

SWT Tenants Strategic Group - 25 July 2022

Present: Councillor Luke Manning (Chair)

Councillors Jessie Bunn, Paul Cram, Colin England, Ivor Hussey, Samantha Rickward, Mark Lithgow and Janet Lloyd

Officers: Claire Reed (Housing), Stephen Boland, Ian Candlish, Simon Lewis, Tracey Meadows, Sharon Yarde (Housing), Ollie Warcup, Tony Knight and Sharon Sloan and Tracey Meadows

(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm)

52. Apologies

Apologies were received from Alex Akhigbemen and Kevin Hellier. James Barraah and Shari Hallet also sent apologies.

53. Welcome from the Chair

The new Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

54. Minutes from previous meeting

Action points raised from the Chair

The Chair raised a query on telephone training in relation to Housing queries. He requested that when staff spoke to customers on the telephone, they treated customers with respect and directing the customer to the correct department.

He also stated that a member of the public had put in a complaint to SWT regarding no response from their Housing Officer for not answering emails or returning calls. The Chair request that this concern be investigated.

The Chair also raised a query on who trained the Out of Hours service, Deane Helpline.

The request was raised that The Wellington Office be re-opened as customers in Wellington that required advice would have to come to Taunton. Stated that the Wellington Town Council had spare offices that could be used for this.

Update on TAG regarding grassing cutting was made. The response was that *TAG had their meeting on Thursday, an update would follow.*

55. Update on the voids workshop lean process

The report provided:

- Members with information on our void property performance in relation to the Council owned stock;
- Statistical information covering the period 2020-2022 with a specific focus on the month of June 22;
- The Council's approved lettable and returns standard for voids as set out in Appendix 1;

During discussion of this item the following points/queries were raised; (summarised)

- How many void properties did you revisit within 3 months to re-do repairs? This would provide the group with a better statistic on the tenant satisfaction table and how the void team were performing. How long were properties empty before work commenced on them? *With regards to tenant satisfaction on void performance, 65% of people were contacted over a period, not just one phone call. The table in the agenda stated the length of time that the property was empty before work commenced on them, usually 3-4 days;*
- Concerns that voids were not surveyed for asbestos and decorating completed before tenants moved into the properties; *An asbestos survey was needed before the tenant moved into the property. The asbestos would be removed before the tenant moved in this could take up to 25 days before completion. Other surveys regarding upgrades to bathrooms and kitchens would also be completed in this time;*
- Concerns with the statement on that "major capital works statement as part of the capital programme where possible, after the tenant moved in rather than during the void. This would also be more cost effective through economies of scale". This work needed to be completed before the tenant moved in; *This has been discussed and we had also discussions with the TAG. The TAG has been invited to inspect void properties from the start of the process to completion to a lettable standard;*
- Can you confirm that major works can be completed in 25 days? *Yes, we can also get on with other works whilst the asbestos works were completed;*
- What was the time limit for asbestos removal? *The property was surveyed with a report submitted back if asbestos was found in the property. A 14 day notice to HSE, certificate is then issued to AA Woods for removal;*

The report was noted.

At this point in the meeting Tony Knight and Ollie Warcup left the meeting.

56. **Housing Ombudsman Self assessment**

The report was to update the Tenant's Strategic Group on work currently being undertaken by the Housing Performance team, to ensure that the directorate was compliant with the Housing Ombudsman's revised Complaint Handling Code by 1 October 2022.

During discussion of this report the following comments/queries were raised; (summarised)

- Accessibility and awareness - 2.3 in our packs states that " we are compliant but as an improvement, we will add wording to the website to say the policy is available in different formats upon request" for customers suffering with poor eye site they will not be able to see this in the first instance, we need to get the message out that there is information out there in different formats; *we do hold a database for customers that require large print at the point that the customer signs up. Currently 80 people have already signed up for this. As an action point, we will take this back to Customer Services to make sure that all the information is available on our website to comply with the Housing Ombudsman's code;*
- A Scrutiny group for complaints was needed to assist and see what complaints were received from the public and how they could be resolved from the tenants point of view; *we were currently exploring an option for a tenant panel or Scrutiny group to see where we can make this more efficient. No tenant details would be identified in this process;*
- Was there a possibility that a lot of the complaints that came through were not complaints in the first place? *Concerns with communications issues for a response from Officer's were the main concerns for complaints. This was something that we were working on currently;*
- Concerns that issues were dealt with so slowly with the Council procedures, we needed to get better at this and build bridges with tenants going into unitary; *The IT systems were being improved to enable better working practices and getting the right person for the role. It should be noted that all correspondence was logged as a complaint even if it is a service request;*

The report was noted.

