

Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 25 February 2016 at 6pm in The John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton.

Present: Mr R Balman (Chairman)
Ms M Davis (Vice-Chairman)
Mrs J Bunn, Mrs J Hegarty, Mr I Hussey, Mr R Middleton, Mr D Pierowicz,
and Councillor S Coles.

Officers: Julie-Anne Gordon (Housing Development Project Officer), Caroline White (Housing Development Project Lead), Lucy Clothier (Senior Accountant - Services), Stephen Boland (Housing Services Lead), Terry May (Interim Assistant Director – Property and Development), Simon Lewis (Assistant Director - Housing & Community Development), Paul Grant (Building Services Manager), Rachel Searle (Housing Development Project Lead), Jo Humble (Housing Development and Enabling Manager), Martin Price (Tenant Empowerment Manager), and Emma Hill (Democratic Services Officer).

Others: Mark Evans; Head of Inspired 2 Achieve
Julia Williamson; Vice-Chair, Tenants' Forum

(The meeting commenced at 6.00pm)

1. Apologies

Mr D Galpin, Mr K Hellier, Councillor Bowrah, Mr A Akhigbemen

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 25 January were taken as read and were signed.

3. Public Question Time

No questions received for Public Question Time.

4. Declarations of Interests

Mr R Balman, Ms M Davis, Mrs J Bunn, Mrs J Hegarty, Mr I Hussey, Mr R Middleton, Mr D Pierowicz declared personal interests as Taunton Deane Borough Council Housing Tenants.

5. “Get On” Tenant Empowerment Support Programme

Mark Evans, Head of Inspired 2 Achieve, gave a verbal information presentation to the Board Members concerning the “Get On” Tenant Employment Support Programme (TESP).

Below was a summary of the main points from the Information Presentation concerning the programme:

- “Get On” TESP was working with the residents and tenants of Taunton Deane.
- The contract had been won by “Inspired 2 Achieve” who were working with Yarlington Housing Group currently.
- Inspired 2 Achieve had been set up as social enterprise.
- After success with Yarlington, Inspired 2 Achieve decided to investigate working with other housing providers.
- The programme was commissioned for three years within the three One Team areas.
- The programme model was to provide Information, Advice and Guidance.
- It was about understanding their individual positions and where they wanted to be.
- The programme would provide individual mentors who would provide support for all aspects to help them improve and achieve their goals.
- An Action Plan would be created to help track their progress and set out the individual stages and goals.
- The contract would be monitored using Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to keep track of its progress.
- Inspired 2 Achieve and the Council were aiming to beat national trends.
- With the Yarlington programme, Inspired 2 Achieve had been using the existing supply chains and businesses to find employment for the tenants. We were hoping to transfer this to Taunton Deane.
- Inspired 2 Achieve were also working with education providers and businesses regarding apprenticeships.
- Once they were in employment, they would step back but continue to support them.
- Each individual journey was different and it was about understanding the individual needs and abilities as well as who they were.
- Individual achievements would definitely be celebrated.

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

- What sort of demographic range were you working with?
Currently, the programme was working with those who were claiming Job Seekers Allowance. Although, we were looking to include and support those claiming Employment Support Allowance.
- From what I have heard, what the programme was achieving on the estates, it was working well.
- This type of programme/project had been running in Scotland for ten years and was still going on. Were we not late introducing a product like this?
*The Council might be late in coming to the table with this scheme but previously, we had not had the funds to do something like this. It would be good to see the results after 12 months of the programme in place and hear the stories.
This was funded from HRA underspend and the Council decided to invest it in helping people get back to work.*
- This was a good scheme and in others areas the similar schemes were celebrating those individual achievements and recognising them being in work and reaching their goals.

Resolved that the Information Presentation’s report be noted.

6. Weavers Arms Development Update

Considering Development Project Performance Scorecard previously circulated, concerning the Weavers Arms Development in Wellington.

