

## STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

### HOUSING MANAGEMENT ADVISORY BOARD MINUTES

Date: Thursday, 25 October 2018

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Shimkent Room - Daneshill House, Danestrete

**Present:** **Councillors:** P Bibby CC (Chair) and L Kelly

**Resident Members:** F Plumridge (Tenant) (Vice-Chair), C Anderson (Tenant), K Gibson (Tenant), L Saunders (Tenant), L Storey (Tenant) and J Thurlow (Leaseholder)

**Staff Members:** J Cresser (Assistant Director – Housing and Investment) and C Miller (Assistant Director – Direct Services)

**In Attendance** D Dharmasuriya (Service Delivery Manager), C Fitzgerald (Repairs and Voids Manager), S Georgiou (Finance Business Partner [HRA]), K Shirley (Housing Policy, Performance and Improvement Manager)

**Customer Scrutiny Panel Members:** C Danpure (Tenant), D Howell (Tenant) and J Smith (Tenant)

**Start / End Time:** Start Time: 6.00pm  
End Time: 7.55pm

#### 1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs S Barr, L Martin-Haugh, S-J Potter and J Thomas (Executive Portfolio Holder – Housing, Health and Older People).

There were no declarations of interest.

#### 2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

It was pointed out that the Tenants' Annual Report (Housing Matters) was not easily accessible on the Stevenage Borough Council (SBC) website (Agenda Item 6 – Tenants' Annual Report and Future Publicity).

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the minutes of the Housing Management Advisory Board (HMAB) meeting held on 12 September 2018 are approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.
2. That the Housing Matters newsletters be moved to a more prominent and easily accessible page on the SBC website.

### 3 CUSTOMER SCRUTINY PANEL VOIDS REVIEW REPORT

The HMAB considered the report on the service review of the SBC Voids process. The review was carried out by four members of the Customer Scrutiny Panel (CSP). The review team used a range of methods including document review, staff interviews, work shadowing, benchmarking against other organisations and site visits. The team made eight recommendations.

The Board thanked the CSP team for the review. In response to a question about keys (Recommendation Eight), it was clarified that there was a security risk related to the failure to return fob keys. The Assistant Director (Direct Services) welcomed the report and accepted the eight recommendations. It was indicated that the recommendations resonate with the ongoing Business Unit review. The Council was looking into the possibility of introducing a handyman service – particularly for vulnerable residents. The following recommendations were already being implemented:

- **Recommendation 4** - Involvement of Investment Team staff in void meetings. Response: Investment Team is now involved in regular void meetings.
- **Recommendation 6** - Countersigning of documentation for work to be completed in-situ after a void property has been let. Response: Lettings team now receives details of pending repairs.
- **Recommendation 7** - Provision of tablet computers for officers and operatives. Response: A pilot for the use of the devices has been completed. Devices are to be provided to relevant staff in phases.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the recommendations are accepted
2. That the Assistant Director (Direct Services) provides a written response to the report

### 4 HRA MTFs REPORT

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Partner presented the HRA Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) Report for the period 2018/19 to 2047/48. The report covered key principles, assumptions, comparison of current recommendations against 2017 Business Plan and Policy Changes. The presentation highlighted a reduction in Right to Buy (RTB) sales from 50 to 35 leading to a positive impact on Revenue over 30 years and a negative impact on Capital available over 30 years. It was also assumed that there would be 71 additional new homes over 30 years.

The HRA Business Plan considered the following options:

- Base Case – 2017/18 HRA BP adjusted with assumptions
- Scenario 1 – Base Case and the Debt Cap bid of £9.1m

- Scenario 2 – As per Scenario 1 but include Private Sales
- Scenario 2b – As per Scenario 2, but revised interest rates and borrowing to cover shortfalls

Scenario 2b was the recommended option. Members were reassured that the Business Plan would produce a surplus over 30 years. There was no immediate risk associated with interest rate changes because the Council borrowed at fixed term rates. Revenue headroom was very close to the base in 2022/23 and there were financial risks unless the Council introduced efficient measures for collecting fees from leaseholders. The report considered potential government policy changes regarding one-for-one (1-4-1) receipts and the removal of the debt cap. The government had started consultations for 1-4-1 receipts. In response to a question, the Business Partner confirmed that the removal of the debt cap, (subject to affordability) would allow the Council to borrow to build more homes.

It was **RESOLVED** that the report is noted.

