

## STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

### HOUSING MANAGEMENT ADVISORY BOARD MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 20 November 2018

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Autun Room - Daneshill House, Danestrete

**Present:** **Councillors:** P Bibby CC (Chair), Lin Martin-Haugh, Lizzy Kelly, Sandra Barr and Sarah-Jane Potter

**Resident Members:** F Plumridge (Tenant) (Vice-Chair)

**Staff Members:** C Miller (Assistant Director – Direct Services)

**In Attendance:** Di Dharmasuriya (Service Manager – Repairs), Andrew Garside (Housing Operations Manager – IHP), Jane Konopka (Co-operative Neighbourhood Manager), Chloe Norton (Corporate Performance and Improvement Officer), Paul O'Donnell (Senior Project Leader - Procurement and Delivery), Dennis Panter (M & E Compliance 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: 6.45pm

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

Apologies for absence were received from Jaine Cresser (Assistant Director – Housing and Investment), Lesley Storey (Tenant) and Jon Thurlow (Leaseholder).

There were no declarations of interest.

#### 2 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The quorum for HMAB meetings is six members with three customers, two councillors and one staff member. Since only one customer was present, the meeting was inquorate.

It was **RESOLVED** that the approval of Minutes of the Housing Management Advisory Board (HMAB) meeting held on 25 October 2018 be deferred to the next meeting.

#### 3 **HOUSING SERVICE PERFORMANCE QUARTER 2 REPORT**

The HMAB considered the Housing Service Performance Report for Quarter Two. The Corporate Performance and Improvement Officer highlighted the Compliance

and Customer Service measures that had performed below target. The Compliance target had been affected by contract delays and certification issues regarding the statutory and SBC enhanced definition of assets known to be Health and Safety compliant. It was indicated that the Council is working with the contractor to ensure that regulations are met and that compliance certificates are provided.

With regard to the Customer Service theme, Members were informed that the final outcome for Anti-Social Behaviour and customer complaints were below target. The percentage of complaints closed on target was improving. This was partly due to customer care training provided to Housing Staff as part of personal development training.

It was reported that Repairs are being fixed promptly and exceeding target. Officers introduced the following measures to improve voids performance:

- Seeking to re-let properties and reschedule major works while the tenant is in the property
- Collaborative working with investment and empty homes teams
- Remodelling hard to let properties

The Assistant Director informed the HMAB that remodelling hard to let properties was not an easy option because there was no constant flow of suitable properties. The Council was considering revising the policy to include a trigger point for remodelling hard-to-let studio properties to one-bed flats. There were plans to introduce a key performance target for properties that were being remodelled. It was indicated that the Independent Living Team continued to market voids through direct contact with potential tenants and referrals received.

Members were informed that the impact of Universal Credit would not be known until after the middle of next year.

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

#### 4 **MAJOR REFURBISHMENT CONTRACT UPDATE**

The Capital Programme Manager provided an update on the Major Refurbishment Contract (MRC).

Members were informed that the SBC Delivery Team has been working very closely with Mulalley and Wates over the past six months to develop processes and procedures to ensure robust management of the MRC programme. Pilot works have gone well and the quality of works from both contractors has been to a high standard. Work is now progressing at a slow pace.

UK Power Networks (UKPN) does not have an obligation to fully align its programmes and timescales to requests by SBC or other contractors. This has been the biggest challenge so far and it has caused delays to the MRC programme. The Council is working closely with UKPN to plan ahead for future years in order to minimise any further delays. It might take the next six to 12 months to resolve current issues and then hopefully start working ahead of the programme.

The duration of works at Southend Close have been extended following the recent discovery of structural issues on the chimney stacks which were not identifiable from ground level when the blocks were surveyed. As a result of this, scaffold will be in place longer than expected while the chimneys are demolished and this is likely to be an inconvenience to the residents. Residents have been invited to a coffee morning and offered face-to-face meetings to discuss the latest developments. The Council will also be writing to all tenants next week. In future, the Council will inform residents prior to works that programme durations may be extended if unforeseen building defects are encountered after works commence.

At a meeting in October 2018, the Executive approved the addition of garage refurbishment works to the MRC contract. This will allow works to be planned and coordinated efficiently and offers economies of scale with the rates. Pilot works on garages are due to commence January 2019.

Following a very successful mobilisation period, the Council is now ready to progress with works to the remainder of the year one programme. This means that productivity will increase significantly over the next two to three months. Officers will monitor progress, quality and communication very closely during this time and for the remainder of the contract. An update will be provided to the HMAB on completion of work on a block.

