

Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on Monday 29th October 2012 at 6pm in The John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton.

Present: Mr Dustyn Etherington (Chairman), Mrs Jessie Bunn, Mrs Enid Drage, Mr Mark Edwards, Mr Dennis Galpin, Mr Ian Gould, Mrs Judith Hegarty, Mr Robert Middleton, Mrs Tammy Urquhart, Mr Kevin Hellier and Councillor Robert Bowrah.

Officers: James Barrah (Health and Housing Manager), Phil Webb (Housing Manager – Property Services), Christine Thompson (Supported Housing Manager), Martin Price (Tenant Empowerment Manager), Paul Hadley (Housing Manager – Lettings), Rosie Reed (Tenant Services Development Officer), Lucy Clothier (Accountant), Antony Knight (Estate Officer ASB) and Emma Hill (Corporate Support Officer).

Others: Councillor T Slattery, Councillor Mrs Warmington, Cllr A Wedderkopp, Lisa Wychwood and Graham Vickery from Halcon North Tenants & Residents Association

(The meeting commenced at 6.00pm)

1. Apologies

Councillor Steve Brooks

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 24 September were taken as read and signed.

3. Public Question Time

Representatives of the Halcon North Tenants and Residents Association expressed their gratitude for the support of Tenant Services Management Board and also expressed their pleasure at the outcomes from Community Scrutiny and Executive Committee.

The representatives also requested some advice for residents from the Housing Managers of Property Services and Lettings.

4. Declaration of Interest

The following members declared a personal interest as a council house tenants:

- Mr Dustyn Etherington
- Mr Mark Edwards
- Mrs Jessie Bunn
- Mrs Enid Drage
- Mr Dennis Galpin
- Mr Ian Gould
- Mrs Judith Hegarty

- Mr Robert Middleton
- Mrs Tammy Urquhart
- Mr Kevin Hellier

Councillor Bowrah declared a personal interest as he has family members who are council tenants.

5. Review of Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2012 - 2042

Considering the report previously circulated, concerning the annual review of the HRA Business Plan

Following the HRA Self Financing settlement a new 30 year HRA Business Plan 2012-2042 was agreed from the 1st April 2012. At this time a formal review process was agreed and as such a project group has been convened to lead on a review of the HRA Business Plan, in light of a number of changes and issues that have arisen since April.

The purpose of this report is to consider and agree the aspects of the HRA Business Plan 2012-42 under review, and refresh the financial aspects of the plan to ensure they remain current.

The Council agreed that the HRA Business Plan would be subject to a formal annual review involving member scrutiny and agreement as part of the budget setting timetable each year.

In the first few months of the financial year it has become apparent that there are a number of issues that require amendment or inclusion in the business plan, as the context in which Housing Services operates continues to change rapidly. As a result of this a review of the business plan has now been undertaken to address a number of issues that are outlined in this report.

Asset Management:

Uplift of Disabled Facilities Grant and Aids & Adaptations Budget

The HRA budgets £500K capital per year to provide disabled aids and adaptations for tenants in our stock, this work is undertaken by the Somerset West Private Sector Housing Partnership (SWPSHP) on behalf of the housing service. In the original business plan we projected this figure to remain constant, however we were aware that the need is likely to increase in future years as the population ages.

Consequently a needs analysis has been commissioned for the HRA from the SWPSHP. This work is underway and will be reported in due course. For business planning purposes it is thought prudent to increase this provision by 5% per year for the next 10 years and then for it to remain fixed for the remainder of the plan. This issue can be re-visited pending the outcome of the needs analysis work.

Stock Investment Figures and Data Cleanse –

During the creation of the original business plan, a validation exercise was undertaken by Savills in relation to the quality of the Council's stock condition data. Consequently concerns were raised about the accuracy of the data and reliance on it for business planning purposes. At this time a commitment was made to address this issue during 2012 and the outcome from this work would be fed into the review process.

Since April work has been underway to cleanse the stock data of certain inaccuracies and undertake stock condition surveys. The impact of this work is a slight reduction in

the Future Major Works requirement for our stock over 30 years of approximately £4M, due to some re-profiling of the needs based on better stock information. However, there remains a significant backlog of work created in part by tenant refusals for improvement works previously and other works not completed as part of the Decent Homes programme. As a consequence of the inclusion of the additional items identified in the report, the overall capital expenditure over the 30 year period has risen to £191M from £187M.

