

SWT Tenants Strategic Group - 28 November 2022

Present: Luke Manning (Chair)

Alex Akhigbemen, Paul Cram, Colin England, Kevin Hellier, Ivor Hussey, Samantha Rickward, Janet Lloyd and Francesca Smith

Officers: Shari Hallett, Claire Reed (Housing), Sharon Yarde (Housing), Roxanne Mclean, Stephen Boland, Chris Brown, Ian Candlish, Kevin Alexander, Shari Hallett (Housing Performance Manager), Simon Lewis and Kerry Prisco and Tracey Meadows

Also Present: Councillor Brenda Weston

(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm)

68. **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Jessie Bunn and Cllr Mark Lithgow and James Barrah.

69. **Notes/action points from previous meeting**

Action points;

- Point 1 – The group felt that the Tenancy Case Managers were still not doing their job correctly. No introductions were being made when they walked the estates and tabards stating who they were, were not worn. The group stated that they would like this to be looked at again.
- Point 2 – Residents had reported to the group that they had received letters regarding the 'estate walkabouts', but these letters did not state timings for the event. Please can this be investigated as some tenants do wish to talk to their tenancy Case Manager.

A group member stated that he had received a letter informing tenants that there would be an estate walkabout of his sheltered housing building. The letter stated that if the tenants required to speak to the Officer, they were asked to make an appointment and not interfere or talk to the Officer whilst they were performing this walk about.

The Assistant Director of Housing and Communities stated that he was unaware of this procedure and not the standard set by Officers. He apologised and said that this was not acceptable as you should be able to walk up to and speak to the Officer and ask questions. This would be investigated and reported back to the group.

The group member also requested that a report of the findings from the block inspections about should be supplied to the tenants. *These reports should be*

shared with the tenants within one week of the estate walkabout. We will look into why this was not being shared and report back to the group.

An update was requested on how the drop-in centres were performing and how many people had come in to use them. *The findings of the drop-in centres would be reported back to the group.*

- Action point 11. Issues with the communal light still not working at Kelway Road. Reported that a meeting with the tenant and Officer would be held to discuss this issue.

70. Directorate Report

The report is to update the Tenants' Strategic Group on work being undertaken and progress made by the Housing Directorate since the last TSG meeting in September.

During discussion of this item the following comments/questions were raised; (summarised)

- Concerns with the report stating the increasing challenge in meeting affordable housing need in the district and specialist accommodation; *we were delivering high numbers of affordable housing compared to historic numbers. However, we are worried that the future projections were low due to phosphate challenges and the viability for private sector developers because of inflationary factors, the costs of materials and less money available within the schemes which could put pressure on the number of affordable housing units that could be delivered;*
- Would the new Capita system be easily integrated with the new Council? *We have not yet mapped to the Council's system. We will look at this and report back to the group;*

The Tenants' Strategic Group noted the report

71. Tenants Action Group (TAG) Report

The Tenants' Action Group Annual Report stated that the group have continued to stay connected through their face-to-face meetings and improve local communities and neighbourhoods through the distribution of funding. Over the next year, TAG is committed to increasing their membership and continuing with their active role, working with the council to improve their services, and continuing to support as many local projects as possible through funding opportunities. With the upcoming merger, the Chair can see that TAG will be even busier and good clear communication, between the authority and the tenants is vital to establishing trust.

During discussion of this item the following comments/questions were raised; (summarised)

- Regarding grounds maintenance, could TAG confirm that they were happy with what grounds maintenance were doing and were there any issues to take back to Darren Hill? *TAG confirmed that they were happy with this;*

The group thanked the TAG group for the report and for the work that they were doing.

72. Q2 Performance

The report provides an update on the housing performance through key performance measures and financial information for the first quarter of 22/23 (July -September 2022).

