

Tenant Services Management Board - 26 November 2018

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

Officers: Stephen Boland, Steven Clarke and Vanessa Hankin

(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm)

1. **Apologies.**

Apologies were received from Mr A Akhigbemen, Mrs J Hegarty and 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 29 October 2018 were signed and taken as read.

3. **Declaration of Interests.**

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

4. **Public Question Time.**

No questions were received for Public Question Time.

5. **Introduction to the Head of Communication and Engagement (verbal update).**

Head of Communications and Engagement Robert Hillier sent his apologies for this meeting.

6. **Void Report (verbal update).**

The Housing Services Lead presented the detailed Void Report

Reported that Taunton Deane Borough Council had 8,500 rented properties, on average there were 450 voids per year. Vacant void properties would need to be brought back into a lettable condition. The work required would be completed as

efficiently as possible, our performance on this was then assessed to how we compare with others.

The Void Budget set for 18/19, was £668,000 the budget was allocated from April 2018 to the end of 2019. A forecast of an overspend against this budget was not a significant amount in case of the overall spend as we had an income of £26 million so it was not a significant amount.

The overall rent model would assume a rent loss of 2% due to voids. Total voids for 17/18, are 464 which is in line with what we normally see. From April this year we have had a total of 279 voids.

Targets were reported on a quarterly basis. The main performance indicator in calendar days is how long has it taken to get a property ready for reoccupation. Our target is 26 days, which is significantly less than 5 or 6 years ago when it was in the high 40's.

Reported that Property Services had been piloting a new process where on minor works a multi traded Officer would be given permission to assess the void property, order their own supplies for the works and get on with the repairs. Which meant that void properties could be turned around at a much quicker pace which was way in advance of anything that we had completed before. The pilot would be ongoing to look at the results.

Woolaway Project

Stated that in North Taunton a consultation process with the tenants/homeowners had been taken place. Within the 279 properties this included 32 voids which were currently vacant in Dorchester Road, Rochester Road, Wells Close, Dover Road and Oxford Place. The project team took a decision to not let properties once they became vacant, these properties would then be used to decant tenants. Once the project has been passed by the Planning Committee the decant would be done in phases, this would include 213 properties. Tenants had stated that they did not want to be scattered across Taunton so tenants in phase 1 would be offered these properties.

There were currently 4 vacant Woolaway properties available in Oake. Refurbished to a whole property had never been completed on a Woolaway property as a whole house, extensive works had been completed on the properties but in terms of a complete refurbishment as oppose to a demolition and then rebuilding. The development team would like to see what this would look like. The next steps would be to go out to contractors who would put in a schedule of works. The findings from that work would then inform the North Taunton Woolaway Regeneration Project Team. On completion these properties would be used to decant some of the tenants into that small area of Oake.

Reported that a property in Normandy Drive, Taunton had been vacant for a number of months due to works requiring major adaptations needed to the property. Planning permission along with Building Regulations had now been

received for the works. This had also gone out to tender which closes on the 2 December 2018. Next steps were for a contractor to be appointed. The works for this were to be completed by March 2019. The property would then be occupied by someone who had special needs. The planning process had taken quite a time to complete hence the length of time the property has been vacant.

Another property had become vacant in Grange Drive, Taunton where the tenant had passed away, unfortunately the tenant had a person that was living with them that had no right to succession. Before a Possession Order was made for the property we were required to help that person find suitable accommodation as once this goes to court the Judge needed to be aware that there was a property available for them to occupy.

Since March the Housing Services Lead had been chairing a Rough Sleeper meeting. Stated that the people that have been rough sleeping in the town did not want to engage with the homelessness processes, an example of this is if we asked them to join the Homefinder Somerset, provide information regarding their homelessness claim or that they needed to address their alcohol/drug addiction before they enter the scheme they were not capable of joining in with that process.

In order to try and support some of those people, we have had to make some properties available. There was a new model called Housing First where we would allocate a property and then we will go about supporting the needs of the tenant and would hopefully get them to a place where they were capable of supporting themselves .

Other agencies would also support this process. If rough sleepers were not housed they would not survive as their circumstances were so extreme. A rough sleeper count had just been completed a few nights ago and the reporting figure for this was 12 which was a massive improvement on one that was completed earlier on in the year which stated that there were 27 rough sleepers in the town. These rough sleepers had also been allocated private accommodation but reported that this has been difficult due to private landlords not liking them in their properties.

