

Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on Monday 17th December 2012 at 6:00pm 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 Kevin Hellier, Mr Robert Middleton, Councillor Robert Bowrah and Councillor Steve Brooks .

Officers: Steve Esau (Property Manager; Maintenance), Paul Hadley (Housing Manager – Lettings), Martin Price (Tenant Empowerment Manager), James Barra (Health and Housing Manager), Phil Webb (Housing Manager – Property Services), Steven Clarke (Tenant Services Development Officer), Stephen Boland (Housing Services Lead), Rosie Reed (Tenant Services Development Officer), and Emma Hill (Corporate Support Officer).

Others: Councillors J Adkins and J Warmington

(The meeting commenced at 6.00pm)

1. Apology

Mrs Tammy Urquhart

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 19 November were taken as read and signed.

3. Declaration of Interest

The Chairman requested that the Members of the Tenant Services Management Board declare any additional declarations to be made, not already on the attached list of declarations.

Councillor Brooks declared a prejudicial interest as tenant of a Council owned property.

4. Gas Safety Policy and Procedure, Asbestos Management Policy and Housing Property Service Standards

Board Members considered the report previously circulated, concerning the proposed new Gas Safety Policy and Procedure, Asbestos Management Policy, and Housing Property Service Standards for Taunton Deane Borough Council Housing Property Services.

It outlines the strategic overview that tenants in council housing can expect from Housing Property Services on managing Gas Servicing and Asbestos Management. The service standards show the minimum standard that tenants can expect from Housing Property Services in relation to certain works carried out in their homes.

It provides details of the specific elements of the service and would show how Housing Property Services would deal with Gas Servicing and Asbestos Management for council tenants.

The Policies and Service Standards were living documents and would be reviewed on a regular basis to reflect changes in legislation and people's behaviour.

Housing Property Services' priority was to improve the quality of life for people and communities now and in the future. Part of that vision was that they are committed to being responsive to the needs of TDBC tenants and to ensuring that all tenants can access services easily and on equal terms. Through these policies and service standards it can be ensured that all staff in Housing Property Services adopt a common approach to giving advice, guidance and assistance to tenants.

Housing Property Services are responsible for maintaining and repairing TDBC's housing stock, ensuring tenants can reside safely within their homes and that TDBC complies with the legal requirements.

The policies and service standards would show to tenants the minimum standard they can expect from Housing Property Services in relation to the below:

Policies

- Gas Safety Policy and Procedure
- Asbestos Management Policy

Service Standards

- Gas Servicing and Maintenance
- Asbestos Management
- Kitchen Replacement
- Bathroom Replacement
- External Refurbishment
- Rewiring of tenants homes

Aim of the Policies

- To meet the legal requirements of Gas Servicing, and Asbestos Management.
- To give tenants clear information on what they can expect from Housing Property Services, and the support and assistance available to them.

The service standards were designed to be sent out to tenants when they were informed about the proposed work to be done on their property. Each one is about a specific item of work. They were to give tenants clear information on what they can expect from Housing Property Services, and the support and assistance available to them.

The cost of implementing these policies would be met within existing budgets. It is the intention that the policies would be incorporated into the Housing Property Services' internal website SharePoint site that was available for all staff. The service standards would be incorporated onto the Taunton Deane Borough Council Website.

Tenants would be better informed on what to expect from Housing Property Services.

Some people may need specific help to fully access the policies. Additionally information may be required in different formats:

- Large Font
- Audio Version
- Different Languages
- Website page

The Timetable for this is as follows; the documents would be presented to Executive Member for approval. Subject to agreement and approval by all of the above the policies and service standards would be implemented with effect from the 2nd January 2013.

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

- What is the notice for tenants prior to gas service appointments?
We can look into including this information in the leaflet. The time scale currently stands at three weeks.
- Could it be four weeks?
The Council and ALHCO were looking into providing appointments on Saturdays and Evenings.
- Could you offer the Tenants multiple dates rather than just one option? The Council should push for out of hours appointments.
We can include this in the Tenant's Talk.
- Could there be a reminder call the day before the appointment?
The partnership between the Council and ALHCO is for five years so things can be reviewed and developed.
- The indicator on my boiler tells me when it's due for a service. Is this set at 10 months or 12 months?
This would most likely be set 10 months. A letter is sent out at 10 months to inform tenants that their boiler is due for a service. The aim currently is to get it done two weeks prior to the expiry date of certificate.
- The three year time period mentioned in 3.1 Asbestos Management Policy, what period of three years does this mean?
The time period is 2012 – 2015.
- 50% of the surveys have been completed. What time frame would the other 50% completed by?
We are working towards three years but we were hoping to be finished sooner than that. The surveys are geared around the types of houses.
- I have spoken to the engineer who came to service my boiler and he mentioned he is overloaded with appointments to the point that he is unable to complete them all.
This was mentioned at the last Tenant Service Management Board meeting where ALHCO were present. I just want to reassure the Members of the Board, this issue is being dealt with.
- Looking at the section to do with staff training matrix for asbestos, would those who attend the training received a certificate?
All staff who attends any of the training session would receive dated certificate.
- Could Members of the Board receive some the asbestos training? To make them more aware of this subject.
Yes, that a possibility we could look into. We could set up session of the asbestos awareness training completed by staff last week.

