

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 14 August 2017 at 6.00pm in the Committee Room, The Brittons Ash Community Centre (BACH), Bridgwater Road, Bathpool, Taunton.**

**Present:** Mr R Balman (Chairman)  
Mr A Akhigbemen, Mrs J Belcher, Mrs J Bunn, Mr D Galpin, Mr I Hussey,  
Councillor R Bowrah, BEM and Councillor Mrs F Smith.

**Officers:** Rich Prewer (Property Services Manager), Stephen Boland (Housing Services Lead), Derek Quick (Landlord Health and Safety Compliance Project Manager), Rachel Searle (Development Manager), Rosie Walsh (Development Decant Manager), Julia Williamson (Housing Options Assistant), Martin Price (Tenant Empowerment Manager) and Marcus Prouse (Democratic Services Officer).

**Others:** Amanda Taylor (Nash Partnerships)

(The meeting commenced at 6.00pm)

**1. Apologies**

Apologies were received from Mrs J Hegarty, Mr K Hellier and Councillor T Beale.

**2. Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 17 July 2017 were signed and taken as read.

**3. Public Question Time**

No questions were received for Public Question Time.

**4. Declarations of Interests**

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

**5. Fire Safety Update**

The Landlord Health and Safety Compliance Project Manager introduced the item and informed Members of the situation locally and what impact the Grenfell Tower tragedy had on the Fire Safety Risk Assessment programme.

The Officer team had reviewed the local situation and was pleased to be able to say that the Council was already pro-active in this area, and as stated there was already a programme of Fire Safety Risk Assessments in place, but to offer further reassurance this would no longer be done over an 18 month period, instead it would be done in six weeks, and had been completed this week.

Results of the Assessments would be fed through to this Committee once further analysis had been done, however, it was reassuring that no major issues had come to light. Early indications were that most of the identified issues were due to

housekeeping by tenants. An issue had been identified with the Bin Stores that are located usually by a Back or Front door, which could present a fire hazard. A piece of work had been commissioned which would move these away from the main residence and still provide a secure compound. Another piece of work currently underway was the replacement of Doors in flats, which has been extended to Leaseholders and would be around 200 doors that would be replaced. It was reassuring that of the 448 blocks of flats in the Borough nothing major had been identified, but the Officer team would continue to provide a pro-active service in this area, with more findings and figures brought before the Committee in the future.

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

- Was the person carrying out the Risk Assessments trained to a high standard?
- *It was confirmed that the person/s are highly trained to Fire Service standards, undertaking an intensive course and able to assess complex buildings.*
- It was considered that it was fortunate Taunton Deane did not have any high rise buildings, but it was presumed the emphasis would still be on keeping areas clean and clear and free of pot plants, carpets and bicycles?
- *Taunton Deane had a zero tolerance policy to obstructions in the communal areas which is enforced. There had been a noticeable improvement in the last six months, with Grenfell seeming to reinforce the messages regarding Fire Doors and obstructions.*
- There had been a few incidents in the past with regard to Door Access issues, with Anti-Social Behaviour occurring. Would this be improved under the replacement programme?
- *A controlled access programme would address the Door Access issues to ensure this would stop the problem.*
- Where could amenities like bicycles which are often in the way be stored in a flat with no designated communal space?
- *This was recognised as a real difficulty but safety had to come first.*
- Through the Assessment programme, were there any communal spaces that were identified as needing a sprinkler system?
- *Yes, Kilkenny Court, which is an 'extra care' facility had been identified six or seven months ago, and this would be rectified. No systems were identified as being necessary in the communal flats elsewhere in the Borough.*

**Resolved** that the report be noted.

## **6. Performance Indicators Quarter 1 2017/18**

The Housing Services Lead introduced the KPI's under his jurisdiction which were currently at 'Amber' or had changed back to 'Green'.

