



## Tenant Services Management Board

You are requested to attend a meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board to be held in The John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton on 27 March 2017 at 18:00.

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### Agenda

- 1 Apologies.
- 2 Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 20 February 2017 (attached).
- 3 Public Question Time.
- 4 Declaration of Interests  
To receive declarations of personal or prejudicial interests, in accordance with the Code of Conduct.
- 5 Transformation Project. Report of the Chief Executive (verbal update).  
Reporting Officer: Penny James
- 6 Extra Care Housing Update. Report of the Project Manager (verbal update).  
Reporting Officer: Jan Errington
- 7 Grounds Maintenance Service Review. Report of the Strategy and Partnership Officer (attached).  
Reporting Officer: Neil Anderson

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.

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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.

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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 20 February 2017 at 6.00pm in the John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton.**

**Present:** Mr R Balman (Chairman)  
Mr A Akhigbemen, Mrs J Bunn, Mrs J Hegarty, Mr K Hellier, Mr I Hussey and Councillor C Booth.

**Officers:** Stephen Boland (Housing Services Lead), James Barrah (Director of Housing and Communities), Simon Lewis (Assistant Director Housing and Community Development), Richard Prewer (Property Services Manager), Tim Child (Asset Manager), Jan Errington (Project Manager), Lucy Clothier (Senior Accountant), Karl Griffiths (Accountant), Martin Price (Tenant Empowerment Manager) and Clare Rendell (Democratic Services Officer)

Also present: Councillor Beale and Councillor Warmington.

(The meeting commenced at 6.00pm)

**12. Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillor Bowrah and Mr D Galpin.

**13. Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 16 January 2017 were taken as read and were signed.

**14. Public Question Time**

No questions received for Public Question Time.

**15. Declarations of Interests**

Mr R Balman, Mr A Akhigbemen, Mrs J Bunn, Mrs J Hegarty, Mr K Hellier, Mr I Hussey declared personal interests as Taunton Deane Borough Council Housing Tenants.

## 16. Transformation of Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset Council.

The Director of Housing and Communities had presented the plans for the Transformation Project at previous board meetings. He had attended this meeting to request feedback from the board in response to the consultation.

During the discussion of this item the following comments and questions were raised:-

- Concern was raised about the council's proposal and what was the likelihood that the council tax would significantly rise? Was there any guarantee that this would not happen?

*There was no guarantee. Council tax was something that the Members considered on an annual basis. The purpose of creating a new council was to create savings so there was less pressure on both council's financial positions. One way to raise income was through taxation, but this was not the only option and not likely to be chosen by Members. The significant pressure on the public sector meant it was difficult to predict. Members would assess the council's financial situation before they set the rates.*

- Concern was raised that savings would equal poor service across the council. *The councils had already made significant savings through joint working with staff. The Joint Management Team had not seen any dip in service standards, which was a credit to the staff. The intention going forward was that some processes, through transformation, would seek improvement in service. This would be through better technical support, real time information on performance and to provide better access for our customers. Work had already begun on avoidable contact and ways to improve our self-serve processes. There would be difficult decisions to be made but the service delivery would continue and hopefully improve. The councils currently had a traditional staff structure which need to be updated. Options for utilising staff knowledge and technical abilities were being investigated.*

- Would tenant services be protected?

*Housing services should not be affected.*

- What responses had been received for the consultation?

*Exact numbers were not available. However, there had been a late surge in support for the transformation. Some residents had raised questions which were against the proposals. Many of the key stakeholders had submitted responses which indicated their support. All the data would be submitted to the Secretary of State to consider.*

- Concern was raised that certain tenants would be forgotten about once the councils were joined up. Service repairs were already behind schedule and this could potentially worsen over time. Tenants wanted assurance the transformation would not affect service level standards.

- Many of the board were undecided on a personal level but believed that on the whole, the housing tenants would not be affected by the transformation project due to West Somerset Council not owning any housing stock.

- Although there was uncertainty on some of the aspects of the transformation, the board by a majority vote were in favour of the project.

- The vote was 4 in favour, 2 against and 1 undecided.

**Resolved** that the board members voted by majority in support of the proposal.

## 17. Financial Monitoring Quarter Three 2016/17.

The Senior Accountant for Services presented the report which provided an update on the projected outturn financial position of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the financial year 2016/17.

The HRA was a 'Self-Financing' account for the Housing Landlord function, which was budgeted to break-even (net of approved transfers to/from HRA Reserves). The current forecast HRA Revenue Outturn for 2016/17 was a net surplus of £33k (0.1% of gross income).

The major under and overspends forecast for the year were summarised as follows:-  
**Dwelling Rents and Service Charges.** The void rate was lower than budgeted which led to an additional income of £257k.

**Leasehold Income.** Income from leaseholders was higher than budgeted by £106k which reflected the increased cost of maintenance on shared blocks.

**Housing Management.** Underspends were identified which related to staff vacancies, IT costs and right to buy income. However, there were additional costs which related to an Asbestos Management Survey. This would cover 20% of all dwellings. An overall overspend of £132k was forecasted.

**Asbestos Surveys.** Surveys and testing continued to be a priority. The forecasted variance was £39k overspend due to increased activity.

**Void.** An underspend of £82k had been forecasted on void repairs. This was due to lower than budgeted void numbers.

**Grounds Maintenance.** A review was currently being undertaken. The current forecast was £34k over budget.

**Supported Housing.** Additional works and equipment in Supported Housing had created a forecast overspend variance of £147k. This included the installation of suited locks.

**Other Maintenance.** A forecast overspend in General Maintenance of £312k had been driven by demand and was partially offset by an expected underspend in Responsive Electrical and Heating works of £63k.

