

## SWT Tenants Operational Group

Thursday, 5th December, 2019,  
11.00 am

Meeting Room C - Flook House



Somerset West  
and Taunton

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Members: Francesca Smith, Janet Lloyd and Wayne Hobson

### Agenda

1. **Apologies**
2. **Notes from previous meetings**  
Minutes of the meeting held on 21 August and 14 October 2019 (Pages 5 - 10)
3. **Feedback on action highlighted at the last meeting:-  
Roof repairs at Darby Way, Bishops Lydeard, Key codes at meeting halls, Local surgeries including 3 officers attending once a month and concerns about locality officers not attending monthly meetings.**  
(Fiona Davies)
4. **Talk on new I.T. system and tenant portal that is to be installed in the future.**  
(Karen Penfold) (Pages 11 - 16)
5. **Talk about the role of the Tenant Operational Group members in setting up the new VOID group**  
(Louisa Hill for Ollie Walcup)
6. **Performance issues relating to Ground Maintenance**  
(Darren Hill)
7. **Terms of Reference**  
Feedback from the working group

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James Hasset". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a prominent initial "J".

**JAMES HASSETT  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

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**Minutes of the Meeting of the Tenant Operational Group held on 21 August 2019 at 12 noon in the Conference Room, Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton.**

**Present:** Mr W Hobson, Mr J Beaman, Mr R Fenge, Ms L Mongare, Ms S Betts, Ms M Bird, Mr M Halliday, Ms G Grehan, Ms A Heath,

**Officers:** Christine Fraser (Head of Performance and Governance), Stephen Boland (Housing Specialist), Tracey Meadows (Governance and Democracy Case Manager).

(The meeting commenced at 12 noon)

**1. Welcome and introduction**

The Head of Performance and Governance updated the group on the background of the previous Tenants groups which had ceased to exist due to the formation of the new Council on the 31 March 2019. Work to develop a new tenant's empowerment structure which would meet the needs of our tenants as well as fit with the new staffing structures set up in the Council was being worked on.

The Tenants Forum and the Supported Housing Development Group had already started working together as they were dealing with many of the same issues, and there was overlap with the work of the Tenant Services Management Board. The new Executive Councillor responsible for Housing, Councillor Francesca Smith, has agreed to the formation of two new groups and we have been asking members of the existing groups to work with us to help develop their terms of reference and ways of working, so that we can establish full membership by April 2020.

The role of the Operational Group would be to scrutinise our service and make sure that tenants had what they needed. Tenant engagement sessions would be set up and the group would help to develop the agenda's for these sessions and also to encourage different local groups to come together to share information to air any issues that we were not aware of.

As the district has now been divided up into 9 sections, each ward has a new Localities team, these teams go out into their local areas working with Parish's and local groups to bring them together and to discuss any local issues that may arise.

It is essential that tenants are involved in developing these groups and we are very grateful that many members from the previous groups have agreed to help with this, as well as carrying out the functions of the new groups during 2019/20. We are looking for more tenants to take part.

During the discussion, the Board Members asked questions and made the following points:-

- Communication issues, tenants had concerns with regards to the localities teams, there were no numbers or names to contact; *tenants need to phone customer services and ask to be put through to the service that they require. Estate Officers were no longer in place, but our staff should know to put you through to the appropriate service.*
- Parishes did not work with Council tenants;

- Concerns that the Localities teams were not visiting the Sheltered Housing schemes as often as they should do despite paying for this service; *the structure and how we work is different, we are the ones that need to communicate that to you, you should not have to figure that out;*
- Concerns that the 0300 number did not work, a wall that had fallen down has been reported numerous times and it has still not been cleared up;
- Lead person for the group;
- Concerns with grounds maintenance ;
- More rubbish and dog bins;
- Estate walk about were needed to be implemented again;
- The new Council has been established for 6 months with and has not improved, we are not listened to; *the new online self-serve needs to be communicated to the tenants by yourselves;*
- Older tenants are not computer literate; *those that can will help those that can't;*
- Concerns with the lack of maintenance schedules; *this is what will be in the Terms of Reference;*
- Calls to Customer Services are frustrating as they never know what we are talking about; *you need to be reassured that you call is being dealt with;*

The question was put to the group, what do you want to get from us?

