

Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on Monday 20 January 2014 at 6pm in The John Meikle Room, Belvedere Road, Taunton.

Present: Mr Dustyn Etherington (Chair)
Mrs J Hegarty (Vice-Chair),
Mrs J Bunn, Mrs E Drage, Mr M Edwards, Mr D Gaplin, Mr I Gould, Mr K Hellier, Councillor Bowrah and Councillor Miss Smith.

Officers: Steve Esau (Property Manager; Maintenance), Christine Thompson (Supported Housing Manager), Phil Webb (Housing Manager; Property Services), James Barrah (Director for Housing and Communities), Simon Lewis (Assistant Director; Housing and Community Development), Martin Price (Tenant Empowerment Manager) and Emma Hill (Corporate Support Officer).

Others: Councillors Jean Adkins and Cllr Mrs F Smith

(The meeting commenced at 6.05pm)

1. Apologies

Mr R Middleton

2. Public Question Time

No questions received for Public Question Time.

3. Declarations of Interests

Councillor Bowrah and Councillor Miss Smith declared personal interests as several members of their families were Taunton Deane Borough Council Housing Tenants. Mr Etherington, Mrs Hegarty, Mrs Bunn, Mrs Drage, Mr Edwards, Mr Galpin, Mr Gould and Mr Hellier declared personal interests as Taunton Deane Borough Council Housing Tenants.

4. Kilkenny Court Update

The Supported Housing Manager and Property Manager for Maintenance gave a verbal update on the planned works for Kilkenny Court Extra Care Facility.

Communal Bathrooms – Below was a summary of the planned modernisation of the two communal bathroom facilities.

- These planned modernisations would bring the bathrooms up to standard and compliant with the regulations.
- All current fittings would be removed.
- The new style of facility would be walk in/wet room.
- There had been ongoing issues around water pressure, so this would be addressed when the facilities were modernised to allow for good pressure when using the new facilities.

- The contractor for this planned works was 'Mi Space'.

Refurbishment of the Four Lifts - Below was a summary of the planned refurbishment of the four lifts.

- The tenders would be back at the end of this month.
- The contract would start early May this year.
- The work would be phased with only one lift in each block out of action at anyone time.

Installation of Mobility Scooter Storage - Below was a summary of the planned installation of Mobility Scooter Storage facilities.

- There would be two new facilities available.
- The idea behind was to clear the communal areas of mobility scooters.
- These would be access through key fob system opening individual shutters.
- Inside there would a charging point access.
- These would be wide enough to allow for transfer to frame walkers or manual wheelchairs.

Also part of the planned of works for the both blocks communal water testing, emergency lighting testing and electrical testing.

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

- Didn't the residents also mention issues with the door entry and the key fobs? Had this issue been sorted?
- *This issue wasn't in the current planned works but the officer said they would investigate the issue and look making the system more user friendly for the Residents*
- Mentioned issues with the guttering and windows at Kilkenny Court?
The guttering issue was being investigated and more work would be planned for the future.
The Property Manager would look into the issues concerning the windows and go back look at the repairs history for the properties.
- Repairs works would be and can be done but it would take time for these to be completed.
- Some of residents/people didn't understand the restrictions and difficulties relating to budgets and think works and development should happen instantly.

Resolved that the Board noted the Officer's report.

5. **Review of HRA Business Plan 2012 - 2042**

Considered report previously circulated, which detailed the latest review of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan 2012-2042.

Since the last review process, a number of significant changes and issues had arisen that impacted on the Business Plan, which had resulted in a further review being undertaken.

(1) Business Plan - Income

Stock Figures and Average Rent - Due to increased discounts, the number of Right to Buy sales had significantly increased since the last review of the Business Plan.

There had also been a small number of disposals to housing associations for redevelopment such as Parmin Close and Victoria Gate, Taunton and the planned demolitions involved in the Council's own Creechbarrow Road, Taunton development, which had also been reflected in the updated assumptions. In addition some acquisitions had been made using Right to Buy receipts.