## 5 **RESPONSE TO GREEN PAPER ON SOCIAL HOUSING**

The HMAB considered the draft SBC response to the Green Paper on Social Housing. The Housing Policy, Performance and Improvement Manager informed Members that the tragic fire at Grenfell, raised the profile of social housing and forced a rethink on perceptions about social housing. The Green Paper is divided into the following five chapters:

- Ensuring homes are safe and decent
- Effective resolution of complaints
- Empowering residents and strengthening the Regulator
- Tackling stigma and celebrating thriving communities
- Expanding supply and supporting homeownership

It was agreed that unless there was financial settlement, grant funding or revised rent policy, the enhancement of the decent homes standard would put pressure on the Business Plans of local authorities. The democratic filter did not serve much purpose in the resolution of complaints. In most cases, parties to a complaint did not do any consultations during the eight week period. It was noted that the Housing Ombudsman did not have a consistent approach to complaint resolution. Members were not in favour of linking performance to funding. League tables did not take into consideration data accuracy, local settings and local authority priorities. It was agreed that increased scrutiny of local authorities was welcome as long as this did not overlap with current arrangements. It was acknowledged that SBC tenants on shared ownership tenancies faced challenges including ineligibility for Right to Buy discounts. SBC was no longer offering shared ownership tenancies.

It was **RESOLVED** that the SBC response is agreed subject to the following additions/amendments:

- The government and landlords should be driving the agenda to tackle social housing stigma
- “Best neighbourhood” awards appeared to be well meaning but they could be

- perceived as patronising
- Gardening competitions should be encouraged to celebrate thriving communities
- Local Planning Authorities should be robust in fulfilling their role and responsibilities in ensuring appropriate housing development

## 6 REPAIRS AND VOIDS UPDATE

The Assistant Director (Direct Services) provided an overview of Repairs and Voids for the past twelve months. The Assistant Director thanked the Service Delivery Manager and the rest of the Direct Services team for the outstanding performance. Some reporting areas that were below target prior to October 2017 were now consistently on target or above target. Some officers had relocated from Cavendish Road Depot to Daneshill House and this had improved collaborative working with Housing and other teams. It was noted that some major work Voids took a disproportionately long time to complete and this had a bearing on KPIs.

The following projects were now complete:

- Repairs fleet procurement
- Relocation to Daneshill
- Schedule system upgrade
- Recruitment of Repairs and Voids Manager
- Voids Pilot

It was reported that all Repairs Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and Standard Voids Repairs turnaround are now on target.

The Business Unit was currently focussing on the following projects:

- Supply chain procurement (December 2018)
- Staff development and performance management
- Housing system upgrade
- Health and Safety Framework

The following projects were scheduled to start soon:

- End of year budget reviews
- Policy and Procedures reviews
- Business Process Mapping – including fourth tier management consultation
- Service Review

There were plans to improve the self-service facility for customers and enable more digital working for officers.

Members commended the Repairs and Voids team for the positive turnaround. It was suggested that the KPIs be revised to cater for the major work voids.

It was **RESOLVED** that the update is noted.

7 **APPROVAL OF HOUSING AND INVESTMENT BUSINESS UNIT FIFTH TIER STRUCTURE**

The Assistant Director (Housing & Investment) clarified that the Item had been brought to HMAB for update and not approval. Following the successful recruitment of Tier Four managers, the Business Unit was reviewing the fifth tier structure so as to streamline the service and avoid duplication. The four week consultation for the fifth tier structure was due to commence on 12 November 2018. Officers affected by the review had been informed. Recruitment for posts on the approved structure would start after the consultation phase.

It was **RESOLVED** that the update is noted.

8 **FEEDBACK FROM COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE**

The Leaseholder representative on the HMAB provided feedback after attending a Community Select Committee meeting on 2 October 2018. A revisit of the Damp and Mould Review and Resident Engagement were on the CSC agenda. Members were informed that a review of Allocations Policy, Housing Services Charges and Allocations and Tenancy Agreement were some of the items on the CSC Work Programme for 2018/2019.

It was **RESOLVED** that the update is noted.

9 **RESIDENTS' NETWORK ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2018**

Following positive feedback about the 2017 Residents' Network Annual Conference in 2017, it was recommended that two HMAB members attend the conference on 06 December 2018.

It was **RESOLVED** that arrangements be made for Christine Anderson and Len Saunders to attend the 2018 Annual Conference in London.

10 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

None.

11 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Tuesday, 20 November 2018, 6.00pm, Autun Room, Daneshill House, Danestrete, SG1 1HN

**CHAIR**