Extension of Properties

Many years ago the housing service allocated a budget to undertake extensions to existing TDBC dwellings to help meet the housing needs of our larger families. Such practice ceased due to insufficient funding being available.

Currently (Aug 2012) our Housing Register tells us we have:
236 Silver Band Taunton Deane Registered applicants who are one bedroom deficient; and 15 Gold Band Taunton Deane Registered applicants who are two bedroom deficient.

Current TDBC Tenants within the figures above:
53 Housing Register Silver Band Taunton Deane Borough Council tenants who are one bedroom deficient; and 4 Housing Registered Gold Band Taunton Deane Borough Council tenants who are two bedroom deficient.

Note: Overcrowding data at August 2012 Homefinder Somerset Statistics.

With 3,818 (at 30/6/12) Housing Registered applicants in Taunton Deane and 18,813 (at 30/6/12) Housing Register applicants Somerset wide the demand for social housing is high.

It has been suggested that it would be appropriate to re-introduce a budget that will provide TDBC Housing Services with an additional means of helping to alleviate the housing need of those who are living in overcrowded conditions. It is therefore suggested to create a new improvements budget of £160K per year which would be used to fund approximately 4 two storey extensions per year. Operationally decisions regarding where extensions will be undertaken will be made on the basis of need, property type and return on investment.

In creating properties with a greater number of bedrooms the rent would have to be re-set to the appropriate level which would produce a small additional income to the HRA. In the original Business Plan £210K was allocated between years 1-10 for known extensions required to 6 properties where bathrooms required re location upstairs, this allocation will be incorporated into modelling of the additional budget for extensions.

Social Housing Development Fund (SHDF):

The current projections for SHDF phase one would be that 26 new units are feasible at cost of approximately £3.43 million. The Current business plan shows a SHDF investment of £2.3 million. If the "Phase 1" sites are to be delivered in the next four years, an additional £1.13 million would need to be added to the Capital Programme. The fund could go further if part of the revenue allocated for housing development were

used to service additional debt.

Welfare Reform:

An emerging housing services welfare reform strategy sets out the actions over the next 12 to 24 months for effectively managing the welfare reform changes. The strategy provides a clear focus for our interventions and initiatives, which would be aimed at maximising tenants' income.

The business plan could be impacted by the increase in financial hardship in the community and the potential greater challenges in collecting rent.

Firstly, the council's cash flow may slow down, which would create additional risk for the General Fund relating to less money for potential investment and for the HRA would benefit less from the return on those potential investments. Secondly, the irrecoverable debt may increase leading to a higher level of write offs.

Right to Buy (RtB):

The council signed the agreement with Government on the use of 'additional' Right to Buy receipts.

The additional receipts of 18 properties have been modelled into the business plan for this financial year. This shows potential 'additional' receipts in year 1 (2012/13) of approximately £600K.

Staffing:

In order to deliver the projects outlined, additional staffing resources would be required to lead on the HRA's development activities in the form of:

- Increase Housing Enabling Post's Part-Time Hours
- Recruit a temporary Housing Development Projects Lead (sustainable energy)
- Recruit a Housing Development Projects Lead
- Recruit a Development Manager
- Restore Repairs Line Service to the original 3.7 FTE

Other Financial Adjustments:

Retail Price Index (RPI) inflation, on which the annual uplift of rental income is calculated, has been falling in recent months and has reduced substantially from 5.6% in September 2011 to 2.6% in September 2012. Therefore it would be prudent to reduce the level of inflation included within the model from 3.5% to 2.5%. The impact of this is a reduction in both the annual expected increase in rent, and also the annual expected increase in expenditure

Due to better interest rates, the council gained an additional £0.817 million in year 1 in savings for the business plan. The council had taken advice from Treasury Management Advisors (Arlington Close) and they said it is not advisable to use interest savings to pay off any debt capital at this time.

Due to a long lead in period on development sites, not all Social Housing Development Fund would be spent in certain years.

Finance Comments:

Each Key change identified in this report had been modelled and its impact (either positive or negative) had been identified on both cash flow and 30 reserve position. If the council agrees all recommendations, the HRA Business Plan would still be viable and healthy.