- Someone to go around and check on the elderly once a fortnight;
- Tenants required honest communication and honest answers to enable the group to report back to the tenants;
- Tenants need a named person and contact numbers;
- More computer training for tenants in the meeting halls;
- Information needs to go out to the sheltered housing groups to advise them of the changes;
- Concerns that an extra charge of £11 per week is being paid by the Sheltered Housing tenants for a service that they were not getting at present;

Action points;

- Head of Performance and Governance to talk to the Localities Manager to ensure that tenants had a named person in the Localities team;
- Work with the Housing Specialist on how to communicate better with tenants;
- The group would be properly supported, notes that can be circulated within your areas, actions taken with names associated with those actions, and deadlines with when the actions should be carried out;

(The meeting ended at 1.10pm)

**Notes of the Meeting of the Tenant Operational Group held on 14 October 2019 at 11am in the Conference Room, Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton**

**Present:** Mr W Hobson, Mr J Beaman, Mr R Fenge, Ms S Betts, Ms M Bird, Mr M Halliday, Ms G Grehan, Ms A Heath

**Officers:** Christine Fraser (Head of Performance and Governance), Stephen Boland (Housing Specialist), Fiona Davis (Housing Specialist), Julie Sabey (Case Manager Lead), Paul Morgan (Manager – Landlord Health and Safety compliance), Simon Lewis (Head of Customer), Tracey Meadows (Governance and Democracy Case Manager)

(The meeting commenced at 11am)

**1. Changes to processes for tenants (rent collection, arrears recovery) (S. Lewis)**

The Powerpoint presentation presented by The Head of Customer, Simon Lewis provided an overview to the group on “Lean” thinking in Arrears Management for our tenants. We needed to look at what we were doing now to utilise a “lean” approach. This would cut out the process waste which was not adding value to services from the point of view of the customer. The benefits would mean that tenants had more certainty and lower housing debt as the rent would be collected in advance resulting in less or no evictions. These major changes will be taking place 31 March 2020.

During the discussion of this presentation the following comments were made by the board (responses are in italic);

- If a tenant has payments and it alters, will the information be relayed to the rent department? We do recognise that we have had all these different hand offs and stuff is getting lost and not working effectively. A new system of approach where process will be put in place so that we are clear when information comes in we know who is holding and auctioning that information in a timely manner, which I don't think that we have always been doing. This emphasises that this processes needs modernisation and a review;
- Concerns that rent has been taken out of a resident's bank account but not being paid to the Council. This scared an 80 year old tenant in sheltered housing; this is why we are trying to lean the process. There has probably been a hic up with the Academy prompt letters, unless I know the case I cannot look into it. Daily we are looking at problems and trying to put them right. We will continually improve on this;
- The number of tenants in arrears is one in four, we need to jump on it a lot quicker. We are not in a strong place so that is why we need to do something different here;
- Have we any evidence that this is tenants that have moved onto Universal Credit? We have evidence that year on year since this was implemented tenants arrears had worsened. What is interesting is that when we look at homes in Sedgemoor who introduced this despite Universal Credit ramping up they had managed to flat line and managed to reduce their arrears. The trend across the country is that as Universal Credit ramps up so does tenant arrears. We have set a target to address our arrears from £700,000 down to £60,000 by the end of this financial year and the following year will be even better with the end goal of the average arrears being far lower for a tenant and the number of tenants that have arrears are lower and also evictions start to decline rapidly;

- Would it be possible to know who the three new officers are on our patch? We are going to have local surgeries where the three officer will be present, they may not be present together. We are then going to send out flyers and leaflets to say these are your three officers. One will be responsible for arrears management, one for tenancy and one is for tenancy sustainment so if people need that extra bit of help to sustain their tenancy then that is the person that they can contact;
- It has been 7 months and tenants still do not know who is doing what no one has told residents, tenants anything. People don't know who is doing what job, it's a disgrace;

**2. Housing team structure, including Supported Housing service and priorities (F. Davies/J. Sabey)**

The Powerpoint presentation presented by the Housing Specialist Fiona Davies provided an overview to the group on the Housing Team structure and included Supported Housing service and priorities. Somerset West and Taunton Council had gone through the transformation process and the offer of sheltered accommodation remained the same. Some staff structures had changed, Lettings, Arrears, Tenancy Sustainment, Anti-Social Behaviour Case Managers) and some actions are now done by different departments. (Meeting rooms, estate checks H&S) Somerset County Council were now using Community Connect/Village Agents and 2<sup>nd</sup> step to provide some housing related support. People can self-refer, through the 'Talking cares' and also be referred by Somerset West and Taunton Council staff. More services and help was available online, so tenants/residents could report repairs, concerns and request help, 24/7.

