

Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on Tuesday, 23 July 2015 at 6pm in the JMR, the Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton.

Present: Mr R Balman (Chairman)
Ms M Davis (Vice-Chairman)
Mr A Akhigbemen, Mrs J Bunn, Mrs J Hegarty, Mr I Hussey, Cllrs Appleby and Bowrah.

Officers: James Barrah (Director of Housing & Communities), Stephen Boland (Housing Services Lead), Terry May (Assistant Director Property & Development), Martin Price (Tenant Empowerment Manager), Rachael Searle (Housing Development Project Lead), Rosie Walsh (Housing Development Project Officer), Michelle Brooks (Democratic Services Officer),

(The Meeting commenced at 6.00pm)

1. Apologies

Cllr T Beale.

2. Minutes of TSMB 1 June 2015

All happy, signed by Chairman.

3. Public Question Time

No questions received for Public Question Time.

4. Declarations of Interests

As previous.

Cllr Appleby declared family and friends in Taunton Deane housing and that he is a leaseholder of a property in Taunton Deane.

Staffing update – Kene Ibezi has now left, James Barrah introduced Terry May. Terry will fill this role for the interim 6 months, while the office takes

stock and reviews the role. Terry has a lot of experience with the housing association and property teams, and we looking forward to his input.

5. Creechbarrow Road Development Update

Dashboard format has been updated for July 2015, with the main points being:

- The first occupation of the Nightstone units is be Friday, 24 July, then further work towards the Taunton Deane units handover. Currently have properties at many different stages, from foundation stage to handover.
- Currently have all activities and trades on site, which is providing much opportunity for apprentices. Across site there are 13 apprentices:
1 plumber, 1 fencer, 1 electrician, 3 roofers, 2 ground workers, 5 bricklayers.
- Community liaison drop in sessions continue at 5 Moorland Road, and more interest is expected as the handover of units get closer. People are also being referred by Ward Councillors.
- Site tours continue, with Councillors and Staff members taking part. There is tour being arranged for new Ward Councillors in September 2015. The intention is to arrange a tour for TSMB members and Tenants Forum members once the first units have been completed.
- Returning decants have been taken to see the new properties, and will be taken back again nearer the time of completion.
- Program timings going forward - there are issues with labour shortages, particularly bricklaying, There has been the impact of extra time needed due to new asbestos finds, gas mains diversion and retaining walls. Contractor has submitted an extension of time claim for time period to push out completion date, this is currently being assessed.

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

Residents are pleased with the development, but concerned with uneven pathways (accessibility for wheelchairs, pushchairs), unfinished drains, fence heights, dust pollution and noise pollution (radios and language).

Noted. The Roman Road end pathway, projected above the surface and would be elevated by the top coat, but this was delayed, hanch will be applied around edges to help the problem. Dust – there is a bowser, and damping down takes place continuously, the contractors have been reminded, in the last 24 hours, that this is an issue and that they must keep on top of it. Radios can only be used inside the property and this is enforced rigorously, cannot be audible outside of the property, any complaints should be passed on and this can be reported and filed across to site management Language to be reported straight away and then the site manager can sort out immediately.. The fence height is below the required height and will be replaced at the contractors own cost, properties will not be handed over until the fences are the correct height.

Comment – Well done to all, good to hear that TD is on top of the concerns / problems. Great to see so many apprentices.

Resolved that the Board noted the Officer's report.

6. Briefing on July 2015 Budget Statement.

Statements will be available in August, when all the detail is available for the Housing and Welfare bill. More reports will be presented further into the year.

Headlines:

- Reductions in rents from next year to be 1% (social housing rents), for the next 4 years. Our issue is how do we review this in our business plan, will have to model and assess.
- Pay to Stay - Earlier proposal threshold was £60,000 (household income greater than) in if excess of this need to pay market rents. Waiting for details could now be £30,000.
- Revisiting Lifetime tenancies, there has previously been consultation around introducing flexible tenancies. Proposals around this, do we introduce Life time tenancies? May not be applicable to every tenant, but could be a useful purpose as part of a menu of options. Sounding out at the moment, these proposals may well be mandatory, again we are waiting for details. Issues are that we have limited accommodation available, not enough supply to meet demand, and it is about making the best use of stock.
- Welfare benefits - cap amount claim greater than £20,000. Concerns are whether affordable and how the changes would be received, this

could result in people not paying rent. A number of changes also affect TD as a landlord.

