

Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on Thursday, 20 August 2015 at 6pm in JMR, Taunton.

Present: Mr R Balman (Chairman)
Ms M Davis (Vice-Chair)
Mrs J Bunn, Mrs J Hegarty, Mr I Hussey, Mr D Galpin, Councillor Bowrah

Officers: Terry May (Assistant Director - Property & Development), Stephen Boland (Housing Services Lead – Housing Communities) Lucy Clothier (Accountant) Martin Price (Tenant Empowerment Manager), Phil Webb (Property Services Manager) and Michelle Brooks (Democratic Services Officer).

Others: Mr Dustyn Etherington

(The meeting commenced at 6.00pm)

1. Apologies

Mr A Akhigbemen, Mr K Hellier

2. Minutes of TSMB 23 July 2015

All agreed, signed by Chair.

3. Public Question Time

Comment and questions – Mr Dustyn Etherington:

With regard to the budget outlined by the Government, pay to stay for higher earning tenants in social housing. £30,000 average wage, isn't a high wage. This will affect many, with the average rent of £400 to increase to a market rent of £800, a lot of money to find. This could affect self-employed, may drive people to buy and take on a mortgage rather than rent, £500,000 mortgage will be cheaper than £800 rent. How will this affect HRA? How can HRA spend all receipts in 3 years? If not able to spend money, does this go to the Government and does this mean the Council loses it? £30,000 too low an amount, feels that this would change estates as there would be no social mix. Social mix gives aspirations to people, without this the estates could end up like ghettos.

Resolved that the Board note the comments.

4. Housing Revenue Account Financial Monitoring Quarter 1 2015/16

Considering the report previously circulated, concerning the budget for 2015/16. Budget monitoring report for Quarter 1, with a new format for the report. Key issues:

HRA revenue - Income:

- HRA – underspend of £12k
- Income - overall budget is £26.9 million, mostly dwelling rents. Dwelling rents over recovery of £138K (expected).
- Additional over recovery of £17K service area and 19K supporting people.
- Overall = £177k over recovery.

HRA - Expenditure

- Housing management agency staff caused over spend of £103K, looking how to manage this.
- Overspend of £38k planned maintenance, additional asbestos testing and two contracts slipped back (maintenance and electrical testing contract).
- Other expenditure - communal areas, higher spend than last year, linked to planned maintenance and central costs all OK.

Capital

- £23.4 million overall approved budget, complete budget approved. Over the next few months work will be done to profile.

Three areas of reporting; major works, major internal items, other bits (external garages, meeting halls, environmental improvements, sustainable energy)

- Major Works – budget £9.2 million
- Major internal items, Contracts in place – kitchens, bathrooms, air source heat pumps, contracts coming into place, contracts started.
- Other works – on target, environmental improvements and extensions, because so large will go into next financial year
- Development – all schemes due to complete on financially on target.
- Expected to spend - £17.9 this year and £5.4 following year.

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

- Concerned Agency staff employed, long term?
Basically covering posts, opportune moment because of future transformation, with variable market rates, very difficult to attract employees. The temporary posts are to help cope with change and the initial impact, will see how it is affecting us in the service. This will help make firmer decisions, a temporary adjustment until we see what landscape will look like.

- Has anything been done on the figures, what is the actual income actually going to get over the next 4 years
Initial figures presently, waiting for full details but expect significant change with a lot of work to plan fully, not sure of the exact impact, but expecting it to be significant. More information will come from the Government in autumn - September/October, and then the information shared.

Resolved that:

1. The Board note the report.
2. Should anyone require a new format, speak with Lucy.

5. Performance Indicators Quarter 1 2015/16

Considering the report previously circulated, concerning the key areas:

- Red or amber indicators relating to lettings - lettings of vacant properties. There is due to be a major review as the performance is poor. Imparticular tenant responses are at low satisfaction levels and expectations of new tenants are not being met.
- Accepting feedback from potential tenants – notice has been taken and the let able standard is being reviewed. A new document, will be produced looking afresh and reviewing the process.
- Because of the poor state of property, once vacated, the neglect or damage, is expensive to repair. Temporary measures are being put into place to manage damage. Intention is to employ two members of staff to get alongside tenants known to cause damage. Then able to make early intervention, give support and in some cases maybe enforcement action will be needed.
- Internal audit – auditors to look at operating process, carry out assessment and provide findings. Indicators relate to lettings in 3-4 months' time, more information to come.
- Complaints – currently off course, but are within target and the parameters set. Senior management is raising the profile of dealing with complaints, expectations beyond target time will be improved upon.
- Income – within target, what the future will look like is uncertain. The risks are because of concerns of the changes from the Government.
- Rent arrears - primarily need to recover. There is no difference in previous years, and this always improves towards the end of the year.

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

- Empty properties – one in Staple Fitzpane that has been empty for 6 months, is this across the board, or a one off?
This is a one off. Sometimes have to enter into a legal process, and make available linked to parties. The legal processes in some areas of housing are frustrating but we have to set aside because the law requires it. As soon as the legal process concludes will re-let. Average 24 days to re-let time.
- Sheltered housing - believes this should not be on first floor.
Linked to next report, need to respond to the change and make decisions effectively making effective use of properties. Lots of information to take into account and review, maybe decommission is an option.
- Wellington project – is there still difficulty moving a client?
Oaken Ground, new build in Rockwell Green. Planning supported the application 2 weeks ago, out of 10 occupants, 8 have moved, 1 accepted, and the final occupant is still under discussion. Delicate situation, doing everything to bring about a satisfactory solution.