During the discussion of this presentation the following comments were made by the board members (replies are in italic)

- Would the Welfare Officer still be in the new structure? This is now the Tenancy Sustainment Officer who will be in the new structure. If you are in sheltered housing and wanted a weekly/ monthly visit this will be her role; this needs to be relayed to the tenants as we have been told that you are no longer going to provide this service as some people have been let down by her; we meet on a weekly basis and we go through their roles, as this is new roles for the Officers, they do know that this is a task for them. We still need to do work on the language, making sure that the Customer Champions put through to the correct department;
- We paid £12 per week extra for a general needs person, why are we paying for something that we are not getting? All I can do is apologise. We have tried to make it clear that within their roles their responsibilities was to continue visit vulnerable elderly customers. Now that I am hearing it from a customer I will take that up with that Officer. Emails were also sent from the Deane Helpline that they had to monitor;
- How would the office know if a tenant was vulnerable if they do not visit? Most sheltered housing has the piper system and you would just phone through; not everybody would do this, if you are vulnerable and do not know who you are phoning will not phone. Trust is built when you know the person on the end of the phone as you have dealt with then for a while. You have said that tenants should have a voice, well we are giving you a voice, we are saying this is what we want so what are you going to do to provide that, we were not asked about these changes, you just dumped them on us; Somerset County Council sent everyone letters, they also went around meeting halls, everyone had a voice then to speak to SCC who withdrew monies for sheltered housing; our contract was not with SCC, I don't care whether they give you money or not, what I care about is my contract with you; in April 2016 the contract



and base line services were set in place and approved was by the Council. All support that was funded by SCC has ceased, this is why you are seeing a different service; the tenants saw this coming and no one on this Council took any notice of our concerns; from next month the offices will be available through coffee mornings or just meeting in the meeting halls to build up trust;

- Why can't you bring back the local wardens to bring back the trust between the people and the people in the Council? If the phones are down we cannot contact anyone to tell them about a vulnerable tenant; the piper line generally does work very well;
- When will the roofs be repaired in Derby Way? *This will be followed up and reported back to the group;*
- Concerns that the codes to the key safe was so well known that people were using the facilities;
- Concerns that the Localities Officers would not turn up for the planned monthly visits; myself and Julie will do checks to make sure that this is happening and to get your feedback;
- Who will be dealing with maintenance issues regarding windows and door frames as contracts have been handed down and down to save money and the workmanship is appalling; This will be raised with the Localities team;

The Portfolio Holder, Cllr Fran Smith indicated that she was hearing a few comments from tenants that she surprised her. She stated that tenants needed to realise that the Council was different from what we had for the previous 10 years and the changes that had been implemented in the previous couple of years and had not worked as well as the administration had hoped. I hope that moving forward things will sort themselves out, tenants will have to be patient with us as it has only been 5 months since the new Council. There has been a huge cut in resources a huge cut in funding and we are trying our best to move forward not bring it back to how it was before because I don't think we will be able to sustain that, moving forward was what we wanted to achieve. I really want to be supportive of tenants and Council homes. I was also shocked at the amount of evictions that were coming forward and the reasons behind that. Hopefully this will not happen in the future, so I am hoping that you will be supportive in the new ways of working and if we can get more money back into the Council then that enables us to provide more services for you. My goal is also to build far more social homes, so that is a positive. Please contact Officers if you have other issues to raise.

## 5. Issues around clear hallways (P. Morgan)

The interim compliance Manager updated the group on the clear hallways policy that was drive by the Local Fire Authority. This policy was to stop residents from storing personal items in communal hallways which could be combustible or cause them to slip or trip whilst they were attending.

