

Minutes of the Meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 20 February 2017 at 6.00pm in the John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton.

Present: Mr R Balman (Chairman)
Mr A Akhigbemen, Mrs J Bunn, Mrs J Hegarty, Mr K Hellier, Mr I Hussey and Councillor C Booth.

Officers: Stephen Boland (Housing Services Lead), James Barrah (Director of Housing and Communities), Simon Lewis (Assistant Director Housing and Community Development), Richard Prewer (Property Services Manager), Tim Child (Asset Manager), Jan Errington (Area Community Manager), Lucy Clothier (Senior Accountant), Karl Griffiths (Accountant), Martin Price (Tenant Empowerment Manager) and Clare Rendell (Democratic Services Officer)

Also present: Councillor Beale and Mrs Warmington.

(The meeting commenced at 6.00pm)

12. Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr D Galpin.

13. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 16 January 2017 were taken as read and were signed.

14. Public Question Time

No questions received for Public Question Time.

15. Declarations of Interests

Mr Akhigbemen, Mr R Balman, Mrs J Bunn, Mrs J Hegarty, declared personal interests as Taunton Deane Borough Council Housing Tenants.

16. Transformation of Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset Council.

The Director of Housing and Communities had presented the plans for the Transformation Project at previous board meetings. He had attended this meeting to request feedback from the board in response to the consultation.

During the discussion of this item the following comments and questions were raised:-

- Concern was raised about the council's proposal and what was the likelihood that the council tax would significantly rise? Was there any guarantee that this would not happen?
There was no guarantee. Council tax was something that the Members considered on an annual basis. The purpose of creating a new council was to create savings so there was less pressure on both council's financial positions. One way to raise income was through taxation, but this was not the only option and not likely to be chosen by Members. The significant pressure on the public sector meant it was difficult to predict. Members would assess the council's financial situation before they set the rates.
- Concern was raised that savings would equal poor service across the council.
The councils had already made significant savings through joint working with staff. The Joint Management Team had not seen any dip in service standards, which was a credit to the staff. The intention going forward was that some processes, through transformation, would seek improvement in service. This would be through better technical support, real time information on performance and to provide better access for our customers. Work had already begun on avoidable contact and ways to improve our self-serve processes. There would be difficult decisions to be made but the service delivery would continue and hopefully improve. The councils currently had a traditional staff structure which need to be updated. Options for utilising staff knowledge and technical abilities were being investigated.
- Would tenant services be protected?
Housing services should not be affected.
- What responses had been received for the consultation?
Exact numbers were not available. However, there had been a late surge in support for the transformation. Some residents had raised questions which were against the proposals. Many of the key stakeholders had submitted responses which indicated their support. All the data would be submitted to the Secretary of State to consider.
- Concern was raised that certain tenants would be forgotten about once the councils were joined up. Service repairs were already behind schedule and this could potentially worsen over time. Tenants wanted assurance the transformation would not affect service level standards.
- Many of the board were undecided on a personal level but believed that on the whole, the housing tenants would not be affected by the transformation project due to West Somerset Council not owning any housing stock.
- Although there was uncertainty on some of the aspects of the transformation, the board were in favour of the project.

Resolved that the board members voted in support of the transformation project.

17. Financial Monitoring Quarter Three 2016/17.

The Senior Accountant for Services presented the report which provided an update on the projected outturn financial position of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the financial year 2016/17.

The HRA was a 'Self-Financing' account for the Housing Landlord function, which was budgeted to break-even (net of approved transfers to/from HRA Reserves). The current forecast HRA Revenue Outturn for 2016/17 was a net surplus of £33k (0.1% of gross income).

The major under and overspends forecast for the year were summarised as follows:-
Dwelling Rents and Service Charges. The void rate was lower than budgeted which led to an additional income of £257k.

Leasehold Income. Income from leaseholders was higher than budgeted by £106k which reflected the increased cost of maintenance on shared blocks.

Housing Management. Underspends were identified which related to staff vacancies, IT costs and right to buy income. However, there were additional costs which related to an Asbestos Management Survey. This would cover 20% of all dwellings. An overall overspend of £132k was forecasted.

