

You are requested to attend a meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board to be held in Meeting Room C, Flook House, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton on 16 October 2017 at 18:00.

Agenda

- 1 Apologies.
- 2 Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 25 September 2017 (attached).
- 3 Public Question Time.
- 4 Declaration of Interests
To receive declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or personal or prejudicial interests, in accordance with the Code of Conduct, in relation to items on the agenda. Such interests need to be declared even if they have already been recorded in the Register of Interests. The personal interests of Councillors who are County Councillors or Town or Parish Councillors will automatically be recorded in the minutes.
- 5 Fees and Charges 2018-2019. Report of the Business Support Lead (attached).
Reporting Officer: Shari Hallett
- 6 Tenant Services Management Board Meeting Dates 2018. Report of the Tenant Empowerment Manager (verbal update).
Reporting Officer: Martin Price
- 7 Tenant Services Management Board Forward Plan. Report of the Tenant Empowerment Manager (verbal update).
Reporting Officer: Martin Price

Bruce Lang
Assistant Chief Executive

22 February 2018

Members of the public are welcome to attend the meeting and listen to the discussions.

There is time set aside at the beginning of most meetings to allow the public to ask questions.

Speaking under "Public Question Time" is limited to 4 minutes per person in an overall period of 15 minutes. The Committee Administrator will keep a close watch on the time and the Chairman will be responsible for ensuring the time permitted does not overrun. The speaker will be allowed to address the Committee once only and will not be allowed to participate further in any debate.

Except at meetings of Full Council, where public participation will be restricted to Public Question Time only, if a member of the public wishes to address the Committee on any matter appearing on the agenda, the Chairman will normally permit this to occur when that item is reached and before the Councillors or Tenant Services Management Board Members begin to debate the item.

This is more usual at meetings of the Council's Planning Committee and details of the "rules" which apply at these meetings can be found in the leaflet "Having Your Say on Planning Applications". A copy can be obtained free of charge from the Planning Reception Desk at The Deane House or by contacting the telephone number or e-mail address below.

If an item on the agenda is contentious, with a large number of people attending the meeting, a representative should be nominated to present the views of a group.

These arrangements do not apply to exempt (confidential) items on the agenda where any members of the press or public present will be asked to leave the Committee Room.

Full Council, Executive, Committees and Task and Finish Review agendas, reports and minutes are available on our website: www.tauntondeane.gov.uk



Lift access to the John Meikle Room and the other Committee Rooms on the first floor of The Deane House, is available from the main ground floor entrance. Toilet facilities, with wheelchair access, are also available off the landing directly outside the Committee Rooms.



An induction loop operates to enhance sound for anyone wearing a hearing aid or using a transmitter.

For further information about the meeting, please contact the Corporate Support Unit on 01823 356414 or email r.bryant@tauntondeane.gov.uk

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Tenant Services Management Board Members:-

Mr A Akhigbemen

Councillor C Booth

Councillor R Bowrah, BEM

Mrs J Bunn

Mr D Galpin

Mrs J Hegarty

Mr K Hellier

Mr I Hussey

Minutes of the Meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 25 September 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, Mrs J Hegarty, Mr K Hellier, Mr I Hussey, Councillor C Booth and Councillor R Bowrah, BEM.

Officers: Simon Lewis (Assistant Director – Housing and Community Development), Stephen Boland (Housing Services Lead), Jo Humble (Housing Development and Enabling Manager), Richard Burge (Open Spaces Manager), Neil Anderson (Housing and Community Strategy Officer), Martin Price (Tenant Empowerment Manager) and Tracey Meadows (Democratic Services Officer).

Others: Councillor T Beale.

(The meeting commenced at 6.00pm)

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr D Galpin.

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 14 August 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, Mrs J Hegarty, Mr K Hellier and Mr I Hussey declared personal interests as Taunton Deane Borough Council Housing Tenants.

5. Methods of Payment, Rent and the Transformed Council

The Housing Services Lead gave a verbal update on the method of payments used by the Taunton Deane Borough Council tenants.

Members were reminded of the update given to the Board on April 2016 by the Director of Housing and Communities which referred to the Council's Transformation Project. During the presentation the Director discussed the process to make transactions more efficient with more transactions going digital.

