

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

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

Officers: Lucy Clothier (Senior Accountant - Services), James Barrah (Director – Housing and Community), Paul Harding (Corporate and Performance Manager), Simon Lewis (Assistant Director - Housing & Community Development), Stephen Boland (Housing Services Lead), Terry May (Interim Assistant Director – Property and Development), Martin Price (Tenant Empowerment Manager), and Emma Hill (Democratic Services Officer).

Others: Councillor Mrs F Smith
Abigail Davies; Associate Director, Savills

(The meeting commenced at 6.00pm)

1. Apologies

Mr K Hellier, Mr R Middleton, Councillor Bowrah, Ms D Pierowicz, Councillor T Beale and Councillor Warmington

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 16 December 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, Mr D Galpin, Mrs J Hegarty, Mr A Akhigbemen, Mr I Hussey declared personal interests as Taunton Deane Borough Council Housing Tenants.

5. Draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Estimates 2016/17.

Considered briefing report previously circulated, concerning an update on the draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget proposals for 2016/17.

Changes in national policy announced in 2015 had greatly affected the long term financial position of the HRA, and a fundamental review of the HRA Business Plan was underway.

This report also included the proposed rent charges for the year, in line with the amended national rent policy.

The proposals included within this report would enable the Council to set a balanced budget for 2016/17, with the ongoing position to be addressed within the Business Plan Review.

Below was a summary of HRA estimates due to changes in national policy:

- The Welfare Reform and Work Bill sets out a 1% reduction in all social rents from 1st April 2016 for four years.
- This negated the 10 year national rent policy for social housing that was implemented in April 2015, and greatly reduced the income expectations for the HRA.
- Officer had set out in the report figures showing the annual reduction in rent for the next five years, when compared to the Business Plan.
- It was proposed by national rent guidance that the average weekly rent for dwellings for 2016/17 should be set at the guideline rent of £83.06, a decrease of 1.0% or £0.84 per week.
- Taking into account of the Rent Reduction, RtB and Voids the expected dwelling rent income had reduced by £840k.
- In addition, there was an expected £151.8k reduction of income due to proposed changes to specific budget lines and the inclusion of tenants in receipt of Housing Benefit with a Piper Lifeline who would be subsidised by the HRA.
- Management expenses in relation to shared service costs transferred from the General Fund for services such as Finance, ICT and HR were expected to be £67k lower than in 2015/16 as well as £150k costs associated with a range of projects within the housing service.
- Maintenance costs for 2016/17 was expected to decrease by £170k. This equated to spend of around £1,090 per property, based on the service's best estimate of work that could be carried out.
- Special Services included spend on communal areas had a budget increase for Sheltered Housing in 2016/17 relating to the new service provision.
- The overall provision for bad debts had seen a reduction from £515k 2015/16 to £415k in 2016/17.
- The HRA currently held £97.6m of debt. The contribution towards the repayment of debt was due to increase to £1m in 2016/17.
- The interest payable on debt was expected to be lower than the Business Plan by £213k. This was due to additional borrowing for approved schemes that did not need to be externally borrowed during 2016/17.
- Social Housing Development Fund was the revenue contribution made towards developments. This remained at £1.0m in 2016/17.
- Transfers to General Fund in relation to the Transformation Project had included a one-off saving of £177k in 2016/17 compared to the Business Plan.
- Revenue Contribution to Capital (RCCO) paid for capital work. The Draft Capital Programme was £8.589m for 2016/17, which included £0.86m investment proposed to be funded from RCCO. This was slightly less than the amount included in the current Business Plan
- The HRA Business Plan earmarked reserves current balance was £2.458m. This was due to a number of approved changes during the year. This did not include any 2015/16 forecast overspends, or any further supplementary estimates in 2015/16. The proposal for 2016/17 was no budgeted transfers to or from this balance.

Below was an overview of the proposals to deliver a balanced budget in 2016/17.