**Pre-Planned Maintenance and Electrical Testing.** The figures fluctuated annually due to the revenue works needed. This would depend on the properties being surveyed. The electrical services were being completed in house and would be done on a continuous programme.

**Interest Receivable.** Higher reserve balances meant that the interest received on investments was higher than budgeted by £40k.

**Interest Payable.** Borrowing for the development schemes had been delayed. This meant that until the borrowing was externalised, interest was not paid and so a saving was made. This was expected to be £241k in 2016/17.

The HRA capital account had forecast spend of £10.562m against a budget of £20.058m with £9.496m forecast to be spent in future years.

The capital programme could be split into two distinct areas:-

- Major Works. The Major Works highlighted in the report were for Heating Improvements and this was approximately £4m. Improvement Works were included in Major Works and there had been a new addition in the budget for Meeting Halls which equalled £71k. Other improvements that were

highlighted were for Disabled Facilities Grant's £311k and for Asbestos Works £296k.

- Development. The main developments in the Social Housing Development Programme were for Creechbarrow Road and Weavers Arms.

The Director of Housing and Communities praised the team for making substantial improvements on the capital work load this year.

**Resolved** that the report be noted.

## 18. Performance Indicators Quarter Three 2016/17.

The Assistant Director for Housing and Community Development and the Property Services Manager presented the report which detailed the performance indicators for quarter three.

The report was broken down into three sections:-

**Green Indicators.** Areas highlighted for performing well were, rental incomes, cases of anti-social behaviour that had been resolved, housing stock non-priority repairs had been completed within set target times and sheltered housing and extra care tenants had received their annual reviews.

**Amber Indicators.** Areas highlighted for improvement were, customer satisfaction on lettable standards of properties, percentage of properties with a valid gas safety certificate and housing stock repairs for priority cases.

**Red Indicators.** Areas highlighted for concern were, disabled facilities grants not processed within allotted time and the average re-let time was longer than the targets set (New IT and training issues were distorting the data. This meant that it was not entirely accurate due to the recent restructure. This would be amended by April 2017).

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

- Concern was raised about red indicators from previous years. What was the current re-let timescale?  
The current re-let timeframe was 40 days. This was unacceptable to all concerned and will be an area of work that would be improved.
- How was the training progressing?  
They were moving forward with the training and monitoring how the officers used their IT to report and close caseloads down. They had now moved to the new Deane DLO Depot and the Property Services Manager invited the board members to visit.

**Resolved** that the report be noted.

## 19. Supported Housing Property Options Review.

The Asset Manager and Project Manager presented their report to the board. The report presented the findings from a review on the sheltered and extra care properties and the development of a new aspirational property standard which provided information on stock performance and condition. It set out a proposed approach to stock rationalisation, options appraisal and importantly how we could

achieve the key elements of the standard incrementally over the 30 year business plan.

In 2015 the Council undertook a review of supported housing in response to the changing environment and the need to make sure we were providing the right service and suitable accommodation in the future. The aims of the review were:-

- Achieve and maintain a high level of tenant satisfaction.
- Provide housing that was attractive to older people to want to move in to.
- Meet the local demand for people over 60 years of age.
- Support people to maintain their independence and social networks of family and friends.

The Council recognised that it was essential that the buildings themselves were fit for purpose, were somewhere that tenants would want to live, met their needs and were financially sustainable.

The review considered the following:-

- Future demand for the properties.
- Stock condition.
- New Supported Housing Property Standard.
- Appraisal of properties against the Standard.
- Stock performance (through Savills analysis).
- Investment required to meet the Standard.
- How we prioritise works over the 30 years.
- Smarter Solutions.
- Options Appraisals of 5 low performing schemes.

Details of the review were:-

**Stock Profile.** There was 980 dwellings of which 586 were flats and 394 were bungalows. Almost 50% of flats were on the first floor without access to a lift. This was not suitable for those with mobility needs.

**Stock Condition.** The estimated investment needed for the next 30 years was £26.3m (excluded inflation). The average future investment need per sheltered unit over 30 years was £26,884. The sheltered stock was generally in fair condition, but the provision of general amenities was relatively basic, there was poor access, there was work needed to the common areas and there was no dementia friendly signage or colour schemes.

**Financial Performance.** The average Net Present Value of the 30 year operating cash flows for sheltered stock was £14,267, which was 13% lower than the average for TDBC stock. Bungalows scored the highest and flats the lowest. Flats were less likely to reach the aspirational standard.

**Non-Financial Performance.** Each scheme also included a non-financial and social sustainability analysis. Indicators were not specific to sheltered housing but were still relevant.

**Stock Rationalisation.** The aim was to improve the stock profile, swap in more suitable stock and swap out less suitable stock.

**Options Appraisal.** This was to explore opportunities to invest or develop stock and to identify poor performing stock due to financial, non-financial or aspirational standards.

**Aspirational Standard.** This was developed by colleagues and tenants together. It reflected tenants' priorities and national good practice. It encompassed accessibility, condition, security, location and proximity to amenities.

**Approach.** Not all the schemes involved would have to meet the full standard or would be made fully accessible. Work would be realistic, affordable and achievable. Schemes would be appraised against the standard and agreed priorities.

**Essential Planned Works.** These would be carried out through the Capital Programme, Existing Budget and the HRA Business Plan.

**Other Priorities.** The high priorities that were discussed were related to access (paths, doors and positioning) and also health and safety with suited locks.

Details of what needed to happen next:-

- Survey the stock.
- Refine the scheme matrix.
- Refocus the capital programme.
- Integrate the bids process and lettable standard.
- Develop assessment framework
- Options appraisals for low scorers.
- Adapted properties review.
- Sheltered lettings policy review.
- Set rationalisation plan in motion.
- Carry out annual reviews.

