

Minutes of a Meeting of the Tenants' Strategic Group held in the JMR Room, Deane House, Belverdere Road, Taunton TA1 1HE, on Monday, 22 January 2024 at 6.00 pm

**Present:**

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

Cllr Marcus Barr  
Ivor Hussey  
Samantha Rickward  
Cllr Fran Smith

Jessie Bunn  
Abbie Johnson  
Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts

**Officers In attendance:**

Chris Brown  
Ian Candlish  
Bryony Cole  
Simon Lewis  
Kerry Prisco  
Sharon Sloan  
Sharon Yarde  
Clerk: Josh Barrett

**39 Apologies for Absence** - Agenda Item 1

Apologies were received from Alex Akhigbemen, Shari Hallet and Kevin Hellier.

**40 Welcome from the Chair** - Agenda Item 2

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and went through the housekeeping announcements. Steven Tate was observing as a potential new member of the group.

**41 Minutes from the previous meeting** - Agenda Item 3

The minutes from the previous meeting held on Monday 27<sup>th</sup> November 2023 were approved.

RESOLVED.

#### **42 Engagement Group Updates - Agenda Item 4**

The Chair went through an update from the various engagement groups. A summarised update can be found below:

- TAG AGM went ahead 11<sup>th</sup> January 2024. The rest of the meetings have been planned in for the Calander year.
- Leycroft Grove continues to move in the right direction with drainage work put in and some pathways. The Chair meets with Stephen Boland on a monthly basis for an update on progress.
- VOIDS group plan to conduct leaving well visits, these plan to begin later in January.
- Damp & Mould group will be organising events in community halls for tenants to be able to discuss issues. These events will be discussed at the next meeting in February 2024.
- The Low Carbon group has come to an end, the Low Carbon Strategy was taken to full council and agreed in December 2022. A draft of the Communication strategy was reviewed by the group on 24th May and their approval was given. This group was key in putting these 2 strategies together.

#### **43 New Housing Structure - Agenda Item 5**

Chris Brown – Service Director of Housing gave an update on the New Housing Structure. A presentation was shown detailing the below: (summarised)

HRA Structure has been split into 3 functions:

##### **HRA Business function (9,700 Homes)**

New but small function to coordinate HRA responsibilities across the 10,000 homes.

Responsibilities include - HRA Business Plan, ICT investment across the service, direct debits, regulation and returns, assets, RtB, Rent and service charge setting, ALMO client role, development, council returns in relation to regulation and compliance, HRA Governance.

##### **Inhouse Service (Ex SWT) (5700 homes)**

New structure to deliver ever improving Core Property and Tenancy Management Services – Customer journey and Comms, income management, capital programme (decent homes/net zero), tenancy management/ASB, compliance, repairs, voids & Lettings.

Staff retain T&Cs and pay scales (new recruitment SC Pay Scales & JDs)

Increased staff numbers, greater resilience (over 200 HRA staff)

Small changes to some line management, movement of staff from SLA into the service, 1 x at risk post, 2 x seconded posts, several vacancies for recruitment.

### **Homes In Sedgemoor (ALMO) (4000 homes)**

No change, annual negotiation of fees and capital programme

A timeline was also shown which detailed a plan for staffing the structure. The group were also shown proposed staffing for the structure.

After the presentation was shown a discussion between the group was had and the following points were raised and discussed (summarised):

- The self-service portal that was previously discussed where tenants could report issues.
- Funding delay caused by financial issues.
- Funding and length of time graduates are employed.
- The length of time it takes the council to fill VOIDS.
- Disability grant payments in the business plan.

The group were satisfied with the answers given by the officers.

RESOLVED report noted.

## **44 HRA 30-year business plan - Agenda Item 6**

Kerry Prisco – Account Management & Reporting Lead talked through a presentation on The HRA 30 Year Business Plan. A summary of key points can be found below:

- One business plan for all stock
- 19 years additional comfort
- Scenario tested.
- Challenging targets
- Change of emphasis – Net zero and current stock
- Recognises ever stronger regulation.

Once the presentation had concluded the group raised and discussed the following points (summarised):

- How the interest rates in the business plan were calculated.
- General positive feedback about the plan.

#### **45 Directorate Report - Senior Management - Agenda Item 7**

Chris Brown – Service Director of Housing gave an update on the Directorate Report -Senior Management. The group asked to see the Senior Management Fire Report which was agreed this would be shared with the group.

Once the update was given the group raised and discussed the following points (summarised):

- Timescale of stock condition surveys and how this can be improved.
- The Chair gave positive feedback regarding the Church Farm contractor that recently did property work.
- Disposals and the plan for disposals. In the future could the reasoning of why disposals are taking place please be brought to the group.

RESOLVED The Report was noted.

#### **46 Budget Setting 2023-24 and fees and charges. - Agenda Item 8**

Kerry Prisco – Management Accounting and Reporting Lead, talked through a presentation regarding Budget Setting 23/24 and fees and charges. A summary of key points can be found below:

The rent setting proposal is below:

- An increase of 7.7% (CPI+1%) to
  - General Needs social housing rents
  - Sheltered and Extra Care housing rents
  - Shared Ownership properties.
- An increase of 7.7% on affordable rental tenures, with the rent being reviewed at relet based on 80% of open market rent capped at the LHA rate.
- The **continuation of rent flex** at relet for new tenants within the **West of the**

**Council** / in-house service. This will be levied at basic rent plus 5% for general needs tenants and 10% for sheltered and extra care tenants.

- The **introduction of rent flex** at relet for new tenants within the **North of the Council** / part of Homes In Sedgemoor. This will be levied at basic rent plus 5% for general needs tenants and 10% for sheltered and extra care tenants.

The fees and charges proposal are below:

**Homes in Somerset (HiS):** Charged based on actual costs.

**Homes in Somerset (HiS):** The introduction of a new 10% service charge management fee.

**In-House:** An increase in Service Charges for tenants in the West, managed by the In-House Service, of:

- (a) 7.7% for Grounds Maintenance and the Support / Sheltered Housing and Extra Care accommodation services,
- (b) 6.8% for the Piper Lifeline service,
- (c) other charges based on actual costs incurred laundry, heating, communal areas, communal door entry systems,
- (d) no change to the communal utilities charge,
- (e) a new charge for exceptional street cleaning,
- (f) sewerage will increase in line with the Wessex Water increases for 2024/25 once known

An increase of 7.7% for garage rents.

An increase of 6.7% on temporary accommodation daily rates.

An increase of 6.7% for Meeting Hall hourly rental rates.

An increase of 6.7% for Guest Room charges.

Once the presentation was concluded, the group raised and discussed the following points (summarised):

- Homes in Sedgemoor and their knowledge of the proposal.
- Extra help and support for people struggling with rent payments.

The group were happy with the answers given.

RESOLVED – report was noted.

#### **47 Any other Business - Agenda Item 9**

The Chair asked for any other business, and it was confirmed that none was raised. It had been agreed that all presentations be emailed to the group. The meeting was

closed by The Chair.

**(The meeting ended at 7.45 pm)**

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**CHAIR**