- Related Assets 2016/17 – Reduce RCCO by £125k by removing capital programme for Related Assets - There were no planned programmes for 2016/17. Works would resume in 2017/18.
- Related Assets 2015/16 – Reduce RCCO by £24k by ceasing non urgent capital works on Related Assets in 2015/16, and earmarking this underspend to providing funding for the revenue budget in 2016/17.
- Provision for bad debt - The Business Plan allowed for an increased provision for non-payment of rental income for a three year period due to Welfare Reform.
- Creechbarrow Hub - The Business Plan had allowed for the Hub to be in place in 2016/17 but savings would be made on the running expenses and salary of the Hub Manager post as it was not likely to be open until later in the year
- Transfer Removal Grants - The budget was increased to £60k as part of the Welfare Reform measures, however it was expected that demand would be at a lower level going forward.
- The Capital Programme included a number of major works programmes the Council was required to complete to maintain the 'decent homes standard'. The current list of major works programmes came to £6.739m.
- The 'Related Assets' budget was proposed to be removed for one year period. The related reduction in Revenue Contribution to Capital Outlay (RCCO) would contribute towards the revenue budget gap in 2016/17.

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

- What was the Creechbarrow Hub?
This building was called Moorland House and was located at the end of Moorland Road. It contained office space, meeting rooms and interview rooms as well as flats on the first floor. It would contain space for the Local Police Beat Team and the area One Team.

Resolved that:-

1. The Board noted the Officer's report.
2. The Executive Committee and Full Council recommended to approve the HRA draft budget and proposed rent decrease.

6. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan Review

Considering the briefing report previously circulated, concerning an update on the progress of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan Review.

A copy of the discussion paper written by Savills in conjunction with Officers had been enclosed with this covering report.

The Business Plan contained the aims and objectives for the HRA and was first put in place in 2012. There had been a number of changes, both internal to the Council, and external and comprehensive review was now needed to ensure that the HRA continued to meet the needs of tenants within the financial constraints.

The Council had appointed Savills to provide external support and challenge for this work. The Business Plan Review would refresh the priorities of the HRA and financial position over a new 30 year period – from 2016/17 through to 2045/46.

The report contained details of the updated financial position, performance against the Business Plan priorities, and proposals for new objectives and an updated action plan as well as key areas of discussion for Board Members. The discussions and feedback from Board Members would further inform the direction of the Business Plan Review.

The key discussion points were summarised as follows:

1. What should be the core business of the housing service, and were the priorities in the draft action plan appropriate to deliver this?
2. What priority should be given to improving the customer experience of housing services, and which were the most effective and efficient actions to achieve this?
3. How should the Council's limited financial resources be prioritised to support sustainable investment in each of Capital spend, New build programme and Revenue spend?
4. Should the Council consider products that were closer to the market such as Intermediate or Affordable rent in order to generate additional income?
5. What was the Council's appetite for repaying or increasing its debt?

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

- The Board felt that they would need to study and review the information further before passing comments or giving a response.
- Would it possible to get back to Officers and Savills with a response at a later date when the Board have had time to read through the report in more detail?
The Board need not or were not required to make a decision now. We were looking for an initial response to the information provided.
- The Council's core responsibility should be to provide affordable social housing to those who could not afford private rented properties.
- People could not live in debt all the time. People were currently living and buying on credit.
*The Council had taken on some debt when they had signed up and agreed to Self-Financing. Part of the decision that needed to be made within the HRA Business Plan was should the Council spread the debt over 30 years and own the properties.
Currently, the Council could not continue existing expenditure levels to pay for the debt within 18 years as detailed in previous business plan. The way the HRA handled the debt would have to change.*
- Everyone had a bit of debt, it was about not getting into too much debt and managing your finances and debt properly.
- I agree that the Council should be providing social housing but the Council should also spend money to update and renovate existing housing stock to make it more appealing to people.
The Council also needed to ensure that the HRA had other sources of income other than the Rent from properties.
- Could the Council look at renting Housing Stock to people who did not need social housing but could not afford expensive private rented properties or were unable to get on the property ladder? These people could pay a higher rate of rent than

social housing tenants and they would get the affordable and reliable housing they needed.