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

- Agreed the review was a good exercise.
- Concern was raised about the properties that the options appraisal would identify as unsuitable for supported housing and would they be sold or invested in and developed?  
*The options appraisal would identify schemes that could do better but did not mean that they would be sold. The purpose of the review was not to sell any of the Council's assets, but to improve the stock or to use it for other purposes than sheltered housing. It would be an opportunity for investment, but not to make profit.*
- One of the aims of the review was to make sheltered housing better places for tenants to live. However, in the report it stated that 'socially excluded' residents could be moved into the properties which raised concern.  
*Officers would be sensitive when looking at support needs and would try to keep the balance between neighbours. Elderly tenants might have health needs or feel unsafe, so would not want to add to these pressures. There were no definitive answers but wanted to reassure tenants.*
- Issues with 'pepper potting' would decrease over time through the review process.
- Under the rationalisation, what was the breakdown of properties that would be swapped in and out?  
*It would be mainly top floor flats that would be swapped out and bungalows that would be swapped in. However, there were no exact details as these were changeable.*
- In the review, it was reported that bungalows performed better financially. Could we build more bungalows?

*Due to restrictions on land space available for new builds, flats had been built, but they had access to a lift which made it accessible for tenants.*

**Resolved** that the report be noted.

**20. 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.

**21. Confidential Supported Housing Property Options Review Continued.**

Considered report appendix circulated.

(The meeting ended at 7.50pm)

## **Report to Tenant Services Management Board**

**March 27<sup>th</sup> 2017**

### **Progress report on the review of the Grounds Maintenance Service**

**Report Authors: Neil Anderson Strategy and Partnership Officer and Richard Burge**

**Open Spaces Manager.**

#### **Executive Summary**

- 1.1 This report provides detail on the work that has taken place to date into the review of the current content and arrangement for the delivery of grounds maintenance service to land owned by the Housing Revenue Account.
- 1.2 While it acknowledges the concerns raised by the standard of maintenance of land owned by the general fund and Somerset County Council, this is outside of the scope of the review.
- 1.3 The current grounds maintenance service has been delivered in house by the Parks & Open Spaces Service based on a specification originally drawn up in 1997.
- 1.4 A new agreement was established in 2006, since this time the contract has effectively been rolled on year on year and it has not been properly reviewed again until this time.
- 1.5 This review has involved investigation into how other social landlords deliver their grounds maintenance service and the charges these landlords make to their tenants.
- 1.6 Detailed analysis of the nature of customer contact with the Parks & Open Spaces Service has taken place in order to identify areas for improvements in service delivery.
- 1.7 The report sets out the work undertaken so far and identifies further areas for improvement and how tenants should be involved in both setting an agreed standard of service and an agreed level of service provision.

#### **2.0 Background.**

Taunton Deane housing and communities established a project team in September 2016 to review the current grounds maintenance agreement that is in place with the TDBC Deane DLO Open Spaces Team.

The work the Parks & Open Spaces team currently undertake on behalf of the Housing Department is based on the original 1997 Specification of the Contract that was updated to a new agreement in 2006. Since this time, the Open Spaces team has provided services as instructed by the Housing Department.

Additional works are requested by Housing or are undertaken when necessary at the Parks & Open Spaces Manager's direction, if these works are outside of the scope of the original specification they are charged as additional works.

This agreement has been in place since 2006 and is clearly due for review both in terms of understanding required scope of works, quality and true cost for delivery of the service.

The review group was established to address the concerns and dissatisfaction raised by tenants of Taunton Deane highlighted in the Star Survey of 2015, in which 63 per cent of tenants who responded to the survey were satisfied with the grounds maintenance service. (Acuity Tenant and Leaseholders Satisfaction Survey 2015)

The results of this survey together with the Council’s review of the quality of its customer service provided the impetus for the review of the current grounds maintenance agreement.

### **3. Work that has taken place.**

A project group has been established with key personnel involving Assistant Director’s from Housing and Communities and Operational Delivery, the HRA accountant, plus representatives from Housing and Communities and Parks & Open Spaces.

The group has met approximately monthly and has identified the cost of the service and research is continuing into issues around service delivery and costs.

Research has also taken place into comparative costs of grounds maintenance service in other housing providers and examples of good practice.

### **3. Delivery of Service**

#### **3.1 Grass Cutting**

Grass is normally cut between 13 and 15 times between March to October, however, when weather conditions are at their best for grass growth this can necessitate an additional cut or even two additional cuts. This changes the demand on the service and it can be challenging to maintain grassed areas at an acceptable standard within reasonable time frames when grass growth is at its quickest.

The current trigger for an additional cut is the length of the grass. If grass growth is particularly quick in a season the appropriate manager within Open Spaces will make the decision to increase the number of cuts should grassed areas reach 100mm.

The table below shows the number of cuts for both general HRA owned grass areas and those that receive the cut and collect service against the cost of providing this service.

	14/15	15/16	16/17
Number of Cuts Only	13	13	13
Cost of Cut Only	£179,848	£187,341	£191,053
Number of Cuts & Collect	15	15	15
Cost of Cut & Collection	£96,175	£98,724	£105,779*

\* Forecast

Although the average cost per cut for Cut Only and Cut & Collect are superficially similar this is due to the comparatively small areas requiring the Cut & Collect standard. The actual cost of Cut & Collect which includes transportation and disposal of clippings to the Recycling Centre is closer to three times the cost of Cut Only for the same surface area.

### 3.2 Arboriculture Operations

For tree maintenance the working assumption used across the TDBC tree estate is that the council do not undertake works for aesthetic purposes. Generally tree maintenance works are limited to proactive and reactive safety works.