In March 2017, the Chief Executive also gave the Members an update on the Transformation Project and the design principles that would set the framework for the transformation vision. The New Operating Model was based on the following:-

- The focus was on customer demand being reduced;
- There would be a reduction in cost for the services that could be delivered online;

- Service 'silos' would be removed and services would be designed around the needs of customers; and
- The Council would be able to support customers to access information and services at a time and place that was convenient to them.

The Housing Services Lead gave the Members a breakdown of the value and volume of payments received at both the cash machines located in Taunton and Wellington:-

- Rent payments received at Taunton totalled £1,270,027 which included 9966 transactions.
- Rent payments received at Wellington totalled £411,751 which included 3857 transactions.

Officers understood that the Taunton and Wellington offices would not always be a convenient place to make payments in the future. With this in mind, they had investigated where tenants could make payments in their own neighbourhoods which could be more convenient to them. They found that there were 31 Pay Point outlets and 58 Post Offices within the Taunton Deane and West Somerset area that could be used by tenants. (Website and telephone payments were not included in the results.)

The cash machines were due to be removed in Spring 2018 and officers were keen to be proactive and wanted to help users to transition over to other payment methods and recognised the potential need for a temporary person to help explain what changes were being made and engage with users on a transformed way of accessing services.

During the discussion of this item, Board Members made the following comments and asked questions (Responses shown in italics):-

- Members gave positive feedback on the ability to be able to pay their rent in their local convenient store or Post Office.
- Members requested that tenants were kept informed of the other payment methods available to use. A suggestion was made to add a message on the cash machine that when a cash method was selected, it advised the customer of other methods of payment.

There would be lots of information distributed to customers, which included mailshots and other communications. Officers were aware they needed to be careful during the process because they still needed to be able to collect rent payments. The cash collectors charged £18,000 per year to collect from the cash machines and the machines were also very costly to maintain. There would be an officer temporarily sited at the machines to give advice on alternative payment methods.

- Members queried whether the other payment methods were detailed in their annual rent statement?
Yes this was detailed in the statement. Direct debit had already been promoted in the tenant's newsletter and there were 1600 tenants that paid via direct debit.
- Concern was raised about tenants that had used credit cards to pay for their rent.
Work had been carried out with tenants that used credit cards to try and help them manage their finances and possibly use credit unions rather than other lenders that would charge high interest rates.
- Members queried what costs would be involved in the use of other pay points

in the area.

To be able to access the other pay points, there would be a procurement process to secure a supplier for the services and there would be a cost but this was unknown at present.

- Concern was raised for customers that still had their wages paid in cash and were unable to visit the Council offices during opening hours. Officers would need to ensure that there were pay points in local shops for those types of customers.

There would be lots of locations to choose from, which would be more convenient for customers.

Resolved that the Board noted the Officer's update.

6. Diversifying the Choice of Tenure

The Housing Enabling and Development Manager presented her report which provided the reasons for and advised Members on the implementation of two new Council tenures, Affordable Rent and Shared Ownership, to be piloted at the Weavers Arms housing development site in Rockwell Green, Wellington.

The broad range of homes being built at the Council's Weavers Arms, Rockwell Green development had offered the opportunity for the Council to explore the introduction of two new tenures, affordable rent and shared ownership in addition to social rent that was currently offered through the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) housing stock.

Following the review of the HRA Business Plan and the adoption of the Development Strategy in 2016, work had been carried out which explored the options to diversify the choice of tenures that were offered within the 'Newbuild Council Housing Program' and to bring forward the 'Housing Vision'.

The offer would diversify the housing mix at Weavers Arms from 26 social rented properties to:-

- 21 affordable rented properties;
- 2 shared ownership properties; and
- 3 social rented properties for the returning decants.

These new tenures would align the housing scheme with the Council's current aspirations and provide further housing options for the local residents and tenants in the area whilst they significantly improved the financial payback for the scheme in response to the increased build costs and reduced financial income following the implementation of rent reduction.

The diversifying of tenure allowed the Council to have an increased level of revenue which could then be used to finance new development projects through a net positive effect on the HRA Business Plan.

