

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**HOUSING MANAGEMENT ADVISORY BOARD
MINUTES**

Date: Thursday, 16 August 2018

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Shimkent Room - Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: **Councillors:** P Bibby CC (Chair), S Barr, L Kelly, L Martin-Haugh and S-J Potter

Resident Members: F Plumridge (Tenant) (Vice-Chair), L Storey (Tenant) and J Thurlow (Leaseholder)

Staff Members: J Cresser (Assistant Director – Housing and Investment)

In Attendance: Di Dharmasuriya (Service Manager – Repairs), Steve Georgiou (Finance Business Partner [HRA]), Gurmukh Lota (Resident Involvement Officer), Katrina Shirley (Corporate Strategy Manager), Councillor Jeannette Thomas (Executive Portfolio Holder - Housing, Health and Older People) and Elaine Wright (Corporate Performance and Improvement Manager)

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 8.05pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from C Miller (Assistant Director – Stevenage Direct Services), C Anderson and L Saunders.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 19 July 2018 are approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 LIBERTY GAS UPDATE

The M & E Compliance Manager provided an update on the Annual Gas Service Programme. This was in response to a query that had been raised at the last HMAB meeting. The appointment process covered a 60 day period from the Service due date. Stevenage Borough Council (SBC) used a standard two-stage process involving the contractor and SBC staff. It was indicated that the customer had the option to change the original appointment within reason. After a third failed attempt, a case would be handed over to SBC. The SBC phase included hand delivery of

letters, telephone calls and posters highlighting risks associated with missed gas checks. The final letter was a Notice of Action to take the customer to court.

Members were informed that the annual gas check was a time-limited statutory requirement. Engineers from the contractor turned up at scheduled times so as to demonstrate to the courts (if necessary) that laid down procedures were followed.

The M & E Compliance Manager acknowledged management issues and poor customer handling practices at Liberty. An improvement plan was now in place. Contingency plans were in place if performance did not improve. SBC planned to use mystery shoppers to monitor the gas contract performance. Members sought clarification on the communication between the Council and the contractor to customers. Members raised concerns about the quality of letters that were sent to by the contractor to customers. It was indicated that there had been a review of annual gas check letters that were sent by the contractor.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the SBC website be updated to include details of the annual gas check procedure and appointment options for customers
2. That the M & E Compliance Manager provides updates on the Gas Service Improvement Plan
3. That Members submit gas complaints cases to the M & E Compliance Manager

4 **PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT**

The Corporate Performance and Improvement Manager provided an additional housing performance report for measures not achieving target. The additional reporting was done via the Council's corporate business insight system "InPhase". It was highlighted that all the seven Compliance measures were in "Green" or "Green plus" status. The customer levels of satisfaction with the final outcome of anti-social behaviour intervention had decreased slightly. The percentage of Stage One complaints closed on target was still below target. A customer care programme was being developed to improve timeliness and quality of responses. The programme would be extended to Housing staff and then rolled out as a Council-wide programme. Aids and Adaptations performance was not on target partly due to issues relating to showers, handrails and a backlog created by a change of contractor. Homelessness support performance had been affected by resourcing issues. A full staff complement was now in place and consultations with staff were underway.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Quarter One Housing Performance Report is noted.

5 **TENANT AND LEASEHOLDER SATISFACTION SURVEY**

The Interim Corporate Strategy Manager provided an update on the SBC Tenant and Leaseholder Satisfaction Survey (STAR) that was conducted between February

and March 2018. All sheltered tenants and leaseholders and a sample of 2,300 general needs tenants were involved in the 2018 STAR survey.

The survey covered the following satisfaction themes:

- Contact and Customer Service
- Listening and Communication
- Your Home and Neighbourhood
- Repairs, Maintenance and Investment
- Communal Areas
- Value for Money
- Independent Living Services (sheltered tenants only)

Sheltered tenants provided the highest percentage of responses. Sheltered tenants also had the highest satisfaction rate. The survey showed that Leaseholders were the least satisfied with housing services. Repairs and maintenance were at the top of the priorities for the three tenant groups. The survey was conducted during the consultation phase of the Major Refurbishment Contract (MRC) and this might have affected the responses of leaseholders to questions related to repairs and maintenance. It was indicated that more information was required to enable the Council to address some of the issues raised in the open question section of the survey.