We have been able to identify that the Parks & Open Spaces team received 212 requests for work on trees from tenants, this gives an indication of the requests by volume but has no bearing on the amount of work that is created or the eventual costs, with different jobs being of vastly different scales.

It is important to remember that much of this work is for public safety reasons and the Council has a duty to undertake it. Trees that are potentially dangerous or likely to cause damage to property have to be dealt with.

This work is not currently included within the specification and it is reasonable therefore, that the future contract should include an amount for this purpose and a contingency sum for dealing with emergencies which may occur because of storm damage etc.

## 4. Budget vs expenditure

The following section provides members of the Tenant Services Management Board with information on the budget set in previous years for the provision of the Grounds Maintenance service against actual expenditure, i.e. the real cost of delivering all elements of the service.

The figure for the budget for grounds maintenance compared to the income received for this service is shown in the table 1 below:

**Table 1**

<b>Income</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>Budget</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>Budget</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>Budget</b>
General fund Contribution	189,000		198,000		198,000	
Service Charges	227,724		227,130		232,275	
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>416,724</b>	<b>359100</b>	<b>425,130</b>	<b>370,600</b>	<b>430,275</b>	<b>378,000</b>
Estimated Total Spend	658,209	Overspend on budget	479,190	Overspend on budget	530,222	Overspend on budget
<b>Shortfall</b>	<b>241,484</b>	<b>299109</b>	<b>54,060</b>	<b>108,590</b>	<b>99,947</b>	<b>152222</b>

The table above illustrates the shortfall in the level of income collected against actual expenditure. During the last 3 financial years in order to complete necessary works and achieve a minimum standard of service there has been an overspend on the budget. The income collected is insufficient to cover the actual cost of delivering the service.

Members of the TSMB should be aware that any shortfall in the budget for grounds maintenance comes from the general housing revenue account budget. Any overspend on the grounds maintenance budget has to be met from the HRA budget, which therefore means there is less money available for investment in the housing stock.

To account for this properly, now we are aware of this, this should be reflected in ensuring service charges properly reflect the cost of the actual service.

Appendix 1 provides a detailed breakdown of the cost involved in providing the current specification and shows the total cost of providing the service.

## **5. Service Charges**

The following section provides more detailed explanation on services charges and compares the level of service charge made by Taunton Deane to tenants for grounds maintenance, to that made by other social landlords.

Taunton Deane base the service charge for grounds maintenance on an average cost per property. Other landlords who provide a grounds maintenance service that were contacted base their service charge on the square meterage of grass that is to be cut that relates to that particular property together with the frequency and standard of that cut for a particular area. Therefore, a sheltered scheme which has a large area of grass, is cut more regularly than a general open space and has the grass clippings collected pays a much higher service charge than a property which does not benefit from a communal garden. Taunton Deane Borough Council is currently unable to charge service charges in a sophisticated property by property way and this would require a significant investment in resources to charge in this way. Furthermore, TSMB has previously supported the principle of equalising the cost across all tenants to ensure that the service is affordable to everyone.

Information has been obtained from other landlords on the cost and level of service charge made to their tenants.

**Table 2 Comparative figures**

<b>Landlord</b>	<b>General Needs Tenants Service charge</b>	<b>Sheltered Housing Tenants Service Charge</b>
TDBC	0.79 per week *(increasing to 0.81p week in 2017/18)	0.79 per week** ( no extra charge for cut and collect)
Knightstone HA	£1.50 (cut & collect)	£1.50 (cut & collect)
Homes in Sedgemoor	Cost of communal areas aggregated, average cost per tenant of £2.50 per week	£2.50. No cut and collect, higher frequency of cuts, with mulching machines.
Yarlington	£1.27 per mt2	No cut and collect.
Magna	Cost based on area to be cut. Average cost £0.94. Cut and collect first cut of season only.	Average cost £1.63. Cut and collect first and last cut of season only.

\* The HRA accountant has advised that the actual cost of the provision of the Grounds maintenance service per tenant is £1.12 (assuming a 2% void rate).

\*\*While the cost of cut and collect is £2.41 per week. Therefore based on these costs there is a shortfall in the service charge of between 33p and £1.62 per week (for cut and collect).

For 2017/18 service charges will increase to 81p per week, which still leaves a short fall of between 31p and £1.60 per week in terms of funding for this service.

Also the budget for grounds maintenance includes other items in addition to just grass cutting, it includes charges for communal paths and water courses.

These figures are based on maintaining the same services as currently provided. Part of this review is to identify more cost effective ways to provide some services and to provide Tenants with the opportunity to influence which of the non-essential services they wish to include in the future specification. This will allow tenants to decide on the standard of service and to have some control over the costs.

The table 3 below shows some examples of the standard of service provided by other landlords.

**Table 3 Service standards**

Landlord	Grass Cutting period	No. of cuts General areas	No. cuts sheltered schemes	Remove Litter	Paths	Weeds	Prune Hedges	Prune Shrubs
<b>KHA</b>	March to October	Every 2 weeks Grass Cuttings To be removed	Every 2 weeks Grass Cuttings to be removed,	Yes , unless too big for van	Y- check paths, parking areas etc.	Remove by hand Or chemicals	Twice a year by Sept, avoiding nesting birds.	November to February
<b>Mid Devon</b>	March to October	10 cuts	20 cuts	Yes, but not animal faeces	Cleared, also swept by in house team	No selective weed killing	Yes/ August-Sept.	4 times a year. Planning to Have monthly inspections
<b>TDBC</b>	March to October	13 cuts	15 cuts	Yes	As requested as Additional Works	Rose & Shrub beds cleared	Yes/ August - September	12 times per year

## 6. Complaints analysis.

This section describes the results of the analysis of the nature of the customer contacts made to the Parks and Open Spaces team.