Reported that there were challenging times ahead for the team with all the changes due to Transformation. Paul Hadley had left the team in September with a number of staff that had accepted/volunteered redundancy who would be leaving shortly. We are busy trying to cover the work demands which sometimes requires taking agency staff for a short while.

During the discussion, the Board Members made the following points:-

- Why were kitchens and central heating systems being replaced were, was it
- because the tenants damaged them?

There was concern about damage and wilful neglect regarding properties. We took on work regarding pre-void inspectors inspecting the properties before the

tenant vacated the property. The inspectors informed the tenants of the items that the tenant was liable for, this was successful as the tenants took it upon themselves to get the repairs done before they vacated the property as they did not want a charge. What we were seeing in terms of major works is that the life of a kitchen and bathroom has only so many years so they were taking the opportunity when the property was void is to get on and do the repairs/upgrades.

- Would I be liable to pay for repairs if an upstairs property flooded my downstairs property?

There were a number of elements here, firstly your Building Insurance would cover this damage in the first instance. There were also loads of other elements that we needed to look at, it was not just a case of we will or will not do repairs, there were elements that tenants were responsible for, it also depended on what happened. On the whole if there was damage to both council properties we would repair both properties.

- What time scale does the Council use to replace double glazing units as the rubber in the sheltered housing flat where I live needs replacing, these windows have been in for 20 years.

Windows were a complex issue due to the fact that we wait for tenants to inform us of any seals/ handles broken etc. we would then go out to the property and do the work. I will look at when the programme of works was due to replace the windows and boilers in your area and get back to you. (Monmouth Road, Sheltered Housing Scheme).

7. **Repairs Report (verbal update).**

The Repairs and Logistics Manager reported that she had been managing the repairs team since January 2018. Detailed that she had been looking into the performance of the team and their working practices as some of the team were not working as they should be. This was put down to a lack of training within the team to use the systems properly. This had now been addressed and was now looking at the call centre side of the operation. The Call Centre took between 1,000-1,500 calls a month plus 500 emails requesting additional work which was quite hefty work for 3 part time members of staff.

In the summer work progressed on integrating the staff at the DLO with staff at the call centre, this added resilience to the team and cut down on the waiting time for tenants. The positive outcome of this was that the call centre abandon rate had been reduced from 48% to 5%. The number of calendar days from tenants ringing up to report a problem to the completion of a job had also come down to 5.7 days. The team were also working on a same day service which enabled tenants to have their jobs completed on the day that they rung in. The service seemed to be working well with the tenants in Sheltered Accommodation who were at home a lot more.

The only obstacles found were that some tenants still needed to plan in visits and did not want jobs planned in on the day they rung in.

The next process was to educate tenants on how to book online for their repairs. The benefits of this were that you were not waiting in a call queue and once you had reported your fault an operative would call you to make an appointment. A session that we had been trialling over the last month was closing the repairs line for 1 hour at lunch time and the last half an hour at the end of the working day just to try and help tenants to go in the direction of reporting on line which is available 24/7. Emergency calls would still be answered. This had increased the online service by 40% which was really positive. Having fed this back we were going to increase the closing of the repairs line for a little bit longer, not only does this help the team but helps give the tenants the support that they needed. We had also been given training to the Estates Officers to help report faults when they do their visits, this would open up different avenues for people to report faults/repairs. Online reporting is the way forward.

Comments made during the discussion included:-

- What about the options for people that did not have good internet connections or go online? We live in a rural area, does this not have an impact on your same day? service?

Yes there was an impact there and what we were trying to do is manage it in any way that we could. There would still be an element of tenants being able to call in at certain times of the day. There would also be extra support out in the community with the Estate Officers.

- Did we have a system that allows us to call up a property and see all the works that have been carried out on that property? Information in the Tenants Talk or cards that people can put in the post would be good also the phone message stating time to call needed to be clear.

The current system we are using is not brilliant. A new IT system will be implemented next year, this would help us to interrogate the system and would also help the tenant.

We will come back in 3 months with a further update on this.

Members requested to see the new DLO building. Steve Clark will arrange this.

(The Meeting ended at 7.20 pm)