

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

Present: Mr R Balman (Chairman)
Mr D Galpin (Vice Chairman), Mr A Akhigbemen, Mrs J Bunn, Mrs J Hegarty,
Mr K Hellier, Mr I Hussey, Councillor Booth and Councillor Bowrah.

Officers: Lucy Clothier (Senior Accountant), Terry May (Interim Assistant Director – Property & Development), Rich Prewer (Property Services Manager) Stephen Boland (Housing Services Lead), Martin Price (Tenant Empowerment Manager), and Tracey Meadows (Democratic Services Officer).

Others: Councillor Mrs Warmington
Julia Williamson; Vice-Chair, Tenants' Forum

(The meeting commenced at 6.00pm)

1. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 27 June 2016 were taken as read and were signed.

2. Public Question Time

No questions received for Public Question Time.

3. Declarations of Interests

Mr R Balman, Mrs J Bunn, Mr D Galpin, Mrs J Hegarty, Mr A Akhigbemen, Mr I Hussey and Mr K Hellier declared personal interests as Taunton Deane Borough Council Housing Tenants.

5. Report on Financial Monitoring – Outturn 2015/16

Members considered report previously circulated, concerning information related to the Council's financial performance for 2015/16 financial year.

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was a 'Self-Financing' account for the Council's Housing Landlord function, which was budgeted to 'break even' (net of approved transfers to/from HRA Reserves). The HRA Outturn for 2015/16 was a net underspend of £0.476m (1.8% of gross income).

The HRA approved Capital Programme at the end of 2015/16 was £23.759m. This related to schemes, which would be completed over the next five years and the actual expenditure on the Capital Programme during 2015/16 was £11.391m and with £10.214m for planned investment to implement approved schemes in future years. A net underspend of £2.154m (9%) was reported against the overall programme.

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Reserve balance as at 31 March 2016 stood at £2.675m, which was above the minimum level (£1.800m) set within the Council's Budget Strategy and HRA Business Plan.

Below was a summary of the main points from the update provided on the financial outturn for 2015/16:

Summary for reasons for underspend are as follows;

- Dwelling Rents and Service Charges: Rent lost due to void properties was less than the budgeted 1.9%. This had led to an over recovery of rents and service charges. This was in line with void levels previously experienced.
- Housing Management : The overspend reported in Q3 relating to the use of agency staff in key posts across the HRA was managed down by keeping some other posts vacant, and through underspends in some other management areas such as Transfer Removal Grants (grants made to tenants when downsizing) and Tenants Forum.
- Asbestos Surveys: Asbestos testing had increased significantly during the year. This was expected to continue in the medium term.
- Responsive Heating: Responsive heating continues to be lower than budgeted due to lower than expected levels of replacement heating systems. The budget for 2016/17 had been amended to reflect.
- Grounds Maintenance: A mild winter led to additional cost in grass cutting, along with some additional maintenance in some communal areas. This had led to an overall overspend of £0.045m.
- Other Maintenance: Other maintenance, such as general maintenance and maintenance in communal areas is overspent by £0.185m.
- Procurement Savings: Prudent budgeting, and the completion in funding of the transformation savings had led to a one-off underspend of £0.246m in 2015/16.
- Interest Payable: Due to healthy reserves, external borrowing had not yet been needed for the new development schemes, such as Creechbarrow Road. This had therefore reduced the interest payable in 2015/16.
- Interest Receivable: Healthy reserves and an increasing interest rate had led to higher income from investments during 2015/16.
- Other minor variances: Expected areas of high spend in housing management had been offset through keeping some other posts vacant, and through some underspends in non-staffing areas.

