

SWT TENANTS STRATEGIC GROUP

MONDAY, 16TH DECEMBER, 2019

**Present: Jessie Bunn,
Dennis Galpin, Richard
Hirsch, Ivor Hussey and
Livi Mongare**

Also in Attendance:

**Officers: James Barrah, Si
Lewis, Stephen Boland, Ricl
Wiseman, Tracey Meadows**

**Apologies: Francesca Smith, Janet Lloyd and
Alex Akhigbemen**

8 Apologies

Apologies were received from Alex Akhigbemen, Judith Hegarty, Paul Cram and Corrine McMylor

9 Notes from previous meeting 11 November 2019

The minutes of the meeting of the Strategic Tenants board held on 11 November 2019 were signed and taken as read.

10 Public Question Time

No questions were received for Public Question Time.

11 Declarations of Interest

Declarations of Interests.

Mrs J Bunn All Items SWT Housing Tenant Personal Spoke and Voted
Mr D Galpin All Items SWT Housing Tenant Personal Spoke and Voted
Mr K Hellier All Items SWT Housing Tenant Personal Spoke and Voted
Mr I Hussey All Items SWT Housing Tenant Personal Spoke and Voted

12 The year ahead for Housing (verbal update) - James Barrah, Director of Housing

The Director of Housing presented a verbal update on the year ahead for Housing and the key priorities for the service in the coming 12 months.

Corporate picture

Monday, 16th December, 2019

The recent transformation process has had an impact on our services as a Local Authority with the new adapted and streamline ways of working. Due to the grant from the Government ceasing in the next financial year we need to make sure that we can financially sustain our future and generate other savings.

During the transformation process, services to tenants has caused some disruption with changes in personnel and gaps in service and our response time, which we are trying to address. Services will continue to stabilise and improve.

There have been changes to our leadership of the new Council with the Liberal Democrats now in power and the leading opposition group being the Independent group. The new leadership have come in with energy, ideas and a new corporate plan that has two key features, one is housing and the other is a strong drive for climate change. This will be echoed in what we are trying to do in our housing services. Our new Chief Executive brings a sense of focus and urgency to get things done in our communities and is very keen for us to get out into the community and stretch ourselves and improve the customer experience across the district.

With the recruitment of the new directors the organisation will be divided into four directorates and housing will be one of those four. There will be some recruitment as the new structure will have a greater emphasis in some key areas, firstly around development. Our business plan review will allow us to take more borrowing on with removal of our debt cap, this will allow us to build more new homes than we can at present and finance those safely within the business plan.

Compliance

The key themes around this would be fire safety implications, we need certainty about what we can build and can't build, what safe materials we can use and to make sure that the correct components were fitted. Tenants would be involved in the decision making as we need to ensure that a range of tenants have their say. Clarity would be sought on this as soon as possible and reported back.

Actions around fire risk assessment works have taken place, we need to get back to clear hallways, upgrade windows that open into hallways, fire doors and bin stores.

We are continuing with our electrical safety installation tests with a catch up programme ongoing.

Gas safety checks are good, and we need to maintain this.

Social Housing Regulator – in January we will be subject to regulatory intervention around consumer standards and for the very first time our rent standard will be scrutinised along with the regulator for social housing. The regulator has been scrutinising the social housing sector for many years, they rate and assess on their governance and viability and also some discussion on the standard around tenant engagement. This would drive us to perform at a higher level to make sure that we are doing a good job and to keep standards high.

Development and regeneration – our debt cap has gone. We have been working with Savills to ascertain how we can borrow money to build more homes. It was established that over the next 5 years that we can borrow money to build 500 new homes, this includes the North Taunton development.

Regeneration – The North Taunton development would deliver a great housing scheme which would add to our stock of social housing.

Woolaway – we have plans to regenerate these remaining Woolaway homes.

Climate Change – the Council needs to lead the way to address climate change. When new kit is to be installed in properties we need to make sure that we sell the product to the tenants successfully as we are still getting some refusals. The standards on new builds will also need to be discussed with zero carbon being an option on some properties.

Efficiencies – leads on the big three processes, income, repairs and voids. There has been some strong engagement with the team.

Communities – ensuring our services are to the benefit of the customer and supporting communities where we know that there is ongoing hardship.

