

Minutes of a Meeting of the Tenants' Strategic Group held in the John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton TA1 1HE, on Monday, 23 September 2024 at 6.00 pm

**Present:**

Luke Manning (Chair)

Alex Akhigbemen  
Cllr Norman Cavill  
Joanna Draus  
Kevin Hellier  
Zoia Stiebaieva

Jessie Bunn  
Mandy Dalley  
Colin England  
Alison Mckillop  
Stephen Tate

**Officers Present:**

Ian Candlish  
Claire Reed  
Sharon Sloan  
Simon Lewis  
Sharon Yarde  
Kalina Surma  
Dan Bennett

Clerk: Max Perry

**77 Apologies for Absence - Agenda Item 1**

The Chair received apologies from:

Abbie Johnson, Richard Watters, Ivor Hussey, Cllr Fran Smith, Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts, John Moore, Ray Burgess.

**78 Welcome from the Chair - Agenda Item 2**

The Chair welcomed the group and went through housekeeping procedures.

**79 Minutes from the previous meeting - Agenda Item 3**

The Chair resolved that the minutes from the previous meeting on 29 July 24 were noted as a true record.

**80 Engagement Group Updates - Agenda Item 4**

The Chair gave an overview of the updates from the engagement groups. A summarised version of the discussion is below:

- Tenants Action Group (TAG) - The group have had two new potential members that came to see what they are doing and hear about all the projects they are working on.
- Applications for the Child Youth Initiative Fund continue to be received. In the last meeting the group agreed to fund two projects, £3k to St Gregory playing field and £2990 For Wellington Counselling CIC.
- Estate Improvement Fund Applications have been received from Georgina Farebrother to have a fence around a bin store and a barrier to prevent cars coming into Willie Gill Court, this was approved for funding.
- Leycroft Grove continues to be on the agenda and the Chair has met with Jack Mount and Stephen Boland to discuss fruit trees and possibly benches to be placed there, Jack will come back with a quote as all the ground needs to be rotavated and re seeded. The Chair is meeting with Stephen Boland to look at progress each month. The roads are complete.
- Voids - Due to changes in the TAG group: Brian Wyatt, Lou Heald, Catherine Jarvis and Christine Smith are continuing to visit the VOIDS.
- They have seen the work required to get to the lettable standard. They have understood that at times it is about safety as well as the lettable standard, where additional work has been needed in a garden to prevent accidents
- Damp and Mould -The group met again on the 16th August 2024. They scrutinised the number of open cases and monitored the progress of the Damp and Mould action plan. They reviewed the Damp & Mould Audit. Ian Candlish attended this meeting to discuss the findings and action plan.
- Procurement – for the Building Safety Group, a training session with 2 workshops was held. For Voids contractor procurement, Wayne Hobson received a presentation on what is needed for procurement and timescales. For communal cleaning procurement group – consultation feedback is currently being put together for a proposal report to come to TSG in November.

**Resolved – The group noted the update.**

## **81 Directorate Report - Agenda Item 5**

Ian Candlish, Head of Housing Property introduced the directorate report, and the following points were raised and discussed (summarised)

- HRA - The Service continues to work hard to recruit and populate the structures. However, there remains quite a few vacancies in the service leading to pressures on staff and additional work by managers progressing recruitments. We have seen several resignations from the service at a senior level which the service is working hard to replace. The Council's job evaluation process is also incomplete for several posts including the HRA business function.
- Demolition is nearing completion for Phase B and Ci at North Taunton Woolaway Project. The Council have appointed Classic Builders as the main

contractor who will take possession of the site on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2024.