Ways to use the underspend were as follows;

- Extension of the Welfare Reform Officer until March 2018, this post has been extended an additional year to support tenants through the next phase of Universal Credit roll-out (from October 2016) and help to ensure the at the loss of rental income was minimal to the HRA;
- Debt and Benefit Advisor, this post is extended until March 2018 to support tenants through the next phase of the Universal Credit roll-out (from October 2016) and help ensure that loss of rental income was minimised to the HRA;
- 3 additional Estates Officers to cover one in each area until March 2018. This will bring the total to 11 across the borough for the fixed term period;
- Extension of the Mental Health Support currently funded until September 2016 (from 2014/15 underspends) until March 2017. From April 2017. This will become mainstream in the business plan;
- One year funding of 'Chill and Chat' to pilot a dedicated part-time resource to roll-out , drive and oversee the 'Chill and Chat' peer support group to vulnerable women across all three One Team areas;
- Reported that Garage income was 441.9k with 1400 garages that were rented out;

During the discussion of this item the following questions were asked:-

- On page 4 of the report there is was a balance of above the recommended minimum of 875k, will we be getting an observation from the auditors on that sum as we had much money tucked away? *The entirety of that balance is taken into account and forecasted to be used in the next 2-3 years. 333k of that is used within this report to be used by 2016/17. The remainder you will see within budget setting next year 2017/18 that we have to fund part of the general running costs from the reserves in order to balance it. So all of that is taken into account within the next 2-3 years and Audit will see that it was not unallocated balances.*
- Page 6, PV systems, do we have any plans to bring back the further installation of PV systems to housing stock, I know that it was government funded in the first place but was interested to see if we had any plans to bring this back in or has it come to a halt? *We are not looking to do any programmes at present, partly due to funding and the other is we had issues in rolling out what we wanted to do because the existing grid structure locally could not take it. We do have small funding but what we want to do is carry out various pilots of various renewal types of energies so that give us an opportunity for when funding streams for new technologies.* Was there any feedback on the houses that already have this system that we can look at any stage? The residents obviously benefitted when this was installed, has this been monitored? *It is early days and an area that was not monitored, but we will look via the asset team at how savings have been made by residents. This was not set out originally but we have aspirations to do now. As this is good news we need to advertise it.*
- How successful was the 'Chill and Chat'? *This is domestic abuse related, about preventing domestic abuse from escalating. The County Council commissioned Knightstone Housing Association to provide a domestic abuse service that was geared around meeting the needs around those with moderate to high abuse. What we were noticing through the One Team working was that Halcon, Wellington and North Taunton were the areas that their needs had not being met. It was also noticed that a need for earlier intervention was needed and these are through these 'Chill and Chat' sessions. The One Team have been able to demonstrate to Knightstone and Somerset County Council that there was a need for this type of early intervention and they recognised it also. There was a lot to be said about timely interventions before situations escalated and created much more distress for individuals as well as impacting on services such as Housing, Police, Somerset County Council, Social Services and Adult Social Care. All were getting drawn into responding at a stage when interventions could have come much sooner if the help and support was there, Involvement then at a higher level would then not be needed.*

Resolved that:-

1. The officer's report and the HRA Revenue Budget underspend of £0.476m in 2015/16 be noted.
 - (a) support a Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme Budget Carry Forward totalling £10.214m (as set out in Appendix B).
 - (b) support £0.333m Supplementary Budget allocations in 2016/17 for the HRA, utilising 2015/16 underspends, for the following areas:
 - (c) support £0.333m Supplementary Budget allocations in 2016/17 for the HRA, utilising 2015.16 underspends, for the following areas;

- i. £0.038m to fund an extension to the employment of the Welfare Reform Office to March 2018; Debt and Benefit Advisor to March 2018;
- ii. £0.038m to fund an extension to the additional Debt and Benefit Advisor to March 2018;
- iii. £0.198m to increase the Estate Office capacity by one in each area until March 2018;
- iv. £0.021m to fund an extension to the mental Health support until march 2017;
- v. £0.025m to provide funding to Pilot a dedicated part-time resource to roll-out, drive and oversee the 'Chill and Chat' peer support group to vulnerable women across all three One Team areas;
- vi. £0.18m to increase funding available to Community Development Officers in each of the One Teams Areas for 2016/17.

6. Report on Performance Indicators Quarter Four 2015/16

Members considered Performance Scorecard tables previously circulated, concerning the Health and Housing Quarter four performance Scorecard. The tables detailed the breakdown of overall performance for Quarter Four 2013/14.

