

You are requested to attend a meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board to be held in The Brittons Ash Community Centre, Bridgwater Road, Bathpool, Taunton (Committee Room) on 25 September 2017 at 18:00.

Agenda

- 1 Apologies.
- 2 Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 14 August 2017 (attached).
- 3 Public Question Time.
- 4 Declaration of Interests
To receive declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or personal or prejudicial interests, in accordance with the Code of Conduct, in relation to items on the agenda. Such interests need to be declared even if they have already been recorded in the Register of Interests. The personal interests of Councillors who are County Councillors or Town or Parish Councillors will automatically be recorded in the minutes.
- 5 Methods of Payment, Rent and the Transformed Council. Report of the Housing Services Lead (verbal update).
Reporting Officer: Stephen Boland
- 6 Diversifying the Choice of Tenure. Report of the Housing Enabling and Development Manager (attached).
Reporting Officer: Jo Humble
- 7 Grounds Maintenance Service. Report of the Open Spaces Manager and Strategy and Partnership Officer (attached).
Reporting Officers: Richard Burge
Neil Anderson

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.

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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 14 August 2017 at 6.00pm in the Committee Room, The Brittons Ash Community Centre (BACH), Bridgwater Road, Bathpool, Taunton.

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

Officers: Rich Prewer (Property Services Manager), Stephen Boland (Housing Services Lead), Derek Quick (Landlord Health and Safety Compliance Project Manager), Rachel Searle (Development Manager), Rosie Walsh (Development Decant Manager), Julia Williamson (Housing Options Assistant), Martin Price (Tenant Empowerment Manager) and Marcus Prouse (Democratic Services Officer).

Others: Amanda Taylor (Nash Partnerships)

(The meeting commenced at 6.00pm)

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Mrs J Hegarty, Mr K Hellier and Councillor T Beale.

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 17 July 2017 were signed and taken as read.

3. Public Question Time

No questions were received for Public Question Time.

4. Declarations of Interests

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

5. Fire Safety Update

The Landlord Health and Safety Compliance Project Manager introduced the item and informed Members of the situation locally and what impact the Grenfell Tower tragedy had on the Fire Safety Risk Assessment programme.

The Officer team had reviewed the local situation and was pleased to be able to say that the Council was already pro-active in this area, and as stated there was already a programme of Fire Safety Risk Assessments in place, but to offer further reassurance this would no longer be done over an 18 month period, instead it would be done in six weeks, and had been completed this week.

Results of the Assessments would be fed through to this Committee once further analysis had been done, however, it was reassuring that no major issues had come to light. Early indications were that most of the identified issues were due to

housekeeping by tenants. An issue had been identified with the Bin Stores that are located usually by a Back or Front door, which could present a fire hazard. A piece of work had been commissioned which would move these away from the main residence and still provide a secure compound. Another piece of work currently underway was the replacement of Doors in flats, which has been extended to Leaseholders and would be around 200 doors that would be replaced. It was reassuring that of the 448 blocks of flats in the Borough nothing major had been identified, but the Officer team would continue to provide a pro-active service in this area, with more findings and figures brought before the Committee in the future.

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

- Was the person carrying out the Risk Assessments trained to a high standard?
- *It was confirmed that the person/s are highly trained to Fire Service standards, undertaking an intensive course and able to assess complex buildings.*
- It was considered that it was fortunate Taunton Deane did not have any high rise buildings, but it was presumed the emphasis would still be on keeping areas clean and clear and free of pot plants, carpets and bicycles?
- *Taunton Deane had a zero tolerance policy to obstructions in the communal areas which is enforced. There had been a noticeable improvement in the last six months, with Grenfell seeming to reinforce the messages regarding Fire Doors and obstructions.*
- There had been a few incidents in the past with regard to Door Access issues, with Anti-Social Behaviour occurring. Would this be improved under the replacement programme?
- *A controlled access programme would address the Door Access issues to ensure this would stop the problem.*
- Where could amenities like bicycles which are often in the way be stored in a flat with no designated communal space?
- *This was recognised as a real difficulty but safety had to come first.*
- Through the Assessment programme, were there any communal spaces that were identified as needing a sprinkler system?
- *Yes, Kilkenny Court, which is an 'extra care' facility had been identified six or seven months ago, and this would be rectified. No systems were identified as being necessary in the communal flats elsewhere in the Borough.*

Resolved that the report be noted.

6. Performance Indicators Quarter 1 2017/18

The Housing Services Lead introduced the KPI's under his jurisdiction which were currently at 'Amber' or had changed back to 'Green'.

HC 1.1 was pleasing to see as above target, as twelve months ago there had been some anxiety about the introduction of Universal Credit (UC) and how this would affect tenants. Arrears had gone up slightly overall though it was going well and the resource was in place to help people with their UC claims. The team was now going to focus help on the next phase, which is between receiving a payment and making a claim. Housing Officers were equipped with iPads and were able to support those tenants with their claims and ensure the relevant information is supplied to complete a claim. The team had even been supporting Mid Devon Council as they prepare to migrate over to the Digital UC system.

HC 4.8 was Amber and around the review of the support plan of Sheltered Housing Units every 12 months. As the Council had 800 plus of these units, the achievement of 80% of an ambitious 100% target was considered reasonable. A qualification was also that there are tenants living on the schemes who refuse to have a review. In dealing with these, there had been issues with some Sheltered Housing Officers unsure of how to input this kind of response onto the system. This was a relatively new indicator to be measured and this still needed to be worked through with the team as to how input this, with activities in place to address this. Related to this was some of these Sheltered Housing Officers getting used to the new software and database. This was introduced in April 2017 and it was considered that more time was needed for this new way of working to bed in fully.

The Property Services Manager introduced the performance indicators he was responsible for and gave a brief overview;

HC 2.7 dealt with customer satisfaction with lettable standards of properties, which had dipped in the middle of last year but was getting back on track. Two team members had been assigned to do pre-void work and there had been a noticeable improvement in the figures. 18 responses was considered to be too small a sample to really give much of a picture. Tenants were not complaining about the quality of the work, more often it was the time taken to get through to the call centre. Improvements had been made and new people hired, for example, TV's had been installed on the wall so it could be shown how many calls were waiting. The Repairs team were multi-skill trained and were using a dynamic scheduling system, with a push and pull diary which allowed for gaps in the day to respond to emergencies and to pro-actively pursue jobs. A performance management methodology would ensure that the Council was getting the best out of its workforce.

HC 3.1 was measured always at a particular point of time and the issue had been two tenants in hospital so their properties were unable to be accessed to do the gas servicing, but this had now been sorted and there were none outstanding. Gas had recently been taken back in-house, there was a new software system called Gastag being used which allowed the team to know what appliances were in each property and their serviced dates. This would run in a 10 month cycle and would mean that no appliances would ever reach their expiry without a check.

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

- It was queried as to whether the annual assessment of tenants could be changed to a system where the Council were notified of any changes, as annual assessment has been felt by some to be too intrusive?
- *An annual review was required to be done by the Council.*
- It was considered that achieving 100% would always be difficult, as people living in sheltered housing who may not need that but are placed there due to social services.
- *Agreed that the schemes needed a balance of people with different support needs to be resourced without extra difficulty, and perhaps the indicator was too high.*
- What was the split between the tenants we were struggling to make contact with and the Sheltered Housing Officers not updating their computers? Was this a training issue?
- *All Sheltered Housing Officers had had the training and awareness support. Area Community Managers were continuing to restate these messages in their regular 1 to 1's with officers. Some changes had been made to the online database to make it easier to use.*

- **HC 4.2** – was around Emergency repairs within 24 hours and was currently at Amber. The Property Services Manager requested that the measure be changed to 1 day rather than in hours, as the hour's measurement penalised repairs that were the next day.
- *The Board agreed with the Officer's assessment that changing this to 1 Day would be fairer and were happy to see this change going forward.*
- What was classed as an Emergency?
- *It was generally considered to be life, limb, or damage to property. There was a balance to be had, but this would be monitored and an indicator would be a level of complaints. Complaints were now being completed properly and this had been improved.*
- Considering the challenges with the IT systems recognised, did the team have the capacity to do same day repair jobs?
- *Although the scheduling system at the moment does not allow for it, we would be able to do this by leaving gaps in the schedule to deal with expected Emergencies and follow-up jobs. The workforce was being utilised better with more multi-skill staff, and to improve the Call centre so that the right staff were sent to the right jobs for their skill level. A Business Plan was agreed to be shared at a future meeting detailing how the workforce was being organised better.*

Resolved that the report be noted.

7. Property Services Delivery Plan and Performance Indicators Quarter 1 2017/18

The Property Services Manager introduced the report and the Delivery Plan for the year which had been included with the report. This was an overview of what was being worked on this year to put the Council in a position of strength.