Asbestos Surveys. Surveys and testing continued to be a priority. The forecasted variance was £39k overspend due to increased activity.

Voids. An underspend of £82k had been forecasted on void repairs. This was due to lower than budgeted void numbers.

Grounds Maintenance. A review was currently being undertaken. The current forecast was £34k over budget.

Supported Housing. Additional works and equipment in Supported Housing had created a forecast overspend variance of £147k. This included the installation of suited locks.

Other Maintenance. A forecast overspend in General Maintenance of £312k had been driven by demand and was partially offset by an expected underspend in Responsive Electrical and Heating works of £63k.

Pre-Planned Maintenance and Electrical Testing. The figures fluctuated annually due to the revenue works needed. This would depend on the properties being surveyed. The electrical services were being completed in house and would be done on a continuous programme.

Interest Receivable. Higher reserve balances meant that the interest received on investments was higher than budgeted by £40k.

Interest Payable. Borrowing for the development schemes had been delayed. This meant that until the borrowing was externalised, interest was not paid and so a saving was made. This was expected to be £241k in 2016/17.

The HRA capital account had forecast spend of £10.562m against a budget of £20.058m with £9.496m forecast to be spent in future years.

The capital programme could be split into two distinct areas:-

- Major Works. The Major Works highlighted in the report were for Heating Improvements and this was approximately £4m. Improvement Works were included in Major Works and there had been a new addition in the budget for Meeting Halls which equalled £71k. Other improvements that were highlighted were for Disabled Facilities Grant's £311k and for Asbestos Works £296k.
- Development. The main developments in the Social Housing Development Programme were for Creechbarrow Road and Weavers Arms.

The Director of Housing and Communities praised the team for making substantial improvements on the capital work load this year.

Resolved that the report be noted.

18. Performance Indicators Quarter Three 2016/17.

The Assistant Director for Housing and Community Development and the Property Services Manager presented the report which detailed the performance indicators for quarter three.

The report was broken down into three sections:-

Green Indicators. Areas highlighted for performing well were, rental incomes, cases of anti-social behaviour that had been resolved, housing stock non-priority repairs had been completed within set target times and sheltered housing and extra care tenants had received their annual reviews.

Amber Indicators. Areas highlighted for improvement were, customer satisfaction on lettable standards of properties, percentage of properties with a valid gas safety certificate and housing stock repairs for priority cases.

Red Indicators. Areas highlighted for concern were, disabled facilities grants not processed within allotted time and the average re-let time was longer than the targets set (New IT and training issues were distorting the data. This meant that it was not entirely accurate due to the recent restructure. This would be amended by April 2017).

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

- Concern was raised about red indicators from previous years. What was the current re-let timescale?
The current re-let timeframe was 40 days. This was unacceptable to all concerned and will be an area of work that would be improved.
- How was the training progressing?
They were moving forward with the training and monitoring how the officers used their IT to report and close caseloads down. They had now moved to the new Deane DLO Depot and the Property Services Manager invited the board members to visit.

Resolved that the report be noted.

19. Supported Housing Property Options Review.

The Asset Manager and Project Manager presented their report to the board. The report presented the findings from a review on the sheltered and extra care properties and the development of a new aspirational property standard which provided information on stock performance and condition. It set out a proposed approach to stock rationalisation, options appraisal and importantly how we could achieve the key elements of the standard incrementally over the 30 year business plan.

In 2015 the Council undertook a review of supported housing in response to the changing environment and the need to make sure we were providing the right service and suitable accommodation in the future. The aims of the review were:-

- Achieve and maintain a high level of tenant satisfaction.
- Provide housing that was attractive to older people to want to move in to.
- Meet the local demand for people over 60 years of age.
- Support people to maintain their independence and social networks of family and friends.

The Council recognised that it was essential that the buildings themselves were fit for purpose, were somewhere that tenants would want to live, met their needs and were financially sustainable.

The review considered the following:-

- Future demand for the properties.
- Stock condition.
- New Supported Housing Property Standard.
- Appraisal of properties against the Standard.
- Stock performance (through Savills analysis).
- Investment required to meet the Standard.
- How we prioritise works over the 30 years.
- Smarter Solutions.
- Options Appraisals of 5 low performing schemes.