Two new Building Safety Managers would be recruited to be visible to the residents and to police the clear hallway policy. They would also test the fire alarm and emergency lighting systems on a regular basis.

During the discussion the following points were raised; responses in italic

- You need to be consistent on this as it varies in different areas. You need to let everyone know and make sure that it is complied with;

**Monday, 14th October, 2019**

- Our previous Housing Supported Housing Office used to perform these checks once a month;
- Concerns that tenants combustible recycling boxes were stored underneath the stairwells as there was no other storage areas. This had been reported but nothing was being done about it; as officers were visiting properties this would be picked up;
- Specialist storage for Mobility Scooters was also needed; a Policy on Mobility Scooters was needed as these were highly combustible.

The meeting ended 12:35pm

# Project Initiation Document

## Housing Landlord IT System Replacement

### Project Details

<b>Project Manager</b>	Karen Penfold	<b>Programme Manager (where applicable)</b>	Sue Tomlinson
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### Document Control

Revision Date	Version	Author(s) & Role	Comments
15 <sup>th</sup> September 2019	1	Stephen Boland	

### Approvals

	Name	Role	Document Date
<b>Prepared by:</b>	Simon Lewis	<b>Head of Customer</b>	September 2019
<b>Approved by:</b>		<b>(in order to progress through the PMO, HOF sign-off is required)</b>	

The Council's current Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2016- 2046 (HRA) is structured around four strategic objectives:

- Providing quality homes;
- Supporting the most vulnerable;
- Better services; and
- Stronger business.

The pace of change and advances in technology have provided opportunities for housing providers to deliver services and work in a way that we could not have envisaged, even ten years ago.

These advances, that effect all of our lives, have meant that customer expectations have shifted to expect access to services and information in a way, at a time, and at a location that suits their individual needs. The customer expects to be able to access services using smart interactive technology.

These technologies are shaping the way that housing providers are delivering their priorities and local services. The "traditional" approach is no longer viable and leading housing organisations have already moved the way they work and how they deliver services. They are focussing on technology change to develop 24/7 digital solutions for customers.

New technologies are supporting the work of organisations in leaning their processes, policies and workflows across their business areas, helping with the streamlining of these to better meet customer needs more efficiently, quicker and at lower cost.

The current housing management IT system used by the Council to help delivery landlord services to circa. 5,700 tenants is Capita's Housing Academy system. The system was introduced in 2006/07 with an annual contract for Capita to provide software support and maintenance i.e. upgrades for the system. The system is central to the day to day operation of the Council's housing landlord function.

Capita has formally notified the Council that they will be ending Housing Academy System support and maintenance with effect from September 2020. In so doing there is a strong likelihood of our current system eventually failing (more probability as time goes by) where the severity of the consequences are thought to be extremely harmful for the Council and its customers.

The Council is now in a position where it needs to procure a new system that will allow the housing landlord function to continue to meet current and future business requirements.

### **Benefits of a new system:**

#### Management of service:

- The new system will allow for analysis of workload, and allow managers to more effectively target and quickly prioritise resources. It will also significantly aid and speed up communication particularly across areas of the housing service and the council and thereby significantly reduce mistakes; and
- We will be able to add new system processes easily and quickly, updates by non-technical council staff will be achievable to facilitate speed of deployment to meet changing customer and service needs.

#### Benefits for customers:

- Customers to be able to self-serve and access information relevant to their specific requirements 24/7 using a wide variety of e-enabled devices including PCs, tablets, smartphones. With all information held in a central place accessible by all, tenants will be given better, quicker and more consistent responses to their queries, they will also be able to update their own information. Staff time will be freed up and will then be able to spend more time in direct contact with tenants and leaseholders. Mobile working for staff will enable them to access and update information 'in the field' visiting tenants.

#### Performance Monitoring:

- The new system will enable sophisticated management information reporting to aid the deployment of our staffing resources. Such reporting will all support our approach to problem solving and continuous improvement.

#### Web portal for tenants:

- A new system will provide a full interactive web-site for tenants and leaseholders. Examples of services that need to be built in the web site include: the ability to request services; send messages to officers; report repairs; view progress of repairs; look up rent account information; request a new swipe card; make an application for a transfer; view details of voids; make a complaint; interrogate mutual exchanges, update personal records.