Affordable Rent. This was subject to rent controls that required a rent of no more than 80 per cent of the local market rent, which included services charges, where applicable.

When the rent was set it used property valuations from professional valuers and was reviewed on an annual basis. They took account of factors such as the local housing market and the individual property features. Consideration was also given to the

relevant Local Housing Allowance, which was the benefit that residents would receive if they were renting from a private landlord.

Shared Ownership. This was a form of Low Cost Home Ownership and offered a route into owner occupation for those who would not normally be able to afford to purchase on the open market. The resident would buy a share of the property and would pay rent on the share they did not own. The property was shared in terms of ownership between the resident and the Council.

The intention was to use the Homes and Communities Agency Standard Shared Ownership Lease. This was the legal document that set out details of rent and how it was increased, arrangements for buying further shares in the property, service charges and buildings insurance, purchaser's responsibilities and the Council's responsibilities.

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

- Concern was raised that there would be mixed tenure schemes within the same housing estates which could cause problems.
Officers would avoid this where possible.
- Members queried the amount given for the service charge.
This was the amount used for social and affordable rent.
- Members queried was there any information or feedback from existing schemes on how easy it was to sell a shared ownership property.
If a resident wanted to sell their property, the Council would get the property valued. The Council would then have first refusal to purchase it back, however, there would be no obligation to the Council to do so.
- Concern was raised on what would happen when the rent was increased on the shared ownership properties and how over several years, the rent payments would be more than the mortgage payments.
Information was given on the opportunities for first time buyers through the shared ownership scheme and the ability to get onto the housing ladder. Figures were also given on deposits required, rent and mortgage figures for both shared ownership compared to open market properties.
- Members queried the progress made on the Weavers Arms project.
Good progress had been made but there had been delays caused by the section 278 agreement with Somerset County Council for the highways section of the development.
- Members queried whose responsibility would it be if the boiler broke down.
It would be the home owner's responsibility for any repairs to the property.
- Concern was raised about what happened if the home owner got into arrears on their mortgage, would the Council lose out to the mortgage companies.
Officers were working with solicitors who used fundamental clauses and could provide add ons to ensure that the Council did not lose out to the mortgage companies.
- Members queried when the shared ownership scheme would be available.
Once the decision notice had been advertised in the Weekly Bulletin, the properties would be marketed and when they had been sold, the Officer would return to give Members an update on the scheme.

Resolved that the decision for the tenure of the scheme had been discussed and agreed with the Director for Housing and Communities, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing Services. The decision would be advertised through the

Weekly Bulletin once consultation comments were received from the Tenant Services Management Board and Tenants' Forum.

7. Grounds Maintenance Service

The Open Spaces Manager and Strategy and Partnership Officer presented their report which provided details on the work that had taken place on the review of the current content and arrangement for the delivery of grounds maintenance service to land. The report was based on the consultation that had taken place with representatives of the three main Tenant Groups and also provided details of proposed improvements to the specification and potential savings to the service that could be made.

Since the last report to the Tenant Services Management Board (TSMB) in March 2017, further work had taken place which involved tenants in the review and a tour of the District and the establishment of a tenant's panel made up of representatives from the TSMB, Supported Housing Development Group (SHDG) and the Tenants' Forum (TF).

The purpose of the tour was to inspect areas to see examples of good and bad practice and to agree between the various parties what tenants felt was an acceptable standard.

The tenant's panel were provided with details on the cost of each part of the specification and of how the inclusion or exclusion of different items from the grounds maintenance specification effected the overall weekly charge to tenants.

There had also been a demonstration held in August 2017 of four different methods of cutting grass which included a mulching mower, which tenant representatives had attended. Further investigation into the type of mower to be used and the potential cost savings to the service would continue. The mulching mowers would be trialled from April 2018 alongside conventional mowers.

The chosen specification would result in an annual cost to the Council of £538,996, which would equal a weekly service charge of £1.84. The Council and tenant groups recognised that this represented a substantial increase on the current weekly charge of £0.81, but collectively officers and tenants were confident that this would result in improvements to the service and ensure the long term sustainability of the service, which until now had been underfunded. It should be noted that although the current weekly charge had only been £0.81, the actual weekly cost had been £1.12 per week with the annual budget overspend being taken from other HRA budgets.