**HC 1.1** was pleasing to see as above target, as twelve months ago there had been some anxiety about the introduction of Universal Credit (UC) and how this would affect tenants. Arrears had gone up slightly overall though it was going well and the resource was in place to help people with their UC claims. The team was now going to focus help on the next phase, which is between receiving a payment and making a claim. Housing Officers were equipped with iPads and were able to support those tenants with their claims and ensure the relevant information is supplied to complete a claim. The team had even been supporting Mid Devon Council as they prepare to migrate over to the Digital UC system.

**HC 4.8** was Amber and around the review of the support plan of Sheltered Housing Units every 12 months. As the Council had 800 plus of these units, the achievement of 80% of an ambitious 100% target was considered reasonable. A qualification was also that there are tenants living on the schemes who refuse to have a review. In dealing with these, there had been issues with some Sheltered Housing Officers unsure of how to input this kind of response onto the system. This was a relatively new indicator to be measured and this still needed to be worked through with the team as to how input this, with activities in place to address this. Related to this was some of these Sheltered Housing Officers getting used to the new software and database. This was introduced in April 2017 and it was considered that more time was needed for this new way of working to bed in fully.

The Property Services Manager introduced the performance indicators he was responsible for and gave a brief overview;

**HC 2.7** dealt with customer satisfaction with lettable standards of properties, which had dipped in the middle of last year but was getting back on track. Two team members had been assigned to do pre-void work and there had been a noticeable improvement in the figures. 18 responses was considered to be too small a sample to really give much of a picture. Tenants were not complaining about the quality of the work, more often it was the time taken to get through to the call centre. Improvements had been made and new people hired, for example, TV's had been installed on the wall so it could be shown how many calls were waiting. The Repairs team were multi-skill trained and were using a dynamic scheduling system, with a push and pull diary which allowed for gaps in the day to respond to emergencies and to pro-actively pursue jobs. A performance management methodology would ensure that the Council was getting the best out of its workforce.

**HC 3.1** was measured always at a particular point of time and the issue had been two tenants in hospital so their properties were unable to be accessed to do the gas servicing, but this had now been sorted and there were none outstanding. Gas had recently been taken back in-house, there was a new software system called Gastag being used which allowed the team to know what appliances were in each property and their serviced dates. This would run in a 10 month cycle and would mean that no appliances would ever reach their expiry without a check.

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

- It was queried as to whether the annual assessment of tenants could be changed to a system where the Council were notified of any changes, as annual assessment has been felt by some to be too intrusive?
- *An annual review was required to be done by the Council.*
- It was considered that achieving 100% would always be difficult, as people living in sheltered housing who may not need that but are placed there due to social services.
- *Agreed that the schemes needed a balance of people with different support needs to be resourced without extra difficulty, and perhaps the indicator was too high.*
- What was the split between the tenants we were struggling to make contact with and the Sheltered Housing Officers not updating their computers? Was this a training issue?
- *All Sheltered Housing Officers had had the training and awareness support. Area Community Managers were continuing to restate these messages in their regular 1 to 1's with officers. Some changes had been made to the online database to make it easier to use.*

- **HC 4.2** – was around Emergency repairs within 24 hours and was currently at Amber. The Property Services Manager requested that the measure be changed to 1 day rather than in hours, as the hour's measurement penalised repairs that were the next day.
- *The Board agreed with the Officer's assessment that changing this to 1 Day would be fairer and were happy to see this change going forward.*
- What was classed as an Emergency?
- *It was generally considered to be life, limb, or damage to property. There was a balance to be had, but this would be monitored and an indicator would be a level of complaints. Complaints were now being completed properly and this had been improved.*
- Considering the challenges with the IT systems recognised, did the team have the capacity to do same day repair jobs?
- *Although the scheduling system at the moment does not allow for it, we would be able to do this by leaving gaps in the schedule to deal with expected Emergencies and follow-up jobs. The workforce was being utilised better with more multi-skill staff, and to improve the Call centre so that the right staff were sent to the right jobs for their skill level. A Business Plan was agreed to be shared at a future meeting detailing how the workforce was being organised better.*

**Resolved** that the report be noted.

## **7. Property Services Delivery Plan and Performance Indicators Quarter 1 2017/18**

The Property Services Manager introduced the report and the Delivery Plan for the year which had been included with the report. This was an overview of what was being worked on this year to put the Council in a position of strength.

