

Minutes of a Meeting of the Tenants' Strategic Group held in the Virtual - MS Teams - Virtual, on Monday, 20 January 2025 at 6.00 pm

Present:

Luke Manning (Chair)

Alex Akhigbemen
Mandy Dalley
Colin England
John Moore
Cllr Fran Smith

Cllr Norman Cavill
Joanna Draus
Abbie Johnson
Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts
Zoia Stiebaieva

Officers In attendance:

Ian Candlish, Shannon Lewis, Simon Lewis, Claire Reed, Sharon Sloan, Sharon Yarde

96 Apologies for Absence - Agenda Item 1

The Chair received Apologies from:

Jessie Bunn
Jay Burgess
Kevin Hellier
Ivor Hussey
Alison McKillop
Richard Watters

97 Welcome from the Chair - Agenda Item 2

The Chair, opened the Meeting and went through housekeeping procedures.

98 Minutes from the previous meeting - Agenda Item 3

The minutes from the previous Meeting on Monday 25 November 2024 were confirmed as a true record.

99 Engagement Group Updates - Agenda Item 4

The Chair gave an overview of the updates from the engagement groups. A

summarised version of discussion is below:

- TAG - The group now have two new members but have had a resignation so are back to 8 members in total. Applications for the Child Youth Initiative Fund continue to be received. In the last meeting the group agreed to fund two projects, Catalyst £2.5k and Sheba Soul £2510.00. A third application for Neroche Wanderers was declined because the maximum grant of £20k has been spent for the current financial year. This is the first year since covid that the group has managed to spend all of the grant. Estate Improvement Fund Applications – Funding agreed for the purchase of a projector and 2 screens for Tauntfield and Middleway meeting rooms so that they can be used to host meetings-total £1950.00. The AGM will be held on 23rd January 2025.
- Scrutiny TAG - The group will meet again on 29th January to put together their final report and recommendations. This report will be presented to TSG in March.
- VOIDS - Due to further changes in the TAG group: Brian Wyatt and Louise Heald will visit the VOIDS. This has been on hold due to time constraints but will restart in January.
- Damp and Mould - The group met again on 18th October 2024. They scrutinised the number of open cases and monitored the progress of the Damp and Mould action plan. Bill Voyce (Maintenance Manager) introduced himself to the group and confirmed that he will endeavour to work on some of the outstanding action points. The group will meet on 10th January 2025 to review the new Damp & Mould policy, and an update of this meeting will be reported in the TSG March meeting.

Resolved - The Group noted the Report.

10 Recruitment Update - Agenda Item 5

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Simon Lewis, Head of Housing and Ian Candlish, Head of Housing Property provided a Verbal Update on the Recruitment Update, Creation of a Spreadsheet listing outstanding vacancies to the date of the Meeting, covering the following:

- Shortlisted Roles – Garages Officer, Compliance Case Manager, Senior Repairs Surveyor.
- Filled Vacancies – Tenancy Officers, Rent Recovery Officers, Project Manager (Sewage Treatment Plants), Repair Surveyor (Damp and Mould), Carpenter, Repair Supervisor (Roofing), Asset Surveyor.
- Posts filled by Agency Staff – ASB Officer, Maintenance Manager, Senior Lead Compliance, Capital Programme Manager, Contract Managers, Build of Damp and Mould, Plumbers, Housing Surveyor, Painter.

After receiving the Update, the group raised the following points (summarised):

- Do tenants know if they owe money? Simon confirmed Tenants are notified early.
- Is there any plan to keep tenants updated with their balances? Simon mentioned plans for a portal in the future.

10 Directorate Report - Agenda Item 6

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Simon Lewis, Head of Housing along with Ian Candlish, Head of Property presented the directorate report, a summary of the report can be found below:

- HRA Growth - Classic Builders have commenced construction works on Phase Ci with foundations being poured. The groundworkers will then move to Phase B to start the foundations. Phase Dii (Hereford Drive flats) are being decanted, and a Compulsory Purchase Order is being pursued for the one remaining private flat. End of Defects inspections are being carried out on Phase A properties on a rolling programme as the new homes come to the end of their 12-month defect period. Demolition of the Oxford Inn on Roman Road in Taunton has completed. Work has now started on building the eight new energy efficient homes which we aim to complete by December 2025.
- Property Team - There is ongoing recruitment for the trades area to ensure we continue to meet target completion dates. We are also now recruiting for a Building Disrepair Surveyor, following a resignation. We continue to undertake void repairs to successfully meet our Lettable Standard. Procurement for external contractor support for void repairs has now been evaluated and is progressing through the governance process.
- Housing Performance Team - Supporting and enabling the work of the Tenants Strategic Group (TSG) and Tenants' Action Group (TAG) and the subgroups is a key focus for our team. We have agreed a comprehensive training plan for TSG group members and a new suite of training sessions will become available in 2025.

After receiving the Update, the group raised the following points (summarised):

- Does Property Compliance Cover Legionella. Ian confirmed that water safety measures include water risk assessments and temperature checks to prevent Legionella, with the frequency of inspections depending on the property type and client vulnerabilities.
- Concern raised about the kitchen floors being extremely cold due to the material used. New flooring takes the heat out of the room. Ian confirmed that they would look into the issue.
- The group queried the duration of stay in temporary housing families face and concerns on the length of time they stay in temporary accommodations, Simon explained that the responsibility for temporary housing falls under the homelessness service, adding the demand for social housing exceeds the supply with the Council using some of its housing stock, leased properties, and B&Bs to provide temporary accommodation for homeless families.