Below was a summary of the status of Key Project Activities for Weavers Arms:

- Carry out Decanting completed by TDBC was Green. Almost complete.
- Enter into Build Contract completed by TDBC was Green. In progress.
- Start on Site completed by TDBC was Green. Pending.
- Demolition of Properties completed by TDBC was Green. Pending.

The dashboard summarised the key project accomplishments for the site for the current period against the previous period of the Development Project as well as detailing the community liaison over the same period through the local community at a variety of community locations.

Included for the Board's information was the key goals/targets for the development project over the next period as well as detailing any current or ongoing issues with the development.

Below was a summary of Key Accomplishments for the last period and the Key Activities for next period:

- The project had obtained planning permission in Oct 2015.
- Obtained s106 play area contribution for the sum of £12k.
- Tender process for the Build contract had been completed. Contractor selection and interview took place in January 2016.
- Build contract was being procured by the Consultants to award WRW Construction Ltd. Hoping to be on site in March 2016.
- One remaining decant household pending. Hopefully this would be completed next week and key handed over.
- Bat Licence obtained and granted by Natural England.
- Officers sort approval for additional funding of £134k, which was approved by Full Council. This was due to an increase in construction industry costs and decant costs.
- Assist appointed contractor with organising 'meet the contractor' event in Rockwell Green to introduce the team to the local community as well as relay points of contact.

The only issue from the last period, would be that the Council continuing to support households currently being rehoused with significant support needs.

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

- How many bats were found?
The Council found two male bats and there was a lot of paperwork connected to the process of dealing with them as they were a protected species. The Council had finally obtained a special licence from Natural England.
- The remaining number of tenants to be decanted and what was happening?
The final tenants would be decanted next week and the keys would be handed to the Council following this.

Resolved that the Officer's report be noted.

7. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Rent Setting 2016/17

Considered the report previously circulated, concerning the proposed rent reductions for 2016/17 and bring to the attention of the Board recent policy change that offers them some choice on the level of rent set for Supported Housing.

The Executive were alerted to this new development and requested a briefing and the final budget proposal would be set out in the papers for Full Council on 23rd February 2016.

The draft budget reports considered reflected the Welfare Reform and Work Bill that was currently progressing through Parliament. This required that, when enacted, all social landlords, which included Councils must reduce their rent by 1% per annum from April 2016 for the next four years.

When the Bill was being considered in the House of Lords, Lord Freud (on behalf of Government) announced that the Bill would be amended to exempt Supported Housing from the 1% cut in rents for one year.

This followed concerns raised by a number of social landlords nationally about the viability of reducing rents for Supported Housing by 1%. Lord Freud said that it would allow the Government time to consider the issues and implications.

The Council's rent policy was for annual increases of CPI plus 1%. This would equate to an increase of 0.9% for 2016/17 (with CPI of -0.1%) and therefore Members would be able to increase rents in line with the existing rent policy for supported housing schemes, which included sheltered housing, by up to CPI +1% for one year only from April 2016.

The Bill continues to be debated. Any further changes in policy would be returned to Members for any potential changes in policy and the options available for rent setting on Supported Housing, which represented approximately 17% of our housing stock.

The draft budget set out the position assuming a 1% reduction in rents for all tenants. There was now a choice to be made on the rent level for Supported Housing. The choices range from keeping the draft budget position of a 1% reduction through to a rent freeze or maintaining our previously agreed rent policy for these properties and increase rents by 0.9%.

The rent reduction proposals for General Needs Housing stand. There was no indication of any policy change in this area, it was simply a choice being offered to social landlords for Supported Housing rent levels for next year only. The existing rents for Supported Housing were based on a national rent formula. The size of the properties meant that the average rent levels in Supported Housing (£76.79 per week) was less than that charged on General Need's properties (£85.34 per week).

Although the expected change in policy was for one year only, it had a cumulative effect since the base level of rent would be higher for future years rent setting. The financial impact of three different rent levels on Supported Housing was presented to Member within a table.

Any additional income generated in 2016/17 by a change in rent level proposal would be targeted to maintenance budgets within the HRA.

