

Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on Thursday, 23 July 2015 at 6pm in the JMR, the Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton.

Present: Mr R Balman (Chair)
Ms M Davis (Vice-Chair)
Mr A Akhigbemen, Mrs J Bunn, Mrs J Hegarty, Mr I Hussey, Mr D Galpin, Mr K Hellier, Cllrs Appleby and Bowrah.

Officers: James Barraah (Director of Housing & Communities), Stephen Boland (Housing Services Lead), Terry May (Assistant Director Property & Development), Martin Price (Tenant Empowerment Manager), Rachael Searle (Housing Development Project Lead), Rosie Walsh (Housing Development Project Officer), Michelle Brooks (Democratic Services Officer),

(The Meeting commenced at 6.00pm)

1. Apologies

Cllr T Beale.

2. Minutes of TSMB 1 June 2015

All happy, signed by Chair.

3. Public Question Time

No questions received for Public Question Time.

4. Declarations of Interests

As previous.

Cllr Appleby declared family and friends in Taunton Deane housing and that he is a leaseholder of a property in Taunton Deane.

Staffing update – Kene Ibezi has now left, James Barraah introduced Terry May. Terry will fill this role for the interim 6 months, while the role is reviewed.

Terry has a lot of experience with housing associations and property teams, and we look forward to his input.

5. Creechbarrow Road Development Update

Dashboard format has been updated for July 2015, with the main points being:

- The first occupation of the Knightstone units will be Friday, 24 July, then further work towards the Taunton Deane units handover. Currently have properties at many different stages, from foundation stage to handover.
- Currently have all activities and trades on site, which is providing much opportunity for apprentices. Across site there are 13 apprentices:
1 plumber, 1 fencer, 1 electrician, 3 roofers, 2 ground workers, 5 bricklayers.
- Community liaison drop in sessions continue at 5 Moorland Road, and more interest is expected as the handover of units gets closer. People are also being referred by Ward Councillors.
- Site tours continue, with Councillors and Staff members taking part. There is tour being arranged for new Ward Councillors in September 2015. The intention is to arrange a tour for TSMB members and Tenants' Forum members once the first units have been completed.
- Returning decants have been taken to see the new properties, and will be taken back again nearer the time of completion.
- Programme timings going forward - there are issues with labour shortages, particularly bricklaying, There has been the impact of extra time needed due to new asbestos finds, gas mains diversion and retaining walls. Contractor has submitted an extension of time claim for time period to push out completion date, this is currently being assessed.

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

Residents are pleased with the development, but concerned with uneven pathways (accessibility for wheelchairs, pushchairs), unfinished drains, fence heights, dust pollution and noise pollution (radios and language).

Noted. The Roman Road end pathway, projected above the surface and

would be elevated by the top coat, but this was delayed. Dust – there is a bowser, and damping down takes place continuously, the contractors have been reminded, in the last 24 hours, that this is an issue and that they must keep on top of it. Radios can only be used inside the property and this is enforced rigorously, cannot be audible outside of the property, any complaints should be passed on and this can be reported and filed across to site management Language to be reported straight away and then the site manager can sort out immediately. The fence height is below the required height and will be replaced at the contractors own cost, properties will not be handed over until the fences are the correct height.

Comment – Well done to all, good to hear that TDBC is on top of the concerns / problems. Great to see so many apprentices.

Resolved that the Board noted the Officer's report.

6. Briefing on July 2015 Budget Statement.

Statements will be available at a later date when all the detail is available for the Housing and Welfare bill. More reports will be presented further into the year.

Headlines:

- Reductions in rents from next year to be 1% (social housing rents), for the next 4 years. TDBC will have to model and assess in the HRA Business Plan.
- Pay to Stay - Earlier proposal threshold was £60,000 (household income greater than) in if excess of this need to pay market rents. Waiting for details could now be £30,000.
- Revisiting Lifetime tenancies, there has previously been consultation around introducing flexible tenancies. Proposals around this, does TDBC introduce Life time tenancies? May not be applicable to every tenant, but could be a useful purpose as part of a menu of options. Sounding out at the moment, these proposals may well be mandatory, again waiting for details. Issues are that TDBC has limited accommodation available, not enough supply to meet demand, and it is about making the best use of stock.
- Welfare benefits - cap amount claim greater than £20,000. Concerns are whether affordable and how the changes would be received, this

could result in people not paying rent. A number of changes also affect TDBC as a landlord.

- House properties - disposal of local high value properties one bedroom flats, approximate value above £134,000. These could be sold instead of being re-let, with some monies to the Treasury. This may not affect TDBC, but these are interesting times, with real challenges.

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Any figures at all on impact on 30 year Business Plan?

Lucy Clothier (accountant) has done some work on modelling on the impact. The opportunities in the Business Plan 2012-2042 have been reduced, the surplus of the Business Plan is significantly less. Over 4 years the reduction of impact is £9m, therefore there will be cash flow pressure impact to fulfil plans and there is a requirement to look at debt repayments. The impact affects Local Authorities and Housing Associations. Currently advertising internally for a project manager to lead work on HRA Business Plan review for next year. The plan was due to be reviewed, but the budget announcements has now increased the urgency of business plan review.