- Demolition at Wordsworth Drive/Coleridge Crescent is substantially complete. This site will then be landscaped and retained by the HRA as a future development site when budget is available, estimated 2026/2027 to enable planning and tender to be completed.
- At Seaward Way/Rainbow Way, the first 6 houses are now completed and advertised on Homefinder. Allocations are imminent and move ins start in the next couple of weeks. This will be followed in batches with the other 15 houses, finishing with the two chalet bungalows with disabled ground floor facilities. The apartment blocks will follow, and the whole scheme is programmed to be completed by December 2024. Another open event is planned, to view a completed apartment, subject to safe access being available at a suitable time. At the previous open house event over 100 residents attended. The properties are net zero, EPC A rated and with new technology to monitor the energy performance of the homes.
- The scheme at Oxford Inn is now in contract with Classic Builders. The scheme is anticipated to start with demolition of the existing buildings beginning on September the 19<sup>th</sup>. Construction is likely to take 14 months to complete.
- 24 units of modular construction are planned. The planning process will require phosphate and biodiversity net gain mitigation plans. These issues are causing challenges for developers progressing schemes including the HRA. The scheme also has a challenge in relation to funding.
- Property Team There is ongoing recruitment for the trades area to ensure we continue to meet target completion dates. Also, within the management team we are still undergoing recruitment for a Repairs Surveyor and a Maintenance Manager. The vacancy for the Maintenance Manager is a challenge and we have had one failed recruitment round already. We are now investigating options for putting in place interim agency provisions, as well as consideration of alternative permanent recruitment mechanisms.
- The most recent available data at the time of writing this report for repairs performance, July 2024, demonstrates on target performance for both emergency responsive repairs (100%) and non-emergency responsive repairs (96%).
- Income and Tenancy Management Team - Internal officer discussions continue to be developed in response to change proposals that will affect the delivery of extra care support services. From April 2025 the current change proposals will see housing related support services currently delivered by Wayahead Care, being delivered directly by Somerset Council's in-house landlord service. Personal care will continue to be provided by Wayahead Care.
- Officers continue to work closely with members of the Tenants' Action Group and have recently benefited from an award of grant funding at Wille Gill Court for a garden project.

After discussing the report the group raised the following points (summarised):

- Preparation for the damp/mould season.
- The complaints that have gone to the ombudsman, the reasons why and the

expected rulings

- Tenancy management – the level of officer resource required for the new properties in Rainbow Way, Minehead.
- Downsizing and the need for the home move post recruitment.
- With new tenancy management for sheltered housing/extra care housing, and how that will be managed with staff sickness.
- Voicescapes used for rent recovery and the possibility of wider use.

**Resolved – The group noted the report.**

## **82 Q1 (April-June) Performance, and finance report - Agenda Item 6**

Ian Candlish, Head of Housing Property, and Simon Lewis, Head of Housing, Income and Tenancy Management, introduced the performance and finance report. The key points are summarised below:

- Formal complaint numbers have increased in quarter 1 on quarter 4 of the previous year, rising from 8 to 12. However, we recognise that a lot of compliments are not recorded formally and we continue to work on creating a new process to ensure compliments are captured and staff are given feedback to accurately reflect when there has been great service.
- Satisfaction with repairs forms part of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures survey completed by an independent company called Acuity. The TSM question focuses on repairs in last 12 months. 76% of customers surveyed in May 2023 and 79% surveyed in November 2023 were satisfied with the repair carried out in their home in the last 12 months. The combined result was 78% which is above median of 76% (comparison with other landlords by Acuity). This figure was submitted to the regulator and reported to TSG in March 2024. The figure for the TSM survey carried out in May 2024 was 77%.
- Customer Services and Housing management teams meet regularly to review performance and identify training needs. The Housing phone lines are given priority over general calls to ensure the standard or performance remains within target as much as possible, although this is inevitably affected if there is staff absence.
- Performance of recovery of current tenant arrears continues to remain strong, and we have consistently hit the Housemark top quartile in performance in this area for many months. Success has been attributed to the stability, experience and hard work of the team in this area who have been able to successfully build a good relationship with tenants.

After discussing the report the group raised the following points (summarised):

- Slow progress on specific complaints.
- The lack of data on Customer Lettable Standards Satisfaction due to redundancies.

- Customer Repair Satisfaction feedback.
- Customer call statistics and the triage system and difficulty getting through to people.
- Supported housing and annual reviews and work to catch up on these.
- Void re-letting time is getting worse and the context behind this.
- Dealing with antisocial behaviour.
- The HRA overspend of £2.3m.

**Resolved – the group noted the report.**

**83 TSM Results Presentation - Agenda Item 7**

This item was deferred due to time constraints.

**84 Decent Homes Presentation (Presentation to follow) - Agenda Item 8**

Ian Candlish, Head of Housing Property, gave a presentation. The key points are summarised below:

- The criteria to meet the Decent Homes Standard.
- The statutory requirements.
- How compliancy levels with the decent homes standard change.
- Work ongoing to meet the standard and who delivers it.
- Resident engagement.
- The current position of homes failing to meet the standard – 4.94%.
- Comparison with the Housemark accreditation scheme benchmarks.

The following points were raised and discussed (summarised):

- The high target threshold of 0.5%-1% failures.
- The legacy issues leading to not meeting the standard.
- Comparison between local authorities and registered social landlords.

**Resolved – The group noted the presentation.**

**85 Any other Business - Agenda Item 9**

The group were informed that they are due for a re-election for Chair and Vice-Chair of TSG, and that an email would be sent out for expressions of interest. This would be followed by an anonymous vote.

**(The meeting ended at 7.40 pm)**

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**CHAIR**