

Minutes of the Meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 27 March 2017 at 6.00pm in the John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton.

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

Officers: Penny James (Chief Executive), James Barrah (Director – Housing and Communities), Chris Hall (Assistant Director – Operational Delivery), Simon Lewis (Assistant Director – Housing and Community Development), Jan Errington (Project Manager), Neil Anderson (Strategy and Partnership Officer), Richard Burge (Open Spaces manager), Tony Knight (Estates Officer – Halcon), Martin Price (Tenant Empowerment Manager) and Clare Rendell (Democratic Services Officer)

Also present: Councillor Mrs Warmington.

(The meeting commenced at 6.00pm)

22. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 20 February 2017 were taken as read and were signed.

23. Public Question Time

No questions received for Public Question Time.

24. Declarations of Interests

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

25. Transformation of Taunton Deane Borough Council (TDBC) and West Somerset Council (WSC).

The Chief Executive gave a verbal update on the transformation project. Previously the Director of Housing and Community had briefed the Board Members on the formation of a new Council.

During the summer and autumn of 2015, work was carried out with Members to develop a set of Design Principles that would set the framework for our transformation vision.

The Design Principles were set out as follows:-

Social Enterprise – The Councils would embrace the principles of a social enterprise and act more commercially to deliver surplus to reinvest in the delivery of our priority outcomes and services.

Customer Focused – The Councils would focus on agreed priority outcomes and be customer centric.

Self-Service – The customer access arrangements would maximise self-service. This did not mean that all services would be online only. Face to face and telephone access would still be available.

Case Management – The Councils would deliver an approach to deal with customers so that they see one point of contact who would take responsibility for their issues to the point of resolution. This negated the need for the customer to know how the system operated, which tier of government was responsible and who did what within the Councils.

Locality Partners – Wherever possible, the Councils should work with partners in the locality to collectively commission locally important services and use our combined resources to avoid duplication.

Value for Money – All services would offer value for money and be business-like in their approach.

Advocates and Champions – Councillors would be supported to be active advocates, champions and lobbyists to challenge partners on issues that affected their wards or wider areas.

Minimise Governance – The Councils would minimise governance (internal bureaucracy, red tape) whilst they protected the principles of transparency, probity, good leadership and management.

Attitudes and Behaviour – The Councils would recruit, retain, redeploy and reward our people to ensure we had the right skills, attitudes and behaviours needed to deliver our ambitions.

Work was an Activity – The Councils would develop an organisation where work was an activity and not a place. The Councils would go to the community rather than require the customer to physically come to it. Agile working had been introduced to the staff to make it easier for work to be carried out whilst not in an office.

Following on from this, all of the Design Principles were incorporated in the new Delivery Model for Access to Information, Advice and Services.

The Board Members were reminded that the Council would still invest in growth and development in the area. Projects included Urban Extensions at Staplegrove, Monkton Healthfield, Comeytrove and Trull, the Henlade Bypass and the New Strategic Employment Sites.

It was noted that the development of the new Hinkley Point C was the largest construction project in Western Europe. Although the land did not fall within the Taunton Deane boundaries, the Council was due to benefit from money available through the Community Impact Mitigation Fund.

Councillors and colleagues were reminded that the Halcon One Team was a priority and to continue to focus on the vulnerable communities in the area.

During the discussion of this item the following comments and questions were raised:-

- Concern was raised that when the rent reduction scheme had ended, would the Council raise the rents to the private sector level?
It was confirmed that the Council was required by law to provide rent at the social housing level.
- The Board requested that some of the Members could attend the customer awareness training.
- A query was raised on how many staff were required for the case management part of the project?

Work had been carried out to calculate how much time individual staff had spent on case management type of work. This equalled approximately the equivalent of 80 members of staff. However, at this stage of the project it was not known how this would be incorporated in the Delivery Model.

- The Board Members had submitted a response to the New Council Consultation at the previous meeting. Would it be possible to get some feedback from the process?

The responses had been collated and given to the Secretary of State to be considered but had not been analysed by staff. The responses would be available to view online shortly.

26. Extra Care Housing Update.

The Project Officer gave a verbal update on the Extra Care Housing Project.

As previously reported to the Board, the Housing Team was re-commissioning the extra care service provided to their tenants.

