

Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on Monday 24th September 2012 at 6pm in the Meeting Room, Kilkenny Court, Taunton.

- Present:** Mr Dustyn Etherington (Chairman), Mrs Jessie Bunn, Mrs Enid Drage, Mr Mark Edwards, Mr Dennis Galpin, Mr Ian Gould, Mrs Judith Hegarty, Mr Robert Middleton, and Councillor Robert Bowrah.
- Officers:** Tim Burton (Growth and Development Manager), James Barrahan (Health and Housing Manager), Steve Boland (Housing Services Lead), Phil Webb (Property Services Manager), Martin Price (Tenant Empowerment Manager), Rosie Reed (Tenant Services Development Officer) and Emma Hill (Corporate Support Officer).
- Others:** Lisa Wychwood and Graham Vickery from Halcon North Tenants & Residents Association
Sarah Harwood on behalf of her parents.
John Beaman
Mrs B Edwards
Councillor Mrs F Smith

(The meeting commenced at 6.00pm)

1. Apologies

Mrs Tammy Urquhart, Councillor Steve Brooks and Mr Kevin Hellier

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 20 August 2012 were taken as read and signed.

3. Public Question Time

Representatives of the Halcon North Tenants and Residents Association as well as local residents and tenants have expressed a desire to ask questions to express their opinions. Chairman suggested that this be done after Board Members have had their opportunity to question officers having given their report.

4. Declaration of Interest

The following members declared a personal interest as a council house tenants:

- Mr Dustyn Etherington
- Mr Mark Edwards
- Mrs Jessie Bunn
- Mrs Enid Drage
- Mr Dennis Galpin
- Mr Ian Gould
- Mrs Judith Hegarty
- Mr Robert Middleton

Councillor Bowrah declared a personal interest as he has family members who are council tenants.

5. Update Report on Halcon North Regeneration Project.

Considering the report previously circulated, concerning an update on the further work undertaken since the Executive resolved to progress the project to the next stage in October 2011. Board Members are requested to comment and provide a steer to the Community Scrutiny Committee as to whether the Council should still proceed to the next stage involving developing a more detailed business case leading to the procurement of a developer; or alternatively whether in light of this further information that alternative options should now be considered.

Halcon North comprises 7.25 hectares of housing land and approximately 220 dwellings. This part of Halcon features in the top 5% of most deprived wards in the country. The project comprises redevelopment of the area which covers Creechbarrow Road, Valley Road, Beadon Road and Moorland Road.

The Development appraisal indicated a maximum of fifty dwellings being returned to the HRA, whilst the consultation identifies 75 respondents would like to move back to the area as a Council tenant should redevelopment occur.

The Board was updated last year, when the Outline Business Case and the Project Brief was presented and considered. The Executive subsequently resolved to accept that the wider benefits of regeneration outweighed any concerns around mix and tenure and to proceed to the next stage and procurement of a developer.

The Board showed support for the Halcon Regeneration Project but not of the return of 50 houses coming back to HRA. Despite this objection to such a small return of houses the Board resolved to support the major regeneration of Halcon.

In the interim, the Council has been gathering information about the condition of the Council's Housing stock as well as re-engaging with the communities in the Halcon area.

After this update report is presented here, the board and residents' comments and opinions would be taken to first Community Scrutiny Committee then the Executive Committee.

There are still four options open to the Council. They are as follows:

1. Accept that the wider benefits of regeneration outweigh any concerns around mix and tenure and proceed to the next stage and procurement of a developer.
2. Remove the requirement to return any properties to the Housing Revenue Account which would improve viability and, therefore, increase the overall proportion of affordable housing within the scheme.
3. Move away from current proposals and explore options for a smaller scale redevelopment.
4. No longer consider full regeneration and look at retrofit options funded through

the HRA to address the overcrowding issues.

Consultation with residents was carried out during late August by the Estates and Community Development Teams accompanied by members of the Tenant services Management Board and Tenants' Forum. Eighty two per cent of households completed the questionnaire, the full results of which are attached as an appendix. Fifty Two per cent of respondees supported the preferred option i.e. full scale regeneration, although analysis of responses to questions two and six indicate that a number of the issues in this neighbourhood and improvements necessary to address such problems could be achieved without demolishing all the properties e.g. removing problem families, dealing with rubbish, removal of planters, reduced speeding etc.

