

**Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on Monday 14 September 2015 at 6pm in JMR, Taunton.**

**Present:** Mr R Balman (Chairman)  
Ms M Davis (Vice-Chair)  
Mr A Akhigbemen, Mrs J Bunn, Mr D Galpin, Mrs J Hegarty, Mr I Hussey, Mr K Hellier, Councillor Bowrah, and Councillor Appleby.

**Officers:** Jo Humble (Housing Development and Enabling Manager), Sam Muckett (Right to Buy Officer), Caroline White (Housing Development Project Lead), Jan Errington (Area Community Manager), James Barra (Director of Housing & Communities), Stephen Boland (Housing Services Lead – Housing Communities) Lucy Clothier (Accountant), Martin Price (Tenant Empowerment Manager) and Emma Hill (Democratic Services Officer).

**Others:** Councillor Bale and Councillor Mrs Smith

(The meeting commenced at 6.00pm)

**1. Apologies**

Mr R Middleton and Councillor Mrs Warmington

**2. Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 20 August 2015 were taken as read and were signed.

**3. Public Question Time**

No questions received for Public Question Time.

**4. Declarations of Interests**

Councillor Bowrah declared a personal interest as member of his family were Taunton Deane Borough Council Housing Tenants and declared a personal interest as family member had applied to the Council's Right to Buy Social Mobility Fund 'Homeownership' Cash Incentive Scheme.

Councillor Appleby declared a personal interest as Leaseholder of Taunton Deane Borough Council property.

Mr A Akhigbemen, Mr R Balman, Mrs J Bunn, Ms M Davis, Mr D Galpin, Mrs J Hegarty, Mr K Hellier, Mr I Hussey declared personal interests as Taunton Deane Borough Council Housing Tenants.

**5. Right to Buy Social Mobility Fund**

Consideration an update on the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Right to Buy Social Mobility Fund and the grant funding secured by Taunton Deane Borough Council.

£300,000 had been secured through the bid and the administrative process and proposed methods of promotion to undertake a 'Homeownership Cash Incentive' scheme are underway.

Taunton Deane Borough Council led a successful bid in partnership with Magna West Somerset and West Somerset District Council. The purpose of the Fund was to enable local authorities to provide a scheme for their eligible Right to Buy tenants to access a cash payment in the place of their Right to Buy discount on their current social property.

The funding must be spent by 31 March 2016 and the bid was for £300,000 which equated to a grant of £20,000 to a potential fifteen applicants. The bid required a breakdown of potential tenants priority categories, although the scheme was open to all those with an eligibility of Right to Buy or Right to Acquire.

Interested tenants would be required to complete an application form and provide supporting documents, which included a Mortgage in Principle certificate or savings statement as proof of ability to fund their purchase.

The application would be assessed on a 'first come first served' basis as advised by the DCLG. The assessment would confirm the applicant's eligibility for the scheme and would consider the current property occupied by the tenant and the tenant's circumstances against the priority groupings detailed in this scheme.

Successful applicants would be notified in writing and provided with an offer document setting out the terms of the grant and what was required in order to successfully complete a purchase under this scheme.

The grant would be paid direct to the applicants' solicitor's client account once evidence of signed contracts at exchange had been provided. The money would then be held by the applicants' solicitors until the date of completion. Neither the applicant nor their solicitor should be authorised to use the grant monies prior to the date of completion. Therefore, should the applicant wish to exchange contracts before the completion date, they would have to use alternative money for the purpose of a deposit.

The proposed promotion of this scheme included an advert in Tenants Talk, and leaflets within the Deane House reception area alongside promotion through Tenants Services Management Board and Tenants Forum

The Council had received the Grants termination letter from DCLG and this meant that the scheme was active and we were actively promoting the scheme. Officers had received one application already and the scheme details were taken to Tenants Open Day in Halcon last week.

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

- Cllr Bowrah declared a personal interest concerning that a family member who had applied to the Council's Right to Buy Social Mobility Fund. He stated he wouldn't take part in the discussion of the item.  
*Declaration of personal interest noted by the Democratic Services Officer.*
- Felt that £20,000 wasn't an incentive or attractive enough for Tenants to take up the scheme to buy their properties.

- I suggest officers should request with all application to RtB Social Mobility Fund, the Council requests Income and Expenditure, along with a credit check. This would eliminate any time wasters.  
*This was a valid point. The Council would be asking applicants to provide a 'Mortgage in Principle' or proof of savings when applying for the scheme. The deadline for completing on the scheme was 31 March 2016. This was a joint project with Magna West.*
- Did the officers think the grant would be used by the deadline and if not could the increase the size of the individual grants?  
*We had always spoken to the DCLG about extending the deadline so that we could start the committee sign out process for that extension. This was something we would have to consider but we were unsure at the moment.*

**Resolved that:**

1. The Board note the report.
2. Approved the facilitation of the promotion of this homeownership cash incentive scheme.

## **6. The Weavers Arms Development Update**

Consideration of an update on the Weavers Arms Development Project in Wellington.