This meant that the number of dwellings at 2014/2015 had been reduced to 5941 (from 5980), and consequently the rent income forecasted in the Business Plan had been reduced in line with this.

As the average rent was slightly higher than forecast in the last reviewed, this had reversed the reduction of rent in the early years.

Changes to the Rent Formula - Since 2001, rents for social housing had been set based on a formula set by Government. This "formula" rent was worked out based on a combination of the relative value of the property, relative local earnings levels and the size of the property.

Landlords had been expected to move the actual rent of a property to this formula rent, over time, by annually increasing the weekly rents by Retail Price Index (RPI) + 0.5% plus a convergence factor of up to an additional £2 per week where the rent was below the formula rent for the property.

At the Spending Round 2013 the Government had directed that from 2015-2016, rents in the social sector would increase by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) + 1% and that this rent policy would apply for 10 years.

The change from using RPI to the generally lower CPI measure of inflation was not expected to adversely affect the Business Plan in the short term. The actual impact would depend on the difference between RPI and CPI in future years.

The change in the formula to remove the convergence factor of up to £2 would however have an effect on future rents and income. Rents had previously been set with the intention of reaching formula rent (also known as target rent) where possible in 2015/2016, but this would not now happen with the majority of current rents.

The result of the changes would mean that for one year (2014/2015), rents would be higher than previously thought for the reasons explained. However after this, rent would only be uplifted by CPI + 1% meaning rents would increase by less than expected in the Business Plan.

Since the proposal to change rent policy would last for 10 years, after that time an increase of only CPI had been assumed. This adversely impacted upon the income further since the previous rent policy had had no end date.

Re-lets at 'Formula Rent' - Formula rent figures had already been calculated and set for all Council properties and in order to help mitigate the loss of income in the Business Plan, all dwellings being re-let with effect from December 2013 would be let at formula rent level.

(2) Business Plan - Expenditure

Voids - The number of void properties had shown a steady increase for a number of years and a more recent significant increase in the first part of this year. Historically void costs had generally exceeded budget.

Although a new Lettable Standard had been introduced to provide a specification for re-lets, the average cost of voids remained high. The reasons for this were currently being investigated. It was anticipated that improvements to Deane DLO software and the introduction of schedule of rates would provide better control on voids expenditure in future.

Planned Maintenance - Following the “No” vote to stock transfer in 2006, a significant cut was made in HRA expenditure in order to fund the work that was known to be required to achieve Decent Homes. One of the changes that was made at this time was to reduce the frequency of planned maintenance (external repair and decoration) from a cycle of five years to eight years.

A five year contract was now planned for the new financial year which would combine external repairs and redecoration with the replacement of fascias and soffits with UPVC. An appropriate budget had been proposed for the completion of this work.

Following this period these costs were expected to reduce due to the volumes of lower maintenance components installed and the extensive door replacement programme which was continuing. Although this was a higher cost in the short term, over the longer term this would deliver savings.

Compliance - There were a number of important areas of safety checking and specialist maintenance within the housing maintenance theme. There were some weaknesses in our approach to compliance issues and this had resulted in action plans being put in place to move these forward.

The Council was currently seeking to employ specialist services in a number of additional areas which included periodic electrical testing and Legionella monitoring. The costs for these included the servicing and testing procedures and any remedial work that might become necessary.

Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) and Aids and Adaptations (A and As) Budget - The HRA currently budgeted £525,000 capital per year to provide disabled aids and adaptations for tenants in our stock.

The annual spend on A and As was in the order of only £120,000. Therefore it was proposed to reduce the budget to this level whilst not impacting on service delivery.

It was anticipated that the need was likely to increase in future years as the population aged. For business planning purposes it was thought prudent to increase this provision by 5% per year for the next 10 years and then for it to remain fixed for the remainder of the plan. However, as there was currently no evidence to support a 5% increase a freeze to this budget was proposed.

Staffing - In line with the recently agreed Joint Management Structure between Taunton Deane and West Somerset Councils, the management costs had been

increased by £77,600 per annum. This was to build leadership capacity in order to maximise the opportunities and manage the financial risk of the self financed HRA.