Answers to questions four and seven around size and occupancy of properties indicate that whilst the majority of properties are two bed roomed most are occupied by three or less people. This would seem to imply that overcrowding is not widespread and that extension of some existing properties could be a more proportionate response to this issue. Responses around general state of repair identify a wide range of issues not related to the structural condition of the properties.

The Halcon Multi-agency Group's (MAG) views were recently sought. Organisations represented at the meeting included the local church, Friends of Hamilton Gault Park, the Police, NHS, Halcon Primary School, the Link Centre and Knightstone Housing Association.

The group considered that there are housing issues in the area, but that a solely housing regeneration would be an opportunity missed to improve the area, other solutions apart from housing are needed.

There was general support to a phased approach to regeneration, which could act as a catalyst for further change. Development should be linked to an overall master plan which identifies opportunities for change across the entire estate (e.g. around school, church etc.) and not just in these four streets.

A full scale and unphased redevelopment would cause issues around the school roll and upon neighbour and family support networks.

The number of houses should not be maximised at the expense of the health and wellbeing of residents. Whilst stock is not necessarily the biggest issue in the area, issues arising from siblings sharing bedrooms should be addressed.

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

- Member suggested a phased regeneration of the Halcon area i.e. street by street. Also residents who said no to returning after the regeneration may change their mind once they have seen the area afterwards.
- Member asked what percentage of houses would be disabled friendly.
Officer said there would be a chance that residents may change their mind after the regeneration. The exact percentage is not known as yet. But officers would return to the Board to discuss the precise details at later date.
- Member suggested Officers speak to and ask residents with disabilities to advise them on the dos and don'ts for the houses.

- Members were happy with the report but were unsure what option to support for the Regeneration project. How many low cost houses would be available in the scheme.
Officer stated that there would be 200 affordable houses available under the new scheme. The total number of houses would be 350 to 400 houses. This would be split between the housing market and affordable. But not social rented.
- Member showed concerns over losing 192 houses. The Regeneration project was supposed to improve the lives of the residents and tenants of Halcon North. Council could start by removing the brick planters.
- Member was surprised by the number of residents and tenants who didn't want to return the estate after the regeneration.
- Member showed concerns that Council couldn't guarantee communities would stay together after the regeneration.
- Member suggested that the Council should be more sensitive at where it moves and relocates tenants and residents. In relation mainly to problem families.
- Member asked what the financial implications if they were to increase to 65 houses from 50.
Officer stated it would have to be funded by HRA but there is no exact cost. It would depend on the size of the houses.
- Member asked if money from business plan could go into providing additional houses.
Officer stated that this was not currently planned but something that the Council could look at.
Officer mentioned additional expenditure wouldn't just include the build cost but the ongoing maintenance of the additional houses.
- Member asked how many houses would be energy efficient of the 50 planned homes.
Officer stated that new homes would naturally be more energy efficient than the original houses as new builds generally are. The Council would have to look into this more and consider the increase in building cost for more energy efficient houses.

After Board Members discussed this item, Members of public made the following comments and asked questions.

- A resident stated that only 1 or 2 houses in the area create problems for all the streets.
- Request for the removal of the brick planter was echoed. It was stated that residents felt they were a hazard.
- It was commented that the majority of the extra houses being built in the Regeneration Project would not be socially rented houses or Council owned and this would break up the links of familiarity and support that communities have built up.
- Concern was shown if the number of houses in the areas were to reduce this would impact the school including teachers and general staff. Impact could mean people in the area lose their jobs at the school.
- Resident asked if new community facilities could be part of the Regeneration including new school and health centre as well as just extending current houses rather rebuilding.

- Resident commented that current market value of the houses for some residents wouldn't allow them to purchase a similar size house elsewhere in Taunton. Value of most three or four bed houses £130,000.
- Resident commented also the many residents have been refused mortgages or not eligible due to age/value of property.