Officers obtained planning permission on 12<sup>th</sup> August subject to conditions for 26 properties, a mix of 1 bed flats, houses and bungalows. Below was a list of the conditions imposed by the Planning Committee:

- Planning condition 5 – west boundary treatment to be approved by LPA (Local Planning Authority) in the interest of neighbouring residents. Keep foliage in place to soften boundary and provide foraging for bats.
- Planning condition 6 – works implemented in accordance with Bat surveys – bat resting places & accesses thereafter permanently maintained (walls, eaves).

The Council was required to obtain a Bat License from Natural England as bats were protected species could only be moved at certain times of year, this would impact scheme timings. This won't be going ahead until April 2016. The house in question would be demolished by hand.

The officers were currently putting the Project works contract out to tender to contractors using the West Works framework.

There two decanted properties at Oaken Ground waiting to move as well as one household awaiting void property in Wellington to be finished and ready for occupancy.

There was an estimated on site date beginning 2016 and the construction type (timber or masonry) was yet to be confirmed.

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

- Was there any completion date on those Tenants moving into the one house?  
*There was no date as yet as there were void works The Council had impressed on the contractor on the urgency of need for moving date for the tenants.*

- Concerns were raised regarding the presence of Bats at the site. Where were the roosting in the houses or the tree? How many Bats had been found?  
*The Bats were found on site behind a window frame in one of the properties. There were only two male Bats but there was a set procedure when any number of Bats were found.*

**Resolved** that the Board noted the report.

## 7. Photovoltaic (PV) Solar Panels Scheme Update

Consideration of an update on the Photovoltaic (PV) Solar Panels Scheme on the Council's Housing Stock.

The scheme to fit PV to 350 council owned houses is nearing completion, with the final installation due near the 7<sup>th</sup> October.

The two appointed installers were Glevum Heating and Prolectric. Glevum had already installed their target of 175 properties and had the final one to fit in October. Prolectric still had approximately 12 properties to install.

Western Power Distribution were to decide how many properties in an area could be connected to the grid, therefore some tenants had not had PV whereas their neighbours had. This had caused some complaints. All we could do was reiterated the fact we need permission from Western Power Distribution to install PV to their home and connect to the grid.

A recent Government announcement informed us that Feed In Tariffs (FIT) were dropping from 12p per kilowatt hour to 1.63p on the 31<sup>st</sup> December. Our installed properties would be secure on the 12p rate but any future ones would be on the much lower rate. Therefore it was unlikely future schemes would be financially viable as the cost of panels were unlikely to drop in price to match the drop in FITs. The investment TDBC had allocated for the PV scheme is £1.5m. The FITs we received would go towards paying off the cost of the panels, which was estimated to take 13 years. From year 13 – 20 TDBC would have paid off the investment figure and would be in a positive cash flow due to the FIT income.

Over the lifetime of the panels it was anticipated they would save 11,000 tonnes of carbon emissions.

Officers had stated that Tenants were delighted with the results and project had been successful so far. The only problem, the Council had found was we had problems connecting some of properties in the scheme.

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

- Members asked for a commitment from Officers that they would monitor the market to wait and see if was feasible to roll out a second phase in future.  
*Unless the government make a U-turn on the feed tariff, we won't be able to introduce a second phase. Officers had made provision to monitor the market in case, it meant the Council could commit to a second phase of the project on existing housing stock.*

- This project had been successful so far, let hope that the market in future allowed for a second phase.
- Looking at the PV coating, was this a cheaper option the Council was monitoring or considering?  
*Unfortunately, the PV Coating was a new technology and was currently not a cheaper option, which was the same for the battery storage technology, which allowed energy to be stored. Currently, the tenants were having to use the energy produced when the sun was out.*

**Resolved** that the Board noted the report.

## 8. External Wall Insulation Scheme Update

Consideration of an update on the External Wall Insulation Scheme to a selection of Cornish type non-traditional properties.

Solid External Wall Insulation to a selection of Cornish house types was well underway and due to complete in late October. The original cladding from the early 1990s had been removed and a new 150mm fibre board and render system had been applied.

This was to make the homes easier to heat as it would insulate the whole of the lower elevations. The installation had happened over the summer months so tenants would not feel the cold while the original cladding was removed.

There had been a slight delay in completing the project as materials had to come into the UK via Calais, which had encountered problems recently.

Below was a picture of the fibre boards being applied, two coats of render were then applied. Window cills were replaced, pipes were extended out to allow for the four inches of insulation and all external fixings were replaced. Tenants were informed not to affix anything to the EWI as it was not a hard material and puncturing it would lower the thermal efficiency.