The new specification and service standard would have the following benefits:-

- Provide a clear, costed, improved service standard for tenants.
- A clear service standard for both Open Space staff and Housing staff to work with.
- Make it simpler for all involved to understand the expected service standard that would be delivered.
- Enable improved monitoring of contract.

Work was currently underway to establish a costed programme of work to tackle those areas in the Housing Estate which required additional attention to bring them back to the agreed standard.

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

- Concern was raised that the current standard of fifteen grass cuts per year was not carried out in most areas and how would the officers maintain this standard going forward.
Officers had based their service charges on the figures for what they wanted to achieve and also they would use the new visual guide to ensure the standard was achieved.
- Members were happy with their own areas and the grounds maintenance that had been carried out.
- Concern was raised that if weed spraying was carried out in some areas this would kill the whole lawn because some areas were predominantly weeds and not grass.
The areas would be sprayed to kill the weeds and then re-seeded to create a lawn. The affected areas would take approximately a year to develop but in the long term the area would benefit and meet the specification.
- Officers had created a new visual guide to use. Officers would be able to take photos to show what the areas looked like at certain times to prove they had met the standard set in the guide.
- Officers were keen to get the specification and fees correct to make sure they were included in the Fees and Charges report due to go to Council before Christmas. This allowed officers time to implement the changes before April 2018 and communicate the changes to tenants.
- Concern was raised on the confusion over whose jurisdiction it was to maintain the footpaths.
Somerset County Council was responsible for the maintenance of the footpaths, however, because this was an important issue for tenants, the officers had included this in the new specification.
- Concern was raised on the removal of the rose beds and what would they be replaced with.
The rose beds cost £14,000 to maintain and it was decided that they were too costly to retain. Discussions would take place with the local residents and they could be replaced with shrubs which were easier to maintain.

Resolved that the Board approved:-

- a) The implementation of the new specification from the 1 April 2018;
- b) The increase in the level of the service charge to £1.84 per week from April 2018;
- c) That Council officers carry out further work on establishing a robust system of monitoring, the outcome of which was reported back to TSMB in March 2018;
- d) The current tenant panel was invited to become the tenant monitoring panel for the new specification which would be responsible for reporting on a regular basis to the TSMB on the performance of the contract;
- e) The appropriate officers of the Council would provide a progress report to the TSMB on how any new charges and new specification would be publicised to tenants in January 2018; and
- f) Officers from both Housing and Communities and Open Spaces would report on a quarterly basis on progress of the new specification that would commence in April 2018.

(The meeting ended at 7.40pm)

Taunton Deane Borough Council Fees and Charges 2018/19

Housing Service Charges

Background

The service charges are charges made to housing tenants for services that they use. These charges are set locally each year and are in addition to rent charges which are set by government policy.

Legal Authority

It is proposed to increase housing (non-rent) fees and charges by applying Retail Price Index (RPI) inflation as at September 2017. This is in accordance with the 30 year Housing Business Plan. The September 2017 RPI figure is not released until the 17th October 2017 so this paper has been prepared using the August 2017 RPI figure (2.7%). The August RPI figure is for indicative purposes only and once the September RPI figure is published the report will be adjusted so that the correct figures are reported to Corporate Scrutiny 16th November 2017.

The following are exceptions to the rule that service charges are uplifted by September 2017 RPI:

