

Minutes of the Meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on Monday, 16 March 2015 at 6pm in JMR, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton.

Present: Mr D Etherington (Chairman)
Mr R Balman, Councillor R Bowrah, Mrs J Bunn, Ms M Davis, Mr D Galpin, Mrs J Hegarty, Mr K Hellier, Mr R Middleton, Councillor Miss F Smith.

Officers: Chris Hall (Assistant Director – Operational Delivery), Paul Harding (Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager), Paul Grant (Building Services Manager), Simon Lewis (Assistant Director of Housing and Community Development), Steve Boland (Housing Services Lead – Housing and Communities), James Barrah (Director of Housing and Communities), Martin Price (Tenant Empowerment Manager), Kene Ibezi (Assistant Director –Property and Development), Phil Webb (Housing Manager – Property Services), Caroline White (Housing Development and Enabling Manager), Jo Humble (Housing Development Project Lead), Tracey Meadows (Democratic Services Officer), Emma Allfrey (Democratic Services Officer).

Others: Councillor Mrs J Adkins, Councillor Mrs Smith and Councillor Mrs J Warmington.

The meeting commenced at 6.00pm.

1. Apologies

Mr M Edwards and Mr I Hussey

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board that was held on Monday, 16 February 2015 were read and agreed by the members of the Board.

3. Public Question Time

No questions received for Public Question Time.

4. Declarations of Interests

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

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

5. Agenda items 6 and 7

The Chairman raised concerns that reports for the following two items on the agenda (6 - Housing Revenue Account Capital Expenditure and 7 – Deane DLO Performance and IT System Update) had only been presented to the Board at the beginning of the meeting. The Chairman stated this made it very hard to assimilate the information and to ask structured questions. It was agreed that both items be deferred until the next meeting of the Board.

6. Draft Corporate Complaint Process

The Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager submitted details of the current complaints procedure and detailed the need for change due to the following:-

- 1) The complaints procedure had not been looked at for some time.
- 2) Was it still sensible for TDBC and WSC to have separate complaint processes?
- 3) The introduction of the Localism Act in 2011.

The report considered whether a Designated Person or a Tenant Panel should act as a Democratic Filter between the Council and the Ombudsman.

The report found that there are 70 Tenant Panels nationally (3%) that were registered with the Ombudsman. Based on historical figures, if TDBC set up a Tenant Panel they would deal with 3 complaints a year.

The report also considered timescales for resolving complaints which currently stood at 10 working days. The report suggested that the timescales should be in-line with Government timescales for Freedom of Information Requests which were 20 working days.

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

- Could the Tenant Services Management Board form a Tenants Panel or a sub-committee? Would members have to be DBS cleared?
With issues such as complaints being both complex and time-consuming, concerns over disclosure of personal information, data protection and a limited volume of work – was there a need/demand for a new committee?
- 20 working days was a long time to wait for a resolution. Should the complaint be escalated sooner? Was there a compromise on 20 days?

20 days was a consistently achievable target and most complaints were resolved at stage 1.

- How were complaints logged?
A SharePoint system would be used to log complaints. SharePoint users could draw off statistics/common themes.
- When would SharePoint be up and running?
From 1 April 2015. Complaints would be classified at a high level to avoid disclosure issues. After 3-6 months useful data would be able to be extracted.
- Would SharePoint hold information about the resolution of complaints?
As few or many categories as needed could be built in.
- Data gathered from SharePoint should be shared with the tenants via the newsletter.

Resolved that:-

- 1) The content of the Officer's report be noted.
- 2) The approach set out in the report be supported and that it be agreed to review the issue in 3-4 months' time.

7. Verbal update on the Regeneration of the Weavers Arms, Rockwell Green

The Housing Development and Enabling Manager and Housing Development Project Lead provided an update as they were close to submitting a planning application for the redevelopment of this site.

Nine residents were still to be decanted from Oaken Ground and it was hoped there would be a clear and vacant site by June.

Architect drawings were provided for the information of the Board members.

It was likely a planning application would be submitted in April which, if approved, would allow commencement on site by late autumn.

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

- Would parking around the flats have designated numbers?
There would be one space per flat, an extra space for wheel chair users and visitor parking.
- Did the flats overlook facing properties?
No, they were far enough away not to cause any serious overlooking.
- Parking would be affected if the 2 bed properties were converted into 3 beds.
- Trees soften the look of a new build.
- Could the chimneys be used for flumes?

No. There were strict regulations on the placement of flumes.

Resolved that the Board noted the Officer's update.

8. Verbal update on External Wall Insulation

The Housing Development and Enabling Manager provided an update on the provision of external wall insulation for 40 Cornish "off gas" homes and some "on gas" homes.

The Council had funded this project themselves and would continue to look for additional funding sources to fund more properties within the housing stock.

Low Carbon Exchange had the contract to supply and fit the wall insulation and they would be on site in early April for a 15 week build. Tenants had to remove all wall fixings and could not replace them.

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

- It was suggested that a solution was found to provide alternative outside lighting if tenants had to remove security lights.
- It was also recommended that removed tiles were retained.

Resolved that the update be noted.

9. Verbal update on Photovoltaic Systems

The Housing Development and Enabling Manager gave an update on the installation of 350 Photovoltaic systems to the TDBC Housing Stock.

Two local installers had been contracted to complete 175 homes each. Western Power would dictate how many properties could be connected to the grid. The installers would be on-site from early April 2015 until the end of July 2015.

Noted that the tenants had to sign a Tenant Variation Agreement.

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

- Would rural properties be considered?
- *Yes - 2 months down the line.*
- Would it be a greater benefit to use the system to heat water?
Yes. If there was an emersion heating system it could be diverted.

Resolved that the update be noted.

10. Verbal update on Right to Buy Social Mobility Fund

The Housing Development Project Lead updated the Board on a bid submitted to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) for funding so that they could offer cash incentives to tenants eligible for Right to Buy.

Some social tenants who were able to afford to exercise their Right to Buy are prevented from doing so because the social property in which they live was not suitable for their needs, or was difficult to mortgage. Older tenants might wish to move to a different area; working age tenants might want to move closer to employment opportunities; and some tenants struggled to get a mortgage because they lived in a property of non-standard construction.

Local authorities were invited to submit bids for funding to provide a local scheme to provide a one-off cash payment of £20,000 per application to eligible tenants in place of their Right to Buy discount to enable them to purchase a property on the open market.

If the bid was successful the Council would be appreciative for help from the Board in promoting the scheme (mid-April).

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

- Had there been a similar scheme previously?
Yes and it was successful.
- It was good that the Council Housing stock would be retained.

Resolved that the update be noted.

11. Verbal update on the opening of the Vale View Development, West Bagborough

The Board all agreed that the site was impressive and fitted in well with the local area.

It was agreed that a letter should be sent to the architects congratulating them on the success of the design.

Resolved that the update be noted.

12. Verbal update on the Somerset Tenant Conference Feedback

Congratulations were offered to the Tenant Empowerment Manager on a successful conference.

The speakers Jenny Osborne had given support from the Tenant Participation Advisory Service and Tim Martin had promoted SHOUT (**S**ocial **H**ousing **U**nder **T**hreat).

Notes/records from the conference would be typed up and made available to the Board members.

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

- Were there any solutions to how the Council would build extra houses?
- Could compulsory purchase orders be made to land acquire more land?
- Building companies had lots of land as options rather than owning the land.
- Issues were also raised around the Council borrowing more money.

Resolved that the Board noted the Attendees feedback.

The meeting ended at 7.50pm

Next meeting: Monday 20 April 2015 in JMR, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton.