

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

**Present:** Mr R Balman (Chairman)  
Ms M Davis (Vice-Chairman)  
Mr A Akhigbemen, Mrs J Bunn, Mrs J Hegarty, Mr I Hussey, Cllr Bowrah.

**Officers:** James Barrah (Director of Housing & Communities), Stephen Boland (Housing Services Lead), Steve Clarke (Tenant Services Development Officer), Lucy Clothier (Housing Accountant), Paul Hadley (Housing Manager – Lettings and Anti social behaviour), Shari Hallett (Business Support Manager), Michaela Mullen (Welfare Reform Project Officer), Martin Price (Tenant Empowerment Manager), Phil Webb (Property Services Manager) Michelle Brooks (Democratic Services Officer),

**Others:** Cllr C Appleby, Cllr Mrs J Warmington.

(The Meeting commenced at 6.00pm)

**1. Apologies**

Mr D Galpin, Mr K Hellier, Mr R Middleton, Mr M Edwards.

**2. Minutes of TSMB 1 June 2015**

All agreed.

**3. Public Question Time**

No questions received for Public Question Time.

**4. Declarations of Interests**

As previous.

## 5. Welfare Reform 2014/15 End of Year Report.

The Welfare Reform Act 2012, became law as from 1 April 2013. The Welfare Reform Project Officer continues to provide support and assistance to tenants affected by the changes. To prepare for the introduction and use of Universal Credit (UC), there has been promotion of the use of bank accounts. UC generously matches benefits, especially for workers on zero hours contracts or agency work. UC differs from the current benefit system, as it is not specifically an 'in work' or 'out of work' benefit - it is one benefit for people whatever their employment status, and therefore no need for multiple applications.

Following a survey of tenants in 2013 results indicated that 56% of tenants did not have access to the Internet. To support and assist tenants with digital inclusion, kiosks have been installed to enable internet access to a limited number of useful websites.

Housing Services continues to support tenants through change and will monitor and review throughout the year.

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

- Refer to section 2.1 of the Report, what has the take up been on UC?  
*Not a great deal of take up, as of April 2015 only 7 tenants of TDBC had taken up UC. It is expected there will be a gradual increase, with tenants continually advised and supported. Completely tenants' choice as to whether they choose to pay rent by direct debit.*
- Refer to Chart 5, Kiosk 178 (high usage) – where is it?  
*Derby Way, Bishops Lydeard. Other often used kiosks – Middleway, Wellington, PRC, Priorswood and Deane House.*
- Comment from Cllr Warmington:  
*Cllr Warmington commented on the positive value of the work undertaken by Michaela Mullen and Steve Clarke. The breadth of work is important and beneficial, great to have them both doing this.*

**Resolved** that the Board noted the Officer's report.

## 6. Financial Outturn 2014/15.

The Housing Revenue account (HRA) is a 'Self Financing' account for the Council's Housing Landlord function, which is budgeted to 'break even'. A short synopsis of the financial performance report, with the references made to the below items:

- The HRA outturn for 2014/15 has a net underspend of £1.269m (4.8 % gross income). Section 6 of this explains the factors leading to this position, including staff cost reductions due to the restructure. Responsive maintenance considerably lower than forecast and planned maintenance being re-profiled.
- The HRA Reserve balance as at 31 March 2015 stands at £3.484m, which is above the minimum level (£1.8m) set within the Business Plan.
- The HRA Earmarked Reserves balance as at 31 March 2015 stands at £2.222m, this includes £112k related to the Social Housing Development Fund.

**HRA Underspend** - James Barrah made a recommendation that funds from the 2014/15 underspend be allocated to:

**Table 3: Summary of Recommendations for use of the HRA Underspend**

Description	£000
HRA Business Plan review	150
Pre-void and Tenant Property Inspections	160
Lettings Contingency Budget	100
Sheltered Housing Review Project Manager	60
Mental Health Support	41
Employment Support Three Year Programme	138
<b>TOTAL requested for approval</b>	<b>649</b>

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

- Refer to Table 1 – explanation required -51% of TAA.  
*Procurement savings to repay the loan for Southwest transformation, not as many savings with contracts pushed back.*

