

**Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on Monday
Monday 14 July 2014 at 6pm in The John Meikle Room, Belvedere Road, Taunton.**

Present: Mr Dustyn Etherington (Chairman),
Mrs J Hegarty (Vice-Chairman),
Mrs J Bunn, Mr M Edwards, Mr D Gaplin, Mr K Hellier and Councillor Miss
Smith.

Officers: Cyril Rowe (Open Spaces Manager), Chris Hall (Assistant Director Operational
Delivery), Lucy Clothier (Housing Accountant), Stephen Boland (Housing
Services Lead), Phil Webb (Housing Manager – Property Services), Steve
Esau (Housing Manager – Maintenance), Kene Ibezi (Assistant Director
Property & Development), James Barraah (Director Housing & Communities),
Martin Price (Tenant Empowerment Manager) and Emma Hill (Corporate
Support Officer).

Others: Councillors Adkins, Mrs Hebert, Miss James, Mrs Smith, Mrs Warmington and
Cllr Williams.

(The meeting commenced at 6.00pm)

1. Apologies

Mr R Middleton and Councillor Bowrah

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 Tenant. Mr Etherington, Mrs Hegarty, Mrs Bunn, Mr Edwards, Mr Galpin, Mr Gould, Mr Hellier and Mr Middleton declared personal interests as Taunton Deane Borough Council Housing Tenants.

4. Housing Revenue Account Financial Outturn 2013-14

Considering the financial figures table previously circulated, concerning the Housing Revenue Account Financial Monitoring End of Year position for 2013-14 accompanied by a verbal update given by Housing Accountant. The spreadsheets detailed the breakdown of overall financial position at the end of year for 2013/14 split between capital and revenue.

The Revenue Account Performance included such headings as Right to Buy, Income, Expenditure and HRA Revenue.

The following points were covered during the update on Housing Revenue Account Income, Expenditure and Revenue;

- Income was showing an overall under spend of £860,664. This was due to an increase in the Council's bad debt provision.
- Voids had a pressure of £32,033.
- Expenditure was showing an overall underspend of £237,704.
- HRA Revenue was showing an overall under spend of £169,222.
- Planned Repairs and Maintenance were showing an overall pressure of £11,594.

Looking at Right to Buy's (RtB), there had been 47 sales in 2013/2014. Add this to 2012/2013 total and this means 84 sales to date.

The following points were covered during the update on Housing Revenue Account Capital Programmes;

- Overall HRA Capital Programmes had an under spend of £62,024.
- Capital works on existing dwellings had increased significantly since the introduction of self-financing with spend of £6,561K in 2013/14, an increase of £1,866K (41%) from 2012/13.
- SWPSHP HRA Aids and Adaptations and Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG's) programmes were showing an overall underspend of £57,752.
- The SWPSHP Aids and Adaptations underspend was due to Stock Modelling Project.
- There was a £1,397,900 slippage in Capital works programmes.
- There had been 7 property Buyback's in 2013/14. There was some slippage related to this. This was due to a delay in bring purchased properties back up to lettable standard.

The Council was looking at £2.2 million budget for development within Taunton Deane. This included Buybacks of ex-Council properties to return to the Council's housing stock.

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

- Would the underspend from HRA revenue account affect the 30 year business plan?
No, it would not affect Business Plan and the underspend would be returned to General Fund.

Resolved that the Board noted the Officer's report.

5. Requested Information Update on Grass Cutting and Grounds Maintenance

The Chairman of the Board gave a verbal presentation concerning the questions

1. Could TDBC and SCC put budgets together to provide one service?
2. Was there a plan available that shows who owns TDBC and SCC land, the number of cuts it had and who pays what for the cuts?
3. Were there areas of the borough that receive a better/worse service?
4. Why aren't whole areas cut at the same time as opposed to leaving adjoining areas uncut?

