

Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on Monday 15 December 2014 at 6pm in JMR, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton.

Present: Mr D Etherington (Chairman)
Mrs J Hegarty (Vice-Chair)
Mr R Balman, Mrs J Bunn, Mr D Galpin, Mr I Hussey, Mr R Middleton,
Councillor Bowrah and Councillor Miss Smith.

Officers: Rachel Searle (Housing Development Project Lead), James Barraah (Director of Housing & Communities), Lucy Clothier (Housing Accountant), Tim Haynes (Property Manager – Contracts), Phil Webb (Property Services Manager), Martin Price (Tenant Empowerment Manager), Stephen Boland (Housing Services Lead), Simon Lewis (Assistant Director of Housing & Community Development) and Emma Hill (Corporate Support Officer).

Others: Councillors Mrs Smith and Warmington

(The meeting commenced at 6.00pm)

1. Apologies

Ms M Davis and Mr K Hellier

2. Public Question Time

No questions received for Public Question Time.

3. Declarations of Interests

Councillor Bowrah declared personal interest as members of his family were Taunton Deane Borough Council Housing Tenant.

Mr R Balman, Mrs J Bunn, Ms M Davis, Mr D Etherington, Mr D Galpin, Mrs J Hegarty, Mr K Hellier, Mr I Hussey, and Mr R Middleton declared personal interests as Taunton Deane Borough Council Housing Tenants.

4. Creechbarrow Development Project Update.

Considering the Development Project Performance Scorecard previously circulated, concerning the Creechbarrow Road Development in Taunton.

Also enclosed with the dashboard was a current site layout map provided to reference the plot numbers referred to in the dashboard.

Below was a summary of the status of Key Project Activities for Phase 1:

- Build Programme completed by Galliford Try was Amber meaning that there were issues against some of the milestones but remedial action would keep project under overall control.
- Community Liaison completed by Rachel Searle was Green meaning that all milestones met and project on target.

- Training Opportunities completed by Rachel Searle was Green meaning that all milestones met and project on target.
- Finance completed by Rachel Searle was Green meaning that all milestones met and project on target.

The dashboard summarised the key project accomplishments for the both the KHA and TDBC site for the current period against the previous period of the Development Project as well as detailing the community liaison over the same period through the local community at a variety of community locations.

Included for the Board's information was the key goals/targets for the development project over the next period as well as detailing any current or ongoing issues with the development.

The Creechbarrow Rd Development had been nominated by Galliford Try's Partnerships South West business unit to host the 2015 UKCC Open Doors Event. This nationwide event organised by UK Construction Group to give local people an insight into construction at first hand. (For more information, go to the following website www.opendoorsweekend.co.uk)

Looking at Community Liaison, the community paintings had been fixed to the hoarding. These would be moved throughout the course of the build project to allow maximum time on the hoardings.

Also Galliford Try had set up a web link for the development so the progress of the development could be monitored via the internet, which had gone live, see the following web link for access www.gtpcreechbarrow.co.uk .

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

- What was the bricklayer issues concerning?
This was due to the impact of recession. Bricklayers had gone to find other work and then had not come back to the trade when the work started to pick back up. The Council and the contractor were waiting for more apprenticeships to complete.
- What was the cost to the Council if the contractor didn't meet the completion date due to lack of bricklayers?
At the moment, the Creechbarrow Development Project was on target and schedule despite the issues surrounding the supply of bricklayers.
- Was Galliford Try approaching other sources for bricklayer apprentices like colleges?
*The officer would take this suggestion back to the contractor and find out if they had been approaching other sources for bricklayers.
Concerning qualified apprentices onsite, there needed to be work gangs for them to work with.*
- What was the project completion date for Creechbarrow Rd?
The completion date was December 2015.
- With the drainage alterations being completed at one end of the site, would these feed into the existing system and would it have the capacity to cope with the extra water.
If the additions and alteration did indeed feed into the existing system, this would have been signed before work started and get before completion.

Resolved that the Board noted the Officer's report.

5. **Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2012 – 2042 Review.**

Considering report previously circulated, concerning a briefing report on the review of Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan 2012 – 2042.

Since the last review process a number of significant changes and issues had arisen that impact on the Business Plan, consequently a further review had been undertaken.

The purpose of this briefing note up the Board of the considered and agreed aspects of the HRA Business Plan 2012-42 under review, and refresh the financial aspects of the plan to ensure they remain current and robust.