The implementation had gone well so far, for example, the IT department had worked hard with the team to address the issues that had been causing problems. Tradesman's tablets having 3 passwords had been looked at and now there was just one password, with their personalised thumbprint providing access. There were still issues with the network coverage and in one instance the systems going down cost 3 lost days. In staffing terms there had been some disciplinary issues.

Employees should know what to expect now, and the Council would not accept mediocrity. It was pleasing to note that the majority of people in the organisation were working really hard. The KPI's mirrored the Corporate KPI's in a lot of ways. The officer gave further detailed explanation on the 'Repairs out of target' KPI, which was 'red' on the average jobs per day. As staff were going to get more multi-skilled this number would drop from an expectation of 5 and a half per day. This was because a 'job', for the service should be considered a 'visit', with possibly up to 7 or 8 items to do in a property, and it was against those individual items workers would be measured. If a worker was constantly underperforming, it would either be a capability issue or a training issue, and support is on offer to address both. The organisation had recently taken on some excellent apprentices who have embraced the new ways of working which was making the difference. The average age of a plumber was now 56 years old, so it was important the Council worked with local schools and colleges to bring more people into the industry.

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

- How long in time was a worker given for a job?
- *When a tenant rings in for a job, the person taking on the work uses a system called Locator Plus, which for each appliance or job will give Standard Minute Values in which to complete the role, understanding however that construction is not straightforward. The Council's emphasis was that the job took as long as needed to do a professional job on the first visit. The new mind-set being implemented was that vulnerable tenants are engaged with and any potential issues passed onto Housing colleagues.*
- The members of the board were interested in how the Voids process was turning around?
- *All voids were planned in, with cyclical work done to ensure quicker turnarounds. Compared to previously, there would be substantial efficiencies. A void service standard had been developed so that consistent product was offered alongside managing tenants expectations.*
- When Officers were made aware of an Abandoned Property, how quickly was that able to be re-let?
- *With abandonment, Estates Officers have to be very careful and follow a checklist to assure and establish that the tenant has definitely gone. Terminations are very rare, and the Council would normally go through the Courts in these cases to protect the Council.*

Resolved that the report be noted.

8. Considerate Constructors Scheme

The Property Services Manager introduced the report and outlined the motivation behind signing the Council up to this scheme.

Part of his remit ensuring that the Council was doing enough to showcase itself as a professional organisation, for example, they had also signed up to the Association of Gas Safety Managers and the Direct Works Forum. The Considerate Constructors Scheme looked at best practice with organisations that have their own 'in-house' workforce. Major Construction companies with high standards were known to subscribe to this scheme.

The scheme looked at five disciplines across the organisation, and the Council had recently gotten the score back from its first official visit, which was thankfully really pleasing to report as positive. The score was assessed each time on creativity and innovation in the way the Council delivered the service, with the Council now on a schedule of 6 month assessments, the results of which would be brought to TSMB. It was felt important for the Council to be recognised by an outside body and embodied the cultural change that the Officers were trying to drive forward.

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

- How much was Taunton Deane contributing to the scheme monitors paid by the Considerate Constructors Scheme?
- *It was a fee based on turnover and was around £300 pa. The scheme would encourage better behaviour, and in the next assessment the monitors would likely be speaking to tenants.*
- Were any other Local Authorities signed up to this scheme?
- *Cheltenham was one known Borough Council, as well as others such as Advantage SW. The service being looked at by an external organisation*

should be something a LA would encourage, in much the same way as the Finances of the Council are audited.

Resolved that the report be noted.

9. Exclusion of the 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 3 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.

10. Development Update

Considered verbal update and presentation regarding the confidential Development updates on the North Taunton 'Woolaways' at both Dorchester Road and Rochester Road, Taunton.

(The meeting ended at 8.05pm)



Taunton Deane Borough Council

Tenant Services Management Board 25th September 2017

Diversifying the Choice of Tenure

(This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Terry Beale, Housing Portfolio Holder)

1. Executive Summary

Following the review of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan and the adoption of the Development Strategy in 2016 work has been ongoing to explore the options to diversify the choice of tenures offered within the 'Newbuild Council Housing Program' to bring forward the 'Housing Vision'.

This report outlines the reasons for, and advises on the implementation of two new Council tenures, 'Affordable Rent' and 'Shared Ownership' to be piloted at the Weavers Arms housing development site in Rockwell Green, Wellington.

The offer would diversify the forthcoming housing mix at Weavers Arms from 26 social rented properties to;

21 affordable rented properties
2 shared ownership properties
3 social rented properties for the returning decants.

These new tenures would align the housing scheme with the Council's current aspirations, providing further housing options for local residents and tenants in the area, whilst significantly improving the financial payback for the scheme in response to rising build costs and reduced financial income following the implementation of rent reduction.

With the changes to tenure mix, based on current market information the 'Payback Period' when the income from the properties is enough to payback the cost of development reduces the payback period by an extra nine years compared to a 100% social rent scheme.

The diversifying of tenure allows the Council to have an increased level of revenue which can then be used to finance new development projects through a net positive effect on the HRA business plan.

The knowledge and experience gathered from the range of tenures offered at Weavers Arms, Rockwell Green will inform future development scheme appraisals and enable the Council to offer a wider choice to its residents.

2. Main Report

2.1 Introduction

As a Council we are committed to building new affordable homes because there are so many people who desperately need housing. By definition, 'Affordable housing should include provisions to remain at an affordable price for future eligible households or for the subsidy to be recycled for alternative affordable housing provision.'

The broad range of homes being built at the Councils Weavers Arms, Rockwell Green development has offered the opportunity for the Council to explore the introduction of two new tenures, affordable rent and shared ownership in addition to social rent currently offered through the HRA housing stock.

Following the review of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan and the adoption of the Development Strategy in 2016 work has been ongoing to explore the options to diversify the choice of tenures offered within the 'Newbuild Council Housing Program' to bring forward the 'Housing Vision'.

The following extract is from the HRA Business Plan 2016-2046.

Quote:

2.2 Housing Vision

Taunton Deane Borough Council has recently revised the operating model for its housing services in light of community needs and public policy agendas.

The Council recognises that it can usefully broaden its housing offer so that it more effectively caters for residents' housing needs and aspirations at different points in their lives.

In the coming years the Council will move towards delivery of a new aim, which is to provide good quality stable accommodation that facilitates movement towards tenures beyond social housing. This means we will have properties, policies and working practices that are aligned to support residents' aspirations and therefore their 'housing journey'.

This enhances, rather than replaces, the vision stated in 2012 which is to have a long term sustainable Business Plan that secures a better life and future for its tenants and properties. It also supports overall Council objectives to be recognised nationally as a place that is developing sustainably, securing a better life and future for its people, businesses and communities.

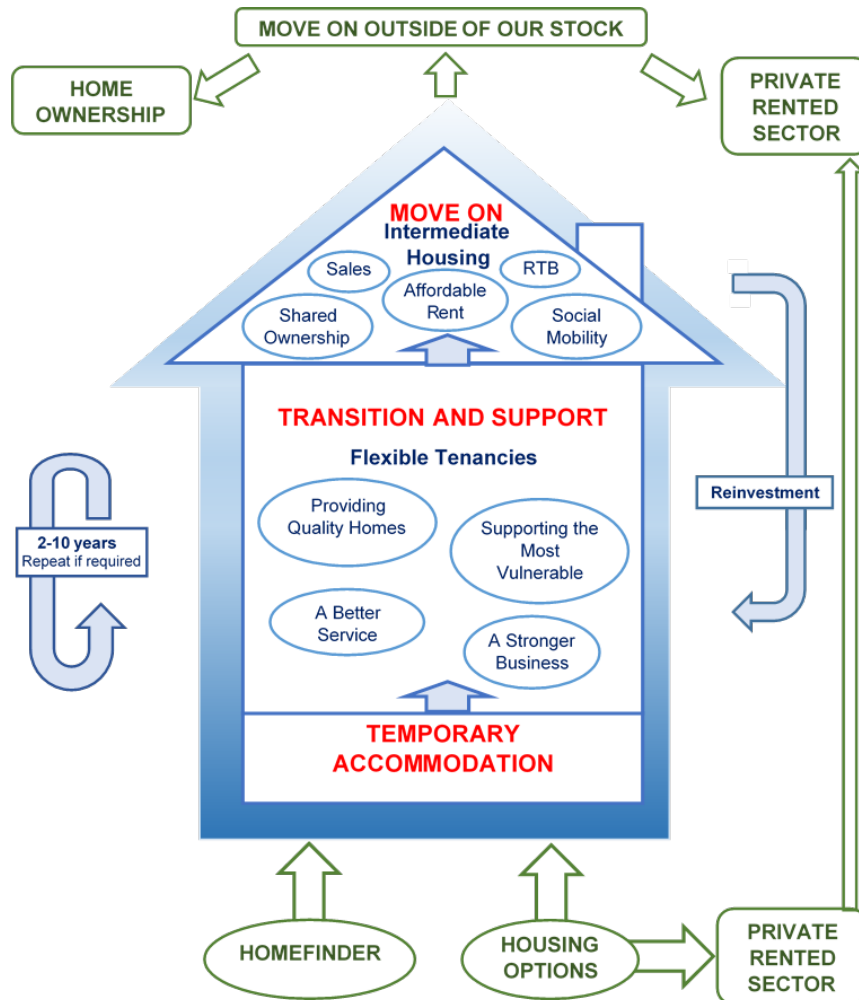


Figure 2: Proposed future housing model

Note: Flexible tenancies may provide some exemption for families with children

The diagram above represents the more dynamic service we intend to offer. Our service will be one that helps people to access accommodation that meets their needs at a particular point in their lives.