Since May 2016 the Parks and Open Spaces Service started to collect detailed information on the nature and number of customer contacts received relating to various grounds maintenance issues.

In period May – December 2016 there were a total of 61 complaints recorded by the Parks department.

This was out of a total number of customer contacts of 556.

This total was made up of the following categories

Complaint: 61

Enquiry 57

Request 438

The largest single category for complaints, enquiries and requests was for issues around trees which resulted in 229 contacts.

Table 4 below provides a breakdown of the main categories which resulted in a complaint, enquiry or request for service during May – December 2016.

**Table 4 (May – December 2016)**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Grass Cutting</b>	<b>Brambles</b>	<b>Bushes/ Shrubs</b>	<b>Trees</b>	<b>Weeds/leaves</b>	<b>Total</b>
Complaint	24	26	2	8	1	61
Enquiry	23	23	0	9	2	57
Request	80	93	44	212	9	438
Total	127	142	46	229	12	556

While the number of complaints appears low, (they make up only 11% of the total number of contacts) requests make up 78% of all contacts.

This suggests that many people are ringing to request a service, which either they think the council should be providing or to request something which the Council does provide, but for which no information is available for the customer to form a judgement hence their enquiry.

If more information was made readily available about what the service includes and what it excludes and this was easily accessible, then the number of enquiries to the team may decline and satisfaction may improve.

More detailed analysis of the nature of the customer contacts regarding trees has been provided by the Parks and Open Spaces team. June, July and August have the highest number of customer contacts for issues concerning trees.

The largest single category of requests was overgrown trees. From the information provided by Parks, 96 percent of these enquiries were actioned validating the tenants report as both necessary and accurate. Tree maintenance is not currently included within the specification but this research would suggest that this type of work would need to be included in any new Specification or service level agreement and routinely completed on a regular cycle.

This would reduce the number of enquiries the Parks and Open Spaces Team receive minimising unnecessary work and in turn providing opportunities to further improve the standard of service. Customers would be reassured that that this is part of a regular cycle of tree maintenance, included in the Grounds Maintenance agreement and that they would not need to intervene.

If the work was programmed in certain times of the year, ideally before the growing season commenced and once it has ceased, this could prevent the reactive nature of the service, making the service more efficient and reducing the number of customer contacts

Further analysis of the customer contacts received by the Open Spaces Service based on a 10 % random sample suggests the following:

Of 35 customer contacts for trees, 14 related to routine maintenance, and 17 were with regard to preventive maintenance, e.g. trees at risk of falling down or causing damage to property.

A random sample of 16 Weeds and Leaves contacts revealed that 11 (over 50%) related to routine maintenance, requests for leaves to be cleared.

Grass Cutting, from a sample of 28 customer contacts revealed that 17 were the result of a caller asking for clarification on when for example the grass would be cut or why a communal area had not been cut.

In all of the above cases the vast majority of the work was completed, which suggests that it is either already within the scope of the current agreement, or if not, it should be added.

This analysis suggests that if information was readily available for all involved in the process, from housing staff to more importantly the customer, our tenants, this would result in less enquires and less work for the staff involved in dealing with the enquiries. The information on when for example an area of grass is going to be cut and the standard to which it will be cut could be displayed on the Council's website and advertised in Deane Housing News etc.

From research carried out a number of other housing providers set out a very clear description of the level of service provided by their own grounds maintenance contract. These providers display their service standard on the organisations website.

A good example of a clear service standard is shown in the attached copy of Rochdale Borough Councils grounds maintenance service standard. A copy of this is shown in Appendix 2.

The council has also produced a short You Tube film setting out how they have improved the service in response to their tenants concerns. <http://www.rbh.org.uk/grounds-maintenance>

TDBC does not have either a publicised service standard or clear information about ground maintenance on our website, this is an area where improvement can be made. A clearly defined service standard that is understood by all parties, is readily available and accessible to our tenants is something the project group wishes to establish.

## **7.0 Finance Officers Comments.**

The current actual cost of the provision of grounds maintenance is £1.12 per tenant (assuming a void rate of 2%)

The service charge to tenants (0.79p) is less than the cost to the HRA. At present the HRA is subsidising the service charge to tenants. The service charge needs to increase to match the service provided.

The service charge is eligible under housing benefit and as at February 48% of our General needs tenants and 74% of our sheltered tenants were in receipt of housing benefit.

Any increase in cost will be to cover the service provided and not to create a profit.

## **8. Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **The Way Forward and next steps.**

The following section describes our approach to moving the project forward to completion. We intend to take the following steps:

#### **8.1 Share current position and progress with tenant representative groups:**

- a. TSMB 27/3/17
- b. Tenants Forum tbc April 2017
- c. Sheltered Housing Development Group tbc April 2017

#### **8.2 Verify cost breakdown of current Specification against existing service delivery and costs of additional work areas that tenants may request in future**

The Parks and Open Spaces team are currently going through the existing agreement to identify and cost those areas of work that have been identified as being important to tenants, that do not appear to be currently included in the agreement.

The purpose of this is to obtain an accurate cost of providing a level of service that meets the requirements of our customers.

This information will then enable the Council to identify whether or not the level of charges collected towards the ground maintenance service are realistic and sufficient to provide the standard of service that our tenants expect.

#### **8.3 Further clarification of issues and concerns of tenants:**

Although we have a useful analysis of areas of concern from tenants through analysis of complaints and service requests, we will test this through TSMB, tenants forum, TSDG and smaller focus groups and undertake further analysis if required. We want to ensure we listen to the direct voice of tenants before we start to specify a new contract. We will organise a tour of our main sites with tenant representatives once the first cuts have been completed in the new growing season so that the standard of work can be inspected and to identify where work completed has or has not met with our tenants expectations. **This tour will take place April/May 2017.**

This work will place us in an excellent position to understand the areas of work that the new contract should cover.