Additional information when considering rent levels for 2016/17

- Supported Housing properties have additional costs not associated with General Need's properties.
- 75% of tenants within Sheltered Housing were in receipt of Housing Benefit and would not be affected by the change in rent.
- Tenants of pensionable age had, to date, been protected from Welfare Reforms. The basic state pension is increasing in April 2016 from £115.95 to £119.30, an increase of £3.35 a week or 2.9%.
- This small increase in rent for one year had a significant positive impact on the HRA Business Plan, and would reduce the deficit over 30 years by up to £2.675m.
- Any change from the 1% reduction planned for all other tenants would create a differential between General Need's rents and Supported Housing rents.

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

- What was the difference between Sheltered/Extra Care Housing and Supported Housing and why was the rent increasing and not reducing?
All Supported Housing (this included Extra Care and Sheltered) would be affected by the rent increase and this was government policy and not the Council's decision.
The reduction in the rent for General Housing Stock was due to the Welfare Reform Bill forced the 1% reduction in rent.
- Supported/Sheltered/Extra Care Housing tenants already pay extra on top of their rent.
There were separate charges and services, which Supported Housing tenants paid for on top of their rent as well as some services, which were included in the rent.
- What was the point in some tenants paying for the Pipeline and additional Supported Housing services if they did not use them?
When people agree to move into a Supported Housing Scheme property, they were made aware for before signing the tenancy that there were compulsory service charges they would be responsible for paying if they agree to take the property. Tenants could not opt out of the additional services but had a choice before moving in. These properties were designated Supported Housing Scheme properties.
- *The money from the rent increase on Supported Housing would be ring-fenced and used to make improvements, which benefited the tenants living in our Supported Housing Schemes e.g. Communal Areas and Meetings Halls etc.*

Resolved that the Officer's report be noted.

8. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Financial Monitoring – Quarter Three 2015/16

Considered the report previously circulated, concerning an update on the projected outturn financial position of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the financial year 2015/16 as at 31 December 2015.

The overall financial position of the council remained within 1% of the approved budget. The current forecast outturn for the financial year 2015/16 was a forecasted overspend of £0.072m and the current capital forecast position for 2015/16 was a forecasted spend of £14.104m with £9.299m for existing approved schemes to be spent in future years.

The Council's reserves remain above the recommended minimum adequate levels, with forecast balances at 31 March 2016 projected to be £2.386m.

A summary of the major under and over spends forecast for year was provided to the Board in the following areas of services - Rental Income, Other Income, Specialist Works, Electrical Testing Contract, Pre-Planned Maintenance, Maintenance Works, Voids, Grounds Maintenance, Communal Areas, Procurement Savings, Interest Payable and Provision for Bad Debt.

Budgets and forecasts were based on known information and the best estimates of the Council's future spending and income. Income and expenditure over the financial year 2015/16 was estimated by budget holders and then reported through the budget monitoring process. As part of this process, Rental Income and HRA Reserves had been identified as risks through quarter three.

The approved HRA capital programme was £23.759m, of which £13.227m related to works and costs associated with existing dwellings and £10.532m for the provision of new housing through development. Below were the headlines from the HRA Capital Programme Forecast Outturn Summary:

- £9.202m of the capital budget in the HRA related to major works on existing dwellings. Actual spend at quarter three was £2.495m. This was lower than would be expected at this point largely due to invoicing in arrears and some contracts starting mid-year.
- £1.781m related to other works such as disabled facilities adaptations, asbestos removal, external wall insulations and extensions. Disabled Facilities Grants and Adaptations were currently expected to be £0.114m under budget due to low demand.
- £0.231m expenditure relating to environmental improvements (used, for example, scooter stores and additional car parking spaces).
- £0.135m for Sustainable Energy Projects and £0.105m for extensions was likely to slip into 2016/17.
- The IT Development budget is also likely to slip by £0.293m.
- £1.509m related to the new budget for adding solar PV systems to dwellings.
- £0.300m was Social Mobility funding from Government.
- £10.532m was the remaining budget for the provision of new housing through the Creechbarrow Road, Phase 1 sites and the buyback of dwellings previously sold through Right to Buy.
- The Weavers Arms housing development scheme obtained Full Council approval for the project on the 9th December 2014 with a budget of £3.500m and the total cost of the scheme was now expected to be £3.634m.