Provision had also been made within the Halcon One Team for one third of the cost of a co-ordinator post to assist in the continuation of the project.

(3) Other Financial Adjustments

The cost of support services provided by the General Fund (GF) was recalculated annually to ensure the cost was apportioned fairly. The HRA share had increased due to the proportionate increase in the size of the HRA against the GF.

Inflation had been amended from RPI to CPI within the financial model to bring this in line with the change in rent policy.

(4) Voluntary Code for a self-financed Housing Revenue Account

The introduction of HRA self financing had given local authorities the freedom to develop and deliver a more positive, less constrained, vision for Council housing. In order to support local authorities, a voluntary Code of Practice had been developed by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy and the Chartered Institute of Housing. The principles and provisions of the code would:-

- Assist housing authorities in ensuring effective governance, finance and business planning;
- Provide transparency to tenants, Members and officers as to how the Housing business was being managed. The Code would provide tenants and Members with a framework against which to hold the authority to account;
- Allow housing authorities to assess where they might need further support and assistance.

A copy of the Code of Practice had been appended to the report for the information of Members.

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

- Page three, section 4.1 Voids investigations into high void property costs and assistance from the DLO. Could you explain this in more detail?
Currently, waiting for the new back office software, this would allow for greater transparency on costing for work as well as with the introduction of a schedule of rates. This was part of bigger review and restructure with the way work was monitored and planned.
There was a planned review of all high expenditure areas relating to Voids and they would be investigated to help understand why then try and reduce them.
- Would that help with the costing of labour?
This would make savings with the new working policies for the DLO.
- Page eight, relating to the outcome bullet points. Would the officers be coming back to the Board to update us on the outcome?
The answer to that was none of the bullet point options. There had now been put into place treasury management measures.
- There were no references within the review about increasing our housing stock. Was this still part of the Council's plan?

There would be £1million per year from year four invested in increasing the Council's housing stock. This included buying back ex-council properties with RtB receipts. So far, there had been four completed purchases.

Ideally the Council would like to keep the housing stock levels above 6000 units/properties. Current, the Council total stock sits at 5940. This was due to RtB's. The government was still pushing RtB.

- When the Council start the self-assessment audit?
This discussion still needed to be hand. There hadn't been any specific decisions made regarding timescales for this process.
- Board members stated they were happy with the use of CIPFA code.

Resolved that:-

1. The Board noted the Officer's report.
2. The proposed changes to the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan be approved;
3. To adopt the use of the voluntary code for a self-financed Housing Revenue Account;

6. Taunton Deane Borough Council Organisational Structure Update.

The Director for Housing and Communities gave a verbal update concerning changes to organisational structure after the joining of management team and shared services between Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset Council.

The structure showed for tiers 1 – 3. This included the following positions:

- Chief Executive Penny James
- Assistant Chief Executive Bruce Lang
- Directors; Shirlene Adam, Brendan Cleere and James Barrah
- Assistant Directors; Richard Sealy, Simon Lewis, Tim Burton, Paul Fitzgerald, Ian Timms, Chris Hall and a vacant post.

During the presenting of this verbal update, the officer gave a brief run down the responsibilities for each of the positions of tiers 1 – 3.

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

- How long for the next tier?
*The next tier was middle management. The process had a broad outline for this including populating the new structure by June to mid summer.
Then the restructure would be looking at individual teams.*

Resolved that the Board noted the Officer's report.

7. Legionella and Electrical Installations Testing Policies.

Considering the report previously circulated, concerning the new Legionella and Electrical Installation testing policies for Taunton Deane Borough Council Housing Services.

It outlined the strategic overview that the tenants could expect from Housing Property Services in relation to Legionella and Electrical Installation testing of our properties.

The Legionella policy gave the organisations arrangements for managing the risk of exposure to Legionellosis within the Council's Housing Revenue Account properties. The Electrical Installation Testing Policy sets out the aims and objectives of the organisation and outlined responsibilities for managing the Electrical Condition Inspection Report programme.

The policies were living document and would be reviewed on a regular basis.