The Executive Portfolio Holder informed the HMAB that street signs were being refurbished and standardised as part of the MRC. It was confirmed that in the event of any delays, scaffold were removed or stripped to a safe minimum. Members raised concerns about disruptions and parking problems on refurbishment sites. Members were informed that contractors had been advised to minimise the number of vehicles that were parked on sites.

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

## 5 **GAS CONTRACT UPDATE**

The M & E Compliance Manager provided an update on the Gas Contract. Members were informed that there had been significant improvements following a long period of management problems at the contractor (Liberty Group) and poor communication between Liberty staff and Stevenage Borough Council (SBC). The Compliance Manager highlighted the following positive developments:

- A drop in complaints received in July to 15 against 27 in June and a further drop each month since then
- Five (5) compliments received from residents in July and (two) 2 cases where the electrician discovered and highlighted dangerous wiring
- Same day response for the majority of complaints
- Improved communication between SBC Gas Administration team and Liberty Administrations team
- Positive feedback from SBC voids team
- Winter planning is in place. The plan includes stockpiles of heaters, more van stock and re-profiling of services away from winter months to allow more engineers on breakdowns

- Monthly tool box talks involving SBC Gas Manager and all engineers
- Weekly meetings between SBC and Liberty Contract Manager to discuss and update improvement plan and any other issues
- An improvement plan now implemented with actions and deadlines
- SBC is cost saving options such as alternatives to scaffold
- Dedicated contact for damp surveyor to deal with any necessary remedial actions
- More training for all engineers including updated asbestos awareness and Baxi products training
- Direct contact with Gas Supervisor and lead engineer call me directly in an effort to sort out more quickly issues as they arise
- More quality checks to be undertaken including monthly checks on the competency of all engineers
- New phone line provider resulting in relatively less disruption to service. Alternative contact numbers for SBC Customer Service Centre are provided should normal phone lines be inoperative
- Daily reports that allow greater visibility of the contract
- New Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) allow engineers to order parts while they are still at the address. The orders are processed by an embedded Parts Centre member of staff
- Liberty services to be expanded to include the testing of smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors in each property visited and ensuring that the alarms have not reached end of life
- Liberty's call back feature for the call centre is up and running
- SBC is in the process of implementing the secret shopper and web chat facilities in order to improve the service

The Compliance Manager informed the HMAB that the improvement plan had 49 measures. Twenty-three of the measures were on target, four were below target, 19 were ongoing and three measures were yet to be started. It was indicated that problems at the shared Liberty Call Centre in Liverpool were causing long waiting times. It was confirmed that current Liberty managers were responsive to issues raised by the Council.

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

## 6 REPAIRS AND VOIDS UPDATE

The Assistant Director (Stevenage Direct Services) provided an update on Repairs and Voids. Members were informed that Repairs and Voids had been reinstated to the Shared Internal Audit Service (SIAS) programme. The Internal Audit covered both the service and management functions. The latest SIAS report indicated substantial compliance for Repairs and Voids. This means that the design and operation of the internal control framework is effective, thereby ensuring that the key risks in scope are being well managed and core objectives will likely be achieved. There are minor reportable audit findings. The SIAS report included recommendations regarding performance data, recharge for works and the review of policies and procedures. It was reported that an external audit had been scheduled for Repairs and Voids.

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

7 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Chair accepted an urgent item on the Asset Management Strategy. The HMAB considered the Housing Asset Management Strategy (AMS) for the period 2018 to 2023. The strategy sets out the key strategic aims & objectives to ensure SBC derives maximum value from its assets. The AMS document covers the background to the strategy, potential changes to legislation, summary of key aims and objectives, profile of the Housing Portfolio, stock condition, stock portfolio management, Investment Planning, Delivering the Strategy and Programme, Capital Programme and Action Plan.

The Housing Operations Manager (IHP) informed Members that the recruitment of the Operations Manager post and projects such as the Major Refurbishment Contract had contributed to delays in the implementation of the AMS. The delays presented the team an opportunity to consider the revised Medium Term Financial Strategy. The AMS had been updated to include current stock statistics, recent changes to building regulations and the retrofitting of fire suppressant sprinkler systems to residential tower blocks.

As a follow up to the September meeting of the HMAB, Members were informed that the “Housing Matters” Annual Report had been moved to a more prominent page on the SBC website.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the Housing Asset Management Strategy update be noted
2. That a link to the Housing Matters report be sent to HMAB members

8 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

**Thursday 17 January 2019**, 6.00pm, Shimkent Room, Daneshill House,  
Danestrete, SG1 1HN

**CHAIR**