Chairman enquired of Board Members and members of the public present if there were comments, suggestions or ideas for solutions:

- Resident suggested a phased regeneration of the area, moving block by block through the estate. Moving residents into the empty houses as a temporary measure.
- Resident commented that not returning to the estate and limiting the number of times they have to move would reduce the amount of upheaval to their families.
- Resident commented that some of the houses suffer with overcrowding or under occupancy.
- Members showed support for suggestion of phased regeneration.
- Member asked why the Council couldn't undertake a small scale, block by block regeneration.
- Member showed concerns over financial impacts of taking money from the business plan.
- Member commented that the housing surplus could be used for other tenants and houses.
- Members commented that it needs to stack up financially whichever option Council goes with.
- Member supported the suggestion of looking at household sizes, making sure the families and people were in the correct size house.
- Member said that when promises are made they need to be kept and better estate management is needed.
- It was commented that only one option was given last time.
- Member commented that a long term phase of regeneration would be more costly.
Officer stated that it would be more costly. This is based on no loss of stock.
- Member commented that they were not happy with any loss of housing stock.
Officer mentioned another factor; money from the sales could be injected back into the scheme. The Council would be on their own but there is the possibility of Grant Funding.
- Member commented that it would be cheaper to improve the existing housing stock in some cases. This would prevent the breakup of communities.
- Observations of a resident who accompanied an estate officer; communities appeared to be well knitted and only a small percentage spoil it for the rest. The planners are a health and safety issue. The scheme is going to break knitted communities and also tidying up the roads would help.
- Member commented that increasing the size of the existing properties through extension and in return re-assessing the rent to be paid for the property.
- Member asked how varied the length of time some tenants had been in their properties is.
- Member asked how many general houses up for sale and how long had some people been on the waiting list as some houses had remained empty for years.
The two projects are linked i.e. Priority Area Strategy and Regeneration Project.

- Member asked residents how they would feel over the noise and disruption of small scale regeneration project.
- Resident commented that some residents and tenants would be affected by the work but small scale regeneration is preferred to large scale and all the upheaval.
- Members commented that they were happy with a form of option two and no loss of housing stock. Maybe a combination of options three and four.
Officers stated that the Council has had quotes for the removal of six of the planters. Advice from the Deane DLO tree section is to be taken in regards to the trees themselves throughout the area.
- Member asked if the Council could allocate money for planting trees in the area.
Officers would come back with results from a survey to the planters and trees. Officer wanted to thank the board and residents for their assistance with the surveys.
- Resident thanked Tenant Empowerment Manager for the way the survey was organised.

Resolved that the:

1. That the officer's report be noted.
2. That Board shows NO support for option one of the Regeneration Project.
3. That the Board shows support and recommends to the Community Scrutiny Committee and the Executive that a combination of options three and four with no loss of housing stock be considered for the Regeneration Project rather than the initial choice of option one.

6. Verbal Report on HRA Business Plan 2012 - 2042.

The Health and Housing Manager gave a verbal update on Taunton Deane's HRA Business Plan. The officer gave a brief update as a full report would be presented to the Board Members next month.

The Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2012-2042 had gone live in April this year. The Business Plan is a working document and changes/amendments to this would be continually made.

The officer informed the Board of the following issues and topics relating to the Business Plan:

- Spending on non-dwelling properties e.g. garages
- The wider allocation on spend for extensions
- The budget for disabled facilities has a proposed increase on five percent year on year.

The Officer highlighted areas of funding as part of the Business Plan; the sustainable energy fund, this to include work on properties as well as education for residents and approval for a temporary project manager post. The Social Housing Development Fund;

details of which to include how the money from this will be spent and development of a policy.

The officer informed the Board of the creation of a post to support residents and tenants through the Welfare Reform and the changes to the Welfare system.

The officers said that models around the impact of the HRA Business Plan impact would be included in a future report for the Board to comment on.

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

- Board Member asked does the change in the timescale of maintenance to properties from eight to five years include painting.
Officers confirmed this change includes all outside maintenance.
- Board Members asked if Officers could keep a closer eye on their painters and some suggested they would rather do it themselves.
Officers reassured Board Members that they are aware of the regular issues with the painting contractors. Officers are reviewing and looking into long term contractors.