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

- How are the building maintenance department going to handle the backlog of improvements for tenants' properties?
The backlog of improvements is due to several reasons some being due to refusal to allow entry but not all. On some occasions there had been no programme for improvements. The backlog would now be spread out over five years alongside current and ongoing programmes of improvements.
- With tenants refusing entry to council workers, are all our legal bases covered as a council.
Scheduled improvements on tenants' properties not a requirement by law, only gas safety certificate. If they refuse entry for whatever reason as landlord we must respect that.
- With reference to item 3.3 in the report, how did the council come to the costing for single and double storey extensions (£25k single & £40K double)?
The costing had been a budget estimate suggested and given by the council and SWPSHP.
- Concern that the uplift of 2% for bad debt would not be enough. Some tenants may lose between 200 and 250 pounds per month.
*An action plan would be put into place to assist council tenants through the welfare reform. With reference to tenants under occupying their properties and look into assisting with relocation. Also looking into transfer/removal grants to assist tenants to move.
The creation of debt advice post would be coming available through the revenue and benefits department.
The uplift percentage is flexible and can be reviewed.*
- Can the officers define what one for one means under the RtB?
The RtB one for one in affordable housing replacement had been set by the government and on a national scale. The council are not involved in the monitoring.
- Some tenants prefer to do the home improvements themselves and others including the elderly don't want the bother, mess or hassle.
There are many variables as to why tenants do not want council workers in complete improvements. Currently, 570 houses have refused entry for kitchen improvements.
- 570 houses would only be 10% of our current housing stock.
- The Chair of the Halcon North Tenants and Residents Association asked if it could help with the issue of those tenants who are refusing entry to the council. It could assist and support tenants through the process.

Resolved that:

1. The Tenant Services Management Board recommended: -
 - (a) To support the uplift Disabled Facilities Grant and Aids and Adaptations budget to 5 % for the next ten years pending the outcome of the needs analysis.
 - (b) To support the creation of new improvements budget of £160K per year, funding approximately four two storey extensions per year.
 - (c) To approve the investigations into extending the reach of the current Social Housing Development Fund by utilising some of the borrowing headroom towards funding for housing development.
 - (d) To support the interim development policy.
 - (e) To support the increase in allowance for bad debt in the HRA to 2% for a period of three years from 1 April 2013.
 - (f) To support the additional RtB receipts being ring-fenced and these to be allocated to a separate budget code.
 - (g) To support agreed outlined approach to additional staffing to support the Business Plan objectives and a consequent increase in revenue staffing costs of £55K.
 - (h) To support the agreement that any surplus Social Housing Development Fund budget remaining at the end of any financial year be allocated to a new "Social Housing Development Fund" ear marked HRA reserve.
 - (i) To support the agreed principle that surplus cash resources within the HRA are allocated to the new Social Housing Development Fund Reserve.

6. Verbal Update on Halcon North Project.

The Tenant Empowerment Manager gave a verbal update on the Halcon North Regeneration Project after an update report was presented to Community Scrutiny Committee on 9 October and Executive Committee on 10 October.

The Executive Committee resolved that, in view of the consensus of opinion in favour of smaller scale regeneration in Halcon North, Taunton, options be explored with partners to access funding for smaller scale development whilst maintaining and improving retained Housing Revenue Account stock. Any regeneration would be linked to the Priority Area Strategy, be constructed to the highest energy efficiency standards practicable and to include full risk and community impact assessments.

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

- Thank you to Tenant Services Management Board for supporting the residents and Community through the Halcon North Regeneration Project.

- The challenge for the Council is to tackle deprivation in this area.

Resolved that the Officer's update be noted.

7. Report on Tenants' Welcome Pack.

Considering the report previously circulated, concerning a proposal detailing the introduction of a new Tenants' Welcome Pack to assist tenants when moving into their new home.

The provision of a Tenants' Welcome Pack for tenants just starting their tenancy has been suggested by officers, the provision of this type of pack is considered good practice across social housing with many housing providers already supplying a variety of packs for their new tenants.

Welcome packs are designed to provide a selection of low value items for tenants when they first move into their new home, the contents are provided to help assist in making the 'void into a home'. By presenting new tenants with a pack the service can help make moving into a new home a more positive experience. A welcome pack is a simple way to help establish a good relationship between the tenant and the landlord at the earliest opportunity.

Research into how other providers source their packs has indicated that there are primarily two ways that they are provided.