- Complaint handling, a Member of the Group made a complaint a while ago, and the Team were amazing.
- Under shelter and Extra Care will the additional Officer that's in place until the 31st of January be in place long enough. The position has been extended to the end of March with the possibility it may go beyond that.
- The group asked if there is a policy and procedure for addressing tenants who do not look after their property. There is no specific policy for addressing tenants who do not look after their property, but the tenancy agreement requires tenants to maintain their property and report repairs.

10 Quarterly Housing Performance Report - Agenda Item 7 **2**

Claire Reed, Case Management Lead Performance & Improvement presented the Quarterly Housing Performance Report, a summary of the report can be found below:

- New Report Format - House mark quartiles (top, median lower scores) for the previous year, so we can identify how we are performing against our sector peers. Our peers are categorised as Local Authority landlords or ALMOs with less than 10,000 units.
- Somerset Council targets – these are applicable for both landlords and have been set (where possible) in line with House mark data. Where House mark quartiles are not available, targets have been agreed by both landlords, in line with the previous year's performance and an uplift applied. The current quarter's average score for the in-house landlord. Where this figure represents an 'average' of the three months within the quarter, this will be explained.
- Direction of travel - whether the in-house landlord has improved or dropped in performance on the previous quarter. A free text box in which the appropriate Manager can provide brief, explanatory notes if needed.
- We believe using this format will provide consistency and transparency, and present TSG with more meaningful data as to how the in-house landlord is performing.

After discussing the report, the group raised the following points (summarised):

- The Group asked if the data for the three indicators that cannot currently be captured (lettings, EPC ratings, and new homes completed) will eventually be included in the report. inability to capture data for lettings is due to capacity issues and prioritization. Once the team is fully staffed, they will be able to capture this data again.
- The Group expressed support for the new reporting format, stating it is forward and progressive thinking. It was agreed that the group would vote on this because not all Members were Present.

10 Extra Care Consultation Update - Agenda Item 8

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Simon Lewis, Head of Housing provided a Verbal Update on Extra Care Consultation, a summary of the update can be found below:

- The current care providers for Kilkenny and Lodge Close were previously commissioned by adult social care, focusing on both care and support needs, including housing-related support.
- Adult social care is recommissioning the contract for a new provider starting in April. Meetings are scheduled to discuss the new care providers and the contract details.
- The service charges for extra care housing will be adjusted to reflect the new responsibilities. This includes a re-baselining of charges to ensure they are categorized correctly (e.g., utilities, cleaning). Despite an increase in service charges, tenants should see a small reduction in their overall weekly bills due to the offset from the care providers' charges.
- Efforts are being made to handle the transition sensitively, especially considering the elderly population in extra care housing, to minimize confusion and anxiety.

After discussing the report, the group raised the following points (summarised):

- The Group asked about the identity of the new care provider for Kilkenny and Lodge Close. New care provider's identity is unknown at the moment, but tenants would be informed during the meeting on Friday.

10 Voids Performance Report - Agenda Item 9

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Simon Lewis, Head of Housing along with Ian Candlish, Head of Property and Space presented the VOIDS Performance Report, a summary of the report can be found below:

Current Issues:

- Benchmarking against peer groups indicates a higher average cost per void to meet out Lettable Standard
- Accurate void repair costs difficult to ascertain for different void types and for revenue / capital budget allocation
- Longer void times than some peer groups
- Benchmarking against peer groups indicates generally median performance

Improvement Proposals:

- Implement a 'Lean' approach to managing lettings and voids
- Work with Finance colleagues to analyse costs and seek to capitalise where appropriate
- Undertake new procurement of external contractors to support in-house voids trades team

- Revisit arrangement with Homeless Service to reduce homeless void times and costs
- Work with Adults Social Care to increase referrals into Extra Care accommodation
- Review use of IT systems and implement processes to ensure timely and accurate data available to enable effective void management
- Apply 'Leaving Well' process to encourage tenants to leave properties in good condition

After discussing the report, the group raised the following points (summarised):

- The Group queried how will this be different to the Lean approach from 5-6 years ago. There won't be anything fundamentally different.
- The Group asked when the proposals for improving voids performance would be put in place and how many of the proposals are complete. it is difficult to provide a timeline for the completion of the proposals due to the need for key managers to drive the process.
- Inquired if there is an action plan with a RAG status. There is an action plan with a RAG status.
- Asked who is ensuring that the proposals are actioned and suggested the possibility of having a tenant group to monitor the action plan. Ian and Simon are responsible for ensuring the proposals are actioned and are open to the idea of a tenant group to monitor the action plan.

10 Any other Business - Agenda Item 10
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The Chair, Informed the group about an upcoming meeting with Chris Hall and representatives from Homes in Sedgemoor regarding housing appraisals and options. He mentioned that he was asked by Chris Hall to assist on this group and will provide updates when available.

(The meeting ended at Time Not Specified)

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CHAIR