- ❖ Grounds maintenance charge. Following consultation, it is recommended that there is an increase in the service charge for the grounds maintenance service from the current 81 p per week to £1.84 per week from April 2018. This increase has been approved by the Tenants Forum on the 12th of September 2017. The Tenant Services Management Board on the 25th of September and the Supported Housing Development Group on the 3rd of October 2017. The increase will ensure that the service is properly funded and enable the Council to provide a new improved specification which reflects the wishes of tenants.
- ❖ Charges for properties not on mains sewer will be increased in line with Wessex Water increases for 2018-19 once known. Wessex Water rates for sewer standing charge per annum and poundage charges are used in the system calculation. In 2017-18 these are £7 unmetered sewerage standing charge and £1.5679 poundage charge, Wessex Water will publish new charges in February 2018 (available on their website).
- ❖ Last year it was proposed that licence fee charges for Temporary Accommodation properties were brought in line with the Local Housing Allowance ordinary rate. As per the previous year we propose to set the licence fee in line with the permitted Local Housing Allowance ordinary rate (90% of the 2011 Local Housing Allowance is payable as towards the daily licence fee in temporary accommodation units).
- ❖ For clarity, separate to the licence fee, the temporary Accommodation Units do attract service charges, higher rates are charged for those properties without key meters and the lower rates are charged for those

with key meters. The service charges will be increased by RPI. Although the licence fee remains at permitted local housing allowance level.

- ❖ Weekly garage rent is higher for private tenants. Last year Tenants Services Management Board wished garage rental for private tenants to increase to £10, this was not achievable in one increase therefore this year private garage rent will increase from £9.34 to £10 inc VAT per week (approximately 7% increase, double RPI). Council tenants rent will increase by RPI only.
- ❖ Feedback during last year's report was that tenants preferred charges to be rounded to whole numbers. Charges for guest rooms and meeting halls have therefore had RPI applied and been rounded. Guest rooms rounded to nearest 50p and meeting halls to nearest 10p.
- Council housing rents will be set early in the New Year in line with government guidance.
- Local Authorities have certain limited freedoms to charge for discretionary services under the Local Government Act 2003.
- Contractually and through section 10 of the Housing Act 1985 (as amended by Local Govt & Housing Act 1989) Taunton Deane Borough Council are permitted to make the charges detailed below.

Charges

- Displayed below is the table of fees and charges, comparing 2017 /18 to 2018/19 indicative prices (RPI of 2.7% has been used for indicative purposes).

Housing Service Charges	Actual 2017/8	% increase	Estimated 2018/19
Service Charges (VAT not applicable) – Per Week			
Communal areas	£0.61	RPI	£0.63
Grounds maintenance	£0.81	Reviewed	£1.84
Heating charge (Broomfield House only)	£4.87	RPI	£5.00
Laundry charge (Broomfield House only)	£1.48	RPI	£1.52
Combined Service Charges (VAT not applicable) – Per Week			
Sheltered Housing	£11.15	RPI	£11.45
Extra Care Housing Service Charge	£20.90	RPI	£21.46
Garage Rents - Per Week			
Council tenants (VAT not applicable)	£5.94	RPI	£6.10
Private tenants and Owner Occupiers (exc. VAT)	£7.78	Approx. 7%	£8.33
Private tenants and Owner Occupiers (inc. VAT)	£9.34	Approx. 7%	£10.00
Hire Charges for Sheltered Scheme Meeting Halls (ex VAT)			
First hour	£10.00	RPI	£10.30
Each half hour thereafter	£5.00	RPI	£5.10
6 hours plus	£60.00	RPI	£61.60
Total charge for residents in a scheme and community organisations	£13.80	RPI	£14.20
Hire Charges for Sheltered Scheme Guest Rooms (ex VAT) Taunfied, Middleway, Hope Corner Lane, Kilkenny and Lodge (darby Way?? Others not used)			
No. of nights per person -1 st night per person per night	£20.00	RPI	£20.50
No. of nights per person -2	£30.00	RPI	£31.00
No. of nights per person -3	£40.00	RPI	£41.00
No. of nights per person -4	£50.00	RPI	£51.50
No. of nights per person -5	£60.00	RPI	£62.00
No. of nights per person -6	£70.00	RPI	£72.00
No. of nights per person -7	£80.00	RPI	£82.00

