

SWT Tenants Strategic Group - 28 March 2022

Present: Alex Akhigbemen (Chair)

Jessie Bunn, Paul Cram, Colin England, Kevin Hellier, Ivor Hussey,
Luke Manning and Samantha Rickward

Officers: James Barrah, Stephen Boland, Chris Brown, Ian Candlish, Kerry Prisco,
Shari Hallett (Housing Performance Manager), Sharon Yarde (Housing),
Sharon Sloan and Tracey Meadows

Also Present: Councillor Janet Lloyd

(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm)

36. **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillor Lithgow

37. **Notes from previous meeting**

Action points in the minutes from the previous meeting required clarification, they were;

- Window replacement – was the plan to replace double glazing with triple glazing correct? *we were still working up the strategy on this and will be balancing the specification of various components. Triple glazing will be going into the new build properties, but we were not necessarily going to have to put in triple glazing in all our properties. There is a lot of information on our stock and this is working through all the different insulation measures on the property including the glazing. We think that most houses would be able to achieve very low power consumption without the need for triple glazing. Some properties such as bungalows tend to be harder to reach lower levels, they tend to be more difficult due to too many exposed walls. There was not anything definitive yet, but it was looking more likely that double glazing will get us to where we needed to be with a lot of other measures that we were planning;*

The minutes were agreed by the board members.

38. **Directorate Plan- presentation by James Barrah**

The Directorate Plan was presented by James Barrah (Director of Housing and Communities) along with slides stating Housing and Communities Key achievements 21-22, circulated with the agenda.

During discussion of this item the following points/questions were raised;

(summarised)

- Concerns with training for new starters;
- Did CCTV cover housing land and did we use the HRA account to cover adopted roads on housing land? *We have 70 cameras across council. The estate did include some that were paid for by the Housing Revenue Account. The cameras were situated in Halcon, North Taunton and Wellington. We recognised the benefits of cameras for community reassurance and this was a relatively small contribution from the HRA because there were a number of cameras on estates that were quite small due to cameras being in the Town Centres;*
- How much of the HRA 7-year business plan would be scrapped through unitary? *No budget would be scrapped, the main concern was trying to predict inflation on materials now in the current world. Our assumption would anyway be refreshed annually so it was a constantly evolving entity due to constant change. A legal provision would be in place that meant the Council could have only one Housing Revenue Account, so effectively from day one we needed to stitch two together. Altair would be working on this business plan for us;*
- Homes of Sedgemoor repairs were of a higher standard than the present Council, what will this look like going forward for SWT? *Homes in Sedgemoor had a contracted service so contractors would do repairs differently. A piece of work was underway to lay out and describe all of our service standards and compare and contrast so that every service across the Council was the same or very similar due to the same sort of business;*

The report was noted.

39. **Performance & Finance report Q3 - Shari Hallett and Kerry Prisco**

2021/22 Housing Scorecard Quarter 3. The report provided an update on the housing performance through key performance measures and financial information for the second quarter of 21/22 (October to December 21)

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

- The wording on the Lettings and Voids indicator, second bullet point needed to be reworded. At present this read (Providing decorating packs for able-bodied tenants, rather than undertaking full redecorating to let the property quicker) was there a way to reword this as it was quite offensive to read if you were not an able bodied person; *Apologies for the clumsiness in the wording this was not our intention to offend anyone. We would look at more appropriate wording for any future reports. It was important to keep making us aware of these lapses in wording in our reports;*

- Were decorating pack offered to disabled people as it was my understanding that a lot of the decorating would be done for them due to their disability;
- Concerns that the performance indicators were very misleading. Officers need to come back to the group with real vast amounts of feedback from people otherwise these indicators were not worth mentioning to the group; *This was a discussion that we had internally. We do not want to report nothing to the group, but if this is the feedback from the group, I would support this decision internally. It should be noted that any feedback is good, whether good or bad.* The Chair stated that he would like Officers to carry on collecting this data and recommended that Officers sought to improve how this data was collected.
- Information on the new Tenant satisfaction survey for lettable standard information on the total number of new tenants for that quarter would be helpful; *This information would be brought to you at the next meeting;*
- Concerns that you were only concentrating on getting your information from the internet. You were excluding a huge number of tenants as some elderly tenants were not on the internet or internet savvy; *This was something that we were looking at in the next paper. We were aware of this for some of our elderly Tenants. Officers would look at the technical document for the tenant satisfaction measures to see what they suggest from the regulator;*
- How were you covering the extra cost of labour, materials and interest payments. Were you covering these out of the money saved in the budget or were you borrowing more money ? *In terms of interest payments on borrowing, we cover those costs from the revenue budgets. In terms of capital programme we had a number of different sources of finance for that in terms of major and improvements we covered a majority of that spend from what we had got from the Major Funds Reserve, so when we depreciate our assets every financial year, we are then able as part of the HRA account move that depreciated cost and hold in a separate reserve to then use that money over here to fund a capital programme and the major and improvement cost each financial year. There was no borrowing or interest paid;*

The group noted the content of the housing score card for quarter 3 (October-December) 2021.