5. Why was the grass left so long that the mowers cannot cut it properly, and then the work taking 4 times as long with strimmer's making it look unsightly?
6. Many were not happy with the service, what was an acceptable service and how much would it cost?
7. Were there other councils who had an excellent standard that we could learn from both locally and nationally?
8. By not collecting the cut grass it not only leaves a mess but it clogs up drains, adding further cost as the drains had to be unblocked. Could the grass therefore be collected after cutting?
9. By paying a service charge as part of rents and Council Tax are tenants paying twice for the same service, they being usually most affected?
10. Why do some housing areas get more cuts and collect than others, for instance flats etc?
11. Were there particular issues that were causing problems? Cost? A lack of trained staff? Lack of correct equipment?
12. Would there be less confusion and criticism if a schedule of grass cutting was published on TDBC and SCC websites – people would then know when the grass by them would be cut. This can obviously be updated if adverse weather conditions mean cuts cannot be done.
13. Can litter and other obstructions be removed before the cut? Less damage to the equipment, better appearance of area (no shredded litter) and safer afterwards (glass etc)
14. Paths could not have any grass cuttings on them – become slippery if it rains. The edges should also be neat and obstruction free to assist people with poor eyesight
15. Hedges must be cut back to make sure that they were not a hazard or obstruction to pedestrians, cyclists or motorists. Schedule/frequency to be agreed

Below the TDBC officer response to the question asked of them prior to this meeting of the Board:

- The Council cut the grass verges on behalf of Somerset County Council and we hold their entire budget for this.
- The Council used to subsidise this budget to complete extra budget, but due to a reduction in our budgets we were no longer able to subsidise their budget and pay for an extra cut.
- The Council had no current issues regarding training staff or issues regarding incorrect or lack equipment for the work being completed by TDBC.
- SCC do not cut hedges anymore unless they have reached a certain level which was deemed to be obstruction and dangerous.
- Council Housing Tenants were not paying twice for the same service i.e. grass cutting and maintenance costs. From your Council Tax, a portion went to SCC which included paying for the grass verge cutting and a portion went to TDBC to pay for maintenance for all Open Space and TDBC land maintenance then for Council Tenants paid a service charge to TDBC Housing Department for the maintenance of TDBC housing land.
- The maintenance schedules for the various different owned land as well as the various different types of land, all had different maintenance schedule, which decided by the individual responsible areas.
- It took six weeks to completely cut the SCC grass verges contract that TDBC were currently responsible for. To simply cut the each individual area all at the same time would mean TDBC was subsidising additional cuts on the SCC owned land.

- The TDBC land had a range cuts from 8 times per year to 21 times per year.
- To provide a cut and collect service cost three times the cost of a fly cut service.
- The Council had planted certain areas with Meadow/Wild flower seeds with fewer cuts but ultimately it was down to the number of cuts per year that were budgeted for.
- The Council had previously approached the County Council regarding the ongoing issues with drains and altering the grass cutting schedule which prevent some of the re-occurring issues but so far there had been no change. SCC were responsible for the maintenance of the drains and highways.

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

- Could the Council consider doing a cut and collect service near the bungalows where I live? After the grass, the pathways to people's bungalows were covered in cuttings and most residents were not able to clear them and they can become slippery.
The decision not to collect grass cutting is down to the Housing officers in the instance.
The Council had lost half of its revenue support from central government and as from 2016, the Council would have another reduction of £3.5million.
The Council had contacted SCC and asked them to increase their grass cutting budget to allow us to complete more cuts but they have said if they increase the grass cutting budget another budget would have to suffer i.e. social care.
- Had TDBC and SCC got plans to ask for volunteers to assist with grass cutting etc?
It's not something, the Council have considered yet but we can take the idea on board.
It would be down to finding the right group of volunteers and the Council could work through any Health and safety issues.
- Could the RtB receipts contribute to housing land maintenance costs?
General Fund contributes to HRA from RtB receipts.
- I am rural Council Tenant, we cut and collect the grass verges near our properties and within the village ourselves because if we didn't do it, nobody would and it would become unsafe.
- Grounds Maintenance on Housing Land were so good that they make other areas look worse. Short of reducing the number of cuts to Housing Land to balance it out, I am not sure what else the Council could do.
- The Land Responsibility Maps and Grass Cutting schedule was very helpful for councillors as well as Tenants and the Public, could these be available online for people to look at?
- It was suggested that this subject may need to go before the Community Scrutiny Committee for discussion. This would also require SCC representatives to be present, not just TDBC.
- TDBC were not the only the Council suffering with overgrown grass verges. On visits to other Local Authorities, it appeared that they were suffering with lack of budgets as much as TDBC with little money for grass verge maintenance.
- More complaints needed to be made to force SCC to take action on this issue.