Details of the review were:-

Stock Profile. There was 980 dwellings of which 586 were flats and 394 were bungalows. Almost 50% of flats were on the first floor without access to a lift. This was not suitable for those with mobility needs.

Stock Condition. The estimated investment needed for the next 30 years was £26.3m (excluded inflation). The average future investment need per sheltered unit over 30 years was £26,884. The sheltered stock was generally in fair condition, but the provision of general amenities was relatively basic, there was poor access, there was work needed to the common areas and there was no dementia friendly signage or colour schemes.

Financial Performance. The average Net Present Value of the 30 year operating cash flows for sheltered stock was £14,267, which was 13% lower than the average for TDBC stock. Bungalows scored the highest and flats the lowest. Flats were less likely to reach the aspirational standard.

Non-Financial Performance. Each scheme also included a non-financial and social sustainability analysis. Indicators were not specific to sheltered housing but were still relevant.

Stock Rationalisation. The aim was to improve the stock profile, swap in more suitable stock and swap out less suitable stock.

Options Appraisal. This was to explore opportunities to invest or develop stock and to identify poor performing stock due to financial, non-financial or aspirational standards.

Aspirational Standard. This was developed by colleagues and tenants together. It reflected tenants' priorities and national good practice. It encompassed accessibility, condition, security, location and proximity to amenities.

Approach. Not all the schemes involved would have to meet the full standard or would be made fully accessible. Work would be realistic, affordable and achievable. Schemes would be appraised against the standard and agreed priorities.

Essential Planned Works. These would be carried out through the Capital Programme, Existing Budget and the HRA Business Plan.

Other Priorities. The high priorities that were discussed were related to access (paths, doors and positioning) and also health and safety with suited locks.

Details of what needed to happen next:-

- Survey the stock.
- Refine the scheme matrix.
- Refocus the capital programme.
- Integrate the bids process and lettable standard.
- Develop assessment framework
- Options appraisals for low scorers.
- Adapted properties review.
- Sheltered lettings policy review.
- Set rationalisation plan in motion.
- Carry out annual reviews.

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

- Agreed the review was a good exercise.
- Concern was raised about the properties that the options appraisal would identify as unsuitable for supported housing and would they be sold or invested in and developed?
The options appraisal would identify schemes that could do better but did not mean that they would be sold. The purpose of the review was not to sell any of the Council's assets, but to improve the stock or to use it for other purposes than sheltered housing. It would be an opportunity for investment, but not to make profit.
- One of the aims of the review was to make sheltered housing better places for tenants to live. However, in the report it stated that 'socially excluded' residents could be moved into the properties which raised concern.
Officers would be sensitive when looking at support needs and would try to keep the balance between neighbours. Elderly tenants might have health needs or feel unsafe, so would not want to add to these pressures. There were no definitive answers but wanted to reassure tenants.
- Issues with 'pepper potting' would decrease over time through the review process.
- Under the rationalisation, what was the breakdown of properties that would be swapped in and out?
It would be mainly top floor flats that would be swapped out and bungalows that would be swapped in. However, there were no exact details as these were changeable.
- In the review, it was reported that bungalows performed better financially. Could we build more bungalows?
Due to restrictions on land space available for new builds, flats had been built, but they had access to a lift which made it accessible for tenants.

Resolved that the report be noted.

20. Exclusion of the Press and Public

Resolved that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item because of the likelihood that exempt information would otherwise be disclosed relating to Clause 3 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act, 1972 and the

public interest in withholding the information outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information to the public.

21. Confidential Supported Housing Property Options Review Continued.

Considered report appendix circulated regarding the confidential details that identified the properties within the review that would be deemed to be ideal for the options appraisal. Officers did not want to raise concern within the tenant community because these details were changeable.

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

- What would happen if a tenant decided to buy a property that had been identified in the review as not fit for purpose?
Right to buy was still protected. If a tenant fulfilled the criteria for the right to buy scheme, they would be able to purchase the property. The property would then come back under the review when the tenant left.

(The meeting ended at 7.50pm)