Looking at the Business Plan Income, there had been some changes to inflation which had affected the Council's inflation assumptions. This was a key change for the Business Plan. The inflation had been lower than expected, which was good for rents and our tenants but bad for the HRA income as this would be less. Over the 30 years of the Business Plan, this would equate to a reduction in income of £133.1m.

Consumer Price Index (CPI) for September 2014 was 1.2%, which was the lowest inflationary uplift in five years and was significantly lower than the expected in the Business Plan which expected 2%.

Although there would be a rent increase of 2.2% (CPI Of 1.2% +1%), this would create a pressure in the 2015/16 budget of £176k due to the reduced income expectations. This reduction in income over the remaining 26 years of Business Plan equated to £10.5m.

Looking at the Business Plan Expenditure, there would need to be some introductions and changes to HRA Expenditure programs. The introductions and changes were as follows

- **Apprenticeship Scheme** – the housing department had been developing this scheme to provide two apprenticeship places in three key areas of the housing department. The proposal was to ring fence these opportunities to benefit tenants and their families.
- **Welfare Reform** – with the impending introduction of Universal Credit, there was a proposal to extend the secondment of a Welfare Reform Project Officer for a further two years. This would be an additional cost to the HRA.
- **Capital Investment** – after undertaking a review of the profile of spend for Capital Programs adjustments were required, which had led to pressure in the early years in this program due to high level expenditure on backlog of works and cyclical replacement.
- **Extensions** – two extension projects had been identified at a cost £55k each. The relative cost for extensions to improve an existing property was higher in

comparison to a new build to provide an entirely new home. Therefore it had been proposed to discontinue this budgetary provision from 2015/16 onwards.

- **Environmental Improvements** – there was a proposed reduction to this budget to ensure essential major works were funded from £155k to £50k for the next seven years.
- **Sustainable Energy Fund** - there was a proposed reduction to this budget to ensure essential major works were funded from £227k to £100k for the next seven years.
- **Development Program and Borrowing Headroom** – with the new builds programme well established and these were planned to be cost neutral to the HRA funding scheme by borrowing over a 30 year period. The HRA's potential borrowing headroom was capped but there was still further £13.5m currently.

The housing department had also undertaken a voluntary code of practice for self-financing of HRA. This had been developed by Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA). Generally, the self-assessment outcomes had been positive but there had been identified a number of areas where further work and reviews were required.

The overall impact of the changes was a forecasted change in projected reserves balances in 2042 from £67.1m to £159.6m, which was a reduction of £7.5m. Although, the figure overall was only a variation of 4.5%, the changes had a significant effect on cashflow due to reduced income in the early years of the business plan leading to pressure on HRA.

This pressure would affect the HRA's ability to repay the self-financing borrowing within 18 years.

If the HRA continued to be affected any more adverse changes which in turn would affect the management of the potential cashflow, the Council had drawn up and considered further measures to manage the HRA budget. These had been detailed in the officer's report.

Overall the 30 year Business Plan continued to forecast a healthy financial positions over the long term but current spending plans would create a small pressure in the medium term. This would be managed in order to produce an affordable budget forecast for the HRA Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP).

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

- Was the borrowing at fixed rate of interest?
The majority of the borrowing was at a fixed rate but the larger borrowing of £5m was at variable rate of interest but it was still on good terms.
- Had the Council done any work into extending the re-payment term of the borrowing?
The Council hadn't looked at this as yet but the officers were going to approach ArlingClose about this but this would be done off the back of the business plan along with other borrowing.
- The new housing that was coming online, how would this effect this?

*The income coming from the rents would offset the borrowing.
The income would go towards paying the loan back completely.*

- What percentage of Right to Buy goes into paying for new build development projects?

There were restrictions regarding the spending of RtB receipts. For example, when you knock down existing stock and replace it with new builds only 30% receipts could be used on the additional properties or to purchase buybacks.

- Could the layout of the inside of existing Council stock be altered instead building an extension?

The Council didn't have budget provision for this and also it would depend on the state of the individual properties to whether or not this could be completed. There could be hidden cost discovered once the work had started.

- Could the Council look at putting extensions on Void properties rather than properties with tenants in? The Council should be looking at the adaptability of the housing stock.

- The Council should consider encouraging small downsizing from 3 bed to 2 bed rather than straight down to a 1 bed.