Within social housing we will help people to develop stable lives and life skills, and then if appropriate we will look to help them move into home ownership over time as and when this meets their needs and aspirations.

We will provide a small supply of alternative housing products, and where these products provide additional revenue we will reinvest the financial proceeds in social housing that meets a range of needs.

Unquote:

2.3 Affordable Rent

The introduction of affordable rent would help fund the building of new Council homes in the Borough. Rising build costs and reduced financial income present significant challenges to developing HRA housing stock.

Affordable rent is subject to rent controls that require a rent of no more than 80 per cent of the local market rent (including service charges, where applicable).

The rent is set using property valuations from professional valuers and reviewed on an annual basis. They take account of factors such as the local housing market and the individual property features. Consideration is also given to the relevant Local Housing Allowance (which is the benefit residents would receive if they were renting from a private landlord).

If the tenant is eligible for Universal Credit they will be able to claim for all levels of affordable rent below the Local Housing Allowance subject to personal circumstance.

Properties would be advertised in the same way as current Council Properties through the choice-based lettings scheme, Homefinder Somerset. They would be marked affordable rent and the level of rent shown.

A local letting plan has been developed by the Lettings team and received 'in principle' approval.

The affordable rent is inclusive of service charge. It is intended that the service charge will be the same cost and service delivery as that for a social rent property. Finance are involved in the process to ensure the rents and service charge income is appropriately reported in the HRA accounts.

It is not proposed to make any specific changes to the existing lettings process or tenancy arrangements. A tenant on an affordable rent or social rent will be treated the same and be governed under existing policies and processes.

The following is a comparison of indicative rent levels based on Weavers Arms, Rockwell Green. The rents are still subject to a final valuation and for comparison purposes the £1.42 service charge has been deducted from the Affordable Rent level as the Tenant will pay the same Service Charge whether Affordable or Social Rent. The difference is how the Service Charge is collected.

	Affordable Rent	Social Rent	LHA
1 Bed Flat	£87	£70	£92.05
2 Bed Bungalow	£123	£87	£120.82
2 Bed House	£118	£87	£120.82
3 Bed House	£137	£97	£145.67
4 Bed House	£146	£105	£184.11

The above rents are indicative only as the rent values are set once a valuation has been completed within 3 months prior to handover.

Affordable rent will be set at a blanket rate of 80% of the open market rent and includes service charges. All the properties except the disabled adapted bungalows have affordable rents which fall below the Local Housing Allowance.

If Weavers Arms as an example is run as a 100% Social Rent scheme the 'Payback Period' when the income from the properties is enough to payback the cost of development is an extra nine years compared to a 100% affordable rent scheme. This then releases further funding to bring forward more council housing.

The above figures are indicative and to illustrate the financial aspects of a rental change. It is intended that the three returning tenant households who were rehoused to enable the development to proceed will be allocated properties at a social rent level. In the event the decant tenant then vacates the property it would revert to an affordable rent level.

2.4 Shared Ownership

Weavers Arms, Rockwell Green also offers a further opportunity to explore diversifying the range of tenure and aspire to the 'Housing Vision'. It is intended for two of the properties to be Shared Ownership.

Shared Ownership is a form of Low Cost Home Ownership and offers a route into owner occupation for those who would not normally be able to afford to purchase on the open market. The resident buys a share of the property and pays rent on the share they do not own. The higher the share they own the less rent they pay. i.e the property is shared in terms of ownership between the resident and the Council.

A project group has been established including representatives from Housing and Finance services to pilot the sale of two properties for shared ownership. The principle of shared ownership has been established for many years, however within the Council the understanding of the tenure and the associated internal processes need to be established.

External advice is being sought from the Council's Housing Association partners and legal advisors who have extensive experience of shared ownership.

The intention is to market the properties to local people with a 40% first tranche sale in the property. i.e the purchaser owns 40% of the property and 60% is rent charged by the council. The opportunity to give priority sale to our existing Council tenants is being explored.

The shared ownership rent and mortgage payments are calculated from the property value and the percentage of share owned. For the rent payment, this can be set at up to 2.75% of the open market value on the unsold share in accordance with Homes and Communities Agency guidelines.

The following is an illustration of the level of cost for a 2 bed shared ownership property. The mortgage payments made by the purchaser will depend on how they fund their 40% share.

Open Market Value (OMV)	£165,000
40% of the OMV	£66,000
10% Deposit (could be 5%)	£6,600
Mortgage on remaining amount	£59,400
Indicative Monthly Mortgage Payments	£357
Monthly Rent Payment to Council for 60% of property	£230
Indicative monthly payment	£587

The property marketing and sale process would be undertaken by a local estate agent who can also offer independent mortgage advice to the purchaser. The purchaser would not be obliged to use the mortgage service offered by the Estate Agent, however the purchaser is responsible for their own financial arrangements to purchase the property share not the Council.

Each purchaser will be vetted to ensure they meet the eligibility and affordability criteria set out through the Homes and Communities Agency Sustainability Calculator. Detailed advice from the housing association partners is being sort on the relevant checks required to ensure the purchaser can afford the property taking into consideration living costs. The intention is to apply a local connection cascade similar to the proposed lettings plan to ensure local people have the priority.

The intention is to use the Homes and Communities Agency Standard Shared Ownership Lease. This is the legal document that sets out details of rent and how it is increased, arrangements for buying further shares in the property, service charges and buildings insurance, purchaser's responsibilities and the Council's responsibilities.

The leaseholder is liable for all maintenance costs on the property, but must obtain Council approval to undertake property improvements.

Staircasing is the term given to buying extra shares in the shared ownership property. The intention is to allow 100% staircasing owing to restricting staircasing to for example 80% significantly affects the mortgage options for the applicant.

Shares are sold at the current market value, and the proportion of rent will reduce in accordance with the extra shares purchased. Options for the Council to have first option to purchase back the property in the event of an onward sale after 100% staircasing is being explored.

Guidance on the details of this lease and any suggested amendments to align with the Council's requirements including staircasing is being provided by an external legal service who have extensive shared ownership experience.

Legal advice and internal procedures will also include options in the event a shared owner is in, or about to be in, mortgage arrears and potentially lose their home, including the likelihood of repossession by the main mortgage lender. Options could include the shared owner selling some of their share back to the Council in order to reduce their mortgage to a more affordable and sustainable level, or by selling all their shares back to the Council and becoming a tenant.

2.5 Weavers Arms Tenure

The final intended mix for the 26 new homes at Weavers Arms, Rockwell Green will be:

Social Rent (3 properties)

- 1 x 2 bed House
- 1 x 3 bed House
- 1 x 2 bed bungalow

Affordable Rent (21 properties)

- 12 x 1 bed flats
- 3 x 2 bed house
- 2 x 2 bed bungalows
- 3 x 3 bed house
- 1 x 4 bed house

Shared Ownership (2 properties)

- 2 x 2 bed house

With the changes to tenure mix, based on current market information the 'Payback Period' when the income from the properties is enough to payback the cost of development is the same as the 100% affordable rent scheme and reduces the payback period by an extra nine years compared to a 100% social rent scheme.

The knowledge and experience gathered from the range of tenures offered at Weavers Arms, Rockwell Green will inform future development scheme appraisals and enable the Council to offer a wider choice to its residents.

3. Finance Comments

The total indicative costs of the Weavers Arms regeneration project as presented in this report is £3.64 million. This has been financed by £991k of RTB receipts and £2.65m of borrowing.

A financial feasibility has been carried out and the scheme currently provides a positive Net Present Value. This means that the scheme's current value will not arise at a loss to TDBC. The scheme is expected to payback within 26 years.

