

Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on Thursday 1 July 2010 at 6pm

Present: Mr Etherington (Chairperson), Mr Edwards, Mrs Hegarty, Mr Hellier, Mr Pearson, Mr Watkin, Councillor Bowrah, Councillor Brooks

Officers: James Barra (Community Services Manager), Stephen Boland (Housing Services Lead), Paul Hadley (Housing Estate Manager), Martin Price (Acting Tenant Empowerment Manager) and Isabelle Caillet (Community Business Support Assistant).

Others: Councillor Stuart-Thorn, Councillor Wedderkopp

(The meeting commenced at 6pm)

1. Apologies

Mr Galpin, Councillor Court-Stenning

2. Minutes of Last Meeting

The minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 10 June 2010 were taken as read and were signed.

Mr Etherington reported two resignations from the board: Mrs Vanstone and Mr Baker

Mr Edwards volunteered to take over the post of Vice-Chairperson, JH seconded, all in favour.

MP referred the board to clauses 4.13 and 4.14 of the Tenant Services Management Board's Terms of Reference, i.e.

4.13 If a member resigns or relinquishes their position the resulting vacancy will be filled as follows:

A previously unsuccessful candidate who received the most votes will be asked to fill the vacancy.

If the candidate is unavailable or unwilling to be co-opted, other candidates will be considered in the order of the number of votes received.

4.14 Should the above provision fail to find a representative, the board members with the Tenant Empowerment Manager will agree on a representative to be co-opted until the next ballot.

Councillor Brooks suggested recruiting the tenant on the Reserve List. Mr Etherington suggested another tenant who has expressed an interest in the board should be contacted and the situation should be discussed at the next meeting.

All board members were requested to put forward the names of any tenants they feel could fill the positions at the next board meeting.

Mr Edwards asked if he could visit a property that is having disabled adaptations work carried out. He also asked how many properties have been converted for the disabled and what percentage of TDBC's stock this equates to.

SB to provide the board with the figures.

Housing Revenue Account changes – Mr Pearson asked what happens to Tenant Tax Levy when all the debt has been repaid. SB answered that under the system recently distributed for consultation the Government's offer is that if TDBC takes on some of the debt, that the rent receipt would be retained so TDBC would no longer pay £6m to the Government. Mr Pearson queried the future of a £25 tax element of the rental charge. SB said that the rent levels are set by Members and TDBC will be looking for parity with other housing providers' rents.

Mr Pearson asked if the DLO was about to close. MP explained that a decision on the DLO's future will be reached next year.

3. Public Question Time

No questions from the public were received.

4. Declaration of Interests

Mr Etherington, Mr Edwards, Mrs Hegarty, Mr Hellier, Mr Pearson, Mr Watkin and Councillor Brooks declared personal interests as Council house tenants.

5. Core Council Review/Housing Structure

The Community Services Manager gave a presentation on the structure of the Council following the Core Council Review. Phase 5 (restructure of Corporate Management Team i.e. Chief Executive and Directors) and DLO review have yet to take place.

6. Housing Client Review

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the separation of the Housing Client function and the workforce.

As a result of the independent review that had been carried out by consultants Turner and Townsend, reported on the staff resources

required to implement the decision to separate the Housing Client function and the workforce.

A Project Team had been appointed and various subject specialists would be required at key stages in the delivery.

Submitted the governance arrangements for the project.

Budget and staffing cuts necessitated closer working relationships between the Housing Client function and DLO workforce. The review suggested that the Asset Management function should be placed within the client function role.

The current responsibilities of the service were detailed and other activities that were undertaken by the Landlord Service would be included in the review. A list of skills required was reported.

Resolved that the report be noted.

7. Income Management Service Standard

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the Income Management Service Standard.

Housing Services were responsible for ensuring that tenants promptly paid their rent and for recovering outstanding debts.

Some tenants had competing debts and it was important that they understood how they could pay their rent, what support could be offered and what actions the landlord would take if regular payments were not made. To meet the requirements of the Rent Recovery Protocol, the Income Management Service Standard would give tenants clear information about this.

The implementation of the Standard could be met within existing budgets, however the mailing of quarterly rent statements would cost £9,000 each year.

Tenants would be better informed and the Standard would promote the regular and systematic approach to rent payment.

Officers would support tenants unable to access the Standard and ensure that it was understood. The Standard would be available in different formats.

It was anticipated that the Standard would be published at the beginning of September 2010 and the first quarterly Rent Statements would be sent to tenants at the end of September 2010. The impact of the Standard would be reported to the Board in April 2011.

The outcomes expected from the implementation of the Standard included the following:

- Improved information to tenants on the landlord service;
- Increased rental income which would result in greater financial resources available to the Housing Service;
- Greater uptake of available benefits to those tenants who qualified. This would prevent vulnerable tenants from falling into economic poverty;
- Reduction of higher level arrears cases which would result in fewer legal notices and a reduction in County Court referrals; and
- Performance could be monitored.

Councillor Bowrah asked about the current rent arrears figure. PH explained that the current amount is £328,000.

Mr Pearson expressed concern that if housing benefit payments were made direct to tenants as opposed to the landlord this would lead to an increase in the rent arrears total.

Resolved that the Income Management Service Standard be approved.

8. Somerset West Social Housing Partnership – Adaptation Agreement

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the Somerset West Social Housing Partnership – Adaptation Agreement.

A group of Social Housing Landlords had been meeting with representatives from Sedgemoor District Council, Taunton Deane Borough Council, West Somerset District Council and Somerset County Council for nearly a year, to discuss possible improvements to the adaptations and housing options services for social housing residents.

A draft agreement was circulated which aimed to clarify responsibility for the adaptations work. The partnership aimed to improve tenants waiting times, clarification of who would do what and when. An action plan would be produced at a later date.

Councillor Brooks asked if specially adapted properties can be purchased under Right to Buy. SB to check and report back to the board.

Resolved that the work being carried out on the Adaptation Agreement be noted.

9. Update - Housing Revenue Account Consultation

MP explained that the presentation the board had received at its last meeting had since gone before the Corporate Scrutiny Committee and was approved on 17 June 2010. The Executive and Full Council considered the presentation and accompanying report on 24 June and approved a formal response that has been forwarded to the government. TDBC is in favour with some provisos. The comments of the board formed part of the reports to all three Council meetings and were noted at each.

10. Update - Tenant Services Authority (TSA)

The TSA was created in December 2008 from the Housing Corporation in order to regulate the services housing providers deliver. The current Housing Minister has expressed his intention to abolish the TSA. However the latest reports suggest the minister needs to obtain further government clearance and the Chief Executive of the TSA has sent a letter to all housing providers explaining that the TSA is still in place and all regulatory duties are still in force. It should also be noted that the TSA was created by legislation and will therefore have to be abolished by legislation.

After a request from Mr Hellier MP asked for permission to circulate board members' contact details to other board members. All in favour.

MP provided details of the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) Annual Conference on 23-25 July 2010 at the Hilton Hotel in Birmingham and requested that if any board members wished to attend to contact him. Mr Etherington asked that any members who do attend to provide feedback on the conference to the rest of the board.

(The meeting ended at 8.40pm)