The Council was currently looking at 38 properties on this contract but we were looking to increase where possible and feasible.

The properties were in much better condition than first thought and only 8 columns out of 800 were in need of replace.

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

- Committee Member informed the rest of the committee and officers that they lived a Council owned Non-traditional Cornish property and the work completed by this project was brilliant and the contractors left the property clean and tidy. They could already feel the insulation working and the property was warmer.

**Resolved** that the Board noted the report.

## 9. Extra Care Housing Services Review Project

The Supported Housing Review Project Manager gave a verbal report accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation regarding the Extra Care Service Model Options Appraisal.

There were three main work streams to this review project, they were:

- Sheltered Housing Servicer Model Review
- Extra Care Service Model Review
- Sheltered and ECH Property Options Review

Officers defined what was meant by Extra Care housing (ECH). The Council had two schemes, they were Kilkenny Court and Lodge Close. We were also working in partnership with Magna Homes in West Somerset who had six flats.

Officers gave the following detailed information regarding the ECH review;

- Why there was a need to review, change and update the Extra Care facilities and services.
- The underlying factors driving the need for was funding cuts, need to create a sustainable service and an aging demographic population.
- The aims of the ECH review, looking at service delivery models and ECH properties.

The service review was in two phases. Currently, the review was at phase one options appraisal. The second phase was the implementation of the chosen and adopted new service option.

Officers had conducted consultation within the ECH service this included ECH Tenants. Below was a summary of the feedback from the consultations:

- Emphasised Staff Flexibility
- Seamless Integrated Service
- Only One Manager to contact
- Local and Small Service Provider
- Sense of Community
- Service needs tailored to Individuals

Officers had discovered differing views between the different ECH schemes of Lodge Close and Kilkenny Court;

- Tenants at Lodge Close were happy with the service they were receiving and wanted no or little change to the current service.
- Tenants at Kilkenny Court weren't worried who provided the service, just wanted a high quality and better service than the current one.

The ECH service at Lodge Close had recently the staff had changed, this was due to...

But ECH facilities had expressed a desire that the housing facility management (or landlord) should remain as Taunton Deane Borough Council.

Officers detailed the key risks to ECH review project and also presented a table of a shortlist of current service model options open to the council. This was constantly changing as additional options not previously thought of were suggested to officers.

The next steps for the officers with ECH service review;

- Seek feedback and approval for option to take forward from the following Tenant Forum, Supported Housing Development Group, Tenant Services Management Board, Community Scrutiny and Executive.
- Implement options decision – this would include procurement, staff restructure, TUPE process, consultation and informing.
- Post implementation, evaluate/review and organise lessons learned workshop.

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

- Suggested that Committee Members should leave any main questions to the Special meeting of the Committee where this item would be discussed on a single item agenda.
- Why were the view of Lodge Close and Kilkenny Court so different? Had we identified the reasons behind the great difference in views?  
*The complaints and comments related to frontline staff.  
The whole of the Extra Care service was undergoing change but at Lodge Close, they had new temporary staff team so this had improved the service at this location without the results of the Business Plan review.  
The service at Kilkenny Court had problems with lots of long-term sickness and operational frontline issues had affected the service. This had meant changing temporary staff cover. This had led to these particular the views of the tenants at Kilkenny court.*
- Was the Extra Care service provider the same at both sites?  
*Yes, it was the same service provider at both sites.*
- There was no mention about Shelter Housing Changes in the report?  
*This was a separate project under the Business Plan review completely and a consultation event was due to take place.*
- How many tenants were part of the scheme and how many tenants had attended?  
*There were 90 tenants part of the scheme of which 16 tenants from Lodge Close and 15 from Kilkenny Court.  
These figures were a combination of the three consultation events that had taken place. There had been two consultation in conjunction with SCC prior to our events.  
We were asking Extra Care service staff to encourage all tenants to keep feeding back information to the project officers.  
The consultation events was really productive. If Tenants had a burning issue or problem, the approach staff regarding these issues and because these were Extra Care Tenants, the Council was in regular contact with them.  
Lodge Close and Kilkenny Court had very strong Community Groups.*

**Resolved** that the Board noted the report.

## 10. Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2012- 2042

Consideration of the latest review of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan 2012-2042.

