

Tenant Services Management Board - 21 January 2019

Present: Mr A Akhigbemen (Chairman)

Mr D Galpin, Mrs J Bunn, Mrs D Flavell, Mrs J Hegarty, Mr K Hellier,
Mr I Hussey and H Prior-Sankey

Officers: James Barraah, Steven Clarke, Paul Harding, Jo Humble, Clare Rendell
and Rosie Walsh

Also Present: Mr W Hobson (Chairman of the Tenants Forum)

(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm)

1. **Apologies.**

An apology was received from Councillor B Bowrah.

2. **Minutes of the previous meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board.**

The minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 17 December 2018 were signed and taken as read.

3. **Public Question Time.**

No questions were received for Public Question Time.

4. **Declaration of Interests.**

| Name | Minute No. | Description of Interest | Reason | Action Taken |
|---------------------------|------------|-------------------------|----------|-----------------|
| Mr A Akhigbemen | All Items | TDBC Housing Tenant | Personal | Spoke and Voted |
| Mrs J Bunn | All Items | TDBC Housing Tenant | Personal | Spoke and Voted |
| Mrs D Flavell | All Items | TDBC Housing Tenant | Personal | Spoke and Voted |
| Mr D Galpin | All Items | TDBC Housing Tenant | Personal | Spoke and Voted |
| Mrs J Hegarty | All Items | TDBC Housing Tenant | Personal | Spoke and Voted |
| Mr K Hellier | All Items | TDBC Housing Tenant | Personal | Spoke and Voted |
| Mr I Hussey | All Items | TDBC Housing Tenant | Personal | Spoke and Voted |
| Councillor H Prior-Sankey | All Items | SCC | Personal | Spoke and Voted |

5. **Change of Landlord Name (verbal update)**

The Senior Transformation Project Lead presented a verbal update on the change of Landlord Name and the possible effects it could have for the tenants.

The new name that would replace Taunton Deane Borough Council (TDBC) as the tenant's landlord would be Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT).

The Senior Transformation Project Lead advised the Board that the change should not affect tenants in too many ways. He further explained that there was no need for a new tenancy to be issued because the information would be automatically transferred from TDBC to SWT and the terms and conditions would remain the same.

He also confirmed that the Council would have the same contact details and the public would still be able to visit the Deane House with their enquiries.

How would officers inform tenants of the change.

The Senior Transformation Project Lead confirmed that information on the changes would be included in the tenant's annual rent statements. The main reasons for that was that all tenants received a rent statement plus it would save on the cost on posting out a separate letter. A copy of the letter was handed out to the Board Members. The letter would also include the new Direct Debit details along with contact details for the tenants to use.

Alongside the creation of the New Council, the officers had gone through a Transformation Project and would be adapting new ways of working, which included those that worked out in the community. Tenants should be aware that those officers might have new job titles but there would still be a maintenance and engagement programmes.

From the 1 April 2019, there would also be a new service available via the SWT website, that would enable customers to set up an account and login to report any concerns and would display their rent balance, council tax details along with other useful information.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Board Members queried why SWT was the name for the New Council. *SWT was the name that Councillors had decided on and could possibly change in the future, like any other Council's name. Officers highlighted that the level of service was more important than the name.*
- Board Members queried whether the Tenant Services Management Board would continue. *Yes it would.*
- Board Members queried whether they would still have contact details for the Housing Department. *Tenants should contact the main Council phone number and they would be assisted by a customer champion or a case manager, who would guide them through the internal structure, rather than the tenant contacting different officers.*
- Board Members queried whether there would be a pilot scheme used to test the new structure prior to its introduction. *No there would not be a pilot scheme, the New Council, website and processes were going live in April 2019 and there was not enough time to run a pilot scheme because officers were still going through the recruitment phase.*
- Concern was raised on how officers felt about the Transformation Project.

There were mixed emotions based on the circumstances for each officer. Majority felt positive and were involved in the changes.

