

**Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on Monday 24 October 2011 at 6pm in the John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton.**

**Present:** Mr Etherington (Chairman)  
Mr Edwards (Vice- Chairman)  
Councillor Bowrah, Mrs Bunn, Mrs Drage, Mr Galpin, Mrs Hegarty, and Mrs Marshall.

**Officers:** James Barrah (Community Services Manager), Clive Chamberlain (Project Manager), Paul Hadley (Housing Estates Manager), John Hart (Estate Officer), Martin Price (Tenant Empowerment Manager), Rosie Reed (Tenant Services Development Officer) and Keith Wiggins (Democratic Services Officer).

**Others:** Councillor Mrs Adkins, Mrs Beryl Edwards and Nigel Stuart-Thorn

(The meeting commenced at 6.04pm)

**61. Apologies**

Apologies: Councillor Brooks, Mr Hellier and Mrs Urquhart

**62. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 19 September 2011 were taken as read and signed.

**63. Declaration of Interests**

The following members declared a personal interest as a Council house tenant:

- Mrs Bunn
- Mrs Drage
- Mr Edwards
- Mr Etherington
- Mr Galpin
- Mrs Hegarty
- Mrs Marshall

Councillor Bowrah declared a personal interest as a family member was a Council house tenant.

**64. Heating and Renewable Energy**

Considered report previously circulated regarding the re-procurement of the contract for servicing and maintenance of domestic heating systems within the Council's housing stock.

Clive Chamberlain explained that the contract for an enhanced service would be for five years and provide:

- A measurable improvement in first time access for servicing and repairs,
- A reduced call out rate for breakdowns,
- 100% compliance with annual servicing consistently,
- A reduction in tenant failure to meet appointments,
- Improved reporting on performance,
- Increased exchange of intelligence on performance of equipment to inform the stock reinvestment plan, and
- Reducing costs through the life of the contract.

The pre-qualification questionnaires deadline was that day, with indications that ten or more responses would be received.

The responses would be evaluated the following week by an internal panel and the Portfolio Holder. Tenders would be issued to successful applicants for return by 6 December 2011.

The new specification would expect contractors to demonstrate how they would meet a number of elements including:

- Enhanced resident engagement,
- Imaginative use of technology and communications,
- Two hour slots for appointments, including out of normal hours;
- Monthly reporting and detailed analysis of trends;
- Feedback on dangers from tenant damage or interference with equipment.

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

- What about solar energy systems? *This was outside of the scope of the heating contract because it was already included within the “rent a roof” solar PC scheme;*
- What would be done to reduce the number of missed appointments? *The new monthly reporting would include failed appointments – and the TSMB could receive a quarterly summary if required;*
- Solid fuel boiler repairs were not handled well by the current contractor;
- The contract should be mindful of new heating technologies and ensure replacements were efficient and use renewable energy where possible, *The contract would make use of Advantage SW pricing where appropriate and include regular review of approved products;*
- Why were boiler systems for blocks of flats not included in the contract? *These were specialist systems but officers undertook to follow up and review.*

Members then considered the report previously circulated regarding the installation of renewable energy heating equipment into bungalows at Stoke St Gregory, Churchinford and Creech St Michael. This followed the trial of air source heat pumps earlier in the year.

The new systems would replace electric storage systems with conventional radiators heated by air source heat pumps and (in appropriate housing) solar panels.

Tenants would be provided with alternative heating and hot water during the installations.

In response to questions about possible vandalism and effect of weather conditions, it was confirmed that units needed to be properly and securely located and should be 10cm above ground.

**Resolved** to note the reports on heating and renewable energy.

#### **65. Housing Revenue Account Reform Project Dashboard**

Considered project progress dashboard report previously circulated, concerning planned reforms to council housing finance in England and the management of those changes by the Council.

James Barrah explained that there were only concerns with one workstream – Assets – where a data validation exercise covering 100 properties involving Savills had now been completed.

The Savills report had revealed a number of problems and inconsistencies with the data in two database systems. Consequently it was possible that the repair backlog was overstated in the draft HRA Business Plan.

Action was planned to cleanse the stock database, which may require further property assessments from tenants or housing officers.