- The Government would take any money made on the higher rate of rent that the Council would charge.
The Council was considering the 'Pay to Stay' scheme. This would allow those on a higher income that wanted to stay in social housing but we would charge a higher level of rent.
- Tenants who signed up for Homefinder Somerset service who were keeping an eye out for potential exchanges, were receiving annual requests from the service to complete the paperwork again after completing it fully the first time. This was putting people off using the service and looking for potential mutual exchanges. Why did Homefinder Somerset need to repeat this long process annually?
- I have had no contact with the Estates Officer responsible for my area. When eventually I did find out who it was, it was difficult to get in contact with them. Tenants felt the officer's areas were so large that the service was stretched and this was the cause of lack of contact.
Could the Council and the Housing service encourage Estates Officers to hold regular area surgeries or drop in sessions away from the Council offices?
There had not been a reduction in the service but the One Team project had meant officers had increased duties within these concentrated deprived areas so the result was much less out and about within the rest of their area.
- Tenants had raised an issue with me concerning the replacement of broken window and that they had been difficulty getting hold of someone who would help her and eventually the Police had to get a response from the Council.
This appeared to be an issue with communication back to the customer once the concern had been raised. Officers appeared not be communicating or updating customers about progress or the process being completed to resolve the concern. This lack of communication had been highlighted to the Council during the last STAR Survey.
- The Council needed to be more open about the finance and budget restrictions, the public and tenants would prefer this rather than being fobbed off with excuses. Tell the truth.
- Could Estates Officer hold regular surgery's or drop in session in rural community centres?
- There was merit in both increasing internet resources for tenants as well as continuing with face to face communication for those tenants who did not have the experience or access to IT.
- The Council should continue to extend the life of its existing housing stock. If the Council were to focus on New Build properties, their existing stock would deteriorate and then depreciate in value.
- Could the Council consider a mixture of both maintaining existing stock to a good standard as well as finding land and replacing existing stock with New Builds?
The Council maintained its stock to the 'Decent Homes Standard'. This was a basic standard for housing.
- The Council should continue to complete New Build project with the Borough.
- If the Council committed to spending more money on maintaining existing stock and also sourcing better quality components for the programmes of works, then the existing stock would last much longer.
The Council would know more about the condition of its stock and what needed to be done when the Stock Condition Survey was completed.
- The Council's investment into maintaining its housing stock currently was to a very good and to a decent standard compared with the maintenance of years gone by.

- The Council should protect their existing and new stock for tenants who did not mistreat them. More detailed checks should be completed prior to allowing a tenant to rent a property.

Officers wanted to know whether the Board Members thought the Council should spend money on helping people and tenants in communities better themselves i.e. education, work and clearing debt.

- There were enough agencies funded by government funding, helping people to get back to work. This was not something the Council should get involved in.
- I think the Council should get involved and spending money on helping the Communities of the Borough.

The resources for supporting people in the community were shrinking and there were now gaps in community services. The Council had limited resources so could not just jump in and fill the gaps in the public sector services.

Resolved that the Officer's report be noted and made comments on the Draft HRA Business Plan Review report.

The preference of the board was for investment in maintaining existing housing stock. Any remaining funds should be invested in new build.

7. Draft Corporate Strategy 2016 - 2020

Considered briefing report previously circulated, concerning the introduction of the draft Corporate Strategy for 2016-20.

The Strategy had been developed with input from Members and outlined our proposed strategic focus for the next four years, setting out our vision, priorities, values and principles. It would guide our planning and allocation of general fund resources as the Council established detailed corporate and operational plans each year.

There was limited reference within the Strategy to matters directly linked to the Council's role as a housing landlord since this area of the Councils' work was funded by the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and was therefore set out in the HRA Business Plan instead.

A copy of the draft Corporate Strategy 2016-2020 was enclosed with the covering report.

This revised Strategy provided a clear direction for the organisation to follow; with four key priority areas where the Council would concentrate its efforts and resources between April 2016 and March 2020.

This Strategy would lead to a more resourceful and responsive organisation that delivered outcomes to our communities in the most efficient and effective way and continues to play a key role in shaping Taunton Deane.

The Corporate Strategy was not intended to capture everything that the Council did nor did it include the detail of our work and projects. This was the role of the Corporate, Operational and Individual Plans which would flow from the Corporate Strategy.

The Corporate Strategy was the key part of the 'Golden Thread' which set corporate objectives from which key actions flow.

The Strategy was the product of a series of member workshops which took place over

the summer, which were organised along broad geographical lines, based upon electoral wards. Approximately 70% of TDBC members attended these workshops.

An initial draft of the Corporate Strategy was prepared and then shared with the Executive, JMT and Tier Four managers.

