

Minutes of the Meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 20 September 2016 at 6pm in The John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton.

Present: Mr R Balman (Chairman)
Mr A Akhigbemen, Mrs J Bunn, Mr D Galpin, Mrs J Hegarty, Mr I Hussey and Councillor Bowrah.

Officers: Martha Dudman (Community Development Officer), Simon Lewis (Assistant Director – Housing and Community Development), Stephen Boland (Housing Services Lead), Martin Price (Tenant Empowerment Manager) and Emma Hill (Democratic Services Officer).

Others: Councillor Warmington

(The meeting commenced at 6.30pm)

1. Apologies

Mr K Hellier and Councillor Booth

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 15 August 2016 were taken as read and were signed.

3. Public Question Time

No questions received for Public Question Time.

4. Declarations of Interests

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

5. Report on Improving Tenant and Leaseholder Satisfaction

Members considered report previously circulated, concerning the Council project to improve Tenant and Leaseholder Satisfaction within five highlighted areas of concern from the Council's STAR Survey.

Covered within the report provided was the detailed outcomes of the investigation into the five areas of the concern as well as the proposed action plans and recommendations. The workstreams within the project were as follows:

- Grounds Maintenance Contract Review
- Repairs and Maintenance Review
- Feedback, Compliments and Complaints Procedures
- Service Standards Review

- Customer Service
- Leaseholder Engagement

Each workstream had produced its own actions and recommendations as well as overarching themes and ways of working, which included Stakeholder Engagement, Financial Restrictions, Procurement, Communication and Publicity.

As work continued on each workstream, the project team completed regular consultation and testing, to ensure that the conclusions being drawn remained reflective of tenant's views and priorities.

Below was a summary of the main points from the report provided on the Tenant and Leaseholder Satisfaction project:

- Additional outsourced training for Customer Service review had come recommended by Yarlington Housing. Carol Carpenter had provided specific training on customer service practices. This was one of main areas of focus for the project.
- Another part of the customer service project was aligning our customer service standards with that of the main Council and Officers were working with the Assistant Director of Corporate Services to achieve this.
- The project team were reviewing the way that complaints were handled and processed as there was a tendency to follow the formal complaints procedure, rather than take ownership of the issue and if able to, resolve there and then. Officers were looking to change attitudes and empower staff to own complaints and resolve them as quickly as possible.
- If the Council was unable to for fill as request, precise and proper reasoning why must be given rather than an excuse. The Council needed to put in place proper standards and understanding of what we were able to do and what we could not.
- Another area of focus was, the review of the Grounds Maintenance contract. This was about reviewing the detail of the contract and drawing out the options how best to spend the money available.
- The options from this review would be brought from before the Tenants' Forum and TSMB for their opinions and feedback.
- We want to able to make it clear to our Tenants and Leaseholders want they could expect from the Grounds Maintenance contract, but also indicating what land belonged to the HRA and want did not.
- Project Team Officers had visited the Tenants' Forum and the forum had raised concerns that the STAR Survey due in 2017, and that it would not allow time for the changes to take place and take affect properly. So it was suggested that the STAR Survey be delayed until 2018 to allow proper time for the changes to bed in and giving more accurate feedback from Tenants and Leaseholders.
- It was also suggested that the Council look at and investigated the possibility of introducing a 'mystery shopper' exercise to test services including those that had undergone changes.

A copy of the Improving Tenant and Leaseholder Satisfaction report was attached to the agenda for the Board Members.

