

Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on Monday 20 June 2011 at 6pm in the John Meikle Room, the Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton.

Present: Mr Etherington (Chairman)
Mr Edwards (Vice-Chairman)
Councillors Bowrah and Brooks, Mrs Drage, Mr Galpin, Mrs Hegarty and Mr Hellier

Officers: James Barra (Community Services Manager), Stephen Boland (Housing Services Lead), Tim Haynes (Property Manager), Helen Mockridge (Administrative Officer), Martin Price (Tenant Empowerment Manager), Rosie Reed (Tenant Services Development Officer), Tracey Vernon (Tenant Services Development Officer) and Scott Weetch (Community Development Lead)

Others: Councillors Mrs Adkins, Mrs Herbert, Prior-Sankey and A Wedderkopp,

(The meeting commenced at 6.04pm)

20. Apology

Apology: Mrs Marshall

It was reported that Mr E Watkin had resigned from the Board.

21. Minutes

The minutes of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 17th May 2011 were taken as read and were signed.

The Tenant Empowerment Manager distributed a paper regarding questions arising from the meeting on 17 May 2011.

The paper showed figures regarding details of activity, budget and expenditure of disabled adaptations for the period 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011. It set out Right to Buy activity figures showing sold and completed applications for the period 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011.

The Housing Services Lead updated the Board regarding the voids report which was due to go to Corporate Scrutiny in July, but had been deferred until September 2011.

22. Public Question Time

Councillor Wedderkopp asked again about tenants building on land next to their property bought under the right to buy scheme. He suggested a clawback agreement be put in place. It was reiterated that any such monies were recovered from the valuation at that time, under the Right to Buy process.

Councillor Prior-Sankey spoke about the priorities for gas central heating where there was none in a property. The Portfolio Holder and Shadow Portfolio Holder for Housing were concerned that larger properties were prioritised which could disadvantage sick tenants.

A group of tenants living in rural areas stated that if solid fuel/log burners were removed, there would be no back up heating should there be a power cut. The Council had 6000 properties therefore a clear policy was needed. It was suggested that fuel poverty be discussed at a future meeting.

23. Declaration of Interests

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

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

Councillor Brooks declared a personal interest as a Council house tenant.

24 Response to Questions asked at the Annual General Meeting on 18 April 2011

Details of the issues raised by Councillor Morrell at the Annual General Meeting together with the responses were submitted.

The Community Services Manager stated that Councillor Morrell had been sent a copy of the responses.

25. Fire Places

Reference Minute No 24/2011, considered report previously circulated regarding the proposed new policy for tenants on the installation and use of log burners/open fires/solid fuel appliances within Council properties.

As a result of harsh winters and increased fuel costs, an increasing number of tenants had wanted to use log burners, solid fuel appliances or open fires. Housing Property Services were concerned about the risks associated with this use and particularly the health and safety implications. The report detailed the current position of the Council, the aim of the standard and an evaluation of the options available. It was recommended that tenants should not be allowed to install and use open fires, log burners or solid fuel appliances in Council properties. It was considered that the risks of allowing

the use of these appliances outweighed the benefits. The Board was asked to consider the following:

- The risk of fire;
- The risk of carbon monoxide poisoning;
- The burning of incorrect fuels;
- In the current climate, all fuel sources were becoming more expensive;
- The appliances, when correctly fitted were expensive to install and maintain. The savings compared to the cost of installation were negligible with a payback period of many years;
- The appliances would only heat one room therefore other heating arrangements would be required;
- If the Council had taken the time, trouble and expense of installing heating, regardless of the heat source, should the tenant be allowed to refuse to use it and install their own.

It was proposed that the costs arising from the implementation of this standard would be met by those wishing to utilise it. Typical costs of a full heating installation were £6000 for oil and £3500 - £4500 for mains gas, dependant on whether there already being a supply to the property. The cost of this work was covered by the HRA Capital budget.

Tenants who had no heating, open fires or solid fuel appliances would be contacted with a view to carrying out a survey and offered a heating installation.

The Board had to consider the following:

Option 1 – that the use of open fires, log burners or solid fuel appliances should not be allowed in Council properties except where they are the only source of heating and have been installed and maintained by the Council. Solid fuel appliances would take priority and over-ride the need for the other options.