- Executive Councillor was shocked by the picture of the steps and how bad the condition of the steps had become and would be looking into that particular issue.
The presence of representative from SCC would have been helpful regarding the discussions. I would encourage the Board Members to chase this issues with SCC and take up the officers offer to attend another meeting at a later date.
- Could sections of Meadow/Wild Flowers areas be included in the Blenheim Road? Similar to areas on the roundabout near Wickes.
This something that would need to be discussed with SCC as it was there land.
- This was a good suggestions to reduce the number of cuts required in certain by the inclusion of wildflower and meadow flowers areas.
With the permission of SCC for their land, could sponsorship of grass verges be considered as way to increase maintenance on these areas?
This was something the Council could consider and look into but unfortunately we didn't have a waiting list of sponsors but we can take this on board.
- Could the Council review the schedule of grass cutting and increase in some areas, to reduce the need for collection?
TSMB could review the Grounds Maintenance Contract and schedule. This could be done through a Tenant led Scrutiny review. After the review, it could come back to Board for discussion.
Concerning the Service Charge for Housing Tenants, this was spread over all equally, even those who do not have grass area near to their properties as all tenants enjoy the grass area in way or another.
Housing Property Service were co-ordinating with the DLO on a regular basis to keep records and area knowledge up to date.
The maps presented tonight need to be reviewed and altered and then we could bring an update version back to the board.
- Could the Council consider forcing new owners of RtB to contribute to Housing Land Maintenance costs rather than it being spread between the remaining tenants? Were the Council able to do this?
The Council had already considered this and consulted our legal service regarding this. It's not that couldn't do this, but enforcing it would be the issue but it's something we can do more investigation into.
- Please could the officers give numbers for the individual budgets concerning Grounds Maintenance and Grass Cutting?
The Housing Budget was £370,000, the total budget for TDBC was £750,00 and the SCC budget was £22,000.
- Would the Council and SCC consider combining all three budgets?
To a degree the budgets were already combined but if the Council was to combine the budgets and increase the cuts in areas, this would mean the HRA would subsidising the maintenance on non-Housing land.
I believe that the HRA money was a ring fenced budget so the Council was not able to do this.
- As the DLO were completing the all work for both Housing and SCC, more information needed to put out there to let them know who was responsible for what. This would prevent, the DLO and the Council taking flack for things that they weren't responsible for.
- Could the DLO consider including signage on their vehicles, stating that TDBC was cutting grass verges for SCC?
The DLO could look into publicising the responsibility maps but this would need looking into as it was part of larger system.

We would also look into advertising our work for SCC regarding grass cutting and putting onto our vehicles.

Resolved that the:

1. Officers to set up a Tenant led Scrutiny review of the Housing Grounds Maintenance Contract and Schedule with the DLO.
2. Once review was complete for an update report to brought back to Tenant Services Management Board.

6. Housing Property Services – Capital Works

Considering the financial figures table previously circulated, concerning the Housing Property Services Capital Works Programme performance monitoring from 2013/14 and Quarter one 2014/15.

Generally slippage from 2013/14 had been accommodated within the first Quarter's activity barring the odd few. In the case of Fire Doors, the installations started last year had been completed but no new installations started.

Below was a summary of the Capital Works Programme performance update:

- External Repairs and Dec's - 828 completed properties in 2013/14 and in Quarter one of 2014/14, 202 completed properties, this included slippage from 2013/14.
- Roofing – 146 completed properties in 2013/14 as well as 7 slippage properties with 16 properties completed in Quarter one of 2014/15
- Doors – 997 completed properties in 2013/14 as well as 29 slippage properties completed and 75 completed properties in quarter one of 2014/15.
- Windows – 120 completed properties with no slippage properties completed and 24 completed properties in quarter one of 2014/15.
- Kitchens – 98 completed properties in 2013/14 as well as 6 slippage properties completed and 6 completed properties in quarter one of 2014/15.
- Bathrooms – 249 completed properties in 2013/14 as well as 60 slippage properties completed and 151 completed properties in quarter one of 2014/15.
- Boilers – 309 completed properties in 2013/14 and 34 completed properties in quarter one of 2014/15.
- ASHP installations – 94 completed installations in 2013/14 and 23 completed installations in quarter one of 2014/15.
- Door Entry – 158 completed properties in 2013/14 and no completed properties in quarter one of 2014/15 as the contract was now complete.
- Fascias – 637 completed properties in 2013/14 as well as 5 slippage properties completed and 58 completed properties in quarter one of 2014/15.
- Smoke Alarms – 2600 completed installations in 2013/14 and 112 completed installations in quarter one of 2014/15.
- Fire Doors – 240 completed installations in 2013/14 as well as 81 slippages properties completed and 81 completed properties in quarter one of 2014/15.