- Could the Council consult local communities and local groups regarding issues on the estates such as parking?

The information and intelligence had come in from the estates officers. There had been six sites identified for changes relating to parking.

Resolved that the Board noted the Officer's report.

6. Housing Revenue Account Capital Programmes Update

Considering spreadsheet circulated at the beginning of the meeting, concerning an update on the Housing Property Services Capital Works programs.

Below was a summary of the current status of the Council's Capital Works programs performance in 2013/14 and quarter one of 2014/15:

- **Door Program** – There had been a slippage of 29 from the planned works against a completed total of 997 in 2013/14. So far in 2014/15 quarter one 75 had been completed with 63 in quarter two. The slippage was to supplier issues.
- **Kitchens** – There had been a slippage of 6 from the planned works against a completed total of 98 in 2013/14. So far in 2014/15 quarter one 6 had been completed with 0 in quarter two.
- **Bathrooms/Cloakrooms** - There had been a slippage of 60 from the planned works against a completed total of 249 in 2013/14. So far in 2014/15 quarter one 151 had been completed with 85 in quarter two.
- **Air Source Heat Pumps** – This was a four year program with 94 in 2013/14 and no slippage. So far in 2014/15 quarter one 23 had been completed with 27 in quarter two. This was programmed through to February 2015.
- **Smoke Alarms** - This was on target with 2600 in 2013/14 and no slippage. So far in 2014/15 quarter one 112 had been completed with 126 in quarter two. With previous no access being followed up.
- **Fire Doors** - There had been a slippage of 81 from the planned works against a completed total of 240 in 2013/14. So far in 2014/15 quarter one 81 had been completed with 5 in quarter two. The slippage was due to supplier issues.

The following contracts were out for tender for procurement of services for Capital Works programs:

- External Repairs, Decs & Fascias – five year contract. Start on site April 2015.
- Heating Improvements – five year contract. Start on site April 2015.
- Door Entry Systems (fob system) – three year contract. Start on site February 2015.

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

- How were the tenants getting on who have had Air Source Heat Pumps installed to the properties?
There had been a few issues relating to certain tenants and their understanding of how to operate the system. The Council provided additional support to those tenants who required it in the form of estates officers and support from the sheltered/supported housing teams.
We have also in some cases adapted the digital control system to analogue control systems for ease of use.

Resolved that the Board noted the Officer's report.

7. Introduction on Tenant Scrutiny Committee

Considering report previously circulated, concerning the case for the introduction of a Tenant Scrutiny Committee at Taunton Deane Borough Council (TDBC), together with how this would be implemented, the selection process and role of the committee.

Tenant led scrutiny was a fundamental part of the co-regulation of social housing and was enshrined in the regulatory framework for social housing.

The key element for scrutiny to be effective was that it must add value to the service and be shown to have made a positive difference to service delivery.

It should act and be independent of current tenant involvement in TDBC and make its own recommendations without interference or the influence of staff.

Every effort must be made to recruit tenants who were not currently actively involved in tenant involvement within TDBC.

This report set out a model of how this could be achieved within Housing and Communities and make a real difference to the lives of TDBC tenants.

Tenant scrutiny was defined by The Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS), Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) and HouseMark as having five key principles. These were as follows:

- Real Power
- Tenant-led
- Defined Role
- Performance

- Accessible

A fundamental principle of scrutiny was that it acted as a critical friend for the landlord. This meant that the scrutiny panel was not all being critical about the landlord but making positive and informed recommendations on how the service could be improved.

Tenant Development Team would need to encourage tenants from outside the Board and the Forum to get involved with the scrutiny panel. The recruitment process for the panel would seek to recruit tenants with a wide range of relevant skills.

In order to make the scrutiny panel manageable, the membership should be a minimum five members and a maximum of ten members.

Once people had come forward and expressed an interest, the next stage would be for them to complete an application form. As part of the recruitment process for members of the scrutiny panel, there was a range of selection criteria, which included the completion of an application form as well as a list of reasons for exclusion for the panel:

- They were not a tenant, or partner or spouse of the tenant of at least 5 year's standing living at the same household
- They were in serious breach of their obligations as a tenant
- They were an employee of TDBC
- They were an elected member of TDBC
- They were under 18 years old
- One of their family members was a current member of the committee
- They become incapable due to a mental disorder
- They did not have a good rent payment and tenancy history

Those that had shown interest and met the criteria would then be invited to an informal interview made up of a committee included the Tenant Empowerment Manager and the Chair of the TSMB, Chair of the Tenants' Forum and the Portfolio Holder for Housing.