#### **8.4 Define and cost up new Service required with tenants**

Using the costing data, and cost breakdown in the actions above, we plan to undertake work with tenants groups testing their appetite for proposals for the new service specification. This is likely to offer an enhanced service that will require an increase in service charges to cover this. As part of this work, we will consider new solutions to provide a more cost effective and innovative service e.g. use of mulching mowers and identify areas that can be reconfigured to reduce cost of maintenance. As an indication, if tenants choose to enhance the service, this will increase service charges by around 3p per week for every additional £10,000 of service.

#### **8.5 Define and agree a clear service standard for new service**

We will establish a clear and concise service standard agreed with tenants that will be publicised on TDBC website and made readily available to tenants and members of staff in Housing and Communities.

TDBC's service standard will be based on the examples of good practice identified during the course of the research for this project.

The standard will be based on a fully costed service that is in line with the approved budget. Any expenditure required over and above what is contained in the agreed service, will have to be justified, approved and come from an identified budget.

Parks and Open Spaces will provide a level of service to the specified service standard and to budget. This will be monitored by its own supervisors, the estate teams and tenant representatives.

The service specification and costs should be reviewed at regular predetermined intervals in agreement with all parties.

#### **8.6 Implementation, clear communication and monitoring**

We will undertake an extensive communication campaign to ensure that tenants are aware of the service delivery and service standard they should expect in their areas. We will set up a means to monitor this within the Estates Teams through periodic estate walkabouts with tenant representatives.

We will endeavour to upload information onto a GIS mapping system that will show areas covered by the contract and what delivery can be expected in each area. This will help ensure that the contract is easier to monitor and hold to account by tenants and other interested parties. It is our aim for this service to be interactive with tenants and allow them to report issues and concerns directly via the website without the need to call.

#### **9.0 Recommendations**

The TSMB are asked to note the content of the report and endorse the recommendations in section 8 as an effective solution to meet the concerns of tenants. We look forward to working closely with representatives of the TSMB,

the Tenants Forum and the Sheltered Housing Development Group over the course of the next few months to achieve a tailored Standard of Service. That standard will meet both the minimum requirements of TDBC for the management of its assets and an enhanced quality for those areas that are identified by Tenants as requiring a greater investment.

**Appendix 1  
Grounds Maintenance Charges 2017**

<b>BEDDING 2017</b>		
DESCRIPTION	VALUE	FREQUENCY
Clear bedding summer & autumn	£1,535.98	2
Planting summer & autumn	£4,635.27	2
Summer & autumn bed maintenance	£5,471.79	31
Bed prep summer & autumn	£3,787.92	2
Watering summer	£6,907.76	99
Supply plants for summer & autumn	£5,796.68	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£28,135.39</b>	
<b>CONTAINERS 2017</b>		
DESCRIPTION	VALUE	FREQUENCY
Clear bedding summer & autumn	£87.26	2
Planting summer & autumn	£133.57	2
Summer & autumn bed maintenance	£213.78	31
Bed prep summer & autumn	£124.09	2
Watering summer	£2,342.66	99
Supply plants for summer & autumn	£458.24	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£3,359.60</b>	
<b>HANGING BASKETS 2017</b>		
DESCRIPTION	VALUE	FREQUENCY
Installation	£89.89	1
Irrigation	£2,343.50	105
Liquid feed	£8.41	1
Dead heading maintenance	£34.46	3
Removal	£44.63	1
Baskets	£1,136.00	80
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£3,656.89</b>	
<b>ROSE BEDS 2017</b>		
DESCRIPTION	VALUE	FREQUENCY
Cultivate/forking	£438.26	1
Fertilise Rose beds	£249.05	1
Rose prune annual	£617.49	1
Rose prune summer	£3,695.04	7
Rose prune winter	£617.49	1
Hoe & Hand Weed	£6,274.31	18
Fungicide	£1,613.38	3
Insecticide	£1,434.11	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£14,939.13</b>	
<b>SHRUB BEDS 2017</b>		
DESCRIPTION	VALUE	FREQUENCY
Hoe, Handweed & Prune	£88,356.57	12
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£88,356.57</b>	

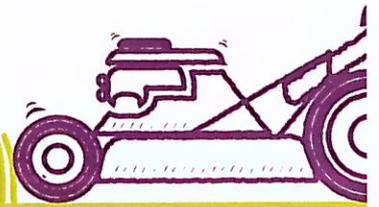
<b>Appendix 1 HEDGES 2017</b>		
<b>DESCRIPTION</b>	<b>VALUE</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Hedge prune 1	£8,555.60	1
Hedge prune 2	£671.63	1
Hedge prune 3	£1,068.10	1
Hedge prune 4	£1,550.17	1
Hedge prune 5	£28,364.48	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£40,209.98</b>	
<b>IMMATURE TREES UP TO 5M / POLLARDING 2017</b>		
<b>DESCRIPTION</b>	<b>VALUE</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Stake & Tie	£0.00	2
Remove Epcormic growth	£0.00	1
Pollarding Year 2	£270.61	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£270.61</b>	
<b>GRASS CUTTING 2017</b>		
<b>DESCRIPTION</b>	<b>VALUE</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Grass spec. 8	£191,053.60	13
Grass spec. 9	£539.15	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£191,592.75</b>	
<b>CLEANSING &amp; LITTER COLLECTION 2017</b>		
<b>DESCRIPTION</b>	<b>VALUE</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Cleansing spec. 8	£7,268.14	2
Cleansing spec. 10	£43.87	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£7,312.01</b>	
<b>GRAVEL AREA 2017</b>		
<b>DESCRIPTION</b>	<b>VALUE</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Raking	£0.00	0
Weedkilling	£0.00	0
Tree grids	£0.00	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£0.00</b>	
<b>ADDITIONAL WORKS 2017</b>		
<b>DESCRIPTION</b>	<b>VALUE</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Cut & Collect Housing grass	£105,779.40	15
TREES TAUNTON	£31,690.71	As required
TREES RURAL	£4,325.00	As required
TREES WELLINGTON	£5,750.00	As required
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£147,545.11</b>	
<b>Total with Additional Works</b>	<b>£525,378.03</b>	
<b>Total without Additional Works</b>	<b>£377,832.92</b>	