Will Increase in rent be forwarded local Councils / Government?

Local authority will return to the Treasury, wait to confirm the details, will get an opportunity to comment. Sometimes mandatory and sometimes a choice, we have to wait for details.

If automatic permission is giving for brownfield sites, how will this affect affordable housing?

Not familiar with this but will ask Jo Humble and team to look into it

Comment on Lifetime tenancies - Secure tenancies great, but go the other way, tenants will worry that they are able to be evicted.

Market rate for high income earners, assuming this effects current tenants, has anyone spoken to the legal team? New tenancies or a letter to inform them?

Waiting for detail, this didn't previously apply to existing tenants. Not yet been in touch with legal team, much information is coming out daily.

Are you clarifying introductory tenancies.

Not operated currently, but committed to it.

In regard to terms and conditions, for renting a council house, TDBC must maintain clauses and conditions can't be blanket for everyone

Have to see detail when proposals come out and then will know how to respond. Number of changes affect us as a Landlord and we will be looking at different aspects.

How will selling affect us, will we keep the money?
5800 properties, if one property becomes empty and is within the threshold will would probably have to sell.

Even though pay TDBC paid c. £80 m for houses, we don't own them?
TDBC own and manage stock, the Government, through subsidy over the years, have put money in, therefore they have a say, details to come. Ownership in context is relative term, the State contributed and through legislation can ask to change management and will be directed by Government.

Resolved that:

1. the Board note the report.
2. Jo humble is requested to research brownfield sites in relation to affordable housing builds.

7. Feedback from TPAS Conference 2015

This was held in Kenilworth, 8-9 July 2015 and attended by Dennis Galpin, Kevin Hellier, Ivor Hussey and Cllr Bob Bowrah. Attended by 242 male, 137 females, and it was noted many previous sponsors missing. Found the conference well organised and informative.

The highlight of the conference was the speech by the Junior Mayor of Leamington Spa, help with engaging the youth of area with local politics and civic events. Kate Newbold will send further details of how this works.

Interesting conference, with 10% representation from councils, with the rest being from housing associations, would like a conference for council house tenants only.

Thanked the Council for the opportunity to attend.

8. Feedback from Deane House Relocation Project – Review Design on 22 July 2015

This was a Joint meeting with the Tenants' Forum, and members that attended noted the high level of negativity. Unsure if this is because people don't understand the rationale behind the move, or why this particular option has been chosen.

The presenter was impartial, very pro-active in what she put forward, and put out the impression that all have to be positive about this move, as it could happen. Now are curious how staff feel about it, and how it affects them. Huge changes to how all staff work, i.e. new IT systems, budget changes. Major thing to go ahead with, with an awful lot happening.

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How do staff feel?

Staff position is a mixed bag, TDBC is working with 25 staff, a consultative body. No doubt big change to the way of working, smart office with less paper and lower footprint. Some will struggle, some will love it and think it is the best thing to happen. There are clear examples some won't fit, but some that were negative about it at the start of the process, have changed and now have enthused motivation to the move. Will do much to support staff, mock up office with furniture so that some can smart work to get used to it. Current assumption is that being present is a major factor, but productivity is – this will affect staff at all levels.

Original plans for central carpark? Will the plans be altered all the time?

This is the concept design stage, basic outline, and will evolve into a detailed stage which will add a layer of further detail. Thinking has gone much further than the basic plans. Parking is a clear issue, parking for staff will change radically.

Impossible to get to sometimes, long way from parade.

Point referred to already and noted. Pushing Somerset County Council on all fronts how migration and footfall will be mitigated on that site, it has many restrictions. Transport definitely has restrictions – options are crossings, traffic calming, also issues around footpath provision, signage and way marking, traffic flow. Also bus routes and transport assessment for vehicles and pedestrians, look at what advised by technical people.

Access option - multi-storey car park has scooters, maybe take possession of scooter to gain access to building

Yes operates in Bath, charitable organisation not Council run service, will check details and see what influence have.

Too many people and services in one building, could be congested?
On entry there will be generic staff, uniformed police enquiries, and then further in there will be more specialised staff (housing, library), mixing and integration but will be clear. Footfall, yes massive increase, how can reassure this is big enough - essentially doubling the width with the build. Will continue to lobby for two entries to the library as this will attract a large number of customers. Will be having regular discussions to negotiate.

Is the space being taken over currently used, organise a walk around?
Yes, 50 staff been already to see current offices, there are markings where you can visualize, if this can help to envisage scale of what is being proposed, it can be organised.

Can a computer mock-up of the space be provided?
Yes, fly through video imaging will be available. Currently disappointed with the architect designs, very sketchy. There will be displays in library, reception as part of consultation exercise promote wider views. Will need to start better conversations with customers about visiting the office for transactions, electronic means instead, this would be cheaper, quicker and easier to deliver.

Payment machines available 24/7 – pay rent and bills like an ATM?
Longer hours than current council offices, cash machines inside, so no out of hour's access. Consider transferring to other location on estates. Meeting halls handy for tenants, we go to localities (sign up new tenancy, meeting hall) balance time with cost, fresh look at how we do this

9. Future Development Proposal.

Confidential item noted by board.

(Meeting ended 7.45pm)