Comments from members included;

- Have we higher properties at present? *We do not have anything over four stories;*
- Are you looking at external bin stores? *This is flagged in the fire risk assessment programme;*
- What is the rough age of our oldest properties 1950's

13 **North Taunton Woolaway Project - Richard Wiseman**

The Property Investment Manager, Richard Wiseman updated the group on the North Taunton Woolaway project.

Reported that the Government has stated that the Woolaway homes were no longer fit for purpose and would continue to be an increased maintenance burden for the Council which will impact on the new homes project. This is why we have decided to make a flagship housing scheme out of them. Neither the former Taunton Deane BC nor West Somerset DC has embarked on anything of this scale. With all 5 phases we will be creating 276 homes which will become a net increase of 86 new homes.

We will continue to work with the community to make sure that tenant's needs are provided for. Planning permission was granted for Phase A unanimously by the Planning Committee on the 27 March 2019. The Design Review Panel considered the design and community consultation process undertaken was extremely rigorous and considered to be outstanding and the design has the full potential to be exceptional. Phase A will start early next year.

Comments included;

- Were there any problems decanting residents from their properties? *No properties were made available with moving fees paid;*

14 **Housing development pipeline - Richard Wiseman, Programme Manager**

The Property Investment Manager, Richard Wiseman updated the group on the Housing development pipeline

Reported that we have completed 4 short term let units in Outer Circle and we converted the old link centre into 1 bed flats, these were perfect for someone who wanted to be in a short term let.

The garages in Laxton Road had been demolished to provide 8 new units, building would start in the New Year.

We are currently looking at Wellsprings Road to potentially put 10-15 new units. These could potentially be manufactured homes.

Milton Road – three garages were not in use which we could build on without buying the land as it is already ours.

Blackdown Road garages – you could develop quite a lot of home on this piece of land.

There is more new homes in the pipeline that we are in the process of negotiation.

Comments from Members included;

- What is the life time of a Roll along? *About 70 years, it is made out of wood and steel;*

15 **Housing information, communication and technology update - To follow**

The Housing Director, James Barrah updated the group on Housing information, communication and technology

(Slides to be included with the minutes)

Reported that Open housing will replace the existing Academy system. 5 new posts will be created to implement the new system. The system is an Activity premises database within it the process and the work flows need to be consistent with how we do things and then staff need to be supported on how they make the transition across. Stated that Open Assets was already funded and already underway. This system is our Asset Management Database which holds the records of our homes. All information about the properties will have a unique record number and hang off of one record. These are some of the things Open Assets will provide for us. Phase 1 which includes the stock condition, decent homes, data, asbestos the energy rating, scenario planner which looks at options on where we would spend money on the properties is all part of phase 1 and looking to go live in February 2020. Our data was at present in a test environment subject to user acceptance testing. We need to get this over the line to start using the system effectively.

Thoughts on how to engage the customer would be looked at and reported back.

No comments were made on this subject

16 **Housing retrofit and new build thermal principles - Richard Wiseman, Programme Manager**

The Property Investment Manager, Richard Wiseman updated the group on Housing retrofit and new build thermal principles

Premium green homes were reported as cheap to live in by residents as well as reducing our carbon footprint and may reduce maintenance costs over time because it generally requires a high skill and better quality level of building so you are looking at reducing your energy usage, the use of solar energy, reducing the amount of water usage, the building materials with doors and windows produced to minimise the loss of heat.

A project to build 111 Lang easy forms was achieved in Wellington. Lang easy forms are a type of non-traditional properties which will last for at least 20/30 years, but we are not in a position in regenerating those so previously the Wellington Woolaway project focused on some of those as they were harder to heat and we still had 300 or so of them. We took these homes and insulated them we put in new windows and doors and we changed the heating systems which increased the energy rating systems on these homes. 30 properties in Slapes Close, Taunton were also updated.

Tenants in these properties were spending £1,600 per year on heating. Our intent was making these properties cheaper to run and to make them more comfortable and attractive, this would also have an impact on our carbon emissions as a business.

A new strategy will be coming forward which will state that we want to address climate change, we want to improve the performance of our properties, we want to deliver a package of works rather than individual components and we will redirect some of our investments to groups of properties in order to try to do this and increase the EPC rating across our stock. These homes will be passively heated buy ourselves. A strategy document proposing this will be produced next year.

Comments made by Members included;

- Are you looking at a programme for new installation for sheltered housing? *We will be looking at this in January;*
- I would like to see more solar heating;

Duration of the meeting: 6.00 - 7.45 pm

Chairman at the meeting on
Monday, 16 December 2019