A summary of the HRA Capital Programme budget and forecast for the year was included with this covering report.

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

- How many grass cuts per year, did the DLO complete for the Housing Service grounds maintenance?
This was something the officer would need to report back to the Board on.

Resolved that the Council's financial performance as at the end of Quarter three be noted.

9. Performance Indicators/Quarter Three 2015/16 Summary and Verbal Repairs Service Update.

Considering the Performance Scorecard Summary previously circulated, concerning the Housing and Communities Quarter Three performance Scorecard and a verbal update on the performance of the Repairs Service.

Looking at each section of the performance scorecard for Quarter Three, the figures and percentages as follows:

- Managing Finances (housing) - There were 8 measures of which 63% Green, 37% Amber, 0% Red and 0% were N/A.
- Service Delivery (Satisfaction) – There were 12 measures of which 25% Green, 17% Amber, 42% Red and 17% were N/A.
- Service Delivery (Decent Homes) – There were 2 measures of which 50% were Amber and 50% were Red.
- Service Delivery (Staffing) - There were 3 measures of which 33% were Green and 67% were Amber.
- Service Delivery (Operational Delivery) – There were 21 measures of which 57% were Green, 19% were Amber, 19% were Red and 5% were N/A.

Below was a summary of the planned actions that were off course:

- Two measures for customer complaints were off course and were not currently hitting the response times 100% of the time, however performance had continued to improve since Q1.
- Three measures for Housing Services Satisfaction were off course and a Star Survey had been undertaken every two years and improvement was expected in 2017. The Council was launching a project and developing an action plan to address the satisfaction issues and ensure this improves in key areas.
- One Measure for Decent Homes was off course. The Council's average SAP (energy efficiency) rating was below target. This was due to us being unable to report at present, as our current asset database was not able to calculate it.
- Housing Services Diversity Information – The Council holds 66% of diversity information. Although below target this had continued to improve since Q1.
- Two measures for Repairs and Maintenance measures were off course. One of these measures had seen a slight improvement, while the other had decreased slightly. Work would continue to investigate the reasons behind jobs not being completed on time.
- Major Aids and Adaptations completion time – below target but an 11 week improvement on Q2. A big factor in delays had been due to a backlog of OT recommendations that built up.

Below was a summary of the planned actions that had uncertainty in meeting them:

- Two measures for Housing Debt – The development bill for £1.2m credited, however housing tenant debt had continued to increase.
- Estate Management Team current rent arrears was off target for Q3, however this was a moving picture and by week 40 the arrears were under target. As at 12th February, the Council was on target with seven weeks to go to year end.
- Sheltered Housing Tenant Satisfaction with Landlord Services was 88% and remained unchanged from the STAR survey in 2013. The Council was developing an action plan to address all issues.
- Percentage of tenants satisfied with their most recent repair had not changed from last quarter.
- One Measure for Decent Homes was off course. Dwellings with a valid gas safety certificate – 99.90% - four properties were not serviced
- Both PRED measures as not all staff had received a performance review in the last 12 months, but there had been a large improvement since Q2.
- Completion of 60 Affordable Units at Creechbarrow handover delayed, phased handovers to continue into 2016/17.
- Lettings Team – vacant dwellings that were unavailable. This was the poorest percentage seen since Q4 2013/14, but was due to changes in the management of asbestos.

Below was a summary of the planned actions that were on course:

- Five measure for Managing Finances were on target.
- Three measures for Housing Service Satisfaction were on target.
- One measure for Housing Service Staffing was on target
- Twelve measures for Operational Delivery were on target.

The Interim Assistant Director for Property and Development and Building Maintenance Manager gave a verbal update on Performance of the Repairs Service.