Since then the document had been enhanced, although the key messages remain unchanged. A draft was provided to Joint Partnership Advisory Group at their meeting of 14 December 2015.

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

- Would Board Members receive an update on the progress of the Corporate Strategy between now, its approval and 2020?
The Corporate Strategy set targets/goals on annual basis. These would be reviewed annually to monitor the Council's progress and whether or not they had completed or achieved these targets. Previously, this had only been completed every four years so it had been decided to breakdown in annual chunks then review it. The review would be published annually in April.

Resolved that the Officer's report be noted and made comments on the Draft Corporate Strategy.

8. Update on Progress of One Teams

Considered briefing report previously circulated, concerning an update report of the progress of the three One Team Areas.

There were now three One Team Areas within Taunton Deane, they were Taunton East, North Taunton and Wellington. The estates officer's that covered these areas now had wider area and increased responsibilities.

Below was a brief summary of update information concerning the One Team Areas:-

- Initially crime figures within the Taunton East area were halved with the introduction of One Team joint working.
- The Acorn Children's Centre was now attracting more local families as result of the increased available services and support.
- Domestic Abuse in Taunton East had reduced within the last year due to the ongoing work of the One Team
- 2015 had been a busy year for the One Teams in Taunton Deane. All of them had made significant progress in further establishing themselves and their value to their communities.
- Collectively, they had also made progress in extending their reach with the inclusion of other partners.
- One Team were still keen to draw in stronger engagement from Children's Social Care, Adults Social Care and Health providers.
- A number of meetings had been held with the GP Federation, Somerset Partnership and Musgrove Park Hospital to explore opportunities for stronger working in our Housing Estates.

- The One Team now had more support from the Community Mental Health team in the One Teams.
- One Team had undertaken targeted Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm screening in Taunton East, working with health professionals. This was a drive to do more preventative work and reduce demand on services.
- MIND had been commissioned to work alongside the One Teams to take referrals to provide support to individuals, but also to train and support staff with difficult cases. This had received positive feedback from all the One Team Co-ordinators.
- The One Teams were hoping to pilot a new approach in North Taunton funded by Somerset County Council Public Health to provide a stronger framework of mental health support to the One Teams and the community.
- An issue of particular concern in some communities was the high levels of unemployment and worklessness and this was likely to be made worse by changes to Welfare Reform with families remaining unemployed.
- These deepen issues for these families would have an impact on the Council's future rental income.
- The One Team recently commissioned a new service to provide support to people to get back into work. This contract had been awarded to Yarlinton Homes' 'Inspired to Achieve'. This new contract would start next month.
- The Safer Somerset Partnership had recognised the One Team model as exemplar in Avon and Somerset and had supported the establishment of new One Teams in Chard, Yeovil and Bridgwater.
- The Police Innovation Fund (PIF) project would officially end on 31st March 2016.
- One Team had been working closely with partners to find a way to fund the project on an ongoing basis.
- The Police had committed underspend from the PIF, which the Council's Housing Service had agreed to match fund and along with financial and staff contributions from the Fire Service, this should allow the project to commit to deliver the One Team approach in the Taunton East, North Taunton and Wellington areas for a further two years.
- Even with the continued funding for the next two years, the service would need to be scaled back to a part-time Co-ordinator for Wellington and a reduced shared admin resource across the three areas.
- Researchers from Bath Spa University, funded by the PIF fund would be reporting back later in 2016 on their evaluation and findings of the One Team approach.
- It was anticipated that this would provide real academic evidence to support the model and demonstrate to partners the value of engaging with us.

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

- How could so many people with problems end up in one place?
*It was known that where there were large concentrations of Council properties, this could lead to high levels of deprivation.
Local Authorities historically grouped and built their properties together in estates but this was not how Council's built communities now. They aimed to create mixture of ages and cultures as well as leaseholder, owner, private rented and social housing.*
- The name One Team Halcon was misleading and people in the community might not or did not know that the team actually covered a much wider area?
The area was referred to as One Team Taunton East.

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

9. Latest Indices of Multiple Deprivation (2015) and Impact in One Team Areas.

Considering the report previously circulated, concerning the latest information on indices of multiple deprivation and how this might impact the Council's One Team Areas.

Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) recently published the English Indices of Deprivation 2015. This was the official measure of relative deprivation at a local level (LSOA – Lower Super Output Areas) and was the first update since 2010.

The 2015 version uses 37 indicators, organised across seven 'domains' of deprivation, which were combined to form the overall Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). The statistics that were used to develop the IMD were drawn from a variety of sources including the Census (2011). The majority of statistics date from 2011 to 2013.

This year, for the first time, the IMD were enhanced by two supplementary indices, which were Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) and Income Deprivation Affecting Older People Index (IDAOPI).

Below was a brief summary of indices of multiple deprivation with Somerset, Taunton Deane and One Team project areas:-

- Taunton Deane contained the two most deprived neighbourhoods in Somerset, both in the worst 5% nationally and serviced by Taunton East One Team.
- Deprivation in Somerset and Taunton Deane had worsened, with Taunton Deane now containing five neighbourhoods in the worst 20% in the country.
- The Council had three neighbourhoods that rank in the worst 10% for Child Poverty as well as two neighbourhoods that rank in the worst 10% for Income Deprivation for the Elderly.
- There were clearly significant challenges of deprivation affecting communities within all the One Team areas and this placed demand on all One Team partners and services.
- The Council was working with partners through the Council's Strategic Partnership Board to bring some additional focus on the following issues on Education, Skills and Training, Crime and Income, Employment & Health.
- There were concerns about Health deprivation in some areas, but particularly in Taunton East which included one neighbourhood in the bottom 5% nationally.
- The Housing Service was speaking with the GP Federation and Musgrove Park Hospital to seek opportunities to work more closely in the One Team areas.
- Somerset was ranked 98 out of 158 county/unitary areas within England and was ranked 112 for IDACI and 118 for IDAOPI.
- There were 32,844 LSOAs across the country. Each LSOA contained approximately 1,500 residents or 650 properties.
- Taunton Deane was ranked 193 out of 326 district / unitary areas. So TD was generally a mid-performing district with some geographic areas of acute deprivation. However, it also contained some LSOAs that perform extremely well.
- Taunton East One Team area contained the two most deprived in Taunton Deane. These being Halcon Roman Road and Halcon Lambrook.
- These were also the most deprived LSOAs in the County and the only two in Somerset to rank in the worst 5%.

- Lyngford East in North Taunton One Team area was within the 10% worst LSOAs nationally. The ranking of this ward had worsened over the past five years.
- The specific areas of concern were income, employment, education, skills and training and crime.
- Lyngford West in North Taunton One Team area was within the 20% worst LSOAs nationally. The particular areas of concern relating to income, employment, health deprivation and disability and crime.
- Wellington North in Wellington One Team was main area of concern with the LSOA was within the bottom 20% nationally. The areas of particular concern were Education, skills and training.
- In comparison Rockwell Green, Tonedale and Wellington North East were within the bottom 30-50% nationally as well as Wellington East and Wellington North West were both within the top 50% best performing LSOAs.
- Looking at Rural areas across Taunton Deane the rankings were positive. There were no LSOAs that appear that appear in the worst 40% nationally by rank.

Enclosed with the covering report was definitions index for the indices of deprivation, index map showing the areas of multiple deprivation with Taunton Deane, deprivation rankings for the areas of Taunton Deane and deprivation rankings for the areas in One Team project areas.

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

- *After the Board Members discussion early regarding the Council investing in helping people in communities better themselves and not just invest in bricks and mortar. With the update concerning the work of the One Team and the information of multiple deprivation indices. Had this information changed the Board's view?*
- The previous two reports presented by the Assistant Director had changed my opinion and the Council should indeed be invested in helping people in the communities. I was shocked by the figures presented in the report.
- If the Council was building new social houses, they could not ignore the social issues effecting the communities and then not get involved in dealing with them. This did not have to cost the Council loads of money.
- There definitely needed to be consideration given to helping the future generations living in the communities. The young people needed to be supported and helped.
- The funds for helping people and communities, did not just have to come from the HRA, this could be sourced from other departments within the Council.
This was the first time, joint working with the agencies had actually worked and made a difference.
Local Authorities and agencies had spoken about joint working previously but nothing had happened until now.

Resolved that the Board noted the Officer's report.

(The meeting ended at 8.18pm)