- House properties - disposal of local high value properties one bedroom flats, approximate value above £134,000. These could be sold instead of being re-let, with some monies to the Treasury. This may not affect TD, but these are interesting times, with real challenges.

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

Any figures at all, the level of inflation was £17, 000,000 over 30 year plan?
Lucy Clothier (accountant) has done some work on modelling on the impact. The opportunities in the Business Plan 2012 have been taken away, notional surpluses taken £120 m off the end position. The surplus of the Business Plan is significantly less. Over 4 years the reduction of impact is £9m, therefore there will be cash flow pressure impact to fulfil plans and there is a requirement to look at debt repayments. The impact affects Local Authorities and the Housing Association. Looking toward the next meeting hopefully there will be scope to discuss the specification for work. Currently advertising internally for a project manager to lead work for next year. The plan was due to be reviewed, but the budget announcements has now increased the urgency of business plan review.

Will Increase in rent be forwarded local Councils / Government?

Local authority will return to the Treasury, wait to confirm the details, will get an opportunity to comment. Sometimes mandatory and sometimes a choice, we have to wait for details.

If automatic permission is giving for brownfield sites, how will this affect affordable housing?

Not familiar with this but will ask Jo Humble and team to look into it

Comment on Lifetime tenancies - Secure tenancies great, but go the other way, tenants will worry that they are able to be evicted for life.

Market rate for high income earners, assuming this effects current tenants, has anyone spoken to the legal team? New tenancies or a letter to inform them?

Waiting for detail, this didn't previously apply to existing tenants. Not yet been in touch with legal team, much information is coming out daily.

Are you clarifying introducing tenancies.

Supported, not operated currently, but committed to it.

In regard to terms and conditions, for renting a council house, we must maintain clauses and conditions can't be blanket for everyone
Have to see detail when proposals come out and then will know how to respond. Number of changes affect us as a Landlord and we will be looking at different aspects.

How will selling affect us, will we keep the money?
5800 properties, if one property becomes empty and is within the threshold will would probably have to sel. Housing services has £97 m debt, and each one of the properties is a proportion of the debt, and so has to be paid off, therefore certain things have to be sold off to pay debt.

Even though pay TD paid £90 m for houses, we don't own them?
TD own and manage stock, the Government, through subsidy over the years, have put money in, therefore they have a say, details to come. Ownership in context is relative term, the State contributed and through legislation can ask to change management and will be directed by Government.

Resolved that:

1. the Board note the report.
2. Jo humble is requested to research brownfield sites in relation to affordable housing builds.

7. Feedback from TPAS Conference 2015

This was held in Kenilworth, 8-8 July 2015 and attended by Dennis Galpin, Kevin Hellier, Ivor Hussey and Cllr Bob Bowrah. Attended by 242 male, 137 females, and it was noted many previous sponsors missing.
Found the conference well organised and informative.

The highlight of the conference was the speech by the Junior Mayor of Leamington Spa, help with engaging the youth of area with local politics and civic events. Kate Newbold will send further details of how this works.

Interesting conference, with 10% representation from councils, with the being from the housing association, would like a conference for council house tenants only.

Thanked the Council for the opportunity to attend.

8. Feedback from Deane House Relocation Project – Review Design on 22 July 2015

This was a Joint meeting, and members that attended were shocked at the high level of negativity. Unsure if this is because people don't understand the rationale behind the move, or why this particular option has been chosen.

The presenter was impartial, very pro-active in what she put forward, and put out the impression that all have to be positive about this move, as it could happen. Now are curious how staff feel about it, and how it affects them. Huge changes to how all staff work, i.e. new IT systems, budget changes. Major thing to go ahead with, with an awful lot happening.

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

How do staff feel?

Staff position is a mixed bag, there is no process to canvas everyone's views, but we are working with 25 staff, a consultative body. No doubt big change to the way of working, smart office with less paper and lower footprint. Some will struggle and leave, some will love it and think it is the best thing to happen. There are clear examples some won't fit, but some that were negative about it at the start of the process, have changed and now have enthused motivation to the move. Will do as much as we can to support staff, mock up office with furniture so that some can smart work to get used to it. Current assumption is that being present is a major factor, but productivity is – this will affect staff at all levels.

Original plans for central carpark? Will the plans be altered all the time?
This is the concept design stage, basic outline, and will evolve into a detailed stage which will add a layer of further detail. Thinking has gone much further than the basic plans. Parking is a clear issue, parking for staff will change radically.

Impossible to get to sometimes, long way from parade.