1. Provided the housing provider sourcing items locally and making the packs up prior to being provided to tenants. This approach can take a lot of officer time and means that the pack contents would vary dependant on the availability of stock items.
2. Sourcing from a supplier who deal in 'ready made', 'pre-packed' stock. This approach involves much less officer time and the packs are simply ordered direct from a supplier.

Research on the internet including Housemark and the Chartered Institute of Housing has shown that HMDC Limited is the No1 supplier of the "ready made pre-packed" packs nationally. The company had supplied welcome packs for over ten years, and in that time have supplied tens of thousands of packs to housing associations.

The supply of the welcome pack is not to respond to problems faced by new tenants when they are offered a tenancy by the lack of sufficient funds to purchase many of the household items such as quality second hand or new furniture and 'white goods'. It is simply a pack that would 'help to make a void into a home'.

The introduction of a tenants welcome pack is a simple way to help establish a good relationship between the tenant and the landlord at an early stage of the tenancy. The supply of a pack that contains a selection of low value household items that would be helpful to the tenant during the disruption of moving home and would help make this stressful period a more positive experience.

The contents of packs can vary, but a typical pack contains some of the following:

Bin bags, cleaning cloths, washing up liquid, multi surface wipes, toilet roll, rubber gloves, scourer, plastic bowl, air freshener, dust pan and a drinks pack.

The packs would be provided to all new tenants and would be left in the home prior to the start of the tenancy by the DLO Voids Team.

Tenants Welcome Pack Options

Options available are:

1. Do not introduce a new Tenants Welcome Pack;
2. Housing Services officers source, pack and deliver the new tenants welcome packs; or
3. Welcome packs are purchased from a specialised supplier.
A selection of such welcome packs can be found at Appendix 1 of the report.

Note: The recommendation of the Housing Manager – Lettings would be to procure one of the two pre-packed items. The benefits of this option are simply that they can be ordered and supplied direct from the contractor. Either of these options would remove the need to take officers away from their normal duties to source, pack and supply the contents of the pack.

Further work would be needed to assess the financial impact on the housing service should Tenant Services Management Board members support option 2 above before a firm decision to proceed be approved.

Feedback/comments from the Tenants' Forum

Tenants' Forum members at their meeting in September 2012 were consulted on the introduction of a new tenants welcome pack and their comments can be found at Appendix 2 of the report.

Tenant Service Management Board members need to note that a significant majority of Tenants' Forum members were not supportive of the introduction of a new tenants welcome pack.

Finance Comments

During 2011/2012 the housing service completed 412 re-lets to new tenants.

The funding of this pack would require an allocation of additional budget resources.

Note: Further work would be needed to assess the financial impact on the housing service should Tenant Services Management Board members support option 2 above before a firm decision to proceed be approved.

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

- What was the source of the idea? Was it one of Estate Officers?
The source of the idea is unknown.
- Has a small trail been done?
Not as yet but it can be set up.

- General Support for this idea was shown by Members of the Board.
- This idea would give a sense of good feeling between Tenants and the Council. *I have seen this operating in other others through a variety of agencies. The council could look at the contents and speak to companies to see if we could move away from to many cleaning products.*
- Member suggested the introduction of Pack Two.

Resolved that the: -

- The Board noted the Officer's report; and
- Recommended to Executive Councillor Jean Adkins, the Housing Portfolio Holder that the preferred option in relation to tenants welcome packs i.e.
 - (a) A ready made Tenant welcome packs to be introduced. This to be purchased from a specialised supplier for all new tenants; and
 - (b) The preferred contents option by the Board Member would be those items in Pack Two.

8. Verbal Update on Lyngford Crescent Local Setting Plan.

The Housing Manager - Lettings gave an update on the Homefinder Somerset Common Letting Policy.

The Lettings Policy allows for occasions where certain property labels can be used in assisting with the tackling of issues that impact on small areas within housing estates. Applying such labels may be to:

- Reduce the concentration of certain needs groups which are impacting on housing management; and
- Promote a mixed and sustainable community by seeking to select/not select households with particular characteristics.

Lyngford Crescent is located in north Taunton within a large mixed tenure estate comprising local authority social housing, owner occupied and registered provider units. The crescent consists of 20 one bedroom flats built in 5 blocks of 4 flats which were constructed in the 1930's.

