

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, 25 November 2024 at 6.00 pm

**Present:**

Luke Manning (Chair)

Jessie Bunn  
Colin England  
Ivor Hussey  
Alison Mckillop  
Cllr Fran Smith

Mandy Dalley  
Kevin Hellier  
Abbie Johnson  
Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts

**Officers In attendance:**

Ian Candlish, Chris Hall, Sharon Yarde,  
Sharon Sloan, Simon Lewis, Claire  
Reed, Kerry Prisco Clerk: Josh Barrett

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

Councillor Norman Cavill gave his apologies.

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

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

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

The minutes from the previous meeting on Monday 23 September 2024 were confirmed as a true record.

**89 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, £3k to In the Mix and £3k for Tiddlygigs Storytime. They have two further applications for December's meeting. Estate Improvement Fund Applications – Funding agreed for Sparkle. Leycroft Grove continues to be on the agenda and Stephen has agreed a quotation to reseed the area and add

patio slabs and chipping to enhance the whole estate. The fruit trees and benches will be funded by the Estate Improvement Budget.

- Scrutiny TAG -The group met again on 13<sup>th</sup> November, Leeane Brownlie and Mal Doyle attended to discuss the current procedures. The group continues to collect feedback from tenants who have already had work done. Their final recommendations will be presented to TSG.
- 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 December. They have seen the work required to get to the lettable standard. They have understood that at times it is about safety as well as the lettable standard.
- 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 and have a draft Damp & Mould policy by the next meeting in January 2025.

Resolved – The Group noted the update

## **90 TAG annual Report - Agenda Item 5**

- The Chair introduced Wayne Hobson who discussed the TAG Annual Report. Summarised Highlights of the report can be found below:
- Development of the Group - The Chair and two members of TAG attended the recent TPAS conference with members of TSG. The Chair and a member of TAG and one from TSG also attended the ARCH conference which they all found informative and extremely useful. Members are committed to widening their awareness of key issues in the sector by attending upcoming training courses over the next year. Various articles have been posted in Tenants' Newsletters to attempt to raise awareness of the group and their activities and to encourage new members to join. The Chair has done articles, having visited some of the causes to see the work they are doing, to raise awareness of the CYIF (Child Youth Initiative Fund) fund and the magnificent work that is going on in our communities. Over the next year the Housing Performance team will continue to work with TAG to publicise their activities and help to recruit new members to bring the group back up to full membership of 10 members.
- Annual General Meeting in January, and the Chair was voted back in, Livi Mongare was re-elected as vice chair. The group has been stable with 8 members, we are continuing to look for and recruit additional members

- 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.

Resolved – The group noted the report.

## 91 Directorate Report - Agenda Item 6

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

- HRA Growth - Demolition has completed for Phase B and Ci at North Taunton Woolaway Project. Classic Builders, the main contractor, have taken possession of Phase B and Ci sites and are currently installing their site compound and welfare facilities at Rochester Road/Ludlow Avenue. 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 the 12-month defect period.
- Property Team - There is ongoing recruitment for the trades area to ensure we continue to meet target completion dates. However, within the management team we have now recruited a Repairs Surveyor and an Interim Maintenance Manager. Our materials supply chain process continues to operate well, with regular review of the Core list of supplies. The delivery of further logistical efficiencies is being progressed.
- 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 membership of ARCH as well as TPAS. Our engaged tenants continue to attend training sessions, and a new suite of training sessions will become available in January 2025.
- After discussing the report, the group raised the following points (summarised):
  - Health and Safety concerns with houses in Minehead. Simon Lewis will provide answer to Sharon who will share with the Group
  - Queried why the property team were interim and not permanent posts. Ian Candlish confirmed that recruitment has failed three times for a particular asset role. Group raised the concern with the route into permanent roles.
  - The Group queried the amount of additional capacity in sheltered care. There is a 37.5 hour a week contract in sheltered care team that increases capacity.
  - The Group asked for clarify on the backlog of work, this was confirmed that these numbers will be passed on to the group after the meeting.
  - The group asked for a recruitment update at each meeting which was

agreed.

- The group asked for clarification on the automated payment system. Simon Lewis confirmed that tenants will still be able to take payments with the old-fashioned system over the phone for those who struggle.
- Councillor Smith queried Tenancy compliance and the use of injunction to gain access to properties. Ian Candlish confirmed that this is being investigated with legal teams.

Resolved – The Group noted the report.

