

Tenants' Action Group – Annual Report 2020-21 to the Tenants' Strategic Group

1. Introduction

The Tenants' Action Group had their first meeting (virtually on Teams) in November 2020, facilitated by the newly established Housing Performance team. In order to ensure that meetings could proceed when Covid prevented face to face gatherings, the group were supported by providing tablets to each member who did not have appropriate technology, SIM cards for those without access to internet and one to one visits to provide training. Some members had repeat visits to ensure they were given confidence to use the new technology.

Two members, who attend meetings together, decided to step back from the group until meetings could resume in person and 1 member resigned permanently due to health reasons, this left 7 members. Meeting online was more challenging and there were a reduced number of members at each meeting. Despite this, members supported bi-monthly meetings being held online, the group worked hard to write and agree a new Terms of Reference and start working with the Council to develop services and distribute funding to help local communities.

2. Work Undertaken

2.1 Terms of Reference

When the Housing Performance team started working with the group, they did not yet have an agreed Terms of Reference, this was the priority to ensure that the purpose of the group was clear. TAG decided to renew their membership with TPAS and make use of the consultancy time included in the cost of membership to get some advice on a new Terms of Reference (ToR). The new ToR was agreed in February 2021.

2.2 Estate Walkabout's

Members raised concerns over the prior notice for Estate Walkabouts and whether the information included in letters prior to walkabouts was clear and received in a timely manner to enable communities to be informed about who would be carrying them out, when and where. The subsequent action plan involved:

- Adding a photo of the staff member carrying out the walkabout to the letter
- Staff members carrying out Estate Walkabouts would be given a tabard to wear ensure they are clear and visible to community members
- TAG members would sign up to attend different walkabouts to ensure there was a representative present at each walkabout

Due to Covid restrictions, some of these actions have been delayed due to restrictions on the number of people allowed to gather. Recent patch changes have

also meant that we are awaiting an updated Estate Walkabout schedule from the Tenancy team. Once this is received TAG members will sign up to join walkabout. Photos have been added to prior notice letters however, there have been some inconsistencies with this therefore the group will continue to work with the council to improve this process over the coming year.

2.3 Leycroft Grove Estate Improvement Groundworks

Chair of the TAG, Wayne Hobson raised concerns over the progress of the improvement project that had been planned at Leycroft Grove, with £100k previously reported to have been put aside for the project which appeared to have been put on hold after transformation. Wayne and the group have worked hard to ensure that these improvement plans are followed up on, writing to the Director of Housing and holding the Council to account to follow through on its promise for improvement works for this area.

- The project has since been re-established, TAG were provided an overview of the project.
- At the most recent meeting the Capital Programme Manager updated the group to say that a preferred contractor had been selected.
- The project is currently on pause until approval is given from Highways at County Council – the Capital Programme Manager is chasing this as work cannot start until approval is received.

Monitoring of the Leycroft Grove project will continue to be on the agenda for the TAG in the upcoming year.

2.4 Funding through the Estate Improvement Fund

A fund of £10k held by the group dedicated to improving neighbourhoods via the purchasing of benches or other small items which improve community spaces, usually on recommendation from Officers.

In the last financial year, the group received 8 applications to the Estate Improvement Fund over the year primarily to provide replacement benches for community spaces and carry out ground improvement works to ensure community gardens were safe and accessible. An officer grant funding request was also received from the compliance team, to provide funds to replace Defibrillator Pads for various Sheltered Housing Schemes.

2.5 Funding for Local Community Projects through the Youth Initiative Fund

A fund of £20k held by the group, available via grant applications of up to £3k to support organisations and projects which seek to improve the lives, health and wellbeing of people aged 0 - 25 years old whose families are tenants of Somerset West and Taunton Council (SW&T) and to help such organisations and projects to become sustainable and more self-sufficient.

Despite the challenges presented by Covid, the group assessed 7 applications to the Youth Initiative Fund and subsequently distributed a £3k grant to 4 local organisations.

- **Arts Taunton** - Funding for 20 arts and wellbeing workshops in North Taunton Youth Centre youth centres and in after school sessions in Taunton Academy school reaching age group 11-25.
- **Somerset Art Works** - Funding to help run a programme of Family, School and Community Activities to provide Covid compliant creative activities for children and their families in Priorswood and Lyngford.
- **Wellington Counselling** - Funding for 60 hours of 1:1 counselling sessions for children & young people up to the age of 25. To pay for creating a survey that will enable the organisation to ask young people (11-25) within the known population of the tenants, what they want from Wellington Counselling by way of therapeutic support.
- **Youth Unlimited** - Funding for detached (street-based) youth work covering Taunton twice a week through the InteGr8 project.
- **Contribution to the SPARKLE Campaign** – A donation of £191 worth of presents was provided to the SPARKLE campaign last Christmas, to provide the children of local families in need with presents.

Development of the Youth Initiative Fund

The group have decided to re-name the fund to the Children and Youth Initiative fund after concerns were raised regarding the previous wording excluding organisations providing projects for younger children. The group wanted it to be clear that the fund is available for organisations working with children aged 0-25 years, hence the new name was agreed.

A new online application form has also been created alongside a webpage to be shared with local organisations, to make applying for and distributing funding for this financial year easier than ever.

2.6 Development of the Group

The group helped to design and choose a new logo for the Tenants' Action Group, this helps to raise awareness of the groups work as it can be added to publications or funding reports produced by local organisations that the group have supported.



Group members have attended training provided by TPAS on courses such as 'Holding your landlord to account' and the recent 'Complaints Masterclass'. Members are committed to widening their awareness of key issues in the sector by attending upcoming training courses over the next year.

Various articles have been posted in Tenants' Newsletters to attempt to raise awareness of the group and their activities and to encourage new members to join. Over the next year the Housing Performance team will continue to work with TAG to publicise their activities and help to recruit new members to bring the group back up to full membership of 10 members.

2.7 Involvement in the newly established Damp and Mould Task Group

The Chair of TAG Wayne Hobson will be part of the new Task Group established to review current procedures for dealing with damp and mould and produce an updated procedure which ensures damp and mould issues are dealt with efficiently and effectively for our tenants.

3. Financial Summary

The total budget assigned for 2020-21 was £44,300.

Name of Fund	Allocated Budget	Allocated Funds	Total Expenditure
Youth Initiative Fund	£20,000	YIF projects - £12,000 SPARKLE (Amazon gifts) - £191	£12,191
Estate Improvement Fund	£10,000	8 Benches - £3253 Defib Pads - £600	£3853
Other	£16,300	TPAS Subscription - £100 Expenses - £100 ICT Expenses - £858	£1058
Total Expenditure			£17,102

4. Looking ahead

In September the group had their first face to face meeting. It was wonderful to have everyone together in the same room and be able to catch up properly. Meeting in person meant that discussions flowed much more readily, and the group had a productive meeting regarding their forward plan. Over the upcoming year the group will:

- Continue to monitor the progress of the Leycroft Grove improvement works, receiving regular updates from the Capital Works Manager.
- Continue to work with the Council to improve the Estate Walkabout process.
- Participate in task groups such as the Damp and Mould start and finish group.
- Focus on 2 key aspects of the Housing Service, these are: Voids and Contractors. The group have previously had some involvement in monitoring the Voids process and they will be looking to reinstate this early in 2022.

5. Conclusion

Despite the challenges presented over the past year, the group have continued to stay connected through their online meetings and improve local communities and neighbourhoods through the distribution of funding. Over the next year, TAG is committed to increasing their membership and reinstating a more active role,

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working with the council to improve their services and continuing to support as many local projects as possible through funding opportunities.