The diversifying of tenure allows the Council to have an increased level of revenue which can then be used to finance new development projects. This will enable the Council to carry out its plans to have a truly flexible housing model that allows tenants to move through the model and be financially secure. There will be a net positive effect on the HRA business plan.

The HRA borrowing position included within this amount will remain comfortably within the HRA capital debt cap imposed by central government.

4. Legal Comments

Through SHAPE Legal Services an independent solicitors with extensive legal experience with shared ownership is being appointed to provide professional advice regarding shared ownership with a specific emphasis on the Shared Ownership Lease.

5. Links to Corporate Aims

The diversifying of tenure offered by the Council links to Key Theme 1 'People' within Taunton Deane Borough Councils Corporate Strategy 2016-2020 to facilitate an increase in the availability of affordable homes and council homes for local people to both buy and to rent.

6. Environmental and Community Safety Implications

The diversifying of tenure within the Council HRA housing stock will offer balanced and sustainable communities. A consistent feature of mixing tenures on estates has been an overall improvement in property prices, reduced turnover, increased demand, tenant satisfaction and improved area reputation.

7. Equalities Impact

A copy of the EIA is attached to this report as Appendix A. It has been identified that shared ownership applicants may require additional support when applying for a property.

8. Recommendations

The decision for the tenure of the scheme has been discussed and agreed with the Director – Housing and Communities, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing Services. The decision will be advertised through the Weekly Bulletin following consultation comments received from Tenants Forum and Tenant Services Management Board.

Contact: Jo Humble
Housing Enabling and Development Manager
07808 847 361
j.humble@tauntondeane.gov.uk

Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset Council
Equality Impact Assessment Form and Action Plan

Appendix A

Expand boxes as required. Guidance notes are stored - TDBC link:

<http://portal/sites/policyPerf/strategyandpartnerships/equality/Equality%20Impact%20Assessment%20GuidanceTemplate/Forms/AllItems.aspx> WSC 'W' drive: W:\Equalities\EIA TEMPLATE

<p><i>"I shall try to explain what "due regard" means and how the courts interpret it. The courts have made it clear that having due regard is more than having a cursory glance at a document before arriving at a preconceived conclusion. Due regard requires public authorities, in formulating a policy, to give equality considerations the weight which is proportionate in the circumstances, given the potential impact of the policy on equality. It is not a question of box-ticking; it requires the equality impact to be considered rigorously and with an open mind."¹</i></p>			
Officer completing EIA form:	Job Title:	Team/Service:	
Jo Humble	Housing Development and Enabling Manager	Housing Enabling and Development	
Why are you completing the impact assessment? <i>Please ✓ as appropriate</i>			
Proposed new policy or service	Change to policy or service	New or Change to Budget	Service review
	√		
1 Description of policy, service or decision being impact assessed:			
<p>Following the review of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan and the adoption of the Development Strategy in 2016 work has been ongoing to explore the options to diversify the choice of tenures offered within the 'Newbuild Council Housing Program' to bring forward the 'Housing Vision'.</p> <p>The offer would diversify the forthcoming housing mix at Weavers Arms from 26 social rented properties to;</p> <p>21 affordable rented properties 2 shared ownership properties 3 social rented properties for the returning decants.</p> <p>These new tenures would align the housing scheme with the Council's current aspirations, providing further housing options for local residents and tenants in the area, whilst significantly improving the financial payback for the scheme in response to rising build costs and reduced financial income following the implementation of rent reduction.</p>			

Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset Council
Equality Impact Assessment Form and Action Plan

Appendix A

Expand boxes as required. Guidance notes are stored - TDBC link:

<http://portal/sites/policyPerf/strategyandpartnerships/equality/Equality%20Impact%20Assessment%20GuidanceTemplate/Forms/AllItems.aspx> WSC 'W' drive: W:\Equalities\EIA TEMPLATE

2 People who could be affected, with particular regard to the legally defined protected characteristics²:

The housing scheme proposal would facilitate the delivery of affordable housing in the Borough to those identified in housing need. It is not specific to a 'protected group'.

Lettings will be taken for the affordable rented properties from the choice based lettings system 'Homefinder Somerset' which has an equality and diversity policies in place to ensure protected groups are not disadvantaged.

The applicants for the shared ownership properties will be vetted to ensure they meet the eligibility and affordability criteria set out through the Homes and Communities Agency Sustainability Calculator, taking into consideration the legally defined protected characteristics.

3 People and Service Area who are delivering the policy/service/decision:

Housing and Communities led by Housing Enabling and Development team working with Housing Services.

4 Evidence used to assess impact: *Please attached documents where appropriate.*

Homefinder Somerset Equality Impact Assessment -

<http://www.homefindersomerset.co.uk/NovaWeb/Infrastructure/ViewLibraryDocument.aspx?ObjectID=555>

5 Conclusions on impact of proposed decision or new policy/service change:

The proposed changes to the housing scheme tenure mix at Weavers Arms will not directly impact upon people with any of the defined characteristics.

Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset Council
Equality Impact Assessment Form and Action Plan

Appendix A

Expand boxes as required. Guidance notes are stored - TDBC link:

<http://portal/sites/policyPerf/strategyandpartnerships/equality/Equality%20Impact%20Assessment%20GuidanceTemplate/Forms/AllItems.aspx> WSC 'W' drive: W:\Equalities\EIA TEMPLATE

6 Recommendation based on findings. These need to be outlined in the attached action plan.

There is no adverse equality impact identified

Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset Council
Equality Impact Assessment Form and Action Plan

Appendix A

Expand boxes as required. Guidance notes are stored - TDBC link:

<http://portal/sites/policyPerf/strategyandpartnerships/equality/Equality%20Impact%20Assessment%20GuidanceTemplate/Forms/AllItems.aspx> WSC 'W' drive: W:\Equalities\EIA TEMPLATE

Equality Impact Assessment Action Plan					
Group Affected	Action required	Expected outcome of action	Person to undertake action	Service Plan - for monitoring	Expected Completion date
Age	None.				
Disability	None				
Gender Re-assignment	None.				
Marriage and Civil Partnership	None.				
Pregnancy and Maternity	None.				
Race ³	None.				

³ Including ethnicity, national origin, colour, nationality, gypsies and travellers.

Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset Council
Equality Impact Assessment Form and Action Plan

Appendix A

Expand boxes as required. Guidance notes are stored - TDBC link:

<http://portal/sites/policyPerf/strategyandpartnerships/equality/Equality%20Impact%20Assessment%20GuidanceTemplate/Forms/AllItems.aspx> WSC 'W' drive: W:\Equalities\EIA TEMPLATE

Equality Impact Assessment Action Plan							
Group Affected	Action required		Expected outcome of action		Person to undertake action	Service Plan - for monitoring	Expected Completion date
Religion and Belief	None.						
Sex	None.						
Sexual Orientation	None.						
Rurality	None.						
Author's Signature:	Jo Humble		Ref/Report Title:	Diversifying Tenure	Date:	25 th September 2017	EIA Version: 1.0
Contact Details:	Tel:	01823 219469	Extn:	2194	Email:	j.humble@tauntondeane.gov.uk	

Report to Tenant Services Management Board 25th September 2017

Recommendation on Specification for the Grounds Maintenance Service and proposed weekly charge to tenants from April 2018.

Report Authors: Neil Anderson Strategy and Partnership Officer and Richard Burge Open Spaces Manager.

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides detail on the work that has taken place to date into the review of the current content and arrangement for the delivery of grounds maintenance service to land.
- 1.2 The report describes the work that has taken place since the progress report provided to the TSMB in October.
- 1.3 The report is based on consultation that has taken place with representatives of the 3 main Tenants Groups
- 1.4 Provides detail of proposed improvements to the specification and potential savings to the service that could be made.

2.0 Background.

Taunton Deane Housing and Communities established a project team in September 2016 to review the current grounds maintenance agreement that is in place with the TDDB Deane DLO Open Spaces Team.

The work the Open Spaces team currently undertake on behalf of the Housing and Communities Service is based on the original 1997 Specification of the Contract that was updated to a new agreement in 2006. Since this time, the Open Spaces team has provided services as instructed by the Housing and Communities Service.

Since the last report to the Tenant Services Management Board (TSMB) on the 27th of March 2017 outlining progress that had been made, further work has taken place involving tenants in the review including a tour of the district, the establishment of a tenants panel made up of representatives from the TSMB, Sheltered Housing Development Group (SHDG) and Tenants Forum (TF).

There has also been a demonstration of a mulching mower in August which tenant representatives also attended.

The content of this report and the recommendations relating to the proposed specification and increase in service charge have all been before and agreed by the Tenants Forum at their meeting on the 12th of September.