The work would be carried out during the void period. Where there was a safe, functional, solid fuel appliance, this would be replaced with the tenant in situ.

Option 2 – that the use of open fires, log burners or solid fuel appliances was only permitted in those properties where mains gas was not available to the street and the property had no renewable technology heating installed. The installation of such appliances would only be approved upon a written application from the tenant and the written acceptance of a number of conditions which were detailed. This option would not be allowed in flats, maisonettes or bed-sits due to increased problems and risk. The condition would also apply to leaseholders.

The work would be carried out during the void period. Where there was a safe, functional, solid fuel appliance, this would be replaced with the tenant in situ.

The Property Manager stated that the installation of any solid fuel appliances would be carried out by a HETAS registered accredited engineer to ensure there were no 'do it yourself' installations.

The Board asked whether renewable fuel could be used. Air source fuel pumps were being trialled by four properties and the trials had reduced costs. Fuel pumps would be used across the rest of the housing stock, where appropriate.

Resolved that Option 2 be approved

26. Summary of Play Provision in Taunton Deane

Considered report previously circulated outlining the recent 'once in a generation' refurbishment of play areas on Taunton Deane. The report outlined where other play provision could be found.

In the last three years there had been significant investment in new play areas as part of the national Playbuilder funding project. Funding from sources such as developer contributions meant there was no direct cost to local tax payers.

The report listed those areas in the Taunton Deane area which had received investment in new play areas.

The Community Development Lead informed the Board that tender documents were being put together for the new play areas at near Asda.

Members complained about some of the litter bins in parks not being emptied. The DLO would be contacted regarding this. Concern was expressed about dog excrement in sand play areas, but the DLO inspected the area weekly and had not experienced any problems. The Community Development Lead was asked to look into two areas and report back to the Board. The Pavilion in Hamilton Park and Allington Close.

Councillor Herbert had asked the DLO for costings as she was concerned that in 10 – 15 years time the life of the play areas' would be over. She wanted guarantees to be checked to enable play equipment to be replaced under guarantees.

The Wellington Skateboard Park was moving forward and the Council would try to match any funds raised.

Ways were being looked at to link the parks in Taunton Deane to the Olympics, sprint tracks were being considered.

Resolved that the report be noted.

27. Asset Management Strategy

Considered the draft dated May 2011 which had been circulated to the Board. The Community Services Manager explained that this was a sample of the main document. The 50 page full document would be provided to Board Members and discussion would take place at a future meeting. Consultants would be appointed.

28. Housing Revenue Account Reform Project

The Community Services Manager identified the link between The Asset Plan and the Housing Revenue Account Reform Project.

He spoke of the Project Brief and Project Streams. £87 million pounds of National Housing debt would become self-financing from next year.

An HRA Project Reform Project Dashboard was circulated to the Board. It would give the Board monthly updates as to how the Project was progressing and flag up any issues of concern.

A 30 year Business Plan would be produced and would address all issues and challenges. Savills had been appointed as consultants and would attend the next meeting. Sessions would also be held with elected members, a wider range of tenants and other housing providers.

29. Status Survey

Considered report previously circulated, regarding the Tenant Services Management Board commissioning of a STATUS Satisfaction Survey during 2011. The results of the survey had been published with the vast majority of tenants (90%) reporting that they were happy with the overall service they had received.

1400 Tenants had been surveyed and there had been a 56% response rate. The Survey would feed into the Business Plan and be used to improve services.

To ensure that the feedback was complete, more work needed to be carried out to improve services and encourage tenants to feel their contributions were worthwhile. It was proposed to set up a small 'Task and Finish' type focus group (led by a tenant), to look at the findings of the survey in detail and to report back to the Tenant Services Management Board in October 2011.

Resolved that:

- (1) the results of the 2011 STATUS Satisfaction Survey be noted; and
- (2) the proposal outlined in the report be approved.

30. Tenant Participation Advisory Service Annual Conference

It was agreed at the last meeting that three Board Members and one member of staff attend the Conference. Four Members had expressed an interest in going, they were Mr Hellier, Mrs Hegarty, Mr Edwards and Councillor Bowrah.

Resolved that four Board Members attend the conference

31. Date of July Board Meeting

It was agreed to hold the next meeting of the Board on 21 July 2011 at 6pm at Lodge Close, Wellington.

(The meeting ended at 8.40pm)