The policy covers all activities under the control of the Taunton Deane Borough Council Housing Property Services and included all properties that it owned, occupied or where it acts as landlord.

Legionellosis was the collective name given to pneumonia illnesses caused by Legionella bacteria; the most serious was Legionella's disease. Similar but less serious illnesses include Pontiac fever and Lochgoilhead fever. To date over 50 species of Legionella bacteria had been identified

Housing Property Services had obligations under the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974, The Electricity at Work Regulations 1989, that electrical installations were inspected and tested.

Aim

Housing Property Services recognised and accepted its responsibility for providing a safe and healthy environment for its employees and the public who could be affected by its facilities and services. The policies were an expression of Housing Property Services commitment to managing Legionella and Electrical Installations risks arising from any activities under its control. Housing Property Services would, so far as was reasonably practicable take all reasonable steps to protect the health and environment of:

- Employees
- Contractors (employed directly or indirectly)
- Clients and tenants
- Other persons

The cost of implementing this policy would be met within existing budgets.

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

- Electrical Testing in bathrooms, was this a separate action or part of this regular testing programme?
Bathroom installation had to have a circuit test completed as part of this the installation process. This was separate to the planned regular and full testing of the properties electrics as part of the testing policy.

- Would you be notifying tenants via letter prior to appointments, similar to the servicing programme?
The Council would issue to all tenants an initial letter explaining the planned programme relating to properties electrical testing.
- Could the Council consider using local contractors for electrical testing?
The Council could put questions in tender process to encourage the use of local contractors. But Ojeu notice had gone out countrywide; this was due to European Regulations for the electrical testing contract.
- What would be tested on the electrical side?
All circuits would be tested and the results and any recommendations would be feedback to the Council and any required actions would be arranged to be completed.
- If you had to re-wire a property, what system would the Council be using to hide the wiring?
The Council would most likely be considering discrete surface mounting for the re-wiring of properties.
- Connected to the re-wiring of properties, when the Council was completing a re-wiring, could they consider bring the height of the electrical sockets further off the floor? Some of the tenants struggle with those sockets that are at floor level.
*This would be considered on a case by case basis. The majority of properties would just have the re-wiring completed.
The electrical testing was a 10 year programme.*

Resolved that:-

1. The Board noted the Officer's report.
2. Recommended to Executive Councillor Adkins, the approval of the Legionella and Electrical Installation testing policies for affirmation.

8. Update on Tenants' and Leaseholders' Open Day 2014.

Considering the report previously circulated, concerning the planning and organising of the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Open Day 2014.

This was an event which typically ran all day and gave tenants and leaseholders an opportunity to gain information on and ask questions about topics that were of interest to them. The day was informal in terms of tenants and leaseholders could pop in at any time during the day; appointments did not have to be made.

The first such event was held in April 2011 and received a very positive feedback with over 100 tenants attending. The second and third events in 2012 and 2013 proved even more successful in terms of numbers attending and feedback.

The Tenant Services Management Board (TSMB) had previously taken the decision to hold its Annual General Meeting (AGM) at the end of the open day.

Representatives of the Tenant Services Management Board, Tenants' Forum and Supported Housing Service Development Group met to shape the event for 2014. This report details the conclusions of this group.

The three Tenants' and Leaseholders' Open days had been held in April since their introduction in 2011. The venue had been the Somerset County Cricket Ground and over 100 tenants and leaseholders had attended each event, with over 20 stalls available including various departments of Taunton Deane Borough Council (TDBC) and representatives from external organisations who were able to answer questions on a wide variety of housing related issues and other matters.

Representatives of the Tenant Services Management Board, Tenants' Forum and Supported Housing Service Development Group met on the 6th January 2014 to shape the event for 2014. Issues discussed by the group included timings and venue for the event, guest speakers, publicity and who should be invited to have stalls.

The group had agreed that there would be further meetings to review progress and ensure everything was on track. There would also be further meetings after the event to see what lessons could be learnt and plan for future year's events.