- Is the Council looking at or do you know of any tenant's garages roofs containing asbestos?
Condition and Asbestos surveys are being carried out.
- What's the risk for Tenants completing their DIY in relation to asbestos? For example drilling into walls and sanding?
There is information including advice on DIY for tenants in the leaflets sent to the Board. These would be available to Tenants. If tenants have any worries or further concerns prior to doing DIY they should contact the Council and we can arrange to come and have a look. The most common areas that include asbestos are Aertex Ceilings. Sometimes there is no way of knowing until you start work.
- What is harmful content of asbestos? The solid elements or fibre spores.
If the Asbestos remains undisturbed, then the policy is just to leave it and manage it. If it gets disturbed then it's the spores that are the dangerous element.
- Those tenants with gas heaters and back boilers, what are the Council doing in relation to Carbon Monoxide levels?
The Council are looking into Carbon Monoxide detectors for those tenants.
- The information leaflets for Tenants, would these be sent out or just available from reception here at Deane House? I think these should be included in the New Tenants Welcome Pack as well as supplying some of the leaflets to the Priorswood and Link Centre
We would include these leaflets in the New Tenants Welcome Pack. We have a list of locations where the leaflets would be distributed which includes both those locations. Also the relevant leaflets would be included any letters being sent out to residents.
- What about those people who planning to buy their Council House? Would they be informed if it contains asbestos?
We will pass on any survey information to the Right to Buy tenants, although not all have surveys as yet.

Resolved that the:-

1. The officer's report was noted.
2. The Board gave their support for the new policies and service standards.

5. Transfer Removal Grant Policy and Leaflet Report

Board Members were requested to re-consider a previously circulated report from agenda item six from the meeting of Board on 19 November 2012 as well as new additional information received in the form of appendix item one and two.

A summary of the additional information received by the Members of the Board relating to Transfer Removal Grant Policy and Leaflet Report.

Performance 2011/12

- 16 TRGs were awarded during the year.
- 11 tenants downsized from 3+ bed roomed properties to either one or two bed properties.
- £26,250 was paid out from the Transfer Removal Grant funding.

Performance 2012/13

To date, in this financial year we have completed 21 TRGs with a total grant award of £23,250.

- 7 of the grants were for the full grant of £2,000
- 2 were for £1,500
- 1 was for £1,000
- The remaining 7 were for £750.

It is anticipated that a further 3 TRGs will be awarded by early December 2012 which will amount to an additional £3,500 (1 x £2,000 and 2 x £750). This will take the total spend up to £26,750.

With the current take up of grants and the remaining time in the year, TDBC expects to have completed up to 34 TRG's by year end (target for the year)

There has also been a budget increase of £15,000, just prior to the November meeting of the Board.

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

- I think there is no need to change the amount available for the TRGs by the responses given. Other Board Members gave general support for this.
- People's reasons for moving not necessarily the financial benefits of the receiving the grant.
- The TRG enables people to move if they wish if they are unable to afford it.
- The number of applications to the TRG may increase over the next couple months due the economic climate.
- What happens to those that apply and the Grant money has run out?
*From April 2013 there would be £60,000 per year in the Grant pot. This financial year it would work out as £45,000 available. This is on a first come first served basis. The only people who are entitled to the TRG were those that have completed their move or exchanged. The TRG is available to everyone not just those who are on benefits.
There were 516 households of working age and receiving benefits that would be affected by the Welfare Reform. These household would be visited and advised of their options.
Mutual Exchange would be a quicker option to tenants. If they know of another Tenant who either needs to upsize or downsize than a mutual exchange would be arranged.*
- This should be well publicised, the fact that tenants can look for mutual exchange not just sit on the register and bid for houses.
- What about those Council Tenants wishing to move to another property outside of the Taunton Deane area?
Yes, it is available to those Tenants who are moving to another Council property outside of the Taunton Deane area but only to another Council property not private rented properties.
- Why would it not be available to those people who move to private rental properties? This would mean a Council property would become available to those on the waiting list. Other Board Members gave general support for this.
Members of the Board can make a recommendation to the Council.

Resolved that the: -

1. The officer's report was noted.
2. That the Transfer Removal Grant should also be available to tenants moving from a Council property to private rented not just those tenants moving from Council property to another.
3. The Board gave their support for the new policy and information leaflet.
4. The Board gave their support that the financial incentive for tenants to downsize was suitable and there was no need to alter it.

6. Verbal Update on Annual Report to Tenants and Leaseholders.

The Tenant Empowerment Manager gave a brief verbal update regarding the progress of the Annual Report Calendar for Tenants and Leaseholders. This has gone to the printer this week and the officer brought draft copies for Members of the Board to look at.

The officer wished to thank all the Tenants and Board Members who assisted the team with the creation of the new calendar.

Resolved that the officer's report be noted.

7. Confidential Verbal Update on Halcon North; the Next Steps.

Councillor Brooks left the room before the discussion of this item after declaring a prejudicial interest.

The Tenant Services Management Board went into confidential session. The Health and Housing Manager gave a confidential verbal update on the Halcon North Regeneration Project.

Resolved that the officer's report be noted.

(The meeting ended at 7.15pm)