

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on Monday 15 April 2013 at 3:30pm in The Long Room, Somerset County Cricket Ground, Taunton.

Present: Mr Dustyn Etherington (Chair),
Mrs J Bunn, Mr D Gaplin, Mr I Gould, Mrs J Hegarty, Mr R Middleton, Mrs T Urquhart, Councillor Bowrah and Councillor Brooks

Officers: James Barrah (Health and Housing Manager), Martin Price (Tenant Empowerment Manager), Stephen Boland (Housing Services Lead), Paul Hadley (Housing Manager; Lettings and Anti-social Behaviour), Phil Webb (Housing Manager; Property Services), Stephen Major (Housing Development Project Lead) and Emma Hill (Corporate Support Officer).

Others: Councillors Jane Warmington.

(The meeting commenced at 3.30pm)

1. Introduction.

The Chair welcomed all Board Members and Tenants to the meeting, which was the third Annual General Meeting.

2. Apologies

Mr M Edwards, Mrs E Drage and Mr K Hellier

3. Public Question Time

A member of the public asked if the Board had a full complement of Members for the forthcoming year as there appeared to be several absences

Tenant Empowerment Manager confirmed that the Tenant Services Management Board had a full complement of Board Members. The absences of Members had been confirmed through their apologies.

4. Tenant Services Management Board 2012/13

The Chair of Tenant Services Management Board gave a verbal update welcoming those present to the third Annual General Meeting and reflected on some of the Board's work over the past year.

The board had seen a lot of change over the last 12 months which reflects not only its role but also the changes that were happening in the world of social housing as a whole and more specifically in Taunton Deane.

The following was a summary of the Chairman's reflection of the Board's activity over the past 12 months:

- 2012 marked the first election of the tenant board members, a historic event as for the first time every tenant in the borough had a vote and had the opportunity to choose who they wanted to represent them and represent their interests.
- This time last year, first discussions relating to the Council's plans to start building houses again after a gap of many years. Much had happened to move this forward over the last 12 months including the proposal to redevelop a large part of Halcon with approximately 200 properties being demolished.
- The board received monthly updates on the development of the project and after reviewing the results of the consultations from tenants of the area, the Board recommended that the project should not go ahead. The Board were pleased that the Executive, the leaders of the council, listened to us and had now decided to move forward with a smaller scale regeneration project.
- The Housing Revenue Account Business Plan was enforced in 2012. The board helped shape this plan and as agreed, had been part of the annual update process. It was also important that all tenants know what future plans were and where their money would be spent. The board was therefore pleased to see a summary of the plan published in the quarterly tenants' newsletter.
- The Board received on a quarterly basis a financial statement. This shows how much money had come in and what it had been spent on for that period. It was helpful that the Housing Accountant presents this and was able to answer any questions we may have.
- One of the main purposes of the board was to scrutinise how Housing Services was performing, making sure it delivers what it was supposed to.
- The board had received a report every three months that details the targets that had been set and the actual performance against them. These performance indicators clearly show whether the target had been met. From these we can see where there were areas for improvement and seek to raise quality of services tenants receive. From this the board had chosen the 'top ten' important performance indicators and had made sure these were available for all tenants to see by publishing them in tenants' newsletters.
- Tenants had consistently said that their priority was getting repairs done quickly and efficiently. Therefore the Board asked for a review of the repairs service and the managers of the DLO and Repairs Assistants attended the board to answer our questions.
- ALHCO had been appointed in the last year to be the new gas servicing and maintenance contractor for the Council.
- The Board had also looked at and approved the Anti-social Behaviour Strategy but also received two reports on Local Letting Plans that had been introduced into two separate areas of Taunton Deane. This would allocate the right properties to the right people showing a marked reduction in anti-social behaviour.
- The topics presented and discussed by the Board were many and varied. These sometimes were areas of concern, which prompted the board to ask for the relevant council staff to attend, provide clarification and more details.
- The Board had been partied to reviewing and commenting on a variety of new government policies, which Officers had brought before the Board. Examples this year include: Changes to Right to Buy policy and Welfare reform and Housing Benefit changes.
- The Board Members had reviewed and approved the council's Welfare Reform Strategy and approved other practical measures that were being put forward

such as the Transfer Removal Grant policy and leaflet that helps tenants move to smaller properties that still meet their needs.

- Thanks to Board Members and the Tenants' Forum who came together to help with the design and content of the Annual Report.

Thanks was given to the other Board Members for all their work over the past year as well as to the Council Officer's for their hard work and unbiased commitment to the board and those Councillors who come along to board meetings and add their valued input.

Resolved that the Board noted the Chairman's report.

5. The Year ahead for Housing Services

The Health and Housing Manager gave a verbal update outlining the new issues facing the Board for the coming year. These included the following:

- Development Projects – Good progress had been made with all development projects including Phase One and Creechbarrow Road. The new development team was now in place. The Council was looking at other site for future developments. There were currently four Phase One sites but we may lose one. The relationship between the Council and the development partnership with Knightstone Housing was good and they were challenging each other with their development project processes.
- Welfare Reform – This was the other biggest challenge for the Housing Service. The Council had made good preparation for this including knowing who would be affected. These affects had now started to kick in but they impact would increase.
- Housing Issues – There were new budgets for property extensions. The Council would be looking at completing four extensions per year. The Council was currently investigating potential extensions on housing stock.
- Sustainability Grant – new grant available for sustainability developments. The Council needed to improve on the current level of stock data to enable a baseline figure before making any improvements. Council planning to engage communities and tenants to advise them on the things that they were able to do.
- Housing Property Services – There was an increase in the Housing Services Capital Programmes over the next year. The procurement process was under way for these contracts.
- Performance – The Council would be continually reviewing the performance of all areas of the Housing Services Department. It was believed that the department had performed well with some of the easier KPI's over the last 12 months but the next challenge was to sustain over the longer term and address some of the harder targets. Generally, good progress had been made. There were areas that would require long term effort in order to bring them up to standard.
- Tenancy Policy – This would run alongside the Council's Business Plan. This had unfortunately not got off the ground as planned in the last year. This was due to the busy schedule of the officers involved. Officers were hoping to make ground on this in coming months.

