

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, 29 July 2024 at 6.00 pm

Present:

Chair: Luke Manning

Jessie Bunn
Mandy Dalley
Kevin Hellier
Ivor Hussey
Alison Mckillop
Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts
Zoia Stiebaeva

Jay Burgess
Joanna Draus
Antonio Hubbard
Abbie Johnson
John Moore
Cllr Fran Smith
Stephen Tate

Officers Present:

Stephen Boland
Ian Candlish
Roxane mcClean
Claire Reid
Sharon Sloan
Kathryn Warren
Sharon Yarde

Clerk: Josh Barrett

68 Apologies for Absence - Agenda Item 1

The chair took apologies from, Councillor Marcus Barr, Alex Akhigbemen and Richard Watters

69 Welcome from the Chair - Agenda Item 2

The Chair welcomed the group and went through housekeeping procedures.

70 Minutes from the previous meeting - Agenda Item 3

The Chair resolved that the minutes from the previous meeting on 20 May 24 were noted as a true record.

71 Engagement Group Updates - Agenda Item 4

The Chair gave an overview of the updates from the engagement groups. A

summarised version of discussion is below:

- TAG - The group have decided on a topic for scrutiny. They are going to investigate "Compliance communication". They held a workshop on 3rd July to plan their scrutiny. Their final report and recommendations will be seen by TSG for endorsement. Unfortunately, the Vice Chair of the group passed away, she will be greatly missed, and the group attended the funeral to pay their respects. The group are actively looking to recruit new members and a new Vice Chair.
- VOIDS - This will be conducted by four members of the TAG group: Brian Wyatt, Sally Mitchell, Catherine Jarvis and Christine Smith. The group have continued visiting properties and they have seen the work required to get to the lettable standard. They are now also aware of some of the issues in being able to relet within the SLA e.g. fire doors can take 8 weeks to be delivered! Pictures of all the properties. Before and after, have been recorded.
- Kitchens/Bathrooms/Roofing - 268 kitchens have been completed and signed off since January 2024. Between 12- 16 kitchens are being completed every week. Over 104 bathrooms have been fitted since January 2024. 25 roofs have been completed this financial year.
- Windows and Doors - Nationwide now progressing well, this financial year target of 600 installations.

RESOLVED – THE GROUP NOTED THE UPDATE

72 Directorate Report - Agenda Item 5

Stephen Boland, Specialist introduced the directorate report, and the following points were raised and discussed (summarised)

- The HRA finance team have finalised the year end accounts, and the final outturn figure is positive. This is good for the HRA and includes Homes in Somerset finance and the In-House Service finances in the single account. There are a few underlying matters which need to be progressed which are a) staff costs for the in house service show significant underspends and this is primarily due to the delays in agreeing JDs and salaries for the permanent staff structure in particular the HRA business function area b) Significant overspend on void costs being charged to revenue c) The capital programme was not in full swing and there was a significant underspend. The position on voids and staffing are not sustainable and more actions are required. The capital programme has been delivering more works over the past 6 months.
- 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 again the service is working hard to replace. The Council's job evaluation process is also incomplete for several posts including the HRA business function.

- A meeting took place in May with the Somerset Council's appointed lead regulator. This was an introductory meeting to discuss co-regulation and the consumer standards. The Service Director Housing has since written to the regulator to update on performance which has the high insight of the year end returns benchmarking our services with other landlords.
- There has been successful recruitment recently into the property team area to ensure we continue to meet target completion dates. However, we are now recruiting for a Roofing Supervisor, Repairs Surveyor, and Maintenance Manager following these roles leaving the council.
- Demand for advertised vacancies remains strong with lots of Homefinder Somerset bids being received for each property advertised. Currently we are seeing a range of properties becoming available to let, for example, 1 bedroomed right through to 4 bedroomed properties.
- We continue to focus on complaint handling as a core service to ensure high quality, well investigated complaints are provided to our residents, within required timescales. Where resourcing has proven challenging, we have extended complaints and managed this process by communicating with our residents, to make sure we are managing their expectations and being transparent in our complaint handling.