#### Automation and streamlining processes:

- We will have the capability to automatic workflow. Automation is a key driver of efficiency and taking waste out of our service. Automation will mean higher quality services at lower cost, focusing on those highly repetitive tasks that add the least value.

## Objectives

- Supply and delivery of a new housing landlord IT system that provides comprehensive IT integration across all the services;
- More effective management of services across the landlord function;
- Contribute to service delivery cost reductions;
- Customers to self-serve, and easily and quickly access services 24/7 using a variety of devices;
- Free up staff resource requirement in more general and routine service transactions;
- Enable mobile working with the functionality for staff to perform transactions out in the field of operation; and
- Automated workflow focusing on those highly repetitive tasks that add the least value.

## Assumptions, Dependencies & Deliverables

Assumptions Description	Impact if not borne / accepted
The assumption is that significant numbers of tenants will embrace and engage with our services using modern technological routes.	It is clear that some level of technological channel shift amongst our tenants is possible. There will still be significant benefits for the landlord service without achieving the full extent of this shift. Staffing costs will need to be reviewed in the event of significantly low take-up.
Dependencies Description	Project / Programme
We are also progressing a project to lean housing service processes. It is sensible for the leaning processes to be completed first and then request the IT supplier helps us configure the new system.	Link to the Lean Partnership work.
Significant input will be needed for key members of staff. A range of Specialist, Case Management Leads and Case Managers from across the council will need to get involved in this project.	Many of these staff will have existing workloads and heavily involved in other key projects (HRA Business Plan Review; Process Leaning Project)
Significant input from staff will be needed to promote the new self-serve technology to our tenants and leaseholders. These customers will need to be supported and enabled to take-up our new service offer.	Low take-up and the extent of the positive impacts reduced. Likelihood of increased staffing costs as a result.
Deliverables Description	Target Date
<i>Supply and delivery of a newly configured, integrated and comprehensive housing landlord IT system.</i>	September 2020
<i>Systems training.</i>	September 2020
<i>Customer self-serve portal.</i>	September 2020
<i>Automated functionality.</i>	September 2020
<i>Mobile working functionality.</i>	September 2020

## Project Costs, Resources and Benefits

Project Costs		
Cost Description	Budget	Actual
Total License, Services and 5 Year Support	Circa £600,000	

Project Resources		
Role	Utilisation %	Permanent / Contractor
Project Manager.	TBC	Permanent
A team of 'in service' specialists.	TBC	Permanent
A team of 'in service' case management leads and case managers.	TBC	Permanent
Supplier (contractor) personnel	TBC	Contractor
IT Team officers	TBC	Permanent
Independent IT Specialist	TBC	Contractor

Project Benefits	
Tangible	Intangible
Maximise the use of IT within the housing landlord service, in particular, to achieve efficiencies e.g. improve accuracy of data, improve management, exploit remote working, timely provision of information, operate customer self-serve.	Reputation of the service.
Meet statutory requirements.	Social and welfare impacts

### Project Risks and Issues

Project Risks		
Risk Description	High / Medium / Low	Risk Response
Suppliers fail to delivery any of the procured systems on time.	Medium	Engage with the supplier and agree timetable. The strength of the contract could lessen this risk. Agree contingency plan with existing system supplier.
Implementation could be affected by lack of project resources.	Low/Medium	It is essential the housing service and our IT services provides adequate resources to test, check and approve the new system and data.
Staff reluctance to accommodate change and potentially low staff morale	Low	Engagement of staff in the project. Staff supported to get involved in the project.
Procurement of new IT and migration of data presents notable risks.	Medium	It is essential we manage the project effectively. Risk to be managed under project management principles

<b>Project Issues</b>		
<b>Issues Description</b>	<b>High / Medium / Low</b>	<b>Issue Response</b>
Need to appoint a Project Manager and bring together a project team that meets regularly throughout the duration of the project.	Low	Engage programme manager to address as a priority.
Need to quickly progress the procurement process to appoint a new IT housing management system supplier.	Low	We will need to prioritise this and ensure that this is given sufficient status to secure required input.