## Appendix 2

REVISION HISTORY



# GROUNDS MAINTENANCE SERVICE STANDARDS FOR 2015



**We don't let the grass grow under our feet**

The tasks overleaf are to be undertaken at each scheduled visit:  
**as required, weather permitting,  
on RBH land.**

## SUMMER – MARCH TO OCTOBER

- All grass areas will be cleared of litter and debris before grass cutting commences.
- All grass areas, including edges and surrounding obstacles will have been cut in order to produce a pleasing appearance with an even finish and height, with no areas being left uncut.
- All grass clippings shall have been removed from hard surfaces or paths, by sweeping or blowing back onto the grass area.
- Horticultural features (e.g. Shrub Beds) shall present an attractive amenity, allowing development of the plants in keeping with the type, shape, size and aspect of the bed.
- Plants that abut other features (e.g. pathways, windows etc.) will have been pruned to ensure public safety and avoid obstruction.
- All soil surfaces shall be clear of litter and debris and any weed growth will have been removed or treated with chemical weed killers following each scheduled visit.
- All hard surfaces shall be free of litter and debris and any weed growth will have been removed or treated with chemical weed killers following each scheduled visit.

## WINTER – NOVEMBER TO FEBRUARY

- All soil surfaces shall be clear of litter and debris and any weed growth will have been removed or treated with chemical weed killers following each scheduled visit.
- All hard surfaces shall be free of litter and debris and any weed growth will have been removed or treated with chemical weed killers following each scheduled visit.
- All plants shall have received appropriate pruning that prevents an increase in height and encroachment, apart from allowing the development of a maturing planting scheme.
- Pruning shall be sufficient to allow growth between visits.
- All edges abutting hard surfaces shall be clean and true following the outline of the relevant hard surface.

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 27 March 2017 at 6.00pm in the John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton.**

**Present:** Mr R Balman (Chairman)  
Mr A Akhigbemen, Mrs J Bunn, Mr D Galpin, Mrs J Hegarty, Mr K Hellier, Mr I Hussey and Councillors C Booth and R Bowrah.

**Officers:** Penny James (Chief Executive), James Barraah (Director – Housing and Communities), Chris Hall (Assistant Director – Operational Delivery), Simon Lewis (Assistant Director – Housing and Community Development), Jan Errington (Project Manager), Neil Anderson (Strategy and Partnership Officer), Richard Burge (Open Spaces manager), Tony Knight (Estates Officer – Halcon), Martin Price (Tenant Empowerment Manager) and Clare Rendell (Democratic Services Officer)

Also present: Councillor Mrs Warmington.

(The meeting commenced at 6.00pm)

**22. Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 20 February 2017 were taken as read and were signed.

**23. Public Question Time**

No questions received for Public Question Time.

**24. Declarations of Interests**

Mr Akhigbemen, Mr R Balman, 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.

**25. Transformation of Taunton Deane Borough Council (TDBC) and West Somerset Council (WSC).**

The Chief Executive gave a verbal update on the transformation project. Previously the Director of Housing and Community had briefed the Board Members on the formation of a new Council.

During the summer and autumn of 2015, work was carried out with Members to develop a set of Design Principles that would set the framework for our transformation vision.

The Design Principles were set out as follows:-

**Social Enterprise** – The Councils would embrace the principles of a social enterprise and act more commercially to deliver surplus to reinvest in the delivery of our priority outcomes and services.

**Customer Focused** – The Councils would focus on agreed priority outcomes and be customer centric.

**Self-Service** – The customer access arrangements would maximise self-service. This did not mean that all services would be online only. Face to face and telephone access would still be available.

**Case Management** – The Councils would deliver an approach to deal with customers so that they see one point of contact who would take responsibility for their issues to the point of resolution. This negated the need for the customer to know how the system operated, which tier of government was responsible and who did what within the Councils.

**Locality Partners** – Wherever possible, the Councils should work with partners in the locality to collectively commission locally important services and use our combined resources to avoid duplication.

**Value for Money** – All services would offer value for money and be business-like in their approach.

**Advocates and Champions** – Councillors would be supported to be active advocates, champions and lobbyists to challenge partners on issues that affected their wards or wider areas.

**Minimise Governance** – The Councils would minimise governance (internal bureaucracy, red tape) whilst they protected the principles of transparency, probity, good leadership and management.

**Attitudes and Behaviour** – The Councils would recruit, retain, redeploy and reward our people to ensure we had the right skills, attitudes and behaviours needed to deliver our ambitions.

**Work was an Activity** – The Councils would develop an organisation where work was an activity and not a place. The Councils would go to the community rather than require the customer to physically come to it. Agile working had been introduced to the staff to make it easier for work to be carried out whilst not in an office.

Following on from this, all of the Design Principles were incorporated in the new Delivery Model for Access to Information, Advice and Services.

The Board Members were reminded that the Council would still invest in growth and development in the area. Projects included Urban Extensions at Staplegrove, Monkton Healthfield, Comeytrove and Trull, the Henlade Bypass and the New Strategic Employment Sites.