## **92 Q2 (July-September) Performance and finance report - Agenda Item 7**

Kerry Prisco, Management Accounting and Reporting Lead, which was elaborated on by Simon Lewis, Head of Housing introduced the report. A summary of the report is found below:

- Customer Complaints - Complaint handling response times within the remit of our Complaints Policy and the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code have continued to drop since the end of the last financial year, although there was a small lift into September. We know this is because of lack of capacity and resource within the service areas, meaning we have not responded to complaints within the prescribed timescales.
- We have received two Housing Ombudsman determinations in this quarter. In the first one (about the positioning of a fence in a communal space), the Housing Ombudsman found that we handled the case and the complaint well, and no maladministration or service failure was found.
- The number of formal compliments logged remains consistent, but we know many compliments received go unrecorded. It is not a priority task, but we are hoping to review how staff record the good news stories and positive feedback we receive.
- Rent Recovery - Performance of recovery of current tenant arrears continues to remain strong, and we have consistently hit the Housemark top quartile in performance in this area for many months.
- After discussing the report, the group raised the following points (summarised):
  - The group asked for the reasons behind homes not meeting decent homes standards. Ian Candlish confirmed that there are a variety of reasons behind this such as kitchens and insulation.
  - The group asked for better understanding be given to tenants on what is

expected for an electric safety test and in more simple language. Ian Candlish confirmed this as an action to be investigated.

- The group asked to see the catch-up plan for supported housing and the appointment of a manager to the department. Simon Lewis confirmed that the recruitment is beginning for an interim post.
- The group queried the target to answer a call within one minute and if this is realistic and it was confirmed as this will be changed and consulted on to be a more realistic timeframe.
- The group asked for a presentation in the future about how VOIDs position will be improved.

Resolved – The Group noted the report.

### **93 Communal cleaning contract update - Agenda Item 8**

Stephen Boland, Tenancy Specialist introduced the update. A summary of the update is found below:

- Communal cleaning in meeting halls and extra care schemes has, to date, been provided for under a formal contract/specification that has existed since 2013. The cost of these services is already recharged to tenants in their service charge.
- Somerset Council has a long-term arrangement in place with AIS Contract Cleaners for the cleaning of the communal areas. This arrangement only relates to domestic properties owned and managed by the former Somerset West and Taunton Council. The existing service is limited to the quarterly removal of cobwebs above 1800mm and the cleaning of window and door glass within the communal area. This service was introduced as a result of the need to avoid the risk of tenants and residents working at height. The current total spend is approximately £12,000 p/a. The cost of this services is already recharged to tenants in their service charge.
- Ad-hoc arrangements, for example the removal of graffiti, deep cleaning and the disposal of sharps has, to date, been procured on an ad-hoc basis by officers within teams.
- A satisfaction survey was shown that detailed dissatisfaction in cleaning contract provided.
- After the update was discussed by the group. They raised the following points

(summarised):

- The communal hallways and landings are often used by contractors who leave them muddy and the rectification of this.
- The group raised the use of fire safety equipment and the monitoring of the equipment.
- Councillor Fran Smith was pleased to see this movement come forward and asked for clarification on how many contractors have come forward with interest.

Resolved – The Group noted the report.

#### **94 Annual Housing Complaints & Service Improvement 2023/24 - Agenda Item 9**

Claire Reed, Case Management Lead – Performance and Improvement introduced the report. A summary of the report is found below:

- Compliments - During 2023/24 the Housing Service received 53 formally logged compliments. We know there are many more compliments received by the service areas which are not logged as formal compliments. Over the coming months we will be working on communicating the importance of recording the compliments we receive with the service areas and our residents, so we can understand what it is that we do well. Most compliments we logged in the year were in relation to the helpfulness or professionalism of our staff. This is testament to the work that our staff do, often going above and beyond in their work with our residents and properties.
- Complaint Response Times - Under Somerset Council's Complaints Policy, we have 10 working days to provide a full stage 1 response to a complaint. In some circumstances (for example, where we need to carry out an inspection, the complaint is multifaceted or complex, or it crosses over different service areas), we can agree an extension with the resident and remain compliant with the Complaint Handling Code. The chart below shows our stage 1 response times in line with our Complaints Policy and the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.
- After discussing the update and report, the group queried the delay in responding to complaints. It was confirmed by Claire Reed that this is falling on a temporary basis to a member of staff and this is why there is an issue.

Resolved – The Group noted the report.

#### **95 Any other Business - Agenda Item 10**

Chris Hall, Executive Director of Community Place and Economy started any other business with a verbal update regarding the creation of a single housing development team in place of the 2 that are currently within the Council (inhouse and HiS)

After hearing the verbal update, The group raised the following points (summarised):

- Councillor Fran Smith queried the next steps for the single housing development team and how this will be consulted to tenants. It was also queried about duplication of job roles within the two development teams.
- The Group asked for a view of the options proposal timeline which will come back to a future meeting.
- The Group queried the future of the newly built homes and the jurisdiction of future homes. It was confirmed that this will not change, and the homes will fall under the same areas as now.

Simon Lewis, Head of Housing gave a verbal update on Kilkenny and Lodge Close care contract and the procurement of a county wide contract for Somerset.

The Chair gave an update in regard to meetings with National Board for Housing and a meeting with the Housing Minister that is coming up. The Chair praised Somerset Council for the good that is done for tenants.

Resolved – The group noted the updates

**(The meeting ended at 7.00 pm)**

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**CHAIR**