**Resolved** to note the report.

#### **66. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan 2012 – 2042**

Considered the draft HRA Business Plan previously circulated concerning the Council's overall aims and objectives for the housing service, as a landlord for over 6,000 homes, and as a key part of the Council's preparation for HRA self financing.

The forthcoming major change in national housing finance introduced new risks and opportunities for the Council's housing service.

The report reflected consultation carried out with residents, members of the board and Council and wider stakeholders. It provided a framework for monitoring and evaluating progress in delivering the plan.

The draft plan would require amendment when final settlement figures were announced by Government – and the final version would be agreed by Council in February 2011.

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

- What information is held about individual properties? *Details are held in two systems Codeman and Academy. The Savills survey indicated some data is out of date or incorrectly dated. Action to correct the errors may include a requirement to survey a larger proportion of properties;*
- Would tenants be asked for the information to correct the data? *When we understood the state of the problem - yes;*
- How flexible is the plan to adapt to circumstances? *The plan was designed to be resilient to external circumstances, but performance would be checked quarterly and the plan refreshed annually;*
- Are you trying to improve tenant engagement? *Yes.*

The Community Services Manager highlighted a number of recommendations within the draft Business Plan where he sought initial support from the board:

- The new four strategic objectives for Housing Services.
- That the business plan reflects the Council's current rent policy
- To explore the use of proposed new "Affordable Rents" in developing its plans for affordable housing.
- To review the use of probationary or introductory tenancies in the next 12 months.
- The potential introduction of fixed term tenancies.
- To take on new borrowing in March 2012 to the "settlement" level published by Government and repay the loan as soon as the business plan allows.
- To review the HRA business plan annually.

**Resolved** to support the draft Business Plan and the highlighted recommendations.

## **67. Anti Social Behaviour Mandatory Powers of Possession Consultation**

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the Government consultation on introducing new powers to speed up the process for social

landlords to repossess properties where tenants have breached conditions of tenancies through anti-social behaviour

The consultation sought views on two main issues:

- Extending the scope of the existing discretionary ground for possession for anti-social behaviour so that serious anti-social behaviour and criminality beyond the immediate neighbourhood of the property can be taken into account;
- Introducing a mandatory power of possession where anti-social behaviour or criminality has already been proven by another court.

The first proposal had been introduced following the recent serious inner city riots in order that tenants/ residents in social housing accommodation found guilty of offences anywhere in the country could be evicted. Members discussed the validity of such a measure only applying to those in social housing.

**Resolved** not to support the extension of discretionary powers.

The second issue of mandatory power was the original main scope of the proposals, which were designed to speed up the process where eviction is deemed necessary. There were five consultation questions related to the mandatory power which were considered in turn by board members.

Overall members felt that the mandatory power was a useful tool in the right circumstances but would and should only be applied where clear breach of housing policy warranted its use.

Officers agreed to take account of the views of board members in the Council's submission to the consultation.

**Resolved** to support the mandatory power of possession proposals.

## **68. Tenant led Scrutiny**

The Tenant Empowerment Manager presented a suggested approach to future involvement of tenants in scrutiny of the housing service delivered by the Council. It showed a division on work between the Tenants' Forum and the Tenant Services Management Board, suggesting the work of the board covered strategic and borough wide issues.

As well as the formal meetings of the board there may be up to three "scrutiny group" investigations each year, supported by officers in the Housing Service.

Members suggested that the majority of tenants would prefer a formal letter notifying them how they could become involved and that this could be included with rent statements.

The Chairman suggested there could be a website or online forum to help tenants raise issues.

**Resolved** to approve the proposal to convene a Scrutiny Group in January 2012.

**69. Annual Report to Tenants**

The Tenant Empowerment Manager confirmed the agreed calendar format and content for this year's annual report.

**Resolved** to support the production of the annual report.

**70. Dates of TSMB Meetings 2012**

Members had received a list of dates for meetings of the board in 2012. One date outstanding was for August 2012, which officers agreed to inform members when a date and venue had been agreed.

**Resolved** to note the meeting dates for 2012.

(The meeting ended at 9.02pm)