The following points were raised and discussed (summarised):

- The positive of procuring 100 new homes
- Where tenants go at first point of call for benefit discrepancies
- What the council are doing to mitigate issues caused by lack of staff in HRA team.
- Hardship fund.
- Internal transfers of property between tenants.
- 1 RAAC bloke within Somerset
- Percentage of homes that require improvements to meet the acceptable homes standards.

RESOLVED – THE GROUP NOTED THE REPORT

Ian Candlish Head of Housing Property the Finance Year End/Out Turn Report. The following points were raised and discussed (summarised):

- This report provides the financial outturn position of the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the financial year 2023/24. To note that the HRA has two operating models: an in-house service in the west of the county and an arms-length management organisation (ALMO) in the north of the county delivered by Homes in Sedgemoor. This report summarises the overall financial performance of the two operating models collectively.
- The outturn figures included are provisional subject to the completion of the external audit of the statutory financial statements. The audit is due to be completed between October and December with the findings due to be reported to the Audit and Governance Committee on 30 January 2025.
- The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) revenue outturn position for 2023/24 is a net underspend of £810k (-1.58% of gross income).
- The HRA is a ring-fenced, self-financing, account used to manage the Council's housing stock of 5,652 properties during the year, with the Council acting as the Landlord.
- The HRA has two operating models: an in-house service in the west of the county and an arms-length management organisation (ALMO) in the north of the county delivered by Homes in Sedgemoor. This report summarises the overall financial performance of the two operating models collectively.

After discussing the report, the following points were raised: -

- The high cost of voids
- What project is the £209,000 earmarked for – it is reserved for Hinkley community grants
- The comparison to other years for write-offs and the reasons for write offs.

RESOLVED – THE GROUP NOTED THE REPORT

74 Housing Ombudsman Self Assessment - Agenda Item 7

Claire Reed, Case MGT Lead Performance and Improvement introduced the Housing Ombudsman Self-Assessment. The following points were raised and discussed (summarised):

- The report is to update the Tenants' Strategic Group on the new Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code which came into effect from 1st April 2024, and the work that has been undertaken by the Customer Resolution team to ensure compliance.
- The Housing Ombudsman first introduced the Complaint Handling Code in 2020. Since then, we have worked hard to align our policies and processes

with each version of the Code, to ensure compliance and the delivery of a strong complaint handling service for our residents. In February 2024, the Housing Ombudsman Service published their revised Complaint Handling Code, with which we needed to be compliant as from 1st April 2024. From this date (and for the first time), compliance with the Code became a statutory requirement of the Transparency, Influence and Accountability consumer standard set out by the Regulator for Social Housing.

- New powers were given to the Housing Ombudsman Service to monitor our complaint handling performance. They can now check our compliance through:
 - Oversight and scrutiny - the self-assessment exercise.
 - Policy - by using our self-assessment declaration to check the policy against our submission
 - Practice - checking the extent to which we are managing our complaints in line with the Code and framework based on the enquiries they receive, investigations they undertake and determinations they may make against us.

RESOLVED – THE GROUP NOTED THE REPORT

75 Introduction to Compliance and Regulation - Agenda Item 8

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

- This self-assessment form should be completed by the complaints officer, and it must be reviewed and approved by the landlord's governing body at least annually.
- Once approved, landlords must publish the self-assessment as part of the annual complaint's performance and service improvement report on their website. The governing body's response to the report must be published alongside this.
- Landlords are required to complete the self-assessment in full and support all statements with evidence, with additional commentary as necessary.
- We recognise that there may be a small number of circumstances where landlords are unable to meet the requirements, for example, if they do not have a website. In these circumstances, we expect landlords to deliver the intentions of the Code in an alternative way, for example by publishing information in a public area so that it is easily accessible.

After the introduction the group raised the following points (summarised):

- Mobility scooter charging, is a fire hazard, was promised a forecourt style charging area.
- Bin placement for blocks
- TSM data
- Comparison Homes in Sedgemoor TSM data.

- Confirmation of the peer groups and Somerset Council
- Tendering new cleaning contract for communal areas
- Service charges for cleaning
- Taunton East Development Trust

RESOLVED – THE GROUP NOTED THE INTRODUCTION PRESENTATION

76 Any other Business - Agenda Item 9

The Chair asked for any other business of which not was raised. The Chair thanked all for attending and closed the meeting.

(The meeting ended at 7.25 pm)

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CHAIR