

Minutes of the Meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 20 August 2018 at 6.00pm in the Ground Floor Conference Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton.

Present: Mr A Akhigbemen, Mrs J Bunn, Mr D Galpin, Mrs J Hegarty, Mr I Hussey, Councillor B Bowrah and Councillor H Prior-Sankey.

Officers: Simon Lewis (Assistant Director for Homes and Community Development), Jan Errington (Project Manager – Housing and Communities), Steven Clarke (Tenants Services Development Officer) and Tracey Meadows (Democratic Services Officer).

Other: Councillor J Warmington.

(The meeting commenced at 6.00pm)

1. Apologies

An apology was received from Mr K Hellier.

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Services Management Board held on 25 June 2018 were signed and taken as read.

3. Public Question Time

No questions were received for Public Question Time.

4. Declarations of Interests

Mr A Akhigbemen, Mrs J Bunn, Mr D Galpin, Mrs J Hegarty and Mr I Hussey declared personal interests as Taunton Deane Borough Council Housing Tenants. Councillor Bowrah declared a personal interest as a Member of Wellington Town Council. Councillor H Prior-Sankey declared a personal interest as a Member of Somerset County Council.

5. Sheltered Housing Pilot and Allocation Plan

The Project Manager for Housing and Communities presented an update on the Sheltered Pilot.

The Project Manager gave an update on their service and details of the Sheltered Housing Pilot.

The team had worked on a strategy which focused on 'business as usual' and also the services offered to vulnerable customers in the area and how they could be extended. This included:-

- Improved procedures which were more customer friendly;
- Tailor-made solutions that were more suited to people's needs;
- Focused work on what customer groups might need more help and services; and

- Investigations on whether there were any extra services that could be provided.

Some of the customer groups that were identified were as follows:-

- Older people;
- Disabled people;
- Rough sleepers;
- Homeless people with complex needs; and
- Customers with mental health needs.

Work had already been carried out on the under 35 age group and had been included in the project work and welfare reform.

The team had investigated different service models for vulnerable customers and had worked with different sections of Housing that included Development, Housing Options and Housing Services.

The Project Manager detailed work that was in the pipeline:-

- Work with Mental Health Services;
- Housing Projects for those with complex needs;
- Work with Sedgemoor District Council;
- Work with the Debt Officer in West Somerset;
- Rough sleeper initiatives including outreach projects;
- Re-commissioned Mental Health Service;
- Housing for complex needs;
- Further support for the Housing Options Team;
- Development of the support provided by the Tenancy Support Officers (for private sector);
- Work on adaptations, resources and assets (details were given on asset management with compassion); and
- Work on customer service and increased work on prevention measures.

Sheltered Housing Pilot

Currently sheltered housing was accessible through the Homefinder Somerset register for applicants over 60 years old. Those with disabilities who were younger could not access sheltered housing and competed with the overall register for general needs properties.

To help deliver the Council's priorities and help more vulnerable people the Project Manager proposed to run a 9 month pilot scheme for designated sheltered schemes with access to meeting hall facilities. The intention was to embed the Allocations Plan into business as usual with the lessons learned along the way to make the most of the sheltered housing provision.

The pilot would be managed tightly by an appointed project manager to ensure effective management of the scheme. Project management with continuous monitoring would enable rapid responses to issues and adjustments to be made which would enable the success of the scheme.

The proposed Allocations Plan set out how allocations would be managed in designated sheltered housing schemes to ensure fair access, due regard to the nature of the sheltered community and that lettings were in accordance with the Right to Buy exemptions.

Key features of the plan were:-

- All suitable sheltered properties were advertised as a sensitive let to assist people regardless of their age who had disabilities (physical, mental health, learning disabilities, sensory loss) who could not currently access this type of accommodation;
- Properties were to be allocated conscious of the need to maintain a balanced community, in order to ensure this, the lettings staff would check with the relevant Area Community Manager (ACM) or the Housing Manager;
- Tenants who were new to social housing would be allocated an introductory tenancy;
- Close liaison on the pilot for each letting between Housing Options and Lettings colleagues and ACMs; and
- The principles also applied to applications to exchange into the Council's stock.

Sheltered housing staff were used to working with a wide range of needs. Training would be offered to those who needed to be upskilled in relation to the pilot. In addition, from October 2018, Community Agents would provide support to all of the sheltered stock with a wide range of needs regardless of age.