The implementation had gone well so far, for example, the IT department had worked hard with the team to address the issues that had been causing problems. Tradesman's tablets having 3 passwords had been looked at and now there was just one password, with their personalised thumbprint providing access. There were still issues with the network coverage and in one instance the systems going down cost 3 lost days. In staffing terms there had been some disciplinary issues.

Employees should know what to expect now, and the Council would not accept mediocrity. It was pleasing to note that the majority of people in the organisation were working really hard. The KPI's mirrored the Corporate KPI's in a lot of ways. The officer gave further detailed explanation on the 'Repairs out of target' KPI, which was 'red' on the average jobs per day. As staff were going to get more multi-skilled this number would drop from an expectation of 5 and a half per day. This was because a 'job', for the service should be considered a 'visit', with possibly up to 7 or 8 items to do in a property, and it was against those individual items workers would be measured. If a worker was constantly underperforming, it would either be a capability issue or a training issue, and support is on offer to address both. The organisation had recently taken on some excellent apprentices who have embraced the new ways of working which was making the difference. The average age of a plumber was now 56 years old, so it was important the Council worked with local schools and colleges to bring more people into the industry.

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

- How long in time was a worker given for a job?
- *When a tenant rings in for a job, the person taking on the work uses a system called Locator Plus, which for each appliance or job will give Standard Minute Values in which to complete the role, understanding however that construction is not straightforward. The Council's emphasis was that the job took as long as needed to do a professional job on the first visit. The new mind-set being implemented was that vulnerable tenants are engaged with and any potential issues passed onto Housing colleagues.*
- The members of the board were interested in how the Voids process was turning around?
- *All voids were planned in, with cyclical work done to ensure quicker turnarounds. Compared to previously, there would be substantial efficiencies. A void service standard had been developed so that consistent product was offered alongside managing tenants expectations.*
- When Officers were made aware of an Abandoned Property, how quickly was that able to be re-let?
- *With abandonment, Estates Officers have to be very careful and follow a checklist to assure and establish that the tenant has definitely gone. Terminations are very rare, and the Council would normally go through the Courts in these cases to protect the Council.*

**Resolved** that the report be noted.

## **8. Considerate Constructors Scheme**

The Property Services Manager introduced the report and outlined the motivation behind signing the Council up to this scheme.

Part of his remit ensuring that the Council was doing enough to showcase itself as a professional organisation, for example, they had also signed up to the Association of Gas Safety Managers and the Direct Works Forum. The Considerate Constructors Scheme looked at best practice with organisations that have their own 'in-house' workforce. Major Construction companies with high standards were known to subscribe to this scheme.

The scheme looked at five disciplines across the organisation, and the Council had recently gotten the score back from its first official visit, which was thankfully really pleasing to report as positive. The score was assessed each time on creativity and innovation in the way the Council delivered the service, with the Council now on a schedule of 6 month assessments, the results of which would be brought to TSMB. It was felt important for the Council to be recognised by an outside body and embodied the cultural change that the Officers were trying to drive forward.

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

- How much was Taunton Deane contributing to the scheme monitors paid by the Considerate Constructors Scheme?
- *It was a fee based on turnover and was around £300 pa. The scheme would encourage better behaviour, and in the next assessment the monitors would likely be speaking to tenants.*
- Were any other Local Authorities signed up to this scheme?
- *Cheltenham was one known Borough Council, as well as others such as Advantage SW. The service being looked at by an external organisation*

*should be something a LA would encourage, in much the same way as the Finances of the Council are audited.*

**Resolved** that the report be noted.

**9. 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.

**10. Development Update**

Considered verbal update and presentation regarding the confidential Development updates on the North Taunton 'Woolaways' at both Dorchester Road and Rochester Road, Taunton.

(The meeting ended at 8.05pm)