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

- Managing Finances (housing) - There were
- Service Delivery (Service Delivery (Satisfaction) – There were
- Service Delivery (Decent Homes) – There were
- Service Delivery (Manage Housing Stock) – There were

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

- Housing Services had three measure off course. The Housing Service launching a project and developing an action plan to address the satisfaction issues and ensure this improves in key areas;
- Decent Homes had one measure off course. This was due to the service not being able to report this properly and the current asset database was not able to calculate it;
- Diversity Information – Housing Services was off course as the service only held 68% of information;
- Repairs and Maintenance had to measures off course. Although these measures had both made slight improvements on quarter three performance.
- Major Aids and Adaptations had two measures off course. The end to end completions had improved by seven weeks during quarter three;
- Estate Management Team was currently off target, however stated that this was a moving picture week by week;
- Staffing was difficult to report and forecast due to the change of line management of Building Services. It should be reported consistently from April;
- Extra Care, the % of extra care tenants with a support plan reviewed in the last six months, although this was below target the percentage had improved quarter on quarter;

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

- Two housing debt measures;
- Housing Services – sheltered Housing Tenant Satisfaction with Landlord Services;
- % of tenants satisfied with their most recent repair;
- One measure for Decent Homes is off course. Dwellings with a valid gas safety certificate;
- Both PRED measures;
- Lettings Team – vacant dwellings that are unavailable;
- Major Aids and Adaptions satisfaction;
- Sheltered Housing;

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

- Housing Management;
- Satisfaction;
- Operational Delivery;

Below were measures under development, not reported or without alerts.

- Housing Services, expenditure against budget.
- Three Repairs and Maintenance Measures

During the discussion of this item the following questions were asked:-

- How many people were involve in the survey? *About 2,000 questionnaires were sent out, and we would receive on average 1,600 back.*

Resolved that the Officer's report be noted.

7. Verbal Update on Capital Programme 2015/16

The Interim Assistant Director for Property and Development gave a verbal update on the HRA's Capital programme for 2015/16.

- **Communal Door Entry Systems** – carried out by ABCA, 51 completed;
- **New Heating System** – Keepmoat contract, 500 boilers per annum (4 year contract), 206 completed, contract started mid-way through year, materials procured through ASW;

Saltire Contract (500 boiler upgrades, started Feb/Mar)

- Late mobilisation of contract team;
- 12 completed up to April 2016;
- Some refusals;

Direct Labour Organisation (Adhoc)

- 17 heating upgrades via voids process;

Saltire Response (maintenance contract upgrades of obsolete boilers)

- 35 heating upgrades via obsolete boiler process;
- Cost via schedule of rates;

Air source heat pumps

- Carried out by Otter South West;
- 95 completed;
- May need marketing to increase take up;

Other Heating Systems

- Gas heating and Hybrid with Otter South West;
- 15 completed;

Electric Heating

- Carried out by T&C Electrical;
- 4 completed out of a 6 yearly target (quantum);

Windows

- Carried out by Wrekin Windows;
- 26 completed;
- Fully SBD (secured by design) and thermal requirements met;

Replacement Front and Rear doors

- Carried out by Pro-fit;
- Fully SBD (secured by design) certificated;
- 1101 completed;

Fire door installation Flats

- Carried out by Pro-fit;
- 459 fire doors supplied and fitted;

Kitchens

- Carried out by Mi-Space;
- Units provided and designed by Howdens;
- All properties are validated before installation;
- Associated Electrical and Plumbing works carried out and upgraded;
- 59 completed;

Bathrooms

- Carried out by Mi-Space;
- All properties are validated before installation;
- Associated Electrical and Plumbing works carried out and upgraded;
- 415 completed of a yearly 500 target;

- 74 adapted bathrooms included in total figure of 415 (level access);

External Painting and Fascia and Soffit Replacement

- Carried out by Mitie – 5 year contract;
- Timber and Render painted with UPVC washed down;
- Full soffit and fascia replacement;
- Guttering and rain water goods replaced;
- General external repairs undertaken pre paint;
- Replacement/repair of shed doors;
- Garden gates repaired or replaced;

Stated that this did not give a full picture on what was being worked on at present but a programme will be presented at future meetings.