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

- Board Members requested clarification on the age restriction placed on the application for sheltered accommodation, because they knew of couple of cases where properties had been allocated to someone under the age of 60 years. Was the age restriction a new rule introduced with Homefinder Somerset?
Some cases might have been historic, where the property might have been hard to let and others would have been discretionary cases.
- Board Members queried how would officers monitor drug and alcohol use by those customers within the pilot scheme.
Officers would depend upon partnership work with other agencies that would be aware of customer dependencies on drugs and alcohol.
- Concern was raised on the increased level of anti-social behaviour that could occur within the sheltered housing schemes with the introduction of younger customer groups.
- Board Members queried whether the properties in the pilot should be restricted to ground floor only.
After a discussion, Board Members agreed that all properties should be included in the pilot to offer the highest level of support, but the properties would be allocated with the manager's discretion.
- Board Members queried the length of an introductory tenancy.
The introductory tenancy was for a 12 month period.
- The Assistant Director for Homes and Community Development supported the pilot scheme.

Resolved that the Board:-

- a) Noted the officer's update;
- b) Commented on the proposed pilot scheme; and
- c) Supported the draft Under 60's Sheltered Pilot Allocations Plan and recommended it for approval to the Portfolio Holder for Housing.

6. Transformation Update

The Assistant Director for Homes and Community Development presented an update on the Transformation Project.

From April 2019, both Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset Council would cease to exist and the new Somerset West and Taunton Council would replace the two.

The creation of a New Council was an opportunity to start with a fresh and improved process on how services were provided to all customers and stake holders. The previous Transformation Project updates had highlighted the introduction of improved customer services with case management and specialist work involved.

The new process included improved office accommodation, new computer software, mobile technology and the shared office space with other partner organisations. The Council's vision would be focused on People, Place and Prosperity. The staff were currently in the midst of the recruitment process for the new work force with the desired behaviours that would place the customer at the heart of the organisation.

The headship roles were introduced for the following functions:-

- Customer;
- Commercial, Investment and Change;
- Localities;
- Strategy;
- Performance and Governance; and
- Communications and Engagement.

Further detailed information was given on the functions of the different job roles within the new structure:-

- Specialist;
- Case Manager;
- Customer Champion; and
- Locality Champion.

The Assistant Director highlighted the key goals the New Council aimed to achieve:-
One point of contact to deal with queries on behalf of customers;
For majority of queries to be resolved at first point of contact; and
To promote self-serve, there were terminals available in reception for customers to use to resolve their own queries.

Another factor that assisted the transition into the new structure was the Accommodation Project. Works had been carried out on the new open plan office space, which included a break out area that staff used at lunch time and for impromptu meetings. The open plan office space also encouraged one of the key behaviours in the new structure, working together.

With the formation of New Council in April 2019, the Shadow Authority arrangements were explained to the Board. Currently there were 84 Councillors, however, the numbers would be reduced to reflect the new joined up area and the work being carried out by the Boundary Commission. The New Council area would cover 1190 square kilometres with a population of 152,000.

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

- Clarification was requested on the organisational structure and the headship roles.
Certain details were still to be decided for the top level of management and would be communicated to the Board once they were known.
- Board Members queried where certain departments sat within the new functional areas.
Explanation was given on where certain job roles would sit but that there would not be department silos in the future.
- Board Members queried how the new structure would be implemented.
The recruitment process would ensure that staff adopted the behaviours and skills that were desired and required for the way of working.

Resolved that the Board noted the officer's update.

7. TPAS Conference Update

Councillor Bowrah presented an update on the TPAS Conference.

Cllr Bowrah attended the conference with three other members of the Tenant Services Management Board. The sessions that they attended were:-

- New Approach o Resident Engagement;
- Social Housing Policy Today;
- Get The Culture Right, Get The Involvement Right;
- How can we Resolve Complaints Faster and Smarter;
- Housing and Disabled People; and
- Digital and Engaging with Residents.

The members were impressed with the venue and found majority of the sessions engaging and informative.

The conference was attended by 229 delegates that represented 63 organisations.

Cllr Bowrah believed that their attendance showed the commitment of the Council towards their tenants and accommodation.

A copy of the AGM notes were handed out to the Board.

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

- Board Members requested reassurance that the Board would exist in the new structure.
The Tenants Services Development Officer advised the Members that the Board would fall under the new Headship for Communications, who was not in post yet. However, he believed that the tenants would continue to be involved in the new structure but that it might be in a different format. Due to the Grenfell Tower tragedy, Central Government had issued Green Papers that highlighted the importance of tenant feedback and communication and the Officer identified that the Council had a statutory requirement to engage with tenants.

Resolved that the Board noted the Member's update.

8. **Star Survey Update**

The Tenants Services Development Officer presented an update on the Star Survey.

The Board Members had received a report that detailed the results of the survey. One of the results highlighted was the same day repairs.

Resolved that the Board noted the officer's update.

(The meeting ended at 7.50pm)