It was noted that the development of the new Hinkley Point C was the largest construction project in Western Europe. Although the land did not fall within the Taunton Deane boundaries, the Council was due to benefit from money available through the Community Impact Mitigation Fund.

Councillors and colleagues were reminded that the Halcon One Team was a priority and to continue to focus on the vulnerable communities in the area.

During the discussion of this item the following comments and questions were raised:-

- Concern was raised that when the rent reduction scheme had ended, would the Council raise the rents to the private sector level?  
*It was confirmed that the Council was required by law to provide rent at the social housing level.*
- The Board requested that some of the Members could attend the customer awareness training.
- A query was raised on how many staff were required for the case management part of the project?

*Work had been carried out to calculate how much time individual staff had spent on case management type of work. This equalled approximately the equivalent of 80 members of staff. However, at this stage of the project it was not known how this would be incorporated in the Delivery Model.*

- The Board Members had submitted a response to the New Council Consultation at the previous meeting. Would it be possible to get some feedback from the process?

*The responses had been collated and given to the Secretary of State to be considered but had not been analysed by staff. The responses would be available to view online shortly.*

## **26. Extra Care Housing Update.**

The Project Officer gave a verbal update on the Extra Care Housing Project.

As previously reported to the Board, the Housing Team was re-commissioning the extra care service provided to their tenants.

Last April, they had reached a decision to allow Somerset County Council (SCC) to procure an integrated care and support service which had been agreed by tenants.

This resulted in a tender which had taken place over the summer and eventually the official appointment of the new provider, Way Ahead Community Services, was announced in January 2017.

Delays had been experienced with the provider and SCC, however, the contract start date was met and commenced on 27 March 2017.

The service level agreement and lease had been signed and the service had been introduced to the tenants. Support would be given to the tenants during this time and a new member of staff would be appointed for this.

Work would be continued on the service level agreement. There was lots of details in the agreement and these would be evolved over time.

## **27. Grounds Maintenance Service Review.**

The Strategy and Partnership Officer presented the report which detailed the work that had taken place on the review and the content and arrangements for the delivery of grounds maintenance service to land owned by the Housing Revenue Account.

TDBC Housing and Communities had established a project team in September 2016 to review the current grounds maintenance agreement that was in place with the TDBC Deane DLO Open Spaces Team.

The works that the Parks and Open Spaces Team had undertaken on behalf of the Housing Department was based on the original 1997 specification of the contract that was updated to the new agreement in 2006. Since this time, the Open Spaces Team had provided services that were instructed by the Housing Department.

Additional works that were outside the scope of the original specification and were requested by Housing or undertaken when necessary at the Parks and Open Spaces Manager's direction, were charged as additional works.

This agreement had been in place since 2006 and was clearly due for review both in terms of understanding the required scope of works, quality and true cost for the delivery of the service.

During the review it was highlighted that grass cutting and work on trees were the main additional works requested by customers and the total cost for these works was £147,000.

In addition to this, the largest single category for complaints, enquiries and requests was for issues around trees which had resulted in 229 contacts.

Whilst the number of complaints appeared low at 11%, requests equalled 78% of all contacts.

If information about what the service included and excluded was made readily available and accessible, the number of enquiries to the team would decline and satisfaction might improve.

In conjunction with this, if work was programmed in certain times of the year, ideally before growing season had commenced and once it had ceased, this could prevent the reactive nature of the service, which would make the service more efficient and the number of customer contacts would be reduced.

Part of the review provided more detailed explanation on service charges and compared the level of service charge made by TDBC to those made by other social landlords.

TDBC based their service charge for grounds maintenance on an average cost per property. Other landlords who provided a grounds maintenance service that were contacted based their service charge on the square meterage of grass that was to be cut that related to that particular property together with the frequency and standard of that cut for a particular area. Therefore a sheltered scheme which had a large area of grass, was cut more regularly than a general open space and has the grass clippings collected paid much higher service charge than a property which did not benefit from a communal garden. TDBC was currently unable to charge service charges in a sophisticated property by property way as this would require a significant investment in resources to calculate these charges. The Board had previously supported the principle of equalising the cost across all tenants to ensure that the service was affordable for everyone.

Part of the review was to identify more cost effective ways to provide some services and to provide tenants with the opportunity to influence which of the non-essential services they wished to be included in the future specification. This would allow tenants to decide on the standard of service and to have some control over the costs.

The Board Members were shown a video clip of the grounds maintenance service provided by Rochdale Boroughwide Housing that TDBC aspired to achieve.

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

- Queried whether the Rochdale service was more expensive and did they have more staff?

*This was not known.*

- Praise was given to the staff who worked in the Priorswood area, job well done.
- Support was given for the project. Queried whether private tenants were included in the service charges?  
*Yes they were.*
- Concern was raised on the grass cutting in the area. Tenants had to chase the work. Queried how many times a year the work should be carried out.  
*Should have grass cut 15 times a year.*
- Where were the clippings taken after a cut and collect service?  
*The clippings were taken to Somerset Waste Partnership (SWP) and Viridor for disposal. This was an expensive method of disposal. The department was looking into purchasing some mulching mowers for grass cutting, this took away the need to dispose of the clippings through the SWP. This method was supported by the Lead Member for Community Leadership.*
- Clarification was requested on whether the budget stated in the report was just for Housing.  
*Yes it was.*
- It was noted that if more work was needed on grounds maintenance, then the service charges would need to be raised.
- The department were due to carry out a tour of the District to see what work was needed and encouraged the Board Members to join them on the tour so they would be able to have input in the works needed.

**Resolved** that the content of the report be noted and the recommendations be endorsed.

(The meeting ended at 7.45pm)