Temporary Accommodation (rent per day, VAT not applicable)	Gross Daily Licence Fee & Service Charge 2017/18	Licence Fee Per Day 2018/19	Daily Service Charge 2018/19	Gross Charge Per Day 2018/19
40 Humphreys Road (2 bedroom)	£17.24	£16.31	£0.96	£17.27
1 Gay Street (2 bedroom)	£17.24	£16.31	£0.96	£17.27
Outer Circle				
96 Outer Circle	£17.24	£16.31	£0.96	£17.27
113 and 113a (studios)	£13.75	£13.05	£0.72	£13.77
115 (3 bedroom)	£23.76	£19.28	£4.60	£23.88
115a (3 bedroom - metered)	£20.45	£19.28	£1.20	£20.48
119 (studio)	£16.71	£13.05	£3.76	£16.81
119a (studio - metered)	£13.75	£13.05	£0.72	£13.77
Snedden Grove				
Unit 1 (2 bedroom)	£17.24	£16.31	£0.96	£17.27
Unit 2 (2 bedroom)	£17.24	£16.31	£0.96	£17.27
Unit 3 (2 bedroom)	£17.24	£16.31	£0.96	£17.27
Unit 4 (3 bedroom)	£20.45	£19.28	£1.20	£20.48
Unit 5 (3 bedroom)	£20.45	£19.28	£1.20	£20.48
Unit 6 (2 bedroom)	£17.24	£16.31	£0.96	£17.27
Unit 7 (3 bedroom)	£20.45	£19.28	£1.20	£20.48
Unit 8 (2 bedroom)	£17.24	£16.31	£0.96	£17.27
Wheatley Crescent (4 studios)				
30 (1 bedroom)	£13.75	£13.05	£0.72	£13.77
32 (1 bedroom)	£13.75	£13.05	£0.72	£13.77
34 (1 bedroom)	£13.75	£13.05	£0.72	£13.77
36 (1 bedroom)	£13.75	£13.05	£0.72	£13.77
Howard Road (Magna)				
43a (1 bedroom)	£13.05	£13.05	£0.00	£13.05
43b (1 bedroom)	£13.05	£13.05	£0.00	£13.05
43c (1 bedroom)	£13.05	£13.05	£0.00	£13.05
43d (1 bedroom)	£13.05	£13.05	£0.00	£13.05

Discounts

Discounts do not apply to service charges.

Budget Impacts

In accordance with the 30 year Housing Business Plan, it is proposed to increase housing (non rent) fees and charges by applying Retail Price Index (RPI) inflation as at September 2017 (August RPI of 2.7% has been used until September figure is published) with the following exceptions:

- Grounds Maintenance Charge
- Water rates and non mains sewerage rates
- Temporary accommodation licence fee
- Private garage rental

The increase in charges will increase income by an estimated £325k TBC. This can be broken down by an increase in service charge income of £24k and an increase in ground maintenance charge of £301k.

Equality Impact Assessment

An Equality Impact Assessment form has been completed and Housing Services will continue to provide a number of initiatives to enable service users to manage their finances and maximise their income.

Recommendation

Tenant Services Management Board has been invited to comment on the proposed fees during their meeting 16th October 2017.

Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset Council Equality Impact Assessment Form and Action Plan

1. Name of policy, procedure, decision or service being analysed:

Housing Services Fees and Charges 2018/19

2. What is the reason for completing this EIA? Please tick.

New policy/service
Change of policy/service
New/change of budget
Service review

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

3. Sources of information used in this analysis:
(E.g. demographic data, research from websites, consultations, equality monitoring data, customer feedback)

Grounds Maintenance charges have been subject to specific consultation exercises.

Fees and charges generally, there will be consultation with Tenant Services Management Board 16th October 2017.

4. Identify the potential effect of this action on each of the groups below.
Please refer to the equality analysis guidance.

Protected Group	Comments	Actions
Age, Disability, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion and Belief, Sex, Sexual Orientation	<i>The proposed fees and charges increases will apply to all services users and as such no potential discrimination amongst the protected groups has been identified. Those on low income will be particularly disadvantaged.</i>	<p><i>Processes are in place to ensure early intervention in cases of rent, service charge, leasehold service charge arrears.</i></p> <p><i>To help support service users on low incomes Housing Services will continue to provide a number of initiatives to enable service users to manage their finances and maximise their income:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• Publish clear information on all the fees and charges that will help service users to manage their own finances;</i> <i>• Signpost service users to a relevant benefit agency to help ensure they are maximising their income to meet their living costs;</i>

Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset Council Equality Impact Assessment Form and Action Plan

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Take action to raise the awareness of accessing benefits; and</i> • <i>Provide the opportunity to access direct support for service users in checking they are in receipt of benefits they are entitled to claim.</i>
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5. Details of person completing this form:

Name: Shari Hallett	Service Area: Housing and Communities
Email: s.hallett@tauntondeane.gov.uk	Telephone: 01823 219425

6. Details of person responsible for signing off this EIA:

Name: Stephen Boland	Signature:
Designation: Housing Services Lead	Date:

7. Review date/timeline of this EIA:

<p>The proposed increase in fees and charges will be applicable from April 2018. The review of this EIA will take place on 8 October 2018</p>

8. Comments/Observations relating to this analysis:

<p>The proposed fees and charges increases will apply to all services users and as such no potential discrimination amongst the protected groups has been identified.</p> <p>To help support service users on low incomes Housing and Community Services will continue to provide a number of initiatives to enable service users to manage their finances and maximise their income:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish clear information on all the fees and charges which helps service users to manage their own finances; • Signpost service users to a relevant benefit agency to help ensure they are maximising their income to meet their living costs; • Take action to raise the awareness of accessing a range of welfare benefits; and • Provide the opportunity to access direct support for service users in checking they are in receipt of the welfare benefits they are entitled to claim.

Minutes of the Meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 16 October 2017 at 6.00pm in Meeting Room C, Flook House, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton.

Present: Mr R Balman (Chairman)
Mrs J Belcher, Mrs J Bunn, Mr D Galpin, Mrs J Hegarty, Mr K Hellier, Mr I Hussey, Councillor C Booth and Councillor R Bowrah, BEM.

Officers: Shari Hallett (Business Support Lead), Martin Price (Tenant Empowerment Manager) and Andrew Randell (Democratic Services Officer).

(The meeting commenced at 6.00pm)

1. Apologies

An apology was received from Mr A Akhigbemen.

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 25 September 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, Mrs J Belcher, Mrs J Bunn, Mr D Galpin, Mrs J Hegarty, Mr K Hellier and Mr I Hussey declared personal interests as Taunton Deane Borough Council Housing Tenants.

5. Fees and Charges 2018-2019

The Business Support Lead gave an update on the charges made to tenants for the services they used. The service charges were set locally each year and were in addition to the rent charges which were set by Government.

It was proposed to use the Retail Price Index (RPI) set in September 2017 to increase the housing fees and charges. This was in accordance with the Housing Business Plan. The September 2017 RPI had not been released until the date of the meeting so the report had used the August 2017 RPI of 2.7%. The August RPI figure was used for indicative purposes and once the September RPI figure was published, the report would be adjusted.

The following were exceptions to the rule that the service charges would be increased by the September 2017 RPI:-

Grounds Maintenance Charge. It had been recommended to increase the service charge for grounds maintenance from 81p per week to £1.84 per week from April 2018. The increase would ensure that the service was properly funded and enabled the Council to provide a new improved specification.

Water Rates and Non Mains Sewerage Rates. The charges for properties that were not on mains sewer would be increased in line with Wessex Water increases for 2018-2019. This included sewer standing charges and poundage charges.

Temporary Accommodation. The licence fee charged was in line with the Local Housing Allowance, with higher rates charged for those without key meters and lower rates for those with key meters.

Private Garage Rent. The charge for private tenants would increase from £9.34 to £10.00 per week. This was more than double the RPI. Council tenants charge would only be increased by the RPI.

Guest Rooms and Meeting Rooms. Feedback from tenants had shown that they preferred charges to be rounded to whole numbers. The charges for guest rooms and meeting halls had the RPI applied and then were rounded.

During the discussion of this item, Board Members made the following comments and asked questions (responses shown in italics):-

- Members queried whether the grounds maintenance charge was covered by housing benefit.
The charge was covered by housing benefit because it was a communal charge.
- Members requested clarification on the licence fee charged for Temporary Accommodation.
- Members were pleased that the charge for grounds maintenance had been increased and hoped that the service would be improved.

Resolved that the Board noted the Officer's report.

(The meeting ended at 6.10pm)