During discussion of this item the following comments/questions were raised; (summarised)

- What would happen if there is an overspend at the end of the financial year (in relation to moving into the new Unitary Council)? *The process is the same as any other year in that any overspend would have to be funded from general reserves, the current position is okay in that any overspend could be funded from existing general reserves, and that the balance of general reserves at the end of the financial year would remain above the minimum balance required;*
- On the report it states that we have made 20 safeguarding referrals to the County Council largely related to concerns for adults who required care and support needs. How long did it take to get a referral? *Staff raise concerns within the Housing Directorate, and we have safeguarding champions who log these incidents. We have been rolling out training to staff to ensure that staff are aware of issues. This has resulted in more referrals coming forward, some of these are not strictly safeguarding and do not meet the safeguarding criteria. An assessment by Adult Social Care will take about 6 weeks;*
- Regarding Lettable Standards, how soon after a tenant takes over a property, do you ask for this information and why were the response so low ? *This is undertaken within a month of the tenant taking over their tenancy. We have tried different methods to try to contact tenants. We will now go back to contacting tenants by telephone as this seems the most preferred way. This will be taken as an action point and reported back to the group;*

The TSG noted content of the housing scorecard for quarter 2 (July to September 2022). The executive summary of the HRA finance report (2022/23 Housing Revenue Account Financial Monitoring as at Quarter 2).

73. **Housing Ombudsman Self-assessment update**

The report is to update the TSG on progress made since the report of July 2022 in relation to our compliance with the Housing Ombudsman's revised Complaint Handling Code and the most recent self-assessment against it.

During discussion of this item the following comments/questions were raised; (summarised)

- Could you confirm that responses to complaints were always in writing and not in a text or by phone? *Yes, this is always in writing the complainant could have received a phone call to discuss but the formal response is always in writing;*
- Would we get to see the new policy before it goes live? *We have been working with a group of Officers to draft at the new Somerset complaints policy which would cover all the services for the new Somerset Council. Clarification was needed on whether this document would be circulated to the wider Somerset Customer Panel of which Paul Cram is now a member, but the document can be circulated for comment to the TSG. This would be brought back to the group;*
- Councillor Weston who represented Priorswood Ward raised concerns over literacy issues for tenants who were raising complaints and could not read replies. Were there other mechanisms for making sure that those who struggle are informed in the way they should be? *If a tenant had a literacy issue, we would hope that they would make that clear as part of logging that complaint. Tenants can also log complaints by telephoning us, they do not have to write in. if tenants made us aware of literacy issues, we would accommodate this. Tenants could also nominate an advocate to contact us on their behalf. We will take this away and see how we can build further improvements into our procedure and report back to the group;*

The TSG noted the report.

74. **Housing Directorate 6 monthly complaints report**

The report has been created using data extracted from our monthly reported Compliments and Complaints scorecard, this covers Quarter 1 (Q1) and Quarter 2 (Q2) between the months of April 2022-September 2022. This data gives the Housing Directorate the opportunity to review complaints received with the view to explore, trends, correlation, and improvements.

During discussion of this item the following comments/questions were raised; (summarised)

- Stage 1 complaints, in the first quarter the graph stated 21 complaints, in the second quarter it was 41. That was a total of 62 in 6 months was there

any reason for the increase? *Letters were sent to tenants in August regarding gaining access to properties for compliance checks (Asbestos). We received several complaints regarding the wording and the content of the letter. The letters were sent to tenants who had not responded to two previous letters and were more strongly worded, this did result in us being able to gain access to more properties. We quickly recognised that this was causing an issue and upset to some tenants so when the next batch of letters were sent regarding Asbestos checks, we revised the wording to make sure that we were handling things slightly more sensitively. To date we have not received any further complaints regarding the wording of the letters;*

- Concern was raised regarding when communications from tenants turning into a complaint and at what stage in the process did this become apparent? *We will bring an interim report to the group so that the group can delve into these details of the trends and reasons on why tenants were complaining;*

The TSG noted the report

75. **Capital Programme report**

The report is to update the Tenants' Strategic Group on work being undertaken and progress made by the Housing Directorate since the last TSG meeting.

During discussion of this item the following comments/questions were raised. (summarised)

- The reported stated; 'Aligned with the Capital Programme are specific initiatives to improve the thermal efficiency of the housing stock and reduce energy consumption for residents' was this taking into account the grants that you were receiving from Eon etc, or would this be on top of your figures? *These grants were not on top of our figures;*

The TSG noted the report

76. **AOB**

One of the group stated that there were issues with parking on the residential area of Hope Corner Lane. He was advised to contact his Ward Member and Highways at Somerset County Council for these issues.

(The Meeting ended at 7.11 pm)