The Council's response to the 2018 STAR survey included the following:

- Customer service skills training
- Repairs improvement plan
- Consultations with resident panels and forums
- New simple, clearer website and on-line forms
- MRC communication plan
- Mobile working and improved visibility
- MRC and Asset Review programme
- Service Charge review
- Big Knock 2

Members were informed that customer care training would include customer profiling and resilience skills. It was indicated that there was a specialist team dealing with damp and mould.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the Tenant and Leaseholder Satisfaction Survey (STAR) is noted
2. That the damp and mould review be shared with leaseholders

6 **REVENUE AND CAPITAL QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE UPDATE**

The Finance Business Partner (HRA) provided an update on the Revenue and Capital Quarterly Performance update. In response to a question about interest and

capital repayments, it was indicated that there was no annual debt commitment.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Revenue and Capital Quarterly Performance update is noted.

7 **HRA MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (MTFS)**

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) update covered the following:

- HRA Business Plan and MTFS
- 2018/19 budget
- Political and Economic Context
- Key Financial Assumptions
- Capital Shortfall
- Debt Cap
- Financial Security
- Minimum Balance
- Quarter One – impacts

Members were informed that the setting of the HRA balances was a management decision. Known risks, loss of savings, risks associated with new ventures and the cost of borrowing for the capital programmes were some of the factors considered when setting the headroom. The report was prepared in light of Brexit uncertainties, inflation and interest rate changes, Independent Review of Building Regulations & Fire Safety, Housing and Planning Act 2016, National Rent Policy post-2020, additional HRA Borrowing Programme and the recently published Social Housing Green Paper.

With regard to Right To Buy receipts, the Council's mitigating actions included looking for strategic fits, finding alternative registered providers and handing receipts back early. Members sought additional details about SBC new builds.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the HRA MTFS report is noted
2. That the Finance Business Partner (HRA) provides the breakdown of new builds by type

8 **HOUSING ALL UNDER ONE ROOF - UPDATE**

The Assistant Director (Housing and Investment) provided an update on the Housing All Under One Roof (HAUOR) programme. The key points of the update were:

- The HAUOR newsletter that had recently been sent to Stevenage Borough Council staff, Members and other stakeholders
- The use of social media and other innovative means to advertise vacancies. This had contributed to a notable increase in applications for Homelessness team vacancies and the position of Housing Operations Manager (Managing

Homes)

- The Housing and Investment team Away Day held on 06 July 2018. The Away Day programme included team building exercises, Big Knock review and tasks designed to help staff uphold the “Co-operative Council” principles
- The appointment of an interim Housing Operations Manager

9 **VOIDS AND REPAIRS UPDATE**

The Service Manager (Repairs) provided the Repairs and Voids update. It was acknowledged that the In-Phase on-screen presentation provided a better picture of the repairs and voids categories and improvements. There was an increase in voids work during the quarter. Some members of the Repairs team had moved from the Cavendish Road offices to Daneshill House. Members were informed that a trial was underway to carry out some work while customers were in situ. In response to questions about communication with customers, it was indicated that SBC would still conform to lettable standards during the trial. Customers would receive letters of promise with details of the work to be carried out and the timescales for the repairs.

10 **FEEDBACK FROM EXECUTIVE**

None.

11 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Chair accepted an urgent item on the corporate business insight system (InPhase). Members indicated that they needed more time and preferably tutorials to familiarise themselves with the on-screen presentation style. It was noted that this was likely to be the case with Customer Scrutiny Panel (CSP) members.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Corporate Performance and Improvement Manager be contacted regarding arranging InPhase tutorials for HMAB and CSP members.

12 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Wednesday 12 September 2018, 6.00pm, **Kadoma Room**, Daneshill House

CHAIR