

**Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on Tuesday 17 May 2011 at 6pm in the John Meikle Room, the Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton.**

**Present:** Mr Edwards (Vice–Chairman) (In the Chair)  
Councillor Bowrah, Mrs Drage, Mr Galpin, Mr Hellier, Mrs Marshall and Mr Watkin

**Officers:** James Barraah (Community Services Manager), Stephen Boland (Housing Services Lead), Steven Clarke (Estate Officer), Norah Day (Housing Estate Manager), Stuart Hall (Senior Technical Officer), Helen Mockridge (Administrative Officer), Martin Price (Tenant Empowerment Manager), Rosie Reed (Tenant Services Development Officer) and Phil Webb (Housing Manager – Property Services)

**Others:** Councillor Mrs Adkins

(The meeting commenced at 6.10pm)

**9. Apology**

Apology: Mr Etherington (Chairman)

**10. Minutes**

The minutes of the meetings of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 15 March 2011 and 18 April 2011 were taken as read and were signed.

**11. Declaration of Interests**

The following members declared a personal interest as a Council house tenant:

- Mrs Drage
- Mr Edwards
- Mr Galpin
- Mr Hellier
- Mrs Marshall
- Mr Watkin

**12. Disabled Adaptations**

The Senior Technical Officer gave an overview of the scheme to the Board members and the criteria for grant eligibility. The Housing Act 1996 set out what Councils could and could not do. Any adaptations undertaken had to

fulfil a need. Adaptations had to be necessary, appropriate, reasonable and practical. All referrals came from the tenant's occupational therapist. The maximum grant in England was £30,000. Referrals received for work costing under £2000 were automatic as they were not means tested.

The Board asked about the length of time it took from the award of the Grant until completion of the works. Many cases were for people with terminal illnesses and these were classed as priorities. Applications were scored by an Occupational Therapist.

The Board asked how people made a referral to an Occupational Therapist and it was explained this was through Care Direct, a One Stop Shop and the GP services.

It was explained that the Grant was made up from the Housing Revenue Account. The budget was £200,000 for those adaptations under £2000 and £300,000 for those over £2000.

**Resolved** that more detailed figures be brought to a future meeting.

### **13. Housing Revenue Account Reform Project**

Considered report previously circulated regarding the Project Outline, this showed how the Housing Revenue Account would be run in the future. The Negative Subsidy system was changing. The Community Services Manager explained that the Project Group was convened to lead Taunton Deane Borough Council's response to the Government's reform of the Housing Revenue Account arrangements, which included plans to radically change Council Housing Finance. Taunton Deane Borough Council would need to procure lending to cover the debt repayment plan over a number of years. Eventually Taunton Deane Borough Council would be free of debt and self financing, with total control over its finances. Change would be effective from 1 April 2012.

Details were submitted of the three broad phases which would collectively deliver the associated outcomes by April 2012.

Reported a summary of the Project Work Packages and the requirements of the Workstream Leads.

The work packages were detailed as follows:

Treasury Management – when obtaining a loan, the Council would take advice with regard to yield and risks and would consider the wider financial market.

Data Checking – constant updating of records was required to enable the Government to decide how much National Debt would be taken on.

Financial Controls/Accountancy Changes – this was a significant responsibility. Processes needed to be at a certain level to enable risks to be managed appropriately. The Council had to evidence that it could make any repayments.

Affordable Housing – the Council had to act more like a business. Assets would have to be reviewed, with regard to benefits and potential for income, to enable the debt to be paid more quickly. However, this would have to balance against any wider community benefit and the impacts of any decisions would have to be considered.

Policies/Best Practice – the Council had to ensure that operating policies were in place and were fit for purpose to adequately address any changes.

Income Management – a better policy had to be put in place for future income streams, including a clear policy to develop rents. Potential income would have to be profiled. It would take 22 years to pay off the debt and maximum income streams had to be ensured. It was in the Council's interest to get a high level of arrears paid and turn around times for void properties would need to continue to improve.

Business Plan – the HRA Business Plan was being renewed.

Stakeholder Engagement – the needs and views of the stakeholder groups, which included staff and tenants would be considered.

Assets – there would be an Asset Management Plan.

Baselining/Benchmarking – the Council would need to be a top performer as it would be compared to other organisations.

The Governance and Responsibilities were detailed to ensure accountability of the project and its outcomes. The Board would receive regular updates on the progress of the project.

The Project Sponsor is Shirlene Adam and external consultants would be Recruited to assist in developing the HRA Business Plan.

Councillor Bowrah requested updates on a quarterly basis, on voids, debt management progress and the disposable Housing Stock. He was informed that a report would go to Corporate Scrutiny in early July regarding voids and the Board would also be updated at that time.

**Resolved** that the report and presentation be noted.

#### **14. Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2012 - 2042**

The Business Plan would detail tenants', officers and Councillors' aspirations and engagement would take place between now and November.

A direction would be set as to how to achieve the Council's objectives for the Housing Service over the next 30 years. Proposals from consultants had been received and selection would take place in the near future.

Further information would be reported to the Board.

## 15. Anti Social Behaviour Service Standard and Policy

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the revised Anti Social Behaviour policy and new Hate Policy for the Council.

The report outlined what tenants in council properties could expect from landlord services on managing anti social behaviour together with specific details of the service.

How the Council would deal with anti social behaviour caused by its tenants or their visitors was reported. The Policy would be reviewed on a regular basis to reflect changes in legislation and people's behaviour and would link into the new Hate Policy which had been drafted.

**Resolved** that the Anti Social Behaviour Service Standard and Policy be approved.

## 16. Tenant's Open Day

The Tenant Empowerment Manager reported the feedback received from tenants following the Tenants' Open Day held at Somerset County Cricket Ground on 18 April 2011.

The feedback included the different ways tenants would like to be involved in the housing service delivery, details of the most popular stands visited and suggestions from tenants to improve any future events.

Over 100 tenants attended. The feedback received had been very positive.

**Resolved** that

(1) the Tenant Services Empowerment Manager's report be noted; and

(2) the Tenants' Open Day become an annual event.

## 17. Leisure Facilities for Younger People

Kevin Hellier asked about Leisure Facilities for Children. The Community Services Manager explained that there were a range of play facilities. External Funding had been received to develop and upgrade sites. The Council had no Capital money available for additional provision at the present time, although funds were available for residents' groups to provide facilities in their area. Councillor Bowrah suggested that the Portfolio Holder Councillor Herbert be invited to the next meeting to explain the plans envisaged for the future.

The Tenant's Forum had £14,500 of grants approved which had funded 7 or 8 projects. The Budget for Youth Initiative Projects had increased to £18,000 for use across the Borough.

**Resolved** that the Community Development Officer be invited to bring a summary report to the next Board meeting and that the Portfolio Holder

Councillor Mrs Herbert also be invited to attend to report the Council's future plans.

**18. Tenant Participation and Advisory Service Annual Conference**

The Tenant Empowerment Manager circulated a leaflet regarding the Tenant Participation and Advisory Service Annual Conference.

**Resolved** that three members of the Tenant Services Management Board attend the conference with possibly one member of staff

**19. Dates of Future Meetings**

Considered report previously circulated, regarding the dates and times of future meetings.

**Resolved** that the dates of future meetings be accepted and noted with the exception that the meeting on 12 July 2011 which would be rearranged.

(The meeting ended at 7.40pm)