3.0 Work that has taken place.

The project group has continued to meet approximately monthly to report on progress made in the review and to identify issues that require further research.

The report presented to the TSMB in March was also presented to both the TF and SHDG.

In May 2017 a tour of various sites throughout the district took place at which tenants from the TSMB, TF and SHDG attended with staff from Housing and Communities and Open Spaces.

The purpose of this tour was to inspect areas to see examples of good and bad practice and to agree between the various parties what tenants felt was an acceptable standard.

Following this tour it was decided to establish a task group of tenant representatives from the TSMB, SHDG and the TF.

This group has now met twice, at the meetings the group has been provided with detail on the costs of each part of the specification and of how the inclusion or exclusion of different items from the grounds maintenance specification effects the overall weekly charge to tenants.

Discussion with those tenants present took place on what panel members wanted to be included in the specification. Council officers made recommendations on what should be included to protect the council's assets and ensure the health and safety of tenants

The final recommendation of this group on the items that they wish to be included in specification and resultant weekly charge is shown in appendix 1.

The group last met on the 22nd of August. Prior to the meeting of this group, the panel members were invited to attend a demonstration of 4 different methods of cutting grass including a mulching mower at Wellsprings Road.

Due to the condition of the grass, which was deliberately left long to show how various machines performed, the demonstration of the mulching mower was not as successful as hoped as it is designed for shorter grass. However, further investigation into the use of this type of mower and potential cost savings to the service will continue. The ultimate decision as to which mowers will be required to best deliver the agreed service specification will rest with the Open Spaces Manager. New mowers will be leased so that they can be returned or changed if required.

3.1 Chosen Specification.

As described above the tenants group have recommended that the choice of the specification is as shown in appendix 1.

This would result in an annual cost to the council of £538,996.14 at weekly service charge of £ 1.84.

The council and tenants group recognise that this represents a substantial increase on the current weekly charge of **£0.81p**, but collectively officers and tenants are confident that this will result in improvements to the service and ensure the long term sustainability of the service, which until now has been underfunded. It should be noted that although the current weekly charge has only been 81p, the actual weekly cost has been £1.12 per week (as shown in Appendix A), with the annual budget overspend being taken from other HRA budgets. In context, comparisons from other Somerset social landlords show that their charges range from £1.50 to £2.50 per week. This is significantly more than TDBC tenants have been charged and helps explain why our service has been unable to afford to meet the standards that tenants might expect until now.

For those tenants in receipt of Housing Benefit, service charges are covered by this benefit so they will not have to pay for the increase in level of service charge.

The specification also reflects those areas which are the cause of the highest number of complaints, that is: trees, bramble (plus hedges and bushes) and grass cutting. The panel and officers have recognised the necessity of ensuring that these elements are included in the specification and are properly resourced. In particular, in relation to trees, this is one area of work which both officers and tenant felt had to be resourced to protect both the health and safety of tenants and the council's assets.

The specification maintains the current level of grass cutting of a maximum of 15 cuts for non-supported housing areas and a maximum of 15 of cut and collect on supported housing schemes (this definition includes both sheltered housing and extra care housing).

The panel have also made the decision to remove the following items from the current specification in order to make savings to the overall cost of the service and to prevent the service charge rising further. These items are as follows:

The provision of hanging baskets, removal of existing rose beds, this will provide a saving of just over £18,000 to the total overall cost.

We are confident that if the Tenants Forum accepts the need to increase the service charge and adopt this specification it will improve the standard of ground maintenance on our estates and lead to noticeable improvements in the appearance of land owned by Housing and Communities, in particular in the communal areas.

3.2 Service Standard

The agreed Service Standard is shown in appendix 2. This is the standard which will be published to tenants and made available on the Council's website.

Alongside the service standard is a new clearer and simpler Service Specification, shown in Appendix 3, this is the specification that Open Spaces will deliver and be monitored against.

The new specification and service standard will have the following benefits:

- Provide a clear, costed, improved service standard for tenants.

- A clear service standard for both Open Space staff and Housing staff to work with,
- Make it simpler for all involved to understand the expected service standard that will be delivered.
- Enable improved monitoring of contract.

3.3 Provision of budget for clearing back log of works.

Work is currently underway to establish a costed programme of work to tackle those areas in our Housing Estate which we believe require additional attention to bring them up to the agreed standard. These works are above and beyond the normal maintenance works that the service standard will deliver and will address a backlog of work which has not been carried out over recent years. Once this programme has been identified we will need to work with the HRA Accountant to try and identify a budget to tackle these areas, or at a minimum the areas that are 'top of the list' and most need attention.

Once a budget can be found and this backlog of work addressed, the new grounds maintenance specification will then be able to keep all areas of Housing land in good condition as described in the new service standard. Dependent on the size of the budget available and the length of the list of works, we anticipate that it will take between one and two years to complete works on these areas.

If approved, this budget will allow the Open Spaces Team to take on additional staff to tackle the backlog of work, without affecting service delivery. This is something which has not been possible before, since diverting staff to tackle e.g. an overgrown area has resulted in failure to provide the service to another area.

Once this programme of work has been identified it will be published and made available to tenants. TSMB should be aware that although the new service standard will be applicable from April 2018 and that work will be carried out to that level, areas where there has been a backlog (e.g. significantly overgrown trees) will not meet the standard until the backlog has been addressed.

3.3 Mulching Machines

The effectiveness of mulching mowers is still under investigation but it is anticipated that they will be trialled from April 2018 and used alongside conventional mowers.

The introduction of mulching machines will improve efficiency of cuts and lead to cost savings through Open Spaces not having to dispose of grass cuttings which currently results in an annual cost of £30,000.

4.0 Recommendations of Tenants Forum

The contents of this report and the recommendations of the Tenants Panel have all been before the Tenants Forum at their meeting held on the 12th of September

The Forum unanimously approved the new specification and the increase in service charge, but did raise a number of questions including the level of contribution towards the cost of the service from the General Fund, how will the service be

monitored and how will the Council ensure that the standard of service meets the new enhanced specification.

5.0 Conclusion

Housing and Communities and Open Spaces are confident that the recommended increase in service charge, while recognising the increase in service quality and cost is substantial, will provide sufficient budget for the service to be properly resourced. The project has highlighted that the service has been consistently underfunded, which has led to the current situation where the staff who provide the service have been stretched beyond the capacity to provide the standard of service expected by tenants and that the staff aspire to.

The review and the recommendations of the project group are also a direct result of the concerns raised by tenants regarding the provision of the Grounds Maintenance Service. Those enhancements to the service are the result of the consultation carried out so far with tenants and reflect their wishes for an improved service.

The improvements to the service cannot be made with increasing the cost of the service but which will benefit all tenants.

The project has also shown that in comparison to other providers the level of the proposed service charge is well below that charged by other social housing providers.

With the increase in the level of service charge and together with the budget to tackle the backlog of work, we are confident that the issues of inconsistency and variable standard of the service will be addressed.

We recognise that further work will be needed to develop how we monitor the quality and delivery of the contract and this will be more robust than what has happened in the past. We expect tenants will play a significant role in this. Following approval of the service standard and service charge, the next step of this project is to focus on how we will monitor and hold the service to account, as well as how we communicate this standard to everyone.

The authors of the report wish to work with staff involved in providing and monitoring the service to develop this, but we also recognise the important role tenants have to play in this. Therefore, we recommend that the current Tenant Panel, that was established to assist with the review, is invited to perform this role.

For example The Panel could take part in estate walkabouts, spot inspections and a whole array of other potential possibilities.

One way that the standard can be verified in future will be to instruct the Open Space operatives to take pictures of the areas where they have just completed work to compare against the approved standard.

There are many opportunities for using digital technology to assist with performance monitoring and to ensure that the standard is met.

We recognise that there is still work to be done in producing an effective monitoring process, but the project team are confident a structure can be put in place for April 2018 to achieve this aim.

The project group recommends that the contract should be reviewed every 3 years, however, with effective contract monitoring this may not be necessary since the monitoring process should deal with issues so that the specification accurately reflects any concerns of tenants and they are addressed without unnecessary delay. The period between implementation of the new specification and the next review is something that can be agreed between the project group and the proposed Tenants Panel.

The project group is also keen to ensure that both the increase in the service charge (if approved) and the implementation of the new specification is publicised and made available to as many tenants as possible through all available media, e.g. the newsletters and Taunton Deane Web page. Work will continue on this part of the project in the next 6 months.

The improvements in the standard of service delivery will lead to an improved visual appearance of the landscaped areas on our estates, in particular in areas which have previously been neglected. While the increase in the level of service charge will ensure that the service is properly resourced.

Both Housing and Communities and Open Spaces are committed to ensuring the successful implementation of the specification and recognise that this is an ongoing process, with the long term aim of improving levels of satisfaction with the service and a reduction in number of complaints.

The service will be proactive in identifying issues before they become a problem rather than reacting to tenant's complaints. This will result in savings to tenants through not having to report problems as they will be dealt with in advance through staff taking a proactive approach.

There will be a need to review the level of service charge made each year and to ensure that it keeps pace with any increase in cost of delivery.

It is important for members of the TSMB to recognise that despite the improvements that will result from the introduction of the new specification and increase in service charge the Council is providing a grounds maintenance service not a gardening service. Therefore, the standard that will be provided will not be the equivalent to that provided in a park or for a formal garden.

However, we are confident this specification and the proposed increase in the annual charge will result in real improvements to the service.

6.0 Supported Housing Development Group

The recommendations of the Panel, the Forum and TSMB will also be reported to the next available meeting of the SHDG on 3rd of October, their comments can then

be reported back to the TSMB on the 16th of October when final approval for the increase in the level of service charge will be sought.

7.0 Finance Comments

The increase of costs to £538,996 results in an increase of the service charge of £1.03 per household. The greatest increase in costs are:

- Weed killing costs as a new service provision. This is broken down by weed kill on grass areas of £54,062 and weed spraying of paths at £23,844. This is a total of £77,906 or 27 pence per household per week.
- Annual tree maintenance as a new service provision at £63,326 or 22 pence per household per week.
- An additional 2 cuts of grass at an increase of £62,329 or 22 pence per household per week

The overall cost of the service continues to be offset by a contribution of £198,000 from the general fund which reflects that a proportion of properties have been subject to right to buy over the years.

There is no impact on the capital budget.

The prepared service schedule is intended to reflect on-going costs to ensure that the service provided does not result in a backlog of works. It is reasonable to expect that these costs will continue for the foreseeable future.

Historically approximately 50% of tenants are on housing benefit. Currently 2,751 households are on housing benefit and therefore they will have their increased contribution covered by their housing benefit. Service charges remain an eligible cost under the Universal Credit benefit system.

There are no investment or borrowing implications with this project.

8.0 Recommendations:

That the Tenant Services Management Board approves the following recommendations:

- 1. The implementation of the new specification from the 1st of April 2018**
- 2. The increase in the level of the service charge to £1.84 per week from April 2018.**
- 3. That Council Officers carry out further work on establishing a robust system of monitoring, the outcome of which is reported back to TSMB in March 2018.**
- 4. The Current Tenant Panel is invited to become Tenant monitoring panel for the new specification which will be responsible for reporting on a regular basis to the TSMB on the performance the contract.**
- 5. The appropriate officers of the Council provide a progress report to the TSMB on how any new charges and new specification will be publicised to tenants in January 2018.**

- 6. Officers from both Housing and Communities and Open Spaces will report on a quarterly basis on progress of the new specification commencing April 2018.**

Appendix 1 TSMB

CURRENT SCHEDULE

	Number	Unit Cost	Total Cost
Standard Grass Cutting - General Needs	13	£ 14,737.90	£ 191,592.70
Standard Grass Cutting - Sheltered	0	£ 2,350.65	£ -
Premium Grass Cutting - General Needs	0	£ 44,213.70	£ -
Premium Grass Cutting - Sheltered	15	£ 7,051.96	£ 105,779.40
Selective Weedkill of Grass areas	0	£ 54,062.00	£ -
Hedge Maintenance (Annual)	1	£ 40,209.98	£ 40,209.98
Pre-Season Trim of Hedges	0	£ 7,548.00	£ -
Summer Flower Beds (Annual)	1	£ 17,521.58	£ 17,609.83
Autumn Flower Beds (Annual)	1	£ 9,532.47	£ 10,944.22
Summer Floral Planters (Annual)	1	£ 2,751.14	£ 2,751.14
Autumn Floral Planters (Annual)	1	£ 550.46	£ 550.46
Rose Beds (Annual)	1	£ 14,939.13	£ 14,939.13
Hanging Baskets (per basket)	80	£ 45.71	£ 3,656.80
Shrub Beds (Per pruning)	12	£ 7,363.05	£ 88,356.60
Maintenance of Trees (Annual)**	1	£ 42,000.00	£ 42,000.00
Cleansing & Litter Collection (Annual)	1	£ 7,312.01	£ 7,312.01
Edging of paths	0	£ 22,644.00	£ -
Weedspraying of paths	0	£ 11,922.00	£ -
Weedkilling of all Hardsurfaced areas*	0	£ 3,000.00	£ -
Leaf Collection November - December	0	£ 30,192.00	£ -
General Fund Contribution (RTB)			-£ 198,000.00
		TOTAL	£ 327,702.27
Number of Tenants	5640		£ 1.12

ENHANCED SCHEDULE

	Number	Unit Cost	Total Cost
Standard Grass Cutting - General Needs	15	£ 14,737.90	£ 221,068.50
Standard Grass Cutting - Sheltered	0	£ 2,350.65	£ -
Premium Grass Cutting - General Needs	0	£ 44,213.70	£ -
Premium Grass Cutting - Sheltered	15	£ 7,051.96	£ 105,779.40
Selective Weedkill of Grass areas	1	£ 54,062.00	£ 54,062.00
Hedge Maintenance (Annual)	1	£ 40,209.98	£ 40,209.98
Pre-Season Trim of Hedges	1	£ 7,548.00	£ 7,548.00
Summer Flower Beds (Annual)	1	£ 17,521.58	£ 17,609.83
Autumn Flower Beds (Annual)	1	£ 9,532.47	£ 10,944.22
Summer Floral Planters (Annual)	1	£ 2,751.14	£ 2,751.14
Autumn Floral Planters (Annual)	1	£ 550.46	£ 550.46
Rose Beds (Annual)	0	£ 14,939.13	£ -
Hanging Baskets (per basket)	0	£ 45.71	£ -
Shrub Beds (Per pruning)	12	£ 7,363.05	£ 88,356.60
Maintenance of Trees (Annual)**	1	£ 98,124.00	£ 98,124.00
Cleansing & Litter Collection (Annual)	1	£ 7,312.01	£ 7,312.01
Edging of paths	1	£ 22,644.00	£ 22,644.00
Weedspraying of paths	2	£ 11,922.00	£ 23,844.00
Weedkilling of all Hardsurfaced areas*	2	£ 3,000.00	£ 6,000.00
Leaf Collection November - December	1	£ 30,192.00	£ 30,192.00
General Fund Contribution (RTB)			-£ 198,000.00
		TOTAL	£ 538,996.14
Number of Tenants	5640		£ 1.84

£10,000 Additional Service = 3.4p per week per tenant

*Patios, Garage Forecourts, Hardstandings

**Full time team of two assigned to Housing - Crown Raising, lifting to 2.5m, pruning back to prevent structural damage and quality of life improvements such as trees overpowering properties.

reactive repairs would be more responsive with a dedicated team able to deal with issues within days rather than weeks or months.



Housing Service Grounds Maintenance

Taunton Deane's Open Spaces team is responsible for cutting our areas of communal grass, the routine maintenance of communal shrub beds and hedges, and the weeding and moss removal on communal pathways. Grass cutting includes removing any litter before the cut and blowing all clippings from pathways back onto the grass and, for Supported Housing areas, the collection of any clippings.

Instead of choosing a frequency for tasks to be carried out, such as grass cutting, the Open Spaces team will make sure that a specified standard is met at all times. We are using this visual guide to set out the standard and we hope that it gives both you and the Open Spaces team a visual reference to ensure that the standard is being met.

Each of the tasks listed in this guide have a set of standards, Grade A is what the area should look like just after the Open Spaces team have finished work, Grade B is how it should look just before they return and Grade C is an indicator of when an area has been missed or maintained to an unacceptable standard. Over the course of the year hedges and grass will grow at different rates and during periods of peak growing weather this can put the Open Spaces team under pressure to keep up so we would appreciate your help to let the team know if any areas reach Grade C so they can be attended to as soon as possible. You can reach the team at parks@tauntondeane.gov.uk

Some points to bear in mind:

- We expect all dog owners to act in a responsible manner and pick up after their pets. If this isn't the case and the Open Spaces team are forced to postpone grass cutting due to excessive faeces in communal areas it will be reported to the Housing Team. Once the waste has been cleared the grass will be scheduled to be cut again.
- Our trees will be getting regular attention and maintenance from experienced and skilled staff, Trees will not be felled, cut back or pruned purely to improve TV or radio reception or to light a property.
- We will be introducing selective weed control to our green open spaces and paths, the Open Spaces team will never use any products that are not safe for pets and wildlife.
- All work will be scheduled and attended to in turn, we welcome any comments but would encourage you to give the team time to deal with Grade B areas and only report areas for attention if they reach Grade C.
- Bringing all areas up to this standard will take some time, both the Housing and Open Spaces teams are committed to achieving this goal and trust that you will support us while we get there.

