also how the Council could make best use of the land.
- In response to a question asking if the Council and Parks service considered investing in and using Mulching Mowers rather than just cutting without collecting, the Board were informed that this had been mentioned several times before but we were talking to Tenants about how best we could use the land and if they had an desires or ideas for it. For example, allotments and community gardens.
- In response to a questions asking if the Council still removed ragwort or did they dealt with it in a different way now, the Board were informed that this was something Officers would have come back to the Board on.
- In response to a questions asking if services had specific call centre for enquiries or the Council only have the main call centre, the Board were informed that as part of the review project and wider Council transformation project we were reviewing the number of published telephone numbers. This was still under discussion and yet to be agreed.
- Members suggested that the Council should encourage and empower Tenants and Leaseholders to take more responsibility for the land surrounding their properties rather than expecting the HRA to pay for maintenance. The Board were informed that the review of the Grounds Maintenance contract would require a decision between what we could afford and what the Tenants want us to do. This might require an increase in charges to cover additional maintenance.

- The Board were informed that the Officers were considering incentives and rewards for Tenants and Communities who took more responsibility of the community areas surrounding their properties allowing maintenance budget to re-directed elsewhere.

Resolved that:

1. The officer's report be noted.
2. The Board approved the delay of the start of the STAR Survey to Tenants and Leaseholder until 2018.

(The meeting ended at 7.45pm)