- Right to Buy – The last 12 months for Right to Buy had been very busy. The number of applicants had not slowed and continuously increased over the period. More than 30 properties sold, this would provide additional receipts towards new builds. Despite the high number of successful applications still several application fail for various reasons. There maybe a future move to reduce the eligibility from five year to three years.
- Leasehold – There currently had not been any continuity with this service but the programme was still in place through ongoing recruitment.
- Supported Housing – The Council was tracking the progress of funding reduction. Currently, a procurement exercise was in place for the contract of the support service. Also work on the Council's Extra Care Schemes.
- Business Plan Review – This would be continually reviewed. The Council would be starting to think about this in September.
- IT Services – In regards to the replacement IT system known as COSY system. There had been developed a programme of works planned for the next couple years as well as many other areas relating to Housing Management system, also the asset management system.

The officer thanked the Board Members for their support and work over the last year.

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

- Members requested an update on Downsizing.
- What pressure was the Council under to convert two bedroom properties into one bedroom properties to cope with the increase in demand?
The Council was not actively looking into this option at the moment. The Council was currently investigating and looking into the merits and issues of one bedroom properties as well as investigating possibilities around bedsit option on new developments.
- What's the service change?
This would be included in the Housing Newsletters both communal service and grounds maintenance service changes. Owner occupiers pay through Council Tax. The budget controlling programme of works for housing hadn't been cut. This was the service as previous year. This would be included in the Newsletter.
- General Grounds Maintenance work; there was a thorny bush requiring maintenance. Do I cut it myself or continue to report it? Stinging nettles over taking area around stream in Outer Circle. Could someone come and cut them.
These grounds maintenance issues needed to be reported either to Estate Officer or directly to Health and Housing Manager or Housing Services Lead.
- Does the Council know what our demographic dominance was through tenant information? Was it predominantly elderly? Also some other local authorities were building and selling their new builds.
*The Council continually completes status surveys, which provides plenty of information for demographic but work continues on Equality and Diversity information. Through the Homefinder Somerset website, the Council had access to tenant's needs and desires.
The Council had increased the number of one bed but there was currently a general coverage of housing types on the development.
Current demands cover types and areas of houses within Taunton Deane.*
- Could certain types of properties be changed to another type of property?

The need around Sheltered Schemes had changed. The Council had done this in the past but it's something the Council would need to look into i.e. de-commissioning housing schemes.

- Would the Council be planning to build bungalows within the new developments?

The Council had decided to go with Flats rather than Bungalows.

Resolved that the Board noted the Officer's report.

6. Creechbarrow Road Development Project Update

The Health and Housing Manager gave a verbal update outlining the new issues facing the Board for the coming year. These included the following:

- Consultation Events held last week were a success.
- There was wide ranging support for the development scheme.
- The Council had been refining the details of the development scheme.
- The officers were putting together feedback from the consultation events.
- There were three developments options presented to the Public, Staff and Councillors at the events.
- The Officers were combining all three options to make a hybrid design.
- The general preferences raised during the consultation event were for traditional looking properties rather than contemporary.
- The planning application moved a little from May. The Council Officer had met with the Knightstone Internal Board this week for approval of the development.
- The Council is moving forward on the consultation for the Community Hub. The Community Development Officer for Halcon would be leading on this but the deadline had been relaxed.
- The Council need to confirm the use of the Community Hub building. This would include the development on the first floor into more flats.
- Support for Tenants and Residents affected was gathering speed and the support would individually tailored for each household.
- The officers would arrange a meeting or post design to the Members to discuss their thoughts on the combined preference design for the development prior to the planning application.
- A more detailed report would be coming to the Board prior to Full Council in July.

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

- Would the house design for the Housing Association houses be different to those of the Council?
It would be cost effective for the design of the all the houses to be the same including the layout inside. Knightstone Housing had at least 50 individual housing designs. The Council would be looking at the external design and appearance but no requirement for them all to be the same. This was being actively discussed at the moment.
- Could 'The Link Centre' move to 'The Community Hub'?
This was to be discussed with Community Development and 'The Link Centre'.
- It was felt that Flats above 'The Community Hub' would limit what evening activities could be run from the Hub.

The new Community Hub would have a larger ground floor than The Link Centre currently.

Resolved that the officer's report was noted.

7. Election of Tenant Services Management Board Chair for 2013/14

The Tenant Empowerment Manager requested for nominations of the position of Chair of Tenant Services Management Board for 2013/14.

Resolved that that **Mr Dustyn Etherington** be appointed Chair of the Tenant Services Management Board for the duration of 2013/14.

8. Election of Tenant Services Management Board Vice Chair for 2013/14

The Tenant Empowerment Manager requested for nominations of the position of Vice Chair of Tenant Services Management Board for 2013/14.

Resolved that that **Mrs Judith Hegarty** be appointed Vice Chair of the Tenant Services Management Board for the duration of 2013/14.

9. AOB

The next meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board would be on 21st May 2013 at 6:00pm in The John Meikle Room at The Deane House.

Notification for Board Member nominations would be this time next year with the election taking place end of April. Tenants would get two weeks to vote.

(The meeting ended at 4.45pm)