Hedge and Shrub Maintenance



Grade A – Good

Shrubs and Hedges well maintained and of good appearance.



Grade B – Satisfactory

Shrubs and hedges are well maintained but in need of some maintenance.

Between April – July Hedges will show growth and will not be cut back.

You should not see a lower standard than this.



Grade C – Unacceptable

Shrubs or hedges not maintained for a considerable time,

Significant reduction in available path width due to overgrowth.

Trip hazard due to trailing brambles.

Grass Cutting



Grade A - Good

Grass has been recently cut, is level and no areas have been missed. Edges are well maintained and the area is predominantly weed free.

This standard should be found after each visit.



Grade A – Good (Sheltered Housing Only)

Grass has been recently cut, is level and no areas have been missed. Edges are well maintained and the area is predominantly weed free.

Grass clippings have been collected.

This standard should be found after each visit.



Grade B - Satisfactory

Grass is in need of some attention and the next cut should be within the next 1-2 weeks.

Weeds may be growing but not well established.

You should not see a lower standard than this.



Grade C – Unacceptable

Grass is overgrown, edges are not maintained and weeds are well established.

If you see areas in an unacceptable condition please contact parks@tauntondeane.gov.uk

Flower Beds & Planters



Grade A - Good

Good coverage from a variety of plants
Weeded and maintained regularly



Grade B – Acceptable

Good coverage but some weeds in evidence
Some variety of plants

This is the lowest standard that you should see



Grade C – Unacceptable

Plants insufficient to present an attractive display

Borders not maintained

Tree Maintenance



Grade A – Good

Trees crown raised appropriately providing clear views

Growth prevented from damaging buildings



Grade B – Acceptable

Tree in some need of attention but poses no health & safety risk

Maintenance would be needed within 6 months

No physical impact on nearby buildings

This is the lowest standard that you should see



Grade C – Unacceptable

Trees unmaintained for a significant period

Tree growth impacting on building

Health & Safety risk

Weed spraying of Paths & Hard Surfaced Areas



Grade A – Good

Weeds and Moss free

No encroachment of grass or plants onto paved area.



Grade B – Acceptable

Some recent weed or moss growth

This is the lowest standard that you should see



Grade C – Unacceptable

No Weed control in over 12 months

Significant growth and impact on available path width



Housing Service Grounds Maintenance

Appendix 3

Grass Cutting

- Grass will be cut 15 times each year evenly with a good finish with no areas being left uncut, this may vary based on weather and growing conditions. All communal grass areas will be cleared of litter and debris before cutting.
- With the exception of Sheltered Housing Schemes cut grass will not be collected but blowers will be used to clear clippings from pathways and hard surfaces.
- On Sheltered Housing Schemes cut grass will be collected and disposed of except for areas where mower access is not possible where strimmers will be used and clippings blown away from paths and hard surfaces.
- To improve the quality of grass areas moss and weeds will be treated with the appropriate weed killer. We take care to use products that are not harmful to humans, pets or wildlife.
- Borders between grassed areas, paths and hard surfaced areas will be defined and cut over the winter period to maintain a neat and pleasant appearance. Debris will be cleared following edging.

Hedge and Shrub Maintenance

- Hedges and Shrubs will be trimmed to a uniform standard providing clear sight for access with weeds and brambles cut back during each visit. Hedges will be trimmed once per year and shrubs on a monthly schedule.
- Obstructions to access areas and footpaths will be cleared.
- Due to legal restrictions hedges cannot be cut back between the end of March to the end of July with the exception of Health & Safety issues. Guidance is provided by the RSPCB.
- Weeds, brambles and overgrown shoots from Hedges will be trimmed back using hand tools mid-season to prevent obstructions to access areas and footpaths.
- Cuttings will be disposed of following trimming

Summer and Autumn Flower Beds & Planters

- Cultivate and provide a range of floral bedding plants to present an attractive display throughout the growing season
- Prepare beds and planters, rotavate, maintain edges and remove old bedding plants
- Weeding throughout the season
- Watering & fertilising three times per week during the summer and as needed dependant on weather conditions during the Autumn

Tree Maintenance

A proactive approach to tree maintenance including:

- Crown raising to 2.5m
- Pruning back of overhanging branches from housing structures
- Monitoring health of trees and carrying out necessary works
- Yearly inspection of all trees
- Trees will not be felled, cut back or pruned purely to improve TV or radio reception or to light a property
- Removal and disposal of all cuttings

Cleansing & Litter Collection

- Collection and disposal of litter
- Collection and disposal of sharps, needles and broken glass
- Removal of Fly Tipping
- Removal of dead animals
- Removal of animal faeces is not included, if the levels of faeces is widespread it will be reported to Housing and grass cutting may not be possible until the issue is resolved.

Weed spraying of Paths & Hard Surfaced Areas

- All paths, parking areas, garage areas, patios and hardstanding areas will be sprayed with selective weed killer twice per year.

Leaf Collection

- Between November & December each year leaves will be collected
- Disposal of leaves

Minutes of the Meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 25 September 2017 at 6.00pm in the Committee Room, The Brittons Ash Community Centre (BACH), Bridgwater Road, Bathpool, Taunton.

Present: Mr R Balman (Chairman)
Mr A Akhigbemen, Mrs J Belcher, Mrs J Bunn, Mrs J Hegarty, Mr K Hellier, Mr I Hussey, Councillor C Booth and Councillor R Bowrah, BEM.

Officers: Simon Lewis (Assistant Director – Housing and Community Development), Stephen Boland (Housing Services Lead), Jo Humble (Housing Development and Enabling Manager), Richard Burge (Open Spaces Manager), Neil Anderson (Housing and Community Strategy Officer), Martin Price (Tenant Empowerment Manager) and Tracey Meadows (Democratic Services Officer).

Others: Councillor T Beale.

(The meeting commenced at 6.00pm)

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr D Galpin.

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 14 August 2017 were signed and taken as read.

3. Public Question Time

No questions were received for Public Question Time.

4. Declarations of Interests

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

5. Methods of Payment, Rent and the Transformed Council

The Housing Services Lead gave a verbal update on the method of payments used by the Taunton Deane Borough Council tenants.

Members were reminded of the update given to the Board on April 2016 by the Director of Housing and Communities which referred to the Council's Transformation Project. During the presentation the Director discussed the process to make transactions more efficient with more transactions going digital.

In March 2017, the Chief Executive also gave the Members an update on the Transformation Project and the design principles that would set the framework for the transformation vision. The New Operating Model was based on the following:-

- The focus was on customer demand being reduced;
- There would be a reduction in cost for the services that could be delivered online;

- Service 'silos' would be removed and services would be designed around the needs of customers; and
- The Council would be able to support customers to access information and services at a time and place that was convenient to them.

The Housing Services Lead gave the Members a breakdown of the value and volume of payments received at both the cash machines located in Taunton and Wellington:-

- Rent payments received at Taunton totalled £1,270,027 which included 9966 transactions.
- Rent payments received at Wellington totalled £411,751 which included 3857 transactions.

Officers understood that the Taunton and Wellington offices would not always be a convenient place to make payments in the future. With this in mind, they had investigated where tenants could make payments in their own neighbourhoods which could be more convenient to them. They found that there were 31 Pay Point outlets and 58 Post Offices within the Taunton Deane and West Somerset area that could be used by tenants. (Website and telephone payments were not included in the results.)

The cash machines were due to be removed in Spring 2018 and officers were keen to be proactive and wanted to help users to transition over to other payment methods and recognised the potential need for a temporary person to help explain what changes were being made and engage with users on a transformed way of accessing services.

During the discussion of this item, Board Members made the following comments and asked questions (Responses shown in italics):-

- Members gave positive feedback on the ability to be able to pay for their rent in their local convenient store or Post Office.
- Members requested that tenants were kept informed of the other payment methods available to use. A suggestion was made to add a message on the cash machine that when a cash method was selected, it advised the customer of other methods of payment.
There would be lots of information distributed to customers, which included mailshots and other communications. Officers were aware they needed to be careful during the process because they still needed to be able to collect rent payments. The cash collectors charged £18,000 per year to collect from the cash machines and the machines were also very costly to maintain. There would be an officer temporarily sited at the machines to give advice on alternative payment methods.
- Members queried whether the other payment methods were detailed in their annual rent statement?
Yes this was detailed in the statement. Direct debit had already been promoted in the tenant's newsletter and there were 1600 tenants that paid via direct debit.
- Concern was raised about tenants that had used credit cards to pay for their rent.
Work had been carried out with tenants that used credit cards to try and help them manage their finances and possibly use credit unions rather than other lenders that would charge high interest rates.
- Members queried what costs would be involved in the use of other pay points

in the area.