During the discussion of this item the following points were made:-

- Members raised concerns about when Tenants and Leaseholders tried to contact Officers or specific services within the Council that they were unable to contact them and were passed around a variety of other Officers and did not receive a solution to their enquiry. The Board were informed that what they had described was part of the customer service workstream within the project and it was about empowering Officers to take ownership of the customer's enquiry, then investigate and provide an answer to the customer by contacting them directly.
- In response to a question asking if the Project Manager was now in place, the Board were informed that the Project Manager was indeed in place and was Martha Dudman. Since this report had been written and published to the Board, several proposals and actions had been completed.
- In response to a question asking what the term GIS stood for and what it was, the Board were informed that it stood for Geographic Information System (GIS) and was a system designed to capture, store, manipulate, analyse, manage, and present all types of dimensional or geographical data (maps).
- The Board were informed that within the revised and updated version of this report, Officers had included a glossary of terms and acronyms.
- In response to a question asking if the tradesman and contractors left any kind of feedback form or card for the Tenants and Leaseholders to complete and post back to the service when the job was completed, the Board were informed that part of the project was reviewing how the Council captured and measured customer feedback as currently each service captured feedback in a variety of ways and mediums, which included feedback cards.
- Discussion took place about the inclusion of face to face meetings with Tenants and Leaseholders who had made complaints and concerns about services. The Board Members felt that arranging face to face meetings would allow and encourage early resolution to issues and also meant Tenants and Leaseholders would feel valued and listened to, rather than pushed from pillar to post and ignored. Officers agreed with the Board on this suggestion and stated that it was too easy to put complaints on the back burner.
- Members were informed that following research, Officers had discovered other housing services and associations were using more instant methods to resolve issues and complaints rather than using a formal procedure. Asking themselves, how could we solve this issue now?
- In response to a question asking if the Council would allow a small budget to make gestures of good will when resolving a complaint, the Board were informed that this was something they were investigating with the review of the customer service. Considering that occasionally it would be better to admit we got it wrong and apologise, rather than make excuses.
- In response to a question asking if within the specific IT and customer services training challenges, would there be areas looking at staff behaviour and attitudes towards Tenants and Leaseholders, the Board were informed that the Council had taken recommendations from Yarrington Housing on specific customer service training, which included correct conscious choice about staff and their behaviour and attitude. The Council were looking to provide unconditional positive service to Tenants and Leaseholders.
- Members suggested that the Council needed to empower staff to make judgement calls and make decisions to resolve issues and complaints without having to go through the management structure for permission for minor issues. The Board were informed that this was being considered but there would be some jobs and complaints that would require permission for supervisors and service managers.

- In response to a question asking if service managers and supervisors completed random checks on tradesman and contractors ensuring that they were where they should be, the Board were informed that this was indeed written into the grounds maintenance contract with Deane DLO but this was not necessarily completed as regularly as we had requested or desired.
- Members were informed that within the repairs sections, the location of tradesman was monitored through the electronic scheduling of their jobs and monitoring through PDA handsets.
- In response to a question asking if Officers had split the data from complaints from Deane DLO between contractors and DLO tradesman, indicating whether or not people were more or less dissatisfied with contractors completing work for the Council, the Board were informed that Tenants and Leaseholder had expressed more dissatisfaction with contractors than DLO tradesman. Currently, the Council was talking to all the contractors informing them we expect the same standard of work and customer service from their contractors as we did from the DLO tradesman's and staff.
- In response to a question asking if the grounds maintenance contact with the DLO was a fixed term or rolling contract, the Board were informed that the contract was originally fixed term but upon the contract renewal date, the contract was renewed without reviewing the contract detail. The HRA needed to review this contract and be more strict about enforcing what we expect from this contract. This did not necessarily mean a formal contract but HRA needed to have more overview and oversight. We were reviewing the contract detail to make best use of money available.
- In response to a questions asking had the Council considered the use of wild flower seed on areas of grass owned by the housing department, where appropriate instead of cutting, the Board were informed that the project team were looking at the best practices of neighbouring and other local authorities. With the wild flower areas, some Tenants liked the areas left to go wild, but other Tenants hated it and felt it looked untidy.
During the review of the contract, the project team would be looking at different ways to use the land of HRA to either make the most of money available but also how the Council could make best use of the land.
- In response to a question asking if the Council and Parks service considered investing in and using Mulching Mowers rather than just cutting without collecting, the Board were informed that this had been mentioned several times before but we were talking to Tenants about how best we could use the land and if they had an desires or ideas for it. For example, allotments and community gardens.
- In response to a questions asking if the Council still removed ragwort or did they dealt with it in a different way now, the Board were informed that this was something Officers would have come back to the Board on.
- In response to a questions asking if services had specific call centre for enquiries or the Council only have the main call centre, the Board were informed that as part of the review project and wider Council transformation project we were reviewing the number of published telephone numbers. This was still under discussion and yet to be agreed.
- Members suggested that the Council should encourage and empower Tenants and Leaseholders to take more responsibility for the land surrounding their properties rather than expecting the HRA to pay for maintenance. The Board were informed that the review of the Grounds Maintenance contract would require a decision between what we could afford and what the Tenants want us to do. This might require an increase in charges to cover additional maintenance.

- The Board were informed that the Officers were considering incentives and rewards for Tenants and Communities who took more responsibility of the community areas surrounding their properties allowing maintenance budget to re-directed elsewhere.

Resolved that:

1. The officer's report be noted.
2. The Board approved the delay of the start of the STAR Survey to Tenants and Leaseholder until 2018.

(The meeting ended at 7.45pm)