Resolved that the Tenant Services Management Board note the officer's report.

7. Update Report on Fire Safety Policy.

Considering the report previously circulated, concerning an update report on the new Fire Safety Policy. Housing Services has carried out a review of its existing fire safety procedures. This review has led to the formulation of a new draft fire safety policy to ensure the safety of tenants and leaseholders, staff contractors and visitors.

TDBC recognises its responsibility as a landlord to ensure the safety of its tenants and leaseholders, staff, contractors and visitors as well as creating a safe environment and minimising risk.

The new draft fire safety policy has been produced in response to the Local Government Group Fire Safety Report published in 2011 and also as a result of recent research undertaken by TDBC, the findings of which formulated a programme of inspections to address health and safety within council properties. The new draft policy applies to all blocks of flats owned and or managed by TDBC irrespective of tenure.

The view of the legal team is agreed that the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 applies and requires a responsible person to complete a Fire Risk Assessment of Common Areas of the building and record and act on the findings to ensure that general fire precautions are provided.

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 places a duty on TDBC as a landlord to take general fire precautions to ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, the safety of the people on the premises and in the immediate vicinity.

This policy supports the HRA business plan 2012-2042 strategic housing objectives, which reflect the council corporate priorities.

In order to deliver the policy it is crucial that we would continue to work in partnership with key agencies including the Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service and Somerset West Private Sector Housing Partnership.

The Tenant's Forum expressed their support for this policy with a few adjustments, which have been included.

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

- Board Member asked if Risk Assessments had been done for the communal areas.
Officer stated that the Risk Assessments for communal areas were some of the first to be completed.
- Board has if Officer's could define a fire hazard. Someone had told them that plug in air fresheners were a hazard.
Officers stated a rolling program of work assessments being completed on priority basis.
- Board Member asked if someone runs and organises an event in a communal areas, does that person have to give out safety notices.
- Board Member asked if we have such a thing as Fire Safety Packs.
- Board Member commented Braille Notices were missing from some of communal areas.

Resolved that the: -

1. The Officers report be noted; and
2. The Tenant Services Management Board supports the recommendation for approval of the policy to portfolio holder.

8. Update Report on Mobility Scooter Policy.

Considering the report previously circulated, concerning an update detailing a new Mobility Scooter Policy relating to Taunton Deane Borough Council compliance with Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. This policy was produced alongside the new Fire Safety Policy.

The Council recognises its responsibility as a landlord to ensure the safety of its tenants and leaseholders, staff, contractors and visitors. The new draft mobility scooter policy has been produced to support the fire safety policy. The new draft policy applies to all blocks of flats owned and or managed by the Council, irrespective of tenure.

This policy supports the HRA business plan 2012-2042 strategic housing objectives, which reflect the council corporate priorities.

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 places a duty on the Council as a landlord to take general fire precautions to ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, the safety of the people on the premises and in the immediate vicinity. Mobility scooters in communal hallways have been identified as a risk.

In order to deliver the policy it is crucial that we will continue to work in partnership with key agencies including the Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service and Somerset West Private Sector Housing Partnership.

Comments from the Tenants' Forum on 12th September 2012 expressed their support for this policy with a few adjustments, which have been included.

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

- Board Member commented that they were a Mobility Scooter user and despite being heavily insured as required, owners would be liable and open to theft if vehicles were stored outside.
Officers stated that the Council has a duty to ensure hallways and fire exits are kept clear at all times.
- Board Member asked if outside charging points and the installation of secure anchor points for scooters could be looked at.
Officers stated that the council were looking into a variety of storage solutions.
- Board Member suggested that tenants should pay for this facility, a cost per week.
- Board Member mentioned that there is example of outside storage for scooters at Victoria Gate.
- Board Member suggested pairing empty properties more carefully with correct users.
- Board Member suggested establishing medical need for Mobility Scooter before making specific arrangement for tenants or residents.

Resolved that the:-

1. The officer's report on the New Mobility Scooter Policy be noted; and
2. The Board supports the recommendation for approval of the policy to portfolio holder.

9. AOB

No further business was raised at this meeting.

(The meeting ended at 8.16pm)