Resolved that: The Board note the report.

6. Project Initiation Document – Review of Sheltered and Extra Care 2015

Considering the report previously circulated, concerning properties:

880 sheltered housing units

90 extra care - Kilkenny, Courtenay Lodge.

Review Respond to external changes:

- Grant from County Council – A grant is received from County Council to fund, and resource shelter and extra care tenants. County Council have changed specification and services, and reduced the amount of funding to provide those support services.
- Service specification is changing and need to respond. Need to make sure Assets (880 + 90) fit for purpose and make effective use of assets.
- Review of meeting needs of people started with Jan Emmington being the project manager,

- Assets – November 2015, received funding responses from tenants positive councillors approved funding for external expertise for review of assets.
- Sheltered housing service, further reports October/November. Details will be provided over coming months.
- Soundings from tenants, response is that they are pleased they are being involved comments on what we need to change and do differently, service delivery and funding arrangements.
- Further updates to be provided as findings collated and then to seek view on proposals from TSMB.

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

- What percentage of funding will the County Council take away? Do County Council expect the same service with less money?
Approximately £153,000. There has been a reduction every year. Rules have changed with service specification changed and the threshold for who qualifies.
- Will Standards go down?
No, have to look at the Business Plan, meeting the needs of the vulnerable is important. Housing will provide a report. Housing support officers still deliver some form of service, and engage with tenants, proposals later to TSMB.
- People in sheltered housing be kept up-to-date? Extra for facilities for being in sheltered housing, will this amount be going up?
- *Try not to pre-empt detail, this will all be in the report. County Council off setting costs, still need to meet needs of vulnerable people. Will produce a report so that TSMB know what is happening, tenants have received letters and been invited to meetings, and this will continue. Feedback is that they want to know detail. Implement by April 2016.*
- Big expenditure would be extra care?
One to one yes, more services on a care scheme, extra care is more complex.
- Sheltered housing officer, doubt should be there, not a lot of point.
Opinions may vary, some value sheltered housing officer. Many cases are complex, and a support plan will be jointly created. Actions agreed to be undertaken and reviewed. Some tenants have greater support needs, if taken away, their confidence goes and can feel less able to cope, and struggle living in general needs housing - people needs vary.
- As Part of property review, some sheltered housing may not fit the bill could change this change, lose a few?
Look towards future, with a more likely older, frailer population. More sheltered supported housing, not able to maintain their independence.

- Do we need this, if I want to chat I call someone.
Estates officers' have one role and sheltered housing officer role very different.
- Decommission sheltered housing? Are you careful who you put in upstairs apartments?
- *Yes, mindful of clash of lifestyles as aware this leads to problems. Decommissioning is not the only option. Mixed schemes has caused problems previously, not necessarily always worked. Sheltered housing need to, target the right audience and client group, need to provide right type of environment, with right support, as County can't afford nursing / residential care. Need to get this right to meet demand. More information in the coming months, interested in what TSMB have to say. Project started in July, receive more information over the coming months.*

Resolved that: The Board note the report.

9. Apprenticeship Management Scheme

Report went to the Board in January as part of housing revenue business plan review. This circulated report is the proposal:

Three year rolling programme with one application a year as below:

- 1st year – Business support
- 2nd year – Communication team
- 3rd year - Property service

The intention is to earn as the apprentices learn and complete a recognised qualification while attending day release at College. The qualification will be NVQ2 in the first year, and NVQ3 in the second year.

This be on a 2 year fixed term contract, with no cost to Taunton Deane.

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

- At the end of apprenticeship, guaranteed employment?
No, cannot guarantee employment, but the organisation will be in a position to look at the apprentice and the apprentice would be able to apply for posts. Gaining the experience and qualifications, while being paid is an advantage.
- What's the take up? Could be expensive for the applicant, bus fares etc.

Not sure, totally new and not done this before. Hope it will be attractive. Lots of publicity, page 4, 3.5 will involve local college, job centre +, making sure lots know and will increase people putting themselves forward.

Resolved that: The Board recommend the report, all in favour – yes.

9. Tenants' and Leaseholders' Open Day

This outline work has been done and thanks to the Board and Forum for all of the support for the housing development group.

Changing to a local focus now instead of holding the open days at Somerset County Cricket Ground. Now these are to be held in and around local areas. These will be easier to get to and enable information to be taken away. This will provide two way advantage, people to speak with face to face and for officers to gain the opportunity to find out information.

The First Event is to be at Halcon:

Halcon – 9 September 2015, All Saints Church informal events from 10 am to 1 pm.

Other business:

Cllr Appleby is now on the TSMB (replacement for Cllr Federica Smith)

SFIS – 1 August

Tenancy fraud in next quarter be brought to board for discussion

TF subletting, allocation – fraud information to obtain action plan created. Range of checks agreed time frame for actions implemented manager

Quarterly report to estates officer.

(The meeting ended at 19.35pm)