

Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on Monday 19 December 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, Mr Mrs Marshall and Mrs Urquhart.

Officers: James Barrah (Community Services Manager), Stephen Boland (Housing Services Lead), Martin Price (Tenant Empowerment Manager), Rosie Reed (Tenant Services Development Officer), Phil Webb (Housing Property Services Manager) and Keith Wiggins (Democratic Services Officer).

Others: Councillor A Wedderkopp

(The meeting commenced at 6.05pm)

81. Apologies

Apologies: Councillor Brooks and Mr Hellier

82. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 24 October 2011 were taken as read and signed.

83. Public Question Time

A statement was received in writing from Mr Martin Aldred, as Chairman of the Halcon North Tenants and Residents Association.

Mr Aldred requested assistance from the Board in obtaining clarification from the Leader of Council regarding his statement at the full Council meeting on 13 December 2011 and the status of the Halcon North regeneration project. He also asked Board members to sign a petition opposed to the Council's preferred regeneration option.

In response to these requests, the Board **resolved** to receive a further report on the Halcon North regeneration project and discuss the other options in more detail.

84. 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
- Mrs Urquhart

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

85. Decent Homes Standard Definition

Considered report previously circulated regarding the government definition of the Decent Homes Standard and its application in Taunton Deane. .

The Housing Property Services Manager explained that a ‘decent home’ was a property that met a minimum standard and was maintained to that standard thereafter. The property must meet the landlord’s and the tenant’s priorities and meet the following four criteria:

- be free from Category 1 Housing Health & Safety Rating risks;
- be in a reasonable state of repair;
- have acceptable and modern facilities and services;
- provide an acceptable level of thermal comfort.

Each of these four criteria was expanded upon in turn.

The Council had recognised that the national standard did not fully meet residents’ aspirations. Consequently the Council had, in consultation with residents and other stakeholders, developed a Decent Homes Standard which exceeded the Government’s minimum standards in certain areas.

The Council had put in place a work programme to ensure the standard was met or exceeded. Environmental works to estates, security improvements or adaptations for disability were contained within other planned investment work streams.

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

- Could outside lighting be provided on isolated or rural housing? *There were a number of issues within the housing stock and the limited budget needed to be prioritised after assessing each risk;*
- Some homes had an electric heater in the bottom of their airing cupboard but no marking on the switch, which was a potential fire hazard; *safety labelling would be taken up with new contractors from April 2012;*
- Had we achieved the standard across all the housing stock? *Less than 500 homes still required work to fully achieve the standard. All “void”*

homes were updated before re-letting and a programme of maintenance was required within the HRA Business Plan to keep all the stock at decent homes status;

- Was there a public record of people who don't allow access and prevent the Council getting their home up to the standard? *There were a number of reasons why a tenant might choose not have work done on their property and other than for safety work they were entitled to do so.*

Resolved to note the content of the report.

86. 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.

The Community Services Manager explained that the draft HRA Business Plan had been approved but the Council still awaited final figures from Government that would determine the final budget requirements and allow the business plan to be completed. The project overall remained on track.

Resolved to note the dashboard report.

87. Gas Servicing Inspection Process where Difficulties with Access Occur

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the procedure for gas safety checks when difficulties with access to properties had occurred.

Taunton Deane Borough Council as a landlord had a legal duty under the Gas Safety (installation and use) Regulations 1998 to ensure that any gas appliance and gas supplies that are provided to its properties are tested every 12 months, for the safety of the tenant occupying the property and the surrounding community.

The majority of tenants allow entry for the gas safety checks to occur. For the a minority of tenants making access difficult TDBC had to have a rigorous procedure to ensure that access was obtained and the necessary gas safety checks completed.

Various methods were used to try and arrange access with the tenant which included:

- Telephone calls to arrange access
- Visits from the tenant's Estate Officer.
- Letters being sent via post and hand delivered by Estate Officers

The letters had an increasing emphasis on the reasons why the gas safety checks were necessary and the consequences of not responding to the request for access.

The revised process was explained and discussed and would normally take 6 or 7 weeks overall if the tenant was still uncooperative.

Resolved to note the improved process and contents of the report.

88. National Tenant Training Programme – Growing Together, HotHouse Training Event, November 2011

Considered report previously circulated, concerning an update from the Tenant Services Development Officer on the training event held in November.

The event was attended by tenants of registered providers across the south west, including members of the Board and Council officers.

The training day covered many areas of co-regulation and scrutiny and had been well received.

Resolved to note the report.

89. Annual Report update

The Tenant Empowerment Manager explained that the final draft of the Annual Report had now been completed.

Copies were circulated around the room for comment.

Resolved to recommend circulation of the Annual Report to tenants.

90. Housing Services and Community Development - Restructure proposals

Considered report previously circulated, concerning proposals for changes to the staffing structure of Housing Services to prepare the service for issues arising from Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Self Financing and the associated new 30 year business plan.

The Community Services Manager explained he was preparing the service for challenges in relation to tenure reform, increased financial responsibility and enhanced expenditure on Council assets and to deliver improving high quality and highly performing services.

Consultation with staff would ensure the service evolved as smoothly as possible. Initial reaction from staff and unions had been positive.

The timetable for progressing the proposals was set out and members asked questions and received replies.

Resolved to note the restructure proposals.

(The meeting ended at 7.50pm)