To be able to access the other pay points, there would be a procurement process to secure a supplier for the services and there would be a cost but this was unknown at present.

- Concern was raised for customers that still had their wages paid in cash and were unable to visit the Council offices during opening hours. Officers would need to ensure that there were pay points in local shops for those types of customers.

There would be lots of locations to choose from, which would be more convenient for customers.

Resolved that the Board noted the Officer's update.

6. Diversifying the Choice of Tenure

The Housing Enabling and Development Manager presented her report which provided the reasons for and advised Members on the implementation of two new Council tenures, Affordable Rent and Shared Ownership, to be piloted at the Weavers Arms housing development site in Rockwell Green, Wellington.

The broad range of homes being built at the Council's Weavers Arms, Rockwell Green development had offered the opportunity for the Council to explore the introduction of two new tenures, affordable rent and shared ownership in addition to social rent that was currently offered through the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) housing stock.

Following the review of the HRA Business Plan and the adoption of the Development Strategy in 2016, work had been carried out which explored the options to diversify the choice of tenures that were offered within the 'Newbuild Council Housing Program' and to bring forward the 'Housing Vision'.

The offer would diversify the housing mix at Weavers Arms from 26 social rented properties to:-

- 21 affordable rented properties;
- 2 shared ownership properties; and
- 3 social rented properties for the returning decants.

These new tenures would align the housing scheme with the Council's current aspirations and provide further housing options for the local residents and tenants in the area whilst they significantly improved the financial payback for the scheme in response to the increased build costs and reduced financial income following the implementation of rent reduction.

The diversifying of tenure allowed the Council to have an increased level of revenue which could then be used to finance new development projects through a net positive effect on the HRA Business Plan.

Affordable Rent. This was subject to rent controls that required a rent of no more than 80 per cent of the local market rent, which included services charges, where applicable.

When the rent was set it used property valuations from professional valuers and was reviewed on an annual basis. They took account of factors such as the local housing market and the individual property features. Consideration was also given to the

relevant Local Housing Allowance, which was the benefit that residents would receive if they were renting from a private landlord.

Shared Ownership. This was a form of Low Cost Home Ownership and offered a route into owner occupation for those who would not normally be able to afford to purchase on the open market. The resident would buy a share of the property and would pay rent on the share they did not own. The property was shared in terms of ownership between the resident and the Council.

The intention was to use the Homes and Communities Agency Standard Shared Ownership Lease. This was the legal document that set out details of rent and how it was increased, arrangements for buying further shares in the property, service charges and buildings insurance, purchaser's responsibilities and the Council's responsibilities.

During the discussion of this item, board members made the following comments and asked questions (Responses shown in italics):-

- Concern was raised that there would be mixed tenure schemes within the same housing estates which could cause problems.
Officers would avoid this where possible.
- Members queried the amount given for the service charge.
This was the amount used for social and affordable rent.
- Members queried was there any information or feedback from existing schemes on how easy it was to sell a shared ownership property.
If a resident wanted to sell their property, the Council would get the property valued. The Council would then have first refusal to purchase it back, however, there would be no obligation to the Council to do so.
- Concern was raised on what would happen when the rent was increased on the shared ownership properties and how over several years, the rent payments would be more than the mortgage payments.
Information was given on the opportunities for first time buyers through the shared ownership scheme and the ability to get onto the housing ladder. Figures were also given on deposits required, rent and mortgage figures for both shared ownership compared to open market properties.
- Members queried the progress made on the Weavers Arms project.
Good progress had been made but there had been delays caused by the section 278 agreement with Somerset County Council for the highways section of the development.
- Members queried whose responsibility would it be if the boiler broke down.
It would be the home owner's responsibility for any repairs to the property.
- Concern was raised about what happened if the home owner got into arrears on their mortgage, would the Council lose out to the mortgage companies.
Officers were working with solicitors who used fundamental clauses and could provide add ons to ensure that the Council did not lose out to the mortgage companies.
- Members queried when the shared ownership scheme would be available.
Once the decision notice had been advertised in the Weekly Bulletin, the properties would be marketed and when they had been sold, the Officer would return to give Members an update on the scheme.

Resolved that the decision for the tenure of the scheme had been discussed and agreed with the Director for Housing and Communities, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing Services. The decision would be advertised through the

Weekly Bulletin once consultation comments were received from the Tenants Forum and the Tenant Services Management Board.

7. Grounds Maintenance Service

The Open Spaces Manager and Strategy and Partnership Officer presented their report which provided details on the work that had taken place on the review of the current content and arrangement for the delivery of grounds maintenance service to land. The report was based on the consultation that had taken place with representatives of the three main Tenant Groups and also provided details of proposed improvements to the specification and potential savings to the service that could be made.

Since the last report to the Tenant Services Management Board (TSMB) in March 2017, further work had taken place which involved tenants in the review and a tour of the District and the establishment of a tenant's panel made up of representatives from the TSMB, Sheltered Housing Development Group (SHDG) and the Tenants Forum (TF).

The purpose of the tour was to inspect areas to see examples of good and bad practice and to agree between the various parties what tenants felt was an acceptable standard.

The tenant's panel were provided with details on the cost of each part of the specification and of how the inclusion or exclusion of different items from the grounds maintenance specification effected the overall weekly charge to tenants.

There had also been a demonstration held in August 2017 of four different methods of cutting grass which included a mulching mower, which tenant representatives had attended. Further investigation into the type of mower to be used and the potential cost savings to the service would continue. The mulching mowers would be trialled from April 2018 alongside conventional mowers.

The chosen specification would result in an annual cost to the Council of £538,996, which would equal a weekly service charge of £1.84. The Council and tenant groups recognised that this represented a substantial increase on the current weekly charge of £0.81, but collectively officers and tenants were confident that this would result in improvements to the service and ensure the long term sustainability of the service, which until now had been underfunded. It should be noted that although the current weekly charge had only been £0.81, the actual weekly cost had been £1.12 per week with the annual budget overspend being taken from other HRA budgets.

The new specification and service standard would have the following benefits:-

- Provide a clear, costed, improved service standard for tenants.
- A clear service standard for both Open Space staff and Housing staff to work with.
- Make it simpler for all involved to understand the expected service standard that would be delivered.
- Enable improved monitoring of contract.

Work was currently underway to establish a costed programme of work to tackle those areas in the Housing Estate which required additional attention to bring them back to the agreed standard.

During the discussion of this item, board members made the following comments and asked questions (Responses shown in italics):-

- Concern was raised that the current standard of fifteen grass cuts per year was not carried out in most areas and how would the officers maintain this standard going forward.
Officers had based their service charges on the figures for what they wanted to achieve and also they would use the new visual guide to ensure the standard was achieved.
- Members were happy with their own areas and the grounds maintenance that had been carried out.
- Concern was raised that if weed spraying was carried out in some areas this would kill the whole lawn because some areas were predominantly weeds and not grass.
The areas would be sprayed to kill the weeds and then re-seeded to create a lawn. The affected areas would take approximately a year to develop but in the long term the area would benefit and meet the specification.
- Officers had created a new visual guide to use. Officers would be able to take photos to show what the areas looked like at certain times to prove they had met the standard set in the guide.
- Officers were keen to get the specification and fees correct to make sure they were included in the Fees and Charges report due to go to Council before Christmas. This allowed officers time to implement the changes before April 2018 and communicate the changes to tenants.
- Concern was raised on the confusion over whose jurisdiction it was to maintain the footpaths.
Somerset County Council was responsible for the maintenance of the footpaths, however, because this was an important issue for tenants, the officers had included this in the new specification.
- Concern was raised on the removal of the rose beds and what would they be replaced with.
The rose beds cost £14,000 to maintain and it was decided that they were too costly to retain. Discussions would take place with the local residents and they could be replaced with shrubs which were easier to maintain.

Resolved that the Board approved:-

- a) The implementation of the new specification from the 1 April 2018;
- b) The increase in the level of the service charge to £1.84 per week from April 2018;
- c) That Council officers carry out further work on establishing a robust system of monitoring, the outcome of which was reported back to TSMB in March 2018;
- d) The current tenant panel was invited to become the tenant monitoring panel for the new specification which would be responsible for reporting on a regular basis to the TSMB on the performance of the contract;
- e) The appropriate officers of the Council would provide a progress report to the TSMB on how any new charges and new specification would be publicised to tenants in January 2018; and
- f) Officers from both Housing and Communities and Open Spaces would report on a quarterly basis on progress of the new specification that would commence in April 2018.

(The meeting ended at 7.40pm)