Below was the procurement for capital works contracts:

- Electrical Safety programme had slipped to mid/late July.
- Asbestos Removal programme had also slipped to mid/late July.

- Heating Improvement programme had slipped to late July but was to go but legal decision.
- Door entry systems programme was fitting in with the other three programme but not all at once.

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

- How many properties had been identified for the installation of ASHP?
Last year the Council installed 100 ASHP, it looks like this figure for the coming was set to continue if not increase.
- Smoke Alarms – concerning the lack of notification to tenants regarding appointments for installation, servicing or updating of alarms. Only notification received was to say the engineer had tried to gain access but nobody was home.
This issues had been raised previously. The Council now had a list of addresses for those tenants and properties on particular programme of works and we can contact and notify the individuals concerned.
- Tenants hadn't received any information prior to appointments to inform them of who would be completing what work as a contractor on behalf of the Council. Sending a letter out to all tenants to inform them a certain company would contacting them regarding a particular programme of works who allow tenants to know if the contractors were genuine or not.
- Those who received information letters prior to appointments expressed concerns that the letters didn't genuine i.e. they weren't on proper Council headed letter paper.
The Council can inform and publish the capital works programmes and their appointed contractors.
- It would definitely be a positive thing to publish or advertise the maintenance schedules and any planned capital works programmes.
Executive Councillors had strong with MI-Space regarding the slippage of works at the end of last quarter.
The Executive Councillor did have strong words with the contractor, this was related to the lack of skilled teams working on the programme of work so two of five teams were removed from site. This was at no cost to the Council.

Resolved that the officer's report was noted.

7. Gas and Other Heating Services Quarterly Monitoring Report

Considering the report previously circulated, concerning the monitoring information on the performance of the servicing and repair contract with ALHCO. This report shows the performance date for Quarter four as well as highlighting issues with the contract.

- Despite previous problems with overdue certificates there had been significant improvements resulting in 100% compliance at the end quarter 4.
- There had been a significant reduction in the number of properties where ALHCO had not gained access through their part of the process requiring our part of the process which the Council called the gas hit.

- There were still improvements that the Council wanted to make to reduce even further and the Council were working with ALHCO and Taunton Deane Estate Management to achieve this.
- Reactive Maintenance the KPI figures were showing below target in all areas in Q4 were still showing below target. There had been improvements as can be seen in the figures.
- The Council had identified recently an issue with our computer systems not recognising data from the contractors system, the Council believes work in the background would result in these figures looking better.
- As officers could only publish what our system reports, there would be in a position to report on this when Quarter one for 2014-15 KPI data was presented to the Board.

The Council had noticed a number of issues with poor diagnosis on breakdowns this we were addressing with ALHCO, this had resulted in training for engineers and changes in their headquarters gave engineers in the field access to technical help when they were trying identify faults. In addition ALHCO had reviewed what was carried on the engineers vans and these would be stocked with parts that they frequently had to replace. The Council saw these initiatives reducing the number of repeat calls and so reduce inconvenience for the tenant.

- The void levels had been above average for the whole year. One of the factors that had influenced this was the decanting programme from Creechbarrow Road and Parmin Close.
- Scrap values were reducing, this was due to a reduction of reactive rather than programmed installs, and the Council had to carry out.
- The programme for the installation of CO detectors to properties with open flued appliances. This programme did not start until June 2013, these detectors were installed at the time of the service.
- The Council had now fitted CO detectors to vast majority of the properties apart from a few properties where we had access problem with.

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

- Were de-cants raising the number of VOIDS within the figures? As I am confused at the levels of VOIDS.
*De-canting of properties were included as a VOID figure because the Council had to return to the property before maintenance work got underway to shut of the gas supply.
But the Council could separate the figures for the next monitoring report.*
- What was the scrap receipts used for once received?
The receipts from the sale of scrap, just go back into the HRA account.

Resolved that the officer's report was noted.

(The meeting ended at 8.15pm)