Last April, they had reached a decision to allow Somerset County Council (SCC) to procure an integrated care and support service which had been agreed by tenants.

This resulted in a tender which had taken place over the summer and eventually the official appointment of the new provider, Way Ahead Community Services, was announced in January 2017.

Delays had been experienced with the provider and SCC, however, the contract start date was met and commenced on 27 March 2017.

The service level agreement and lease had been signed and the service had been introduced to the tenants. Support would be given to the tenants during this time and a new member of staff would be appointed for this.

Work would be continued on the service level agreement. There was lots of details in the agreement and these would be evolved over time.

27. Grounds Maintenance Service Review.

The Strategy and Partnership Officer presented the report which detailed the work that had taken place on the review and the content and arrangements for the delivery of grounds maintenance service to land owned by the Housing Revenue Account.

TDBC Housing and Communities had established a project team in September 2016 to review the current grounds maintenance agreement that was in place with the TDBC Deane DLO Open Spaces Team.

The works that the Parks and Open Spaces Team had undertaken on behalf of the Housing Department was based on the original 1997 specification of the contract that was updated to the new agreement in 2006. Since this time, the Open Spaces Team had provided services that were instructed by the Housing Department.

Additional works that were outside the scope of the original specification and were requested by Housing or undertaken when necessary at the Parks and Open Spaces Manager's direction, were charged as additional works.

This agreement had been in place since 2006 and was clearly due for review both in terms of understanding the required scope of works, quality and true cost for the delivery of the service.

During the review it was highlighted that grass cutting and work on trees were the main additional works requested by customers and the total cost for these works was £147,000.

In addition to this, the largest single category for complaints, enquiries and requests was for issues around trees which had resulted in 229 contacts.

Whilst the number of complaints appeared low at 11%, requests equalled 78% of all contacts.

If information about what the service included and excluded was made readily available and accessible, the number of enquiries to the team would decline and satisfaction might improve.

In conjunction with this, if work was programmed in certain times of the year, ideally before growing season had commenced and once it had ceased, this could prevent the reactive nature of the service, which would make the service more efficient and the number of customer contacts would be reduced.

Part of the review provided more detailed explanation on service charges and compared the level of service charge made by TDBC to those made by other social landlords.

TDBC based their service charge for grounds maintenance on an average cost per property. Other landlords who provided a grounds maintenance service that were contacted based their service charge on the square meterage of grass that was to be cut that related to that particular property together with the frequency and standard of that cut for a particular area. Therefore a sheltered scheme which had a large area of grass, was cut more regularly than a general open space and has the grass clippings collected paid much higher service charge than a property which did not benefit from a communal garden. TDBC was currently unable to charge service charges in a sophisticated property by property way as this would require a significant investment in resources to calculate these charges. The Board had previously supported the principle of equalising the cost across all tenants to ensure that the service was affordable for everyone.

Part of the review was to identify more cost effective ways to provide some services and to provide tenants with the opportunity to influence which of the non-essential services they wished to be included in the future specification. This would allow tenants to decide on the standard of service and to have some control over the costs.

The Board Members were shown a video clip of the grounds maintenance service provided by Rochdale Boroughwide Housing that TDBC aspired to achieve.

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

- Queried whether the Rochdale service was more expensive and did they have more staff?

This was not known.

- Praise was given to the staff who worked in the Priorswood area, job well done.
- Support was given for the project. Queried whether private tenants were included in the service charges?
Yes they were.
- Concern was raised on the grass cutting in the area. Tenants had to chase the work. Queried how many times a year the work should be carried out.
Should have grass cut 15 times a year.
- Where were the clippings taken after a cut and collect service?
The clippings were taken to Somerset Waste Partnership (SWP) and Viridor for disposal. This was an expensive method of disposal. The department was looking into purchasing some mulching mowers for grass cutting, this took away the need to dispose of the clippings through the SWP. This method was supported by the Lead Member for Community Leadership.
- Clarification was requested on whether the budget stated in the report was just for Housing.
Yes it was.
- It was noted that if more work was needed on grounds maintenance, then the service charges would need to be raised.
- The department were due to carry out a tour of the District to see what work was needed and encouraged the Board Members to join them on the tour so they would be able to have input in the works needed.

Resolved that the content of the report be noted and the recommendations be endorsed.

(The meeting ended at 7.45pm)