Tenants' and Leaseholders' Open Day 2014 – Venue and Date

The group came to the conclusion that the open day should be held at the Somerset County Cricket Ground on the 28th April 2014. The Tenant Empowerment Team had booked a function room at the Somerset County Cricket Ground for the whole day on this date. It should be noted that wifi access was available at the cricket ground and stall holders should be encouraged to use this to enable them to answer questions at the event where they were dependant on referring to their computer system.

It was agreed that members of tenant and leaseholder groups would be on the front desk of the venue to meet and greet attendees and give feedback forms. It should be noted that by completing the feedback forms tenants and leaseholders would be entered into a prize draw.

Tenants' and Leaseholders' Open Day 2014 - Timing

The group agreed that the event should be open from 10am to 5pm. However, it was important that all stalls were set up and ready before the 10am start time. The group felt that Councillor Adkins should be invited to open the event. It was also stated that tea and coffee should be available throughout the day.

Tenants' and Leaseholders' Open Day 2014 – Invitations to stallholders

By looking at the organisations that have attended previously and the type of subjects that should be covered a suggested list of organisations and TDBC departments had been drawn up:

Tenant and Leaseholder Organisations – ONE STALL

- Tenant Services Management Board
 - Tenants' Forum
 - Tenant and Resident Associations
 - Leaseholders' Forum
 - Supported Housing Service Development Group
- TDBC Housing Services

- Estates Management
- Leaseholder Section

- Property Services
- Repairs Section
- Supported Housing
- Housing Options
- Digital Inclusion
- Development Section
- Welfare Reform
- Anti-social behaviour
- Right to buy
- Community Development

Other TDBC Sections

- Revenue and Benefits
- DLO
- Deane Helpline
- Environmental Health
- Somerset West Private Sector Housing Partnership
- Tone Leisure
- Parks

Non TDBC Organisations

- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Energy saving organisation
- Avon and Somerset Police
- Age UK
- Credit Union
- Devon and Somerset Fire Service
- ALHCO
- Somerset County Council Children's Services
- Community Centres

The group felt that the Repairs section stall should have had plenty of room to allow tenants and leaseholders to access staff and have their queries answered. Owing to the number of queries dealt with at this stall in previous years the Repairs section should also ensure that there was sufficient staff available throughout the day.

Tenants' and Leaseholders' Open Day 2014 - Publicity

Each tenant and leaseholder would be sent an invitation to the event, detailing time, venue, stall holders and guest speakers. Other methods of advertising the event identified were:

- Tenant and Leaseholder newsletters
- Taunton Deane Borough Council website
- Notice boards across the borough
- Somerset County Gazette and local newspapers
- Posters
- Banner
- TV Screens in reception of Deane House
- Family centres/Children Centres

- Shops/supermarkets
- Post offices
- Local radio stations
- Tenants' Forum notice board in reception of Deane House
- Satellite offices
- Front line staff
- Councillors
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Large sign on the front of the cricket ground

There were other methods of publicity that would be investigated:

- On buses
- At schools
- Quarterly rent statement that is sent to tenants
- Annual rent level letter that is sent to tenants
- At village halls
- In libraries
- At GP surgeries
- In hospitals
- On DLO vans
- On ALHCO vans
- In church halls and in church magazines

Media and Public Relations Officer at Taunton Deane Borough Council would offer advice and useful contacts to ensure the publicity was as effective as possible.

Tenants' and Leaseholders' Open Day 2014 – Guest Speakers

The group agreed that having guest speakers would be a welcome addition to the event. It was decided that there should be two guest speakers, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. The topics and times would be widely advertised and the talks would be held in another part of the cricket ground. There would also be an opportunity to had a question and answer session at the end of the talk. The group decided that the two guest speakers to be invited were:

- James Barra, Director – Housing and Communities. To discuss future plans for Housing Services.
- Phil Webb, Housing Manager – Property Services. To discuss future plans for improving the housing stock.

Tenant Services Management Board AGM – Timing and Venue

The Terms of Reference of the TSMB state that:

“An Annual General Meeting will be held in April each year or within 15 months of the previous AGM”

Last year the AGM of the TSMB formed part of the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Open Day, with the formal meeting held at 3.30pm.