Point referred to already and noted. Pushing County on all fronts how migration and footfall will be mitigated on that site, it has many restrictions. Transport definitely has restrictions – options are crossings, traffic calming, also issues around footpath provision, signage and way marking, traffic flow. Also bus routes and transport assessment for vehicles and pedestrians, look at what advised by technical people.

Tenants Forum seem to be against it, management more informed?
General fund is relevant, this building not comfortable anymore, can't afford to maintain it, must do all we can to cut running costs. Not same level of exposure to that context.

Access option - multi-storey car parks has scooters, maybe take possession of scooter to gain access to building

Yes operates in Bath, charitable organisation not Council run service, will check details and see what influence have.

Too many people and services in one building, could be congested?

On entry there will be generic staff, uniformed police enquiries, and then further in there will be more specialised staff (housing, library), mixing and integration but will be clear. Footfall, yes massive increase, how can reassure this is big enough - essentially doubling the width with the build. Will continue to lobby for two entries to the library as this will attract a large number of customers. Will be having regular discussions to negotiate.

Is the space being taken over currently used, organise a walk around?

Yes, 50 staff been already to see current offices, there are markings where you can visualize, if this can help to envisage scale of what is being proposed, it can be organised.

Can a computer mock-up of the space be provided?

Yes, fly through video imaging will be available. Currently disappointed with the architect designs, very sketchy. There will be displays in library, reception as part of consultation exercise promote wider views. Will need to start better conversations with customers about visiting the office for transactions, electronic means instead, this would be cheaper, quicker and easier to deliver.

Payment machines available 24/7 – pay rent and bills like an ATM?

Longer hours than current council officers, cash machines inside, so no out of hour's access. Consider transferring to other location on estates. Meeting halls handy for tenants, we go to localities (sign up new tenancy, meeting hall) balance time with cost, fresh look at how we do this

9. Future Development Proposal.

Proposed a new development scheme of a garage site at Laxton Road. This is on Lane Estate within Halcon Ward, accessed across White Lodge / Beefeater across from Creech Castle.

Currently there is a block of 16 garages, as of Wednesday 22 July 2015, all 16 garages owned by TD, with 5 garages currently let.

Not determined if there is capacity for additional properties yet, gas, electric and water in proximity to the site, but there is a foul sewer that runs across the site to consider before going forward. Awaiting BT information.

There is a mixture of flats, houses, bungalows which are TD and privately owned. There is a large block of flats already owned by TD in that area which will be refurbished.

Preliminary sketch presented with an idea of what could fit site, the foul sewer would not be too costly to move. Details:

- 8 one bedroom flats and with parking and bin stalls
- 2 and 3 storey flats, via home finder suitable and fit in with the area
- Because of Foul sewer, have to separate off.
- Continue to work on proposal development
- Also looked at providing displaced parking for garages additional parking
- Time line costings appoint an architect for a sketch scheme through tender and take forward to planning application.
- Consultation with Tenants forum, TSMB, residents and staff, and then put through Committee process to seek approval.

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

Carparking spaces positions ?

Certainly not content with this, valid point wouldn't want to take it forward with this layout, very preliminary.

Parking away from site, how can these be dedicated to TD and retain control, residents parking in side streets?

Not allocated parking, as stands at the moment at the back visited garage, no control, different measures to provide control, can be applied if scheme develops, can park on the roadside there is no restrictions, don't need permits.

Opportunity to lease out car parking spaces and money to TD

Did look to who rents 5 garages, 2 do not live within walking distance, 3 live in close proximity to worry about as a priority.

Find out lessons will have been learnt from PRC building currently redeveloped how much thought into longevity?

Proposal to do a traditional construction, many decades still in working order, which gives the best security we have at the moment. Comments on location, historically been worst garage sites in terms of anti-social behaviour and waste disposal, potential to demolish garages as well, couple with private owners, not able to sources ownership middle group retained, owners did come forward look to exchange middle layout to parking spaces, rent digitally, and store items instead of vehicles. New build alongside existing, there is some minor cracking, but not much, Structure assessment concrete ring beam, structure sounds bring forward refurbish plan let as a contract, two schemes hand in hand, demolish garages - raise and improve whole area

Ongoing thing taking over garage blocks? Lots used for other stuff, all over the borough in good locations storage etc.

Locked at other blocks for development potential, continue to look for potential. Find used as major service corridors, locate a substation, sometimes dual purpose areas, and cost of diverting services or development around.

Resolved that: board Members proposed next stage of development

(Meeting ended 7.45pm)