

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, 22 May 2023 at
6.00 pm

Present:

Luke Manning (Chair)
Colin England (Vice-Chair)

Alex Akhigbemen
Paul Cram
Samantha Rickward
Cllr Fran Smith

Jessie Bunn
Ivor Hussey
Cllr Marcus Barr
Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts

In attendance:

Other Members present remotely:

1 Apologies - Agenda Item 1

Apologies were received from Mr Kevin Hellier.

2 Welcome from the Chair - Agenda Item 2

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked the clerk to read out the housekeeping announcement.

3 Minutes from the previous meeting - Agenda Item 3

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 27th March 2023 were circulated with the Agenda.

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the previous meeting of 27th March 2023 were approved nem con.

4 Engagement Groups Update - Agenda Item 4

The Chair gave an overview of the various engagement groups and their activities which were noted.

5 Introduction to the Housing Directorate (verbal report) - Agenda Item 5

The Service Director gave an overview with a set of slides. The Housing side of the Council was a cohort of circa 399 staff with an annual budget of £80m. The service was split into Landlord Services and General Fund Services, alongside the Business Plan, Finance and Growth. An overview of the Directorate Plan for 2023-24 was given. Embedding the housing service within Somerset Council was a key aim. There would be a focus on core services. There would be a new approach to communication with tenants. The Council would deliver its capital programme including grant funded works. There was an increased opportunity to measure in-house service against Homes in Sedgemoor.

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

- The encouragement of apprenticeships and grants was supported with the potential for government grants.
- Discussion took place on the change to a tenancy agreement and the consultation process. Legal input would be sought.
- Concern was raised around the need to build more single occupier properties.
- *There was a desire to build more properties as part of the Business Plan which was a challenge. The Council followed the demand surveys undertaken.*

The update was noted and the Chair thanked the Service Director for his report.

6 Performance Report for Quarter 4 2022/23 - Agenda Item 6

The Housing Performance Lead gave a brief overview of the Performance Report which had been circulated beforehand. The report provided an update on the

housing performance through key performance measures and financial information for the fourth quarter of 22/23 (January-March 2023) and included the end of year position

RESOLVED that the housing scorecard for quarter 4 (January – March 2023) and the end of year position were noted.

7 Tenants' Strategic Group Annual Meeting Plan - Agenda Item 7

This report was to update the Tenants Strategic Group on the agendas for meetings for the forthcoming year.

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

- A request was made for an Agenda Item on the 30 year business plan at a future meeting.

RESOLVED that the Group noted the plan and made comments/suggestions to the forward plan.

8 Annual Complaints Report for 2022/23 including communications complaints deep dive report - Agenda Item 8

The Senior Case Manager gave an overview of the Annual Complaints Report which had been circulated. The key point to recognise was the operation of the new Somerset Council's complaints policy and works alongside the Ombudsman's Code. All complainants are contacted now as part of the process at Stage 1 and 2. There had been 111 compliments over the year which was considered positive.

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

- Queries were raised around the specifications of bins to ensure compliance with Fire Regulations.
- Further information was sought on I-Casework monitoring.
- *This provided a better Audit within the system itself, e.g. time spent on complaints and allowed Customers to view them themselves.*
- Concern was raised over the volume of over-turned Stage 2 complaints and who was involved in assessing these.
- *The benefits of the two stage policy were to allow the Council to review and to take a second look. A different person in the service area works with the Housing Performance team to review.*
- The breakdown of Housing and Communities and what area of the business

referred to was sought.

- It was raised that Communication seemed to be a large issue in the number of complaints. The report did not set out what mitigation was to do in detail to address these communication problems?
- *The Low Carbon and Communication Group had majored on this issue over the last five months. More Tenant Liaison and communication officers were needed. A plan was being brought forward and would be shared as an action point.*

The report was noted.

9 Housing Directorate Report - Agenda Item 9

The report updated the Tenants' Strategic Group on work being undertaken and progress made by the Housing Directorate since the last TSG meeting in March 2023.

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

- Further detail was sought on the pilot mentioned in relation to procurement and supply chains, new building and resident health and safety strategy.
- *Traditionally the Council had used the Direct Labour Organisation and from a variety of local merchants. The operation had been reviewed for Best Value and to look at from a logistical perspective.*
- *The Government had increased requirements on landlords as part of the Health and Safety issue. The responsibilities lay with the Senior Management and Executive of the Council. The relevant statute requires competence at all levels, including from the Tenants Strategic Group, who had recently received training.*
- Praise was given on the partnership working with Adult Mental Health Services.
- Clarity was sought on potential overcrowding where relatives are fleeing certain situations, which offered the Council opportunities to offer interventions.
- A new contractor was being sought for major surplus voids and why do these exist in the first place?
- *The resources of the team were insufficient to deal with the demand.*

The report was noted.

10 Any Other Business - Agenda Item 10

None was discussed.

(The meeting ended at Time Not Specified)

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CHAIR