The crescent had a poor reputation locally and is known by residents as an area where anti social behaviour is prominent. Since January 2012 Avon & Somerset Police have received 48 calls to attend incidents in the crescent. There have been four burglaries, one case of criminal damage and significant incidents of drug activity including heroin, amphetamines and cannabis supply. The drug activity has resulted in one property being the subject of a 'crack house' closure order.

Other issues concern noise nuisance from loud music, dog fouling and abusive behaviour.

The area being considered for the Local Letting Plan Policy is Number's One to Twenty Lyngford Crescent.

The impacting issues on the housing management;

- Poor maintenance of tenancy conditions leading to disruption in the 'community'.
- High incidence of anti social behaviour
- Clear evidence that some tenants engage with Class A drug abuse

The impacting issues on the mixed and sustainable community;

- Tenants with a high benefit dependency
- Concentrations of single occupancy requiring intensive support to maintain tenancy conditions;
- Reputational damage to estate caused by negative impact of tenanted flats in the crescent.

Taunton Deane would only encourage applications from those who know that it would meet their needs e.g. employment opportunities, transport, family/friends networks and other facilities. In short, applicants who want to live there. Additionally to encourage older residents who want to remain in the area to downsize to more suitable accommodation that meets their needs. This would result in the increased availability of family homes for rent on the larger estate.

A mixed and sustainable community will hopefully be achieved if the following are promoted;

- A proportion of new allocations to be made to those in full or part time employment or a proven tenancy record;
- A proportion of new allocations to be made to those existing TDBC tenants who live on the Priorswood estate and want to downsize to a smaller property thus freeing up family homes for re-let;
- No persons known to cause anti-social behaviour problems to be considered for allocation;
- No persons with a history of rug related offences or drug related anti social behaviour to be considered;
- Improvements to the physical environment in and around the flats; and
- Community cohesion.

Regarding performance indicators, it is essential that clear targets are set from the start; therefore performance will be measured on a six monthly basis against the following:

- A reduction in reported incidents of anti social behaviour from the current level of four – five percentage, to two per week within six months;
- Positive feedback from residents;
- Reduce expenditure on the cost of clearing/cleaning and repairing the properties as a result of anti social behaviour, fly tipping and discarded needles and drug paraphernalia;

As monitoring procedures, at the commencement of Local Letting Plan (and annually thereafter) a questionnaire would be given to residents to ascertain their perceptions etc. A report of its findings would be circulated to Housing Services Managers.

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

- Hopefully, the Council have learnt lesson from the previous Local Lettings Plan and would be monitoring and maintaining for Lyngford Crescent.
Each applicant would be vetted. There has been improvement noted by the police and other agencies at our previous LLP. The vetting has additional background check in place. Everything that can be done would be done prior to people moving in.
- Are the trouble makers still there?
If tenants found to have breached their tenancy agreement or evidence of being troubled makers then action will be taken.
- Could LLP be used in the Halcon Estate?
This would be difficult to implement to a whole estate as it is too large to manage but small pockets of the estate have been identified for LLP. There is some trouble houses that are not TDBC owed.
- Could it be done Street by Street in Halcon?

Resolved that the;

1. The Board noted the Officer's report.
2. The Board supports that introduction of a Local Letting Plan at Lyngford Crescent.

9. Verbal Update on Setting Dates of Tenant Services Management Board in 2013

The Tenant Empowerment Manager asked the Tenant Services Management Board to confirm the dates for Board meeting in 2013. The dates for the meetings of 2013 would be as follows:

21 st January	15 th July
18 th February	19 th August
18 th March	16 th September
22 nd April (AGM?)	28 th October
21 st May	18 th November
17 th June	16 th December

Resolved that the Board confirmed and agreed the meeting dates in 2013 of the Tenant Services Management Board.

10. AOB

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

- Is there an update on the Annual Report Calendars?
Taunton Deane is working on this. A work group of tenants will be set up in the future to review the format and content of the Annual Report.
- Officers stated items to come to the Board at future meetings, including; Quarter Two Performance Report from ALCHO, Overall Taunton Deane Performance Scorecard.

- What is the recommended level of loft insulation?
There is a retrofit project coming up involving the topping up of insulation. The recommended level is 150mm but some have up to 200mm.
- How often are the non-traditional houses surveyed?
This is done every five years. The subject of enhanced surveys will be discussed at a future meeting of the Board. This requires a specialist report.

(The meeting ended at 8.00pm)