

Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on Tuesday 23 August 2011 at 6pm in the John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton.

Present: Mr Etherington (Chairman)
Mr Edwards (Vice- Chairman)
Councillor Bowrah, Councillor Brooks, Mrs Bunn, Mrs Drage, Mr Galpin, Mrs Hegarty, Mr Hellier, Mrs Marshall and Mrs Urquhart.

Officers: Shirlene Adam (Strategic Director), Stephen Boland (Housing Services Lead), Steven Clarke (Estates Officer), Martin Price (Tenant Empowerment Manager), Christine Thompson (Supported Housing Manager), Tracey Vernon (Tenant Services Development Officer), Lesley Webb (Housing Enabling Lead) and Keith Wiggins (Democratic Services Officer).

Others: Nigel Stuart-Thorn

(The meeting commenced at 6.03pm)

41. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 21 July 2011 were taken as read and were signed.

42. Declaration of Interests

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

- Mrs Bunn
- Mrs Drage
- Mr Edwards
- Mr Etherington
- Mr Galpin
- Mr Hellier
- Mrs Marshall
- Mrs Urquhart

Councillor Brooks declared personal interests as a Council house tenant and as a Member of Somerset County Council.

43. Halcon North Project

The Strategic Director explained that the Halcon North project was still progressing and proposal documents were still in draft form.

The project aimed to regenerate the area of Halcon North through a change in physical and social environment, by providing green space, community facilities and improvements in housing quality and choice.

The supporting documents previously circulated showed that the preferred option was to deliver the redevelopment in partnership with a Housing Association.

The Council's appointed consultants (Savill's) had indicated their view that there was an affordability gap of eight million pounds between the cost of developing the preferred option and the return on the project. They had been asked to undertake a further delivery appraisal to see what might be deliverable in current market conditions.

The Council intended to take Savill's new report to the Community Scrutiny Committee on 3 October and then take decisions at Executive on 10 October.

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

- Are building costs rising? ;
- Will the Council ask questions of Plymouth and other authorities who may have undertaken similar regeneration projects? *Yes;*
- Why were the estimates for "retrofit" as high as £60,000 per property?;
- The vast majority of Council tenants still want their homes to remain under Council control;
- Why don't the Council now re-consider the Local Authority New Build option? *The new Housing Revenue Account flexibility would still struggle to fund any significant Council project on its own;*
- What percentage of housing will be designed for the elderly or those with disabilities? *The Council continues to consult with disabilities groups and any individuals assigned to accommodation would have their personal needs assessed;*

Resolved to request that a draft update report be provided to the next committee meeting and be circulated to the three Halcon ward councillors.

44. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Reform Dashboard

Considered project progress dashboard report previously circulated, concerning planned reforms to council housing finance in England and the management of those changes by the Council.

The changes would mean that, rather than the negative subsidy the Council currently paid back to the Government from its rents (approximately £7million per year), the Council would be allocated a share of the national housing debt directly. Draft debt settlement figures issued by the Government suggested the Council's share of the debt would be £87million. The Council would be required to pay this debt amount back in March 2012.

The dashboard showed that eight of the ten key project activities were on target and had met all project milestones.

Resolved that the update be noted.

45. The Respect Charter

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the merits of Taunton Deane Borough Council signing up to the Respect Charter, the successor to the Respect Standard for Housing.

Taunton Deane Borough Council did not sign up to the Respect Standard, as the self assessment process showed a number of areas that required improvement before sign up. Officers believed that due to service improvement the Council was now better placed to achieve the aims of the Respect Charter.

The Charter aimed to be outcome-focused and not prescriptive or process-driven. Its purpose was to improve anti-social behaviour services.

Over 100 organisations including 15 councils had signed up to the charter since June 2011.

Members of the committee heard that overall noise remained the biggest cause of complaints locally. Relationships with the Police were good and they now had officers specifically targeting anti-social behaviour.

Members discussed a number of local issues and were advised to always report their concerns to the police.

Resolved to support the recommendation that Taunton Deane Borough Council apply for accreditation to the Respect Charter.

46. Formalisation of Tenant Involvement in developing Supported Housing Services

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the work undertaken by Taunton Deane Borough Council to involve tenants in developing housing related support services..

The report updated members on the progress of formalising the role of the Service Development Group and their terms of reference.

Resolved that the report be noted.

47. Annual Report to Tenants 2010/2011

The Tenant Empowerment Manager explained that the Council intended to produce another Annual Report to tenants, as the previous year's report had been well received.

The report was intended to be produced by October and be distributed with the Tenant's Talk newsletter.

The format of the report was being considered, with the intention of making it something useful for the entire year.

Members discussed how best to promote and inform tenants of the work of the board.

Resolved to support the production of an annual report.

48. Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) Annual Conference

Members of the board who attended the TPAS Annual Conference gave an account of the conference and the workshops and seminars.

The majority of those attending were Housing Association tenants. Members heard the event was shorter and held in a better format than previous years and was well worthwhile attending.

(The meeting ended at 7.55pm)