

Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on Monday 23 January 2012 at 6pm in the John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton.

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

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: Mrs Beryl Edwards and Nigel Stuart-Thorn

(The meeting commenced at 6.05pm)

1. Apologies

Apologies: Mrs Urquhart

2. Minutes

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

3. Public Question Time

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

Mr Aldred requested advice on who to contact regarding an empty property in Halcon and on membership of the Board and received replies.

Replies were promised to his further questions and statement on the Halcon North regeneration project.

4. 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
- Mr Hellier
- Mrs Marshall
- Councillor Brooks

Councillor Bowrah declared a personal interest as a family member was a Council house tenant. Councillor Brooks declared a personal interest as family members were Council house tenants.

5. Supported Housing Service Development Action Plan 2012

Considered report previously circulated regarding an action plan to address the views and concerns of residents in supported housing.

The Supported Housing Manager explained the action plan was as a direct result of the consultation process over the past year to enable tenants to get involved in the development of housing related support services.

Members discussed travel claims and the payment of expenses.

Resolved to note the content of the report and the method for the payment of expenses.

6. 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 project overall remained on track.

Resolved to note the dashboard report.

7. Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2012 – 2042

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 modelling for the business plan now showed lower interest rates and a potential to repay the required new borrowing by year fifteen of the plan.

This had allowed a revision to the plan to provide a small fund to build two or three new homes each year on existing council land – and retain ownership within the HRA.

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

- What rent increases were planned after 2014? *The Business Plan assumptions were that rents would increase by RPI + ½% after 20014/15;*
- Exeter City Council had been building new Council homes so why hadn't Taunton Deane? *Finance was the reason. If the council had borrowed money to build new homes then "right to buy" would leave the council with the loan repayments but only receiving one quarter of the sale proceeds;*
- Any new Council homes should be built to passive housing standards.

Resolved to note the progress towards finalising the business plan and support the principal of the small "home building" fund.

8. Consultation: Reinvigorating the Right to Buy and one for one replacement

Considered report previously circulated, concerning a draft response to the Government consultation on its proposals to increase the cap on Right to Buy discounts and options for meeting the commitment to ensure that every additional home sold under Right to Buy was replaced with a new home for Affordable Rent.

The proposals for tenants related to right to buy entitlement, discount level and cap. The proposals for councils covered costs of the system, methods for distribution of receipts and approach to provision of affordable homes.

Resolved to note the report and support the suggested responses to the consultation. .

9. Housing Estates Team Anti-Social Behaviour Performance

Considered report previously circulated, concerning performance of the Housing Estates Team on tackling and dealing with Anti-social Behaviour.

Housing Services aimed to ensure that tenants and other residents live peacefully within their own homes and communities. The service recognised that failure to tackle anti social behaviour effectively blighted the quality of life of those people living with anti social behaviour and can damage communities. Two estates officers had been employed in December 2010 to focus on tackling anti-social behaviour (ASB).

The Housing Estates Manager explained that the two new officers were now part of “circle of information” and had helped create the confidence that those complaining about anti social behaviour would be listened to.

A new voicemail service had recently been introduced to allow problems to be reported out of hours. Members discussed concerns that although anti social behaviour had reduced in some parts of Taunton there were still significant issues – and often over the weekend period.

Resolved to note the report

10. Council Housing Voids Performance

Considered report previously circulated, concerning void property performance in relation to council owned housing stock.

The report provided details of voids management and performance following the advice and assistance visit conducted by the Audit Commission in 2009. The commission identified a number of strengths and areas for improvement during their audit. The report was a main driver for the review of internal TDBC operational processes which was conducted in March 2011. Following the review a number of changes had been made to the Housing Estates Team.

The Housing Estates Officer explained how the surveying team conducted a physical inspection of each void property. They then prepared a works schedule and instructed contractors. The property was then re-let by the estates team. Overall void performance had improved with 75% accepted on first offer.

Members of the board discussed the issue of access to sites and annual gas inspections.

In response to a question on repair costs for damage, members heard that the majority of tenants leaving homes now had some form of repair recharge. Full figures would be provided.

Resolved to note the report

11. Domestic Abuse Policy, Domestic Abuse Service Standard and Witness Support Policy

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the new Domestic Abuse Policy, Domestic Abuse Service Standard, and Witness Support Policy for Taunton Deane Borough Council Housing Services.

The report outlined the strategic overview that tenants in council housing could expect from Housing Services on managing Domestic Abuse and Witness Support.

Members were highly supportive of the new policies and the approach being taken.

Resolved to approve the policies and service standard.

(The meeting ended at 8.55pm)