- Concern was raised on the communications used and that the information for the New Council needed to be distributed in the correct manner.
The Senior Transformation Project Lead would report that back to the Communications and Engagement Team.
- Board Members queried whether the savings from the Transformation Project would be used to fund housing developments.
No, the savings created were being used towards the Council's survival, not for investment.
- Board Members queried whether the general transformation savings were the same for the housing officers as they were funded from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).
The savings were not the same for the HRA as the rest of the Council because the HRA was ring-fenced.

Resolved that the Board noted the update report.

6. **North Taunton Project Update**

The Housing Enabling and Development Manager presented the report on the North Taunton Woolaway Project which aimed to engage with the community who lived in the Woolaway properties and work with them to bring forward a phased regeneration scheme.

Within the report, the Board were reminded of the background information that had led to sufficient funding being awarded to TDBC which enabled the creation of a Master Planning Team to include expertise in Architecture, Community Consultation, Engineering and Cost Consultancy to support the Development Team in progressing the Project.

Following an extensive 12 month resident consultation and a range of detailed site investigations, an outline planning application and Phase A detailed planning application were submitted in December 2018.

The scheme Masterplan currently showed 5 phases, A to E. To continue momentum for the development, the report made a specific request for funding for Phase A.

Subject to planning approval, a tender process would begin to select the range of professionals, which included a build contractor to progress the scheme development with an application to start physical works during the financial year 2020/21.

The mix of homes was indicative at this stage and would be reviewed prior to the submission of Reserved Matters for subsequent phases. The intention was to undertake the project in 5 stages, to support the decant requirements of existing residents and enable each phase to be assessed against changes in housing need, affordability and mitigate future unknown changes which might affect the scheme proposal and financing.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Board Members queried how the residents felt about living next to a building site for the duration of the works.
There were mixed feelings within the community, however, they understood that the works needed to be carried out.
- Concern was raised on the cost of the works for the private home owners in the repair phase and how were they being supported as this was not funded by TDBC.
Officers were working with the effected residents and were exploring options of external grant funding which might be available to support the home owners in the repair phase who wished to undertake the repairs.
- Board Members queried what mix of housing tenure there would be for the new properties.
The tenants who were on social rent before the decant and were due to return to their properties, would remain on social rent, whilst any properties that were left, could be changed to affordable rent.
- Board Members queried whether the tenants who were on affordable rents would be eligible for the housing benefit top up.
Housing benefit would be available for those who were eligible for that assistance.
- Concern was raised that there could be a delay in funding and what contingency plans had been put in place to mitigate the risk.
The risk had been flagged so officers were aware. Within each phase there were internal contingencies for the reserved fund.
- Concern was raised that Central Government might reduce the social rents again which could affect the funds.
Officers had factored that into the calculations and it was one of the reasons why the work was being carried out in phases.

Resolved that the Board supported the following recommendations:-

- 1) The Council approved the project and the progression of the scheme. Council delegated the decisions to progress matters for the scheme to be determined by the Head of Commercial, Investment and Change in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder;
- 2) The Council approved the proposed funding of the scheme utilising a combination of capital receipts, Social Housing Development Fund revenue contribution, and capital borrowing. Council delegated the final funding arrangement to be determined by the S151 Officer in line with the Council's capital and treasury strategies, prioritising affordability for the Housing Revenue Account;
- 3) The Council approved a supplementary budget of £7,200,000 within the HRA Capital Programme for Phase A of the North Taunton Woolaway Project;
- 4) Approval was granted to serve Initial and Final Demolition Notices, and for the demolition of properties to enable site clearance to facilitate new development for the whole scheme;
- 5) The Council approved in principle to utilise Compulsory Purchase Powers using section 17 of the Housing Act 1985, should Vacant Possession not

progress to acquire properties under the regeneration initiative detailed in this report, and to delegate such decision making to the Executive.

7. **Any Other Business**

The Tenant Services Development Officer discussed some items with the Board.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Mrs Debbie Flavell was co-opted onto the Board with a unanimous vote from the Board Members.
- The Tenant Services Development Officer asked the Board to consider the amalgamation of all three tenant groups (Tenant Services Management Board, Tenants Forum and the Sheltered Housing Group) due to the changes within the Council.

(The Meeting ended at 7.20 pm)