Looking at pages nine and ten referring to HC 5.7, HC 5.8 and HC 5.9, the stated percentages for the services performance in the comments section were different and showed an improvement to the performance. For HC 5.7, DLO was now 97.24%, HC 5.8 was now 94.4% and HC 5.9 was now 95.46%.

There were areas, that the service needed to tighten up procedures and one of these areas was the closure of job tickets once they were completed, also those job tickets which had zero cost and the schedule of rates were also affecting presented performance of the service. These needed to be brought up to date so they reflected the services true performance.

Staff had been working hard to bring up the performance scores to improve the percentage shown.

Through regular performance meetings, the Council was assisting contractors with their performance in order to improve it as well as receiving acceptance reports on a monthly basis.

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

- *Officers were aware of the falling Customer Satisfaction performance. The Council was receiving more complaints and not all of these were complaints but due to increased expectations of the customers and following the introduction of the new IT software OC, a project would be starting in March, which would include an action plan to work on the falling performance level.*
- Board Members requested that the officer submit a written update report on the Performance of the Repairs Service.
- The version update to Open Contractor (OC), would this affect the progress made by staff and would it affect the services?
The Council was planning to update the current version to a newer version, which would provide more benefits and services to the Council and would not affect existing services.
The Council were looking at transferring their Asset Data from Codeman to OC Asset Program and we were also investigating moving away from Academy (used by Housing) to OC Housing.

Resolved that the Housing Service's Performance Scorecard was to be noted.

10. Verbal Update on Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan Review

The Senior Accountant gave a verbal update on Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan Review.

Officers provided the Board with an update on the Feedback from Community Scrutiny Committee, Tenants Forum and Staff detailing their opinions relating to the Key Discussion Points for the Savills reports on the review of HRA Business Plan.

The Key Discussion points were tailored to the individual stakeholder groups and the purpose of this was to allow stakeholders to voice their opinion of the options raised during the review of the Business Plan.

Whereas the Staff and Elected Members of Community Scrutiny Committee had expressed similar views regarding the focus of the HRA in the future, which was to continue new build project with reduced maintenance programme on existing stock. Tenants Forum and the Board had expressed similar opposing views with desire to continue maintaining existing stock to high standard and in some cases bringing the properties more up to date with a desire for smaller new build projects.

Below was a summary of additional update information concerning the review of the HRA Business Plan:

- Savills were currently completing a stock survey of our Housing Assets.
- The survey was due to be completed in the next few week. With initial feedback in early April.
- The data provided from the stock survey would give the Council a better idea of the HRA's financial position.
- This would enable the Council to update its financial baseline.
- There would be tenant consultation in May concerning the contents of reviewed HRA Business Plan.
- The reviewed Business Plan would come to TSMB in June.
- Elected Members sessions would be both in April and June with the HRA Business Plan going before Full Council in July.

- Officers would provide a progress to the Board on monthly basis.

Resolved that the Board noted the Officer's report.

11. Exclusion of the Press and Public

Resolved that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item because of the likelihood that exempt information would otherwise be disclosed relating to Clause 3 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act, 1972 and the public interest in withholding the information outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information to the public.

12. CONFIDENTIAL Update on Housing Development Projects

The Housing Development Project Lead gave a verbal update on Housing Development Projects and provided the Board Members with an updated summary on any changes and developments concerning the Housing Department's Development projects.

Resolved that the Board noted the Officer's report.

13. Any Other Business

A Board Member enquired of the Housing Officers if the following suggestion concerning the inclusion of Shower Cubicles, could be an option for the Council when they were completing Bathroom refurbishments in their Supporting Housing Scheme properties?

The Board Members had spoken to several elderly tenants would had their bathrooms refurbished and were now unable to get in and out of the bath to either use the bath or the shower.

The Officer informed the Board that following the completion of the Savills review of the Council's Housing Stock, which included the Supported Housing Scheme stock, the Council would undertaking a project reviewing what its tenants really required from the Supported Housing Scheme and if facilities installed were in the best needs of the tenants.

(The meeting ended at 7.55pm)