57. **Finance Out turn report**

This report contained information related to Somerset West and Taunton Council's (SWT) Housing Revenue Account's (HRA) financial performance for the 2021/22 financial year. The outturn figures included are provisional subject to the completion of the external audit of the statutory financial statements. The audit is due to be completed between July and September with the findings due to be reported to the Audit and Governance Committee on 27th September this year.

During discussion of this report the following comments/queries were raised; (summarised)

- In the report it stated that political demands had continued to place financial pressure on the HRA during 2021/22. Can you confirm what there were? *We will find out this information from the Accounting Manager and get back to you with this information;*

The report was noted.

58. Directorate Report

The report was to update the Tenants' Strategic Group on the work being undertaken and progress made by the Housing Directorate since the last TSG meeting.

This included reports regarding;

- HRA New Homes, Housing Strategy and Housing Enabling;
- Responsive Repairs and Void Repairs;
- Property Safety Compliance;
- Capital Programmes;
- Asset Management;
- Supported Housing (extra care and sheltered);
- Lettings;
- Income Team;
- Tenancy/Estates & ASB;
- Housing Performance Team Housing Performance Team;

During discussion of these items the following comments/queries were raised; (summarised)

- Confirmation on emergency and non-emergency responsive repairs being undertaken and what is classed as an emergency with the out of hours service (Deane Helpline); *Emergency was classed as a risk to life or property. A list is given to Deane Helpline to define, and we do periodically review this;*
- Concerns that engineers were still turning up without an appointment; *we will take this away and review;*
- Concerns that ASB was getting worse on estates and measures needed to be taken to nip this in the bud. Worries that the Police did not respond to complaints of ASB; *If it was one of our properties causing the ASB complaint, we would get the Estate Officer to talk to the parents if it was children in the property causing the bad behaviour. You could also contact Community trigger, which gives victims of persistent anti-social behaviour reported to any of the main responsible agencies (such as the council, police, housing provider) the right to request a multi-agency case review of their case where a local threshold is met. Agencies, including local authorities, the police, local health teams and registered providers of social housing have a duty to undertake a case review when someone requests one and their case meets a locally defined threshold. Each area chooses a lead agency to manage the process, this is usually the council or police;*

- ASB is not solely down to youths, there were also adults with mental health issues that were not getting any help. Organisations were so stretched that these people were failed by the system and not getting the help they need. As a landlord of these tenants, you should be doing a lot more to help them. *The thresholds to get these interventions were unfortunately very high;*
- Surprised with the grounds maintenance figure of 57%. All residents complained about the lack of grounds maintenance in the area; *This was a drop on last year;*

The report was noted.

59. **AOB**

The TSG group reported that a few of the group Members went to the National TPAS Conference. The Chair stated that he was very lucky in the courses that he choose and felt that he had learnt a lot and had come away with tools to support him in his role.

Group member, Sam Rickward reported that she had enjoyed the conference and learnt a lot from the Ombudsman. She also stated that she felt that TPAS was geared up for Housing Associations not Local Authorities of which we were a huge minority where the Housing Associations had a vast amount of housing stock and more staff.

Another organisation has been identified that was better pitched for Local Authorities. The STG asked if this could be explored as they felt that this would be more suitable for the group.

Action points

Meeting 25/07/2022	
CS training on open Housing, official request to speak to Housing Officer-Luke and Simon Lewis to discuss	SL
Who trains the Helpline?-what training do they receive?	RB
Could the Wellington Office hold a drop-in centre so tenants do not have to come to Taunton?	JB/RB
Send Chair the complaint process flow chart	CR
Speak to Jess about accessibility, where is it on the website.	SY
Should SWT be doing something more than offering 'documents are available in other formats upon request'?	SH
What are the Political demands in Out-turn report?	KP
Script for DHelpline re: emergency, send it to TSG	RB
MD group-repairs -Action point to speak to MD Group re: appointments, appointments not been made	IC/ RP
How many voids to you need to revisit, a better way to score satisfaction?	TK
Scrutiny group for complaints: Paul, Ivor, Jess and Colin	CR

(The Meeting ended at 7.50 pm)