Since the last review process, a number of significant policy changes had arisen through the Government's Budget Statement highlighted changes to the Rent Policy and new Policy supporting Right to Buy around higher value properties. These changes had impacted on the Business Plan. The review of HRA Business Plan two phases covering two indicative time periods, they were:

- 1<sup>st</sup> Phase – September 2015 – November 2015
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Phase – November 2015 – February 2016

Within these two time periods a number of different areas would be looked at. During 1<sup>st</sup> phase, the following would be looked at;

- Establishment of baseline financial position
- Explore flexibilities and constraints
- Sensitivities and stress testing to model options for future decision making
- Health check of Codeman stock condition data
- Refresh business plan progress and priorities

During 2<sup>nd</sup> phase, the following would be looked at;

- Asset Performance and new Strategy
- Development strategy
- Supported housing review

Also there were some general area being review, these were;

- Assist in planning suitable resident and stakeholder consultation activities and events concerning BP priorities.
- Support key decision making therefore plan to present at four evening committee meetings.

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

- It was requested that the officer confirm a previous statement, that the Council couldn't afford our planned new build projects?  
*This was one of the many features around our expenditure, the Council would have to review. It maybe that the extent of our new build ambitions was might be unaffordable. Even within what the Council could afford to do, we would have to prioritise, where we absolutely need to spend money on regenerating the non-traditional estates rather than traditional new builds.*
- Page three, investigating options for a Council owned special purchase vehicle. Could you please expand on this?  
*This was an option many Local Authorities were exploring and implementing. There were multiple benefits. There were lots of risk around building new properties in the HRA. The Council could invest lots in new property but they could be acquired through RtB. There was a level of protection with something called the cost floor. So this stated that for 15 years if someone*



wanted to purchase the property through RtB it would cost them the full construction cost of that new build. There was an exemption from the normal discount from most other RtBs.

It was a risk for Councils with higher number of new builds than us and it's a risk they were looking to mitigate through other models. Equally, the general fund was looking for new sources of income, so could the Council by setting up an arm's length management company explore investing in affordable housing or also invest development of market housing/market rental housing as a source of income. This was a model other Councils were looking and a legal way to make income. There were equal benefits as well as cost to general fund.

- Was stock transfer an option open to the Council?

*The Council had looked at this option and this had no particular incentives or benefits to the Council in doing that and we were not aware of any local authorities that we doing this. This wasn't something we were considering or looking at the moment. The Council was in a better position since we started Self-Financing and we were far stronger position than Housing Associations. It had flipped around completely.*

*Housing Associations were having real problems with the Rent Policy applied them as well and confidence had been knocked all areas.*

- Options around change the tenure or use of around shelter housing stock mean. Was that around people want to change but still stay as Council Tenants but save money by not having the stock of the Pipeline service on top their rent? A lot residents where I live didn't use the service but pay for it  
*This was an option open to the Council and any properties that had a change of use or tenure would fall back into circulation and we would let them as general needs properties. The whole issue of the service charge and the requirement to pay that charge was mandatory requirement and that was what the tenant signed up for when taking on a Shelter Housing property. This discussion would come with the piece of work was doing around the Sheltered Housing Review.*

*In order for the Council to provide that service for 50% of Sheltered Housing tenants, the Council had to guarantee a certain critical mass of staff and we needed an assurance of certain level of income. When officers had spoken to tenants in the past regarding this matter. We said it's an assurance scheme and that they might not need it now but in the future they may do. By paying the service charges means they would guaranteed to have access to it. It needs all Sheltered Housing tenants to pay into that service to maintain that critical mass of staff to provide the service to those who wish to take it. That's did limit choice and one of the things the Council would be exploring in the Service Review would be choice.*

*The Deane Helpline provide great service and takes a great burden off the Ambulance Service. To provide that required service required certain critical level of income for a 24hr service. So it's a balance between choice and mandatory requirements.*

- Demolition of Housing Stock... Didn't want to come home and find my house had been demolished and gone?

*With the Council's housing stock, this was unlikely from what I know of our stock but it had to be a considered.*

*It was more likely to be re-development of a small sheltered housing scheme that was on a really big plot of land and it had limited desirability and limited use as it was and so we would consider decommissioning it rather than changing the use and putting it back into general needs, the Council could put double density new builds on the site instead.*

**Resolved** that the Board noted the report.

## 11. AOB

Members of the Committee asked the following questions of the officers present after the main agenda items had been discussed:

- UK's quota of Refugees – What or where would TDBC put the Refugees if we were to offer space for them?  
*There had been no discussion as yet regarding this. There was potential around some void properties.  
The government and LGA were currently pulling together more information on this subject for Local Authorities.*
- On behalf of the Committee, we would like to say congratulations to Lucy Clothier on her new appointment and welcome to Emma Hill after returning from maternity leave.
- The disabled bay in Parker Close. People had been parking there that weren't allowed or shouldn't be using the space. This meant the resident/s that it was meant for weren't able to use the space. Could officers help with this?  
*What action we could or would take, would depend on where the space was there for a specific person or general disabled space. After the meeting, could you provide with some more information and I would be happy to look into the matter.*

(The meeting ended at 19.20pm)