Tenants new to tenant involvement would be required to attend a series of training session on a wide range of issues, which included how to run a meeting, how to behave in a meeting, minute taking, report writing together with training on the topics, which the committee would scrutinise. This training would be undertaken prior to any member of the scrutiny panel partaking in the review process.

For those selected panel members, there would be an imposed maximum service term on the panel, which was three years. The expected commitment time required to be given up by the Scrutiny Panel members would be the equivalent to one day per month.

Panel members would be reimbursed for pay for the cost of travel or any other out of pocket expenses as well.

The first two topics for the panel to scrutinise had already been chosen the TSMB, which was the any remaining topics review decisions would take place.

A Statement of Intent had been produced stating how the scrutiny panel would operate and would work in close co-operation with existing Tenant Groups.

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

- How was this different to the current format?
This would be made up of a group of tenant's independent from any other tenant groups. This group would make their recommendations on the scrutiny topics to the Board.
Some tenants had already expressed interest in this scrutiny group.
- I think the issues and topics that need to be scrutinised should be coming to the Board considering their experience with housing matters.
- I couldn't see a financial breakdown of the costs implicated with this set up. Would there be a cost to the Council for this?
The only implications were related to training of tenants prior to the scrutiny meetings taking place as well as the paying of any expenses they incur. Initial costs for publicity to attract members would also be incurred.
- This could be a potential source of future recruitment for Forum or the Board or is this just another layer to the process?
There would be some issues, which the Board might want thoroughly investigated and commission the scrutiny group to complete this and present their findings and recommendations back to the Board. Members could in the future decide to stand for the TSMB or join the Tenants' Forum.
- The reference in appendix to 'TDBC Scrutiny Committee' was this Corporate or Community?
It was Community Scrutiny Committee that was referred to.
- The maximum number for the scrutiny group was stated in the report but what was the minimum number?
The minimum required number for the scrutiny group would be five. This was stated in the report.
- Would you have a list of standby tenants for any resignations from the Scrutiny Group? The officers should also make sure that the standbys were trained as well.
The Council would keep a list of standbys in case of drops outs or resignations.
- With the familial connection and it stating no familial connection between scrutiny group members and Board Members, how far did this mean?
This meant no familial connection and was not limited to those members of family who live together.
- Would this report and decision need to go to the Members?
I don't think this needed to go through the Committee system and wouldn't require a Full Council decision but it could simply go through the Housing Briefing and be signed off by the Housing Portfolio Holder.
- Where was the officer time coming from and what else would suffer if officers were supporting the scrutiny panel?
The officer time and support for the scrutiny group would come from the Tenant Empowerment Team. This would be spread out between the officers. The scrutiny topics would be decided on by the Board.
The officer estimated 2 – 3 scrutiny topics per year. There would be no need for additional staffing so no recruitment would be required.
It was the job of the Tenant Empowerment Manager to allocate the work to staff.

The officer felt there was value in the Scrutiny Group but this would also require and involve other officers from the Housing department.

- Could Members of the Board or Forum attend the training sessions that were relevant to them? This would save money.

The officer could accommodate the inclusion of Board and Forum members into the organised training session of scrutiny group members were relevant or requested.

- Where were the scrutiny group going to get the topics from to discuss, investigate and make a recommendation? The main tasking of topics should come from the TSMB first.

The specific decision concerning what subjects would come the Board but this topic or subject would need to very specific and narrow.

The Board could receive requests for scrutiny of topics and they would have to prioritise them to be looked at by the group.

- What was the cut off if this was not working?
This should be a two way process, meaning either could approach the other if it wasn't working but progress could be monitored through progress reports to the Board.

- What was the budget and how was the project costed and please could this include officer's time?

Officers could collate this information and circulate it.

- Board Members requested that the section of the report regarding the make up the Interview panel should be increased to five members and the fifth members should be the Shadow Housing Portfolio Holder.

Officer agreed to make this amendment, although did not affect recommendation six of the report.

Resolved that:-

1. The contents of the officer's report was to be noted.
2. To adopt the resolution for the implementation of Tenant Led scrutiny in Taunton Deane Borough Council.
3. To approve the recommendations 1- 12 contained within the report

(The meeting ended at 8.36pm)