

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, 24 July 2023 at 6.00 pm

Present:

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

Alex Akhigbemen

Cllr Marcus Barr

Jessie Bunn

Kevin Hellier

Ivor Hussey

Samantha Rickward

Cllr Fran Smith

11 Apologies for absence - Agenda Item 1

Apologies received from Paul Cram and Federica Smith- Roberts.

12 Welcome from the Chair - Agenda Item 2

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and went through the housekeeping announcements.

13 Minutes from the previous meeting - Agenda Item 3

The minutes from of the previous meeting held on the 27th of March were approved, noting out of all our insecure tenancies the 90% turn into secure tenancy.

14 Engagement Group Updates - Agenda Item 4

The Chair gave an overview of the various engagement groups and their activities noting the comment about the Capital Programme Monitoring and for a report to come to a future meeting.

15 Finance Out-turn Report - Agenda Item 5

The Managing Accounting Reporting Lead gave an overview of the Financial Outturn Position 2022/2023 highlighting the key points, the housing revenue accounts (HRA) is an overspend £227k, the depreciation overspends of £1.420m relates to a combination of technical accounting, Capital Debt repayment the underspend of £1.021m was a strategic financial decision to offset the adverse variation on depreciation. The maintenance overspends of £455k relates to the ongoing repairs and maintenance the tenancy management overspend of £339k increase of staffing costs. The unearmarked reserves are projected to be £2.986m which is above the recommended minimum and the actual spend on the HRA Capital Programme during 2022/23.

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

- Concerns about the overspends.
- The risks and Concerns of the overall position on the Housing Revenue Accounts.
- The comparison of previous years to this current year overspends.
- The costing of the national vehicles and general wear and tear of the vehicles.
- The £42m savings that Somerset Council need to make is this a part of the Housing Revenue Accounts. It was confirmed that those savings are not part of the ringfenced HRA.

RESOLVED that the reported was noted.

16 Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code self assessment - Agenda Item 6

The Senior Case Manager for Customer resolution team gave an overview of the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code- Self Assessment update highlighting the key points. The Housing Ombudsman self-assessment against the complaint handling code to ensure our complaint handling remains in line with the requirements set out and makes this information accessible. The Code acts as a point of reference for residents and tenants supporting to help provide guidance on

what should be expected from their landlord. The Housing Ombudsman acknowledges that there may be reasons why a landlord is unable to fully comply with the Code for reasons which are beyond their control. For example, as a local authority landlord, our complaints handling falls under the Council's Complaints Policy. A few areas of non-compliance were identified in the June and September assessment, due to the Housing Directorate being bound by the wider, Somerset West and Taunton Complaints Policy and IT systems. The information accessible as part of the recently created Somerset Council website; Adding the Housing Ombudsman details to the website. To ensure that residents are aware of how to access the Complaints Policy through alternative formats. Ensure the Self-Assessment and Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code have links to access on the website,

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

- The not compliant with mandatory code section 5.1 and best practice code section 5.13 has there been a decrease at the first stage. It was confirmed that performance has fluctuated. Figures are reported to the TSG quarterly.

RESOLVED that the report was noted.

17 Communication Plan - Agenda Item 7

The Housing Strategy Officer gave an overview on the Housing Revenue Accounts Communication Plan, which has been developed with tenant involvement, highlighting the key areas the service has begun to implement a proactive communications plan that will elevate the quality of our outward communication to Somerset Council residents, tenants will receive newsletters via email every month. Tenant portal where residents can report, update details and have communication with staff. Communication Champions and publication panels to embed the new ways of working across the Council, the panel will include staff and customers to seek live experience of neurodiversity. Social media to communicate with residents posting key information. Improvements to the website ensuring information is accessible for the audience and the tenant handbook will be available online.

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

- How the newsletter will be communicated.
- Will the Communication Plan be going to Full Council meeting in the future.

RESOLVED that the report was noted.

18 Directorate Report- Senior Management - Agenda Item 8

The report updated the Tenant Strategic Group on the work being undertaken and the progress made by the Housing Directorate since the last TSG meeting.

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

- To have the acronyms in full in reports.
- The support mechanisms in place to support staff of the Council in relation to serious incidents.
- The waiting list for face-to-face counselling for staff once they start the process.
- Tenants living arrangements when individual circumstances change.

RESOLVED the report was noted.

19 Any other Business - Agenda Item 9

None were discussed.

(The meeting ended at Time Not Specified)

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CHAIR