During the discussion of this item the following points were made:-

- Mi-Space vans working on the Creechbarrow estate are parking in the local streets are causing issues with local residents, could you liaise with the contractor to make them aware of the parking issues and encourage them to park elsewhere? *Now that we are aware of the parking problems, I will make the contractors aware and see if they can come up with some alternative parking.*
- Was the new bathroom replacement programme still on track? *Yes, there was still money in the budget for this, the only issue is with wet rooms and the sheltered housing schemes as there will be a review in that area, we do not want to put wet rooms in premises that we are going to do something different with in a future scheme. There were various options on the table that are being discussed at present.*
- Could letters be sent out to residents in a timely manner when repairs or replacements are being made, residents have complained that they have received letters 6-12 months in advance of the replacement happening. *This procedure was in the process of being changed, a blanket letter would be sent out initially stating the works to be actioned, with a caveat that this would be subject to budget constraints.*
- Some of the works that would be carried out would be in blocks of flats where Lease holders reside, can we make sure that we are carrying out the correct consultation and giving the Lease Holders plenty of time and information regarding these works. *Within the Asset Team we have a Lease Hold Officer who gets the list of programmed works at the beginning of the year and then she advises Lease Holders accordingly and at the appropriate time she instigates the Lease Holder process. What we plan to do is give the Lease Holders the heads up with works that are being planned for the year. Could this information be put up on the website so that our residents and customers can plan ahead? This was in our comms plan moving forward.*
- Board Members thanked Officers for the verbal update.

Resolved that the Officer's update report be noted.

8. Report on Rent Arrears by Area 2015/16

Members considered information report previously circulated, concerning tenant rent arrears performance.

Tenant rent arrears performance data as at the end of the financial year 2015/2016 was with the circulated information and showed details of the actual amount of tenant rent arrears across our nine rounds.

It should be noted that the level of rent arrears was a snapshot of that day. The level of arrears could be significantly different at different times during the monthly/weekly rent account cycle. And it could be seen that the rent arrears amount as at the 31st March 2016 was £375,399, a difference of £44,292 compared to the end of that week, the 3rd April 2016. This difference highlights the impact of direct debits being paid against rent accounts.

Below was a summary of the main points from the update provided on the tenant Rent Arrears by Area:

- Under Occupancy Penalty (UOP) in April 2015, 346 tenants affected by the UOP compared to 385 in April 2014;
- Benefits reform, with tenants receiving benefits and not using it to pay their rent;
- Benefit cap;
- Concerns with occupants being unoccupied in their property and not receiving the benefits that they were used to and then not being able to pay their rent;

During the discussion of this item the following points were made:-

- When the Universal Credit is rolled out, I believe that Tenants were going to have to wait a month for payment, is this going to make a difference and how are we going to handle this? *This is only being restricted to single claimants, by the Autumn the plan is that we will go digital and that will open up access to the Universal Credit a lot more. We have employed a Welfare Reform Project Officer, as well as that Officer within each area team, we have a debt benefit advisor. We have also made provision for an additional estates officer within each area team. We have also commissioned the Citizen Advice to continue to provide the money matters advice and also made provision within our business plan to back debt, do we still have a good plan financially even with the offset of University Credit. We are taking steps to enable that we support tenants to enable them to pay their rent.*
- Board Members commented that they had received positive feedback and were happy that the welfare of the tenants was being taken care of. Please could you provide information in the next report on arrears position with our Lease Holders, it would also be good to see what the collection rate is with our Lease Holders.

Resolved that the Officer's update report be noted.

9. Verbal Update on Feedback from TPAS Annual Conference 2016

The representatives of the Board who attended this year's TPAS Annual Conference gave a verbal update.

Below was a summary of the main points from the update provided on the Board Members attendance to TPAS conference:

- It was good to see and learn what other organisations were up to up and down the country;
- Discussions on the 'Pay to Stay' subsidised homes was interesting to see how other housing providers up and down the country were going to deal with this.
- Disappointed that there were not many councils represented, most of the attendees belonged to Housing Associations;
- All sessions were well attended;

During the discussion of this item the following point was made;

- Would it be possible for us to attend an organisation that deals with councils?
The organisation was called ARCH (Association of Retained Council Housing) I will get details of the next conference and report back to the group.

(The meeting ended at 8.05pm)