40. **Tenant Satisfaction measures and Star survey - Shari Hallett**

2021/22 Housing Tenant Satisfaction Measures and RAR Survey

The report provided:

- Awareness of the TSM (tenant satisfaction measurement) requirement from RSH which is currently in consultation and our preparations for TSM formal submission.

- Awareness of next steps in relation to STAR survey due to be undertaken in SWT by the end of 2022.

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

- Were the questions for the survey to be asked over the phone or through the internet? *This is a telephone survey so will be over the phone. There will be an option for us to also send links out to mobile numbers to see if we can get online surveys back for more data;*
- How will the customers be chosen for this survey? *An encrypted data file is sent to the organisation who will randomly select tenants. The organisation would look for tenure types with statical information that told them how many tenants they needed for each type of tenure. No steer was provided to them from SWT;*
- Concerns that there were no questions in the survey on how we as the landlord could support and show tenants that we were a caring landlord by giving advice to tenants on how to maintain and keep their property, offering advice on helping tenants pay their rent; *There were 12 statutory questions in the survey with us looking to add some questions of our own as the survey questions were quite limited. The regulator would get back to us in the summer with the results of the survey;*

The group noted the content of the report.

41. Directorate Report

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

During discussion of this item the following points/questions were raised. (summarised)

- Concerns raised with the backlog of repairs, where were we on this? *Unfortunately, due to storm Eunice we had gone slightly backwards on repairs. There had been a high volume of calls from tenants regarding fallen fences and roofing issues that required repairing. The MD Group had stepped in and helped us out on a number of different work areas. We also had smaller specialists' contractors doing some work for us to help us clear the backlog of repairs;*
- Concerns with rising energy prices and the impact on our tenants going forward. What were our plans for this as a Local Authority in assisting our tenants to access funds to assist them? *We were very mindful of the pressures and cost of living for tenants and the challenges that they may face. In terms of the hardship fund the first tranche to the County Council was 3 million. Confirmation of this would be given once it percolated through to County ; We would then signpost this to tenants to enable them to access funds if they demonstrated hardship through the correct process;*

- Concerns that lights in the communal areas of flats were on constantly, could motion sensor lights be installed to reduce the cost of electricity? Concerns that tenants paid a maintenance charge for these light to be left on from dusk to dawn; *The provision of this would need checking as it may be a requirement in terms of escape that they have to be permanently on. This had not been a priority in the past but would be looked at;*
- Concerns with some homes not having the correct insulation to cut down heat loss; *Our plan was to do a fabric first approach and we think that we could reduce power consumption by two thirds if we did this process successfully which would be a massive reduction on peoples fuel bills. We were also concerned with the high levels of refusals for these improvement works by tenants. Conversations were needed by the group to spread the word around about these improvements;*
- The easiest way to gain access to tenants' properties was to build a relationship with the tenant, not just a stranger turning up on the doorstep. The same person then had to keep returning, it may take three or four visits to build a rapport with the tenant, but this is what was needed to gain entry to a property. Estate open days would also be essential to gain trust of the tenant;
- Concerns with Sheltered Housing Manager/staff not introducing themselves to tenants when they visit. Also concerns that assessments were performed on the phone, not face to face;

The report was noted.

42. **AOB/Actions**

AOB

The Chair announced that he would be stepping down as Chair after the 30 May TSG meeting. He stated that he would still like to sit on the group as a member.

Actions

- Dec packs how we offer to people re disability/ capability/age etc;
- To add total of number of tenants to letting data in performance report
- How many tenants will be picked for telephone survey
- To go back to Paul Cram regarding what we are doing for those tenants that do not use the internet;
- To provide the survey question set to Alex Akhigbemen, how can SWT maintain a tenancy?;
- TSG to visit NT properties in July, September & December;
- Check whether light needs to always be on in communal areas at Kelway Road/motion sensor?;
- Use case studies re: Heat Source Pumps to get tenant's buy-in
- Less visibility of SH & EO's, Ivor Hussey had a particular example, how can we increase this?;
- Election for a new chair;

- Engagement Policy and ICT strategy need to include mention of and alternatives for those not internet savvy, or don't have access (Pam has ICT Strategy and I have engagement policy);

(The Meeting ended at 7.50 pm)