- With regard to the bad debt – how is projection affected?  
*Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) support services to claimants, expectation would involve more people from DWP. Relations are good, 3 -4 a month up till March 16. The Business Plan assumes 0.5, 2 or 3 year short term provision.*
- Wrecked properties, will tenants let you in?  
*There is no legal power to gain entry, informal contact only. If Council demand to enter the home, this could be considered harassment. Visible signs can be judged walking around the area, obvious signs outside if the house is not looked after. If there is a Health and Safety risk repair, right of entry is 24 hour notice. There can be influence to support tenants i.e. gas servicing, can indicate if not looked after. The main thing is to be mindful to what is observed, help the tenants to manage themselves.*
- Would there be a cross over with the budget in regard to pre-void/mental health issues or would it be in isolation?  
*Valid point, definitely interaction, it is one partnership interaction, with the ability to sign post to other services.*
- Will there be an employment support programme, or at least links to employers. People are ready to work, but there is a possibility of no jobs to go to.  
*Valid point, the Economic Development team will work on this. This will enable access to employment services. Intention is grow own and hopefully employ internally, as well as provide skills for external employment.*

**Resolved** that the Board Members support the recommendations for the use of the HRA 2104/15 underspend.

## **7. Housing and Communities Performance Indicators Quarter 4 / Outturn performance.**

Considered the report and an overview and summary of managing finances and service delivery detailed. The following points acknowledged:

- Income – rental costs on track and collection good. The current debt lower than last year.
- Star survey is now two years old, with a new survey being undertaken now. Up-to-date information will be available in August 2015, and comparison can then be made.
- Anti-social behaviour ratings up above target.
- Lettings – performance mixed. Properties rent quickly once the property is ready. Offerings good, i.e. first time acceptance, process allocation good. Start to end process is above target.

- Measures adaptations – wet rooms / stair lifts etc. Work to improve performance and spend against budget.
- Stock issues – SD2 no resources to manage, improving energy efficiency in stock, get to a point to measure.
- Failure to achieve 100% required for gas certificates, one of these 2 properties is a safe house which is secure, no access.
- Repairs, maintenance and contactor systems performance is being measured. Re-iteration that property and housing work together with contractor.

**Resolved** that Board Members note the report.

## 8. Rent Arrears by Area.

This item covered information previously requested by the Tenant Services Management Board. Detailed items:

- £24m rental income, with a target rate of £360,000 arrears to achieve. As of 30 March 2015, the amount was £356,000.
- Estates Officers have good relations with tenants.
- Administration (claims and benefits) can affect the outstanding amounts.

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

- Are the same people consistently in rent arrears? Do you charge interest for late payments?  
*Approximately 1300 people in rent arrears, not necessarily the same families, as circumstances change for families. Interest not charged as the process is to reduce the debt, therefore payment schemes in place to continue to pay the debt off.*
- Is the debt related to benefits and the time taken to assess claims?  
*Re-payments due to revenues and benefits is a hit on a weekly basis. 63-65% of tenants on housing benefits. UC could bring change as payment is continual, although there is a risk of tenants not paying. Look at requesting direct payment or direct debits.*
- Is there a fluctuation in time i.e. Christmas / summer?  
*Definitely, this is known through the tracking counter and is around these times. Incentives in place for staff to keep on top, and clear the rent arrear debt.*

**Resolved** that the Board noted the Officer's report.

## 9. Responsive Repairs Performance.

This report identifies the responsive repairs performance data of Property Services contractors, including the DLO, that deliver responsive maintenance work for the HRA. This report was requested by the Board, 20 April 2015, and addresses concerns including:

- DLO and Property services previously both used different reporting methodologies. From now into the future there is to be one reporting methodology, which will provide more accurate reporting. Differences in DLO and Housing figures will now be rectified and we can be confident in the figures reported.
- The targets for priorities are being made, but more work is needed with the majority of contractors to find ways to improve.

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

- Could there be an Alhco problem, company not reporting the problems?  
*Aware of problems, and parameters have been set. Important to keep in touch with contractors. To be followed up by Phil Webb.*
- Environmental issue, dog bin sited by the children's park Monmouth Rd, request to resite or replace.  
*There is a fund, to be followed up by Stephen Boland.*

**Resolved that:**

1. The Board noted the Officer's report.
2. Agreed that Phil Webb will investigate reporting procedures with Alcho.
3. Agreed that Stephen Boland investigate the environmental issue.

## 10. Additional items

- County Hall, how will people get there safely – traffic problems etc.  
*This item is currently flagged with the County Council. Aware of the situation, especially around the Crescent and greater reassurance of traffic measures is ongoing dialogue. Things being considered – traffic diversion / landscaping.*
- Plastic Facia boards causing a problem for nesting House Martins  
*Phil Webb to seek answers and report back.*

(Meeting ended 7.45pm)