It had already been agreed that the AGM would be held on the 28th April 2014. This date had been publicised in the Annual Report to Tenants and Leaseholders calendar that was sent out in December 2013.

As well as the date detailed in the Annual Report to Tenants and Leaseholders calendar if the TSMB agreed to hold the AGM on the same date as the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Open Day information could form part of the invitation letter sent out to all tenants and leaseholders.

There was no set format to the AGM. However, it was customary to include agenda items such as:

- Reports from the outgoing Chairperson on the board's activities during the year
- Reports on issues that face the TSMB and Housing Services in the coming year
- Consider and vote on any resolutions put forward by tenants
- Elect the TSMB's Chairperson and Vice Chairperson. This was not applicable this year as the TSMB election would be held in May 2014.

Finance Comments

The cost of hiring a function room at the Somerset County Cricket Ground was free up to 5pm, with an additional charge to keep the venue open until 7pm. There would also be a cost to provide lunch for stall holders and teas/coffees/water throughout the day.

There would also be a cost of sending invitation letters to each tenant and leaseholder and other forms of publicity.

The main costs of the AGM would be the hire of the venue and publicity. However, if the TSMB agreed that the AGM would be held at the same venue of the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Open Day the expenditure would be included in the cost of this event.

The event could contribute positively to the aims of the council as whole and in particular housing services' aims of:

- Securing a long term future for our housing service
- Tackling deprivation and sustainable community development
- Investing in our housing stock, regeneration and affordable housing.

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

- Could the Council consider adding advert for the Open Day on Twitter and Facebook pages?
The Council's PR officer was happy to advertise the event on the Council's Tweeter account but the Council didn't have a Facebook account.
- The Council could try contacting the owners of multiple 'Taunton, Somerset' Facebook pages and ask them if they would advertise the event.
- Were there anymore charities, which covered more of the demographic range of the people of Taunton Deane?

- Could you include Community Halls as well for advertising as some of the rural areas don't have Parish or Church Halls?
- Would an advert be going into Tenants and Leaseholders newsletter?
The vast majority had requested individually addressed letters rather than adverts or receiving the newsletter.
- There was also free forthcoming events section in the Wellington Weekly.
- Could we include adverts in local doctor surgeries?

Resolved that the Board noted the Officer's report.

9. Creechbarrow Road Development Project

The Director for Housing and Communities gave a brief verbal update on the Creechbarrow Road Development project, below was a summary of the recent project developments:

- Galliford Try was selected as the contractor and took possession of the site on 20th December 2013.
- KHA portion of land was transferred to their ownership on the 19th December 2013.
- On site at the moment were employees of Galliford Try, undertaking asbestos surveys in preparation of demolition. Utility companies were also removing the gas and electricity meters.
- Following 24th January, the sites appearance would change to more of a 'building site' as works begin on the demolition.
- Residents were been updated regularly by TDBC via letter, one sent in Dec and one in Jan. They would also receive additional letters from the contractor at keys stages where additional information was required e.g. start of demolition phase.
- A letter was sent to local businesses today, to provide an update on progress i.e. Asda, Lavender Court etc.
- The project team had the first site meeting on the 27th January – this meeting would be used to clarify issues such as use of apprenticeships, local labour, community liaison and the build programme.
- An event in the Halcon Community was planned to introduce residents to employees of Galliford Try, KHA and TDBC. Dates for this would be established at the project meeting on the 27th January and then advertised.
- Development Team were attending Halcon MAG and Halcon One Team to provide updates on the project.
- Naming of Creechbarrow, this would be finalised in early February when the Street Naming and Numbering Officer finishes his phased return to work. The Officer had indicated that he was happy with the TSMB suggestions of Kershaw and Seabrook for road names.

Concerning the other phase one sites, the developments were underway for bungalows as well as ongoing projects at Normandy Drive, Bacon Drive and West Bagborough. The tenders for these schemes had already gone out and possible start date onsite would be looking at April 2014.

Resolved that the Board noted the Officer's update report.

(The meeting ended at 7.35pm)