

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**HOUSING MANAGEMENT ADVISORY BOARD
MINUTES**

Date: Thursday, 19 April 2018

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Shimkent Room - Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: **Resident Members:** J Thurlow (Leaseholder) (Chair),
C Anderson (Tenant), F Plumridge (Tenant) and L Saunders (Tenant)
Councillors: P Bibby (Vice Chair), C Latif and J Mead
Staff Members: J Cresser (Assistant Director – Housing and
Investment) and C Miller (Assistant - Director Direct Services)

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

1 **APOLOGIES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L Martin-Haugh, S Mead and J Thomas.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 **MINUTES - 22 FEBRUARY 2018 AND 15 MARCH 2018**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meetings of the Housing Management Advisory Board (HMAB) held on 22 February 2018 and 15 March 2018, are approved as a correct record to be signed by the Chair.

3 **REVIEW OF 2017/18 AND WORK PLANNING 2018/19**

The Board outlined the performance to date against the 2017/18 HMAB Work Plan and agreed the Work Plan for 2018/19.

The highlights of the performance review are listed below:

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| What worked well | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Co-operative working2) Link with Customer Scrutiny Panel (CSP) - CSP Chair ex-officio HMAB Member3) Good attendance at meetings4) Support from Resident Involvement team5) Support from SBC officers6) HMAB objectives were met/HMAB fulfilled fundamental purpose7) Added value through customer/resident scrutiny of performance and challenges - e.g. Review of Rent Letters8) Regular engagement and dialogue with residents |
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| | <p>and other stakeholders</p> <p>9) General format of meetings – discussion, input from stakeholders and detailed reports from officers</p> <p>10) Better understanding of Council work – as a result of HMAB reports, updates and discussions</p> |
| What would you have done differently | <p>1) Agenda too long – not enough time to discuss agenda items in detail</p> <p>2) More involvement in formulating Housing Policy (Term “Advisory” suggests low-key role)</p> <p>3) Provide clarity on functions of HMAB, CSP and Leaseholders’ Forum so as to avoid duplication</p> <p>4) Clarify relationship between HMAB and Community Select Committee</p> <p>5) Less frequent updates on Aids and Adaptations and Voids and Repairs (Provide quarterly updates or monthly updates only for major items)</p> |
| Ideas for the following year | <p>1) Have a shorter agenda</p> <p>2) Remove Housing Performance Updates and use performance briefings instead</p> <p>3) Allocate performance reviews to CSP</p> <p>4) Improve the Leaseholders’ Forum</p> <p>5) Board play leading/active role in setting Agenda</p> <p>6) Networking with other resident groups</p> <p>7) Voids and Repairs Review/Monitoring</p> <p>8) Empty Homes Review</p> <p>9) Aids and Adaptations Monitoring</p> <p>10) Service awareness sessions, e.g. visits to services</p> <p>11) Work with Chair of Leaseholders’ Forum to share experiences and learning</p> |
| Training needs | <p>1) Housing Law</p> <p>2) Analysing budgets/financial statements</p> |
| Any other comments | <p>1) Ensure there is more structure to Residents’ Forum</p> <p>2) Structured and more formalised induction for new members</p> <p>3) How do we know what difference we make in decisions taken by Council?</p> <p>4) Provide updates on organisational changes</p> <p>5) Need for clarity on remit of HMAB with regards to policy development</p> |

It was **RESOLVED**:

- That the issues raised be noted
- That the Assistant Director (Housing and Investment), Assistant (Director Direct Services), the Chair and Vice-Chair discuss the feasibility of HMAB involvement in housing policy development work

- That the Assistant Director (Housing and Investment) liaises with Community Select Committee to avoid duplication

4 **AIDS AND ADAPTATIONS SERVICE CHARGE UPDATE**

The Housing and Investment team provided an update on Aids and Adaptations Service Charges and a general Aids and Adaptations overview. It was pointed out that Disability Living Allowance may cover some or all of increased service charges. The Board was informed that Aids and Adaptations work is considered the same as repairs and therefore forms part of rent. It was indicated that service charges mainly cover the installation of stair lifts, hoists and Closomat water closets and any other items of equipment that will require regular servicing and maintenance.

In response to a question about the servicing of stair lifts, it was indicated that stair lifts were high maintenance units, and failure to carry out regular servicing can result in serious injury or worse. Members were informed that SBC was looking to cover stair lifts with a three star type annual service that would include all call outs, parts and labour for repairs including two service visits a year. This is generally in line with Health and Safety practices, insurance requirements, manufacturer's instructions, and warrantee terms and conditions.

The Board was informed that a new team had been established to bring forward the delivery of the Aids and Adaptations service and implement and develop policy procedures that were recently presented to the Board. The introduction of Framework and Housing contractors has already seen some improvements in the delivery and completion works.

It was **RESOLVED** that the questions and issues raised, and the responses given, be noted.

5 **VOIDS AND REPAIRS UPDATE**

The Assistant Director (Direct Services) provided an update on Voids and Repairs performance. The Assistant Director indicated that overall, performance was improving. The Board was informed that holding weekly team meetings and using hand-held devices had contributed to improvements in the performance of the Repairs team. It was pointed out that Voids turnaround times were improving. Voids performance had been affected by legacy cases. Voids losses were 0.6% above the budgeted position.

The Assistant Director provided an update on the engagement of a Commercial Contracts Manager. It was confirmed that performance monitoring and service standards clauses were now included in repairs and voids contracts. The Assistant Director indicated that the next Repairs and Voids Report would include performance trends.

It was **RESOLVED** that the questions and issues raised, and the responses given, be noted.

6 HOUSING ALL UNDER ONE ROOF UPDATE

The Assistant Director (Housing & Investment) provided an update on the Housing All Under One Roof Programme. The Assistant Director highlighted the following:

- Recruitment of three Housing Operations Managers
- Restructuring of the Housing and Homelessness services in preparation for the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
- Purchasing of Northgate modules for Housing Advice and Housing Support
- New ways of working as a result of the introduction of Task Manager and work flow systems

The Assistant Director pointed out that the next phase of the Housing All Under One Roof programme would be the introduction of hand-held devices. The Board was informed that a pilot on rent arrears letters had seen a reduction of up to two thousand letters per week and a reduction in rent arrears.

The Board received an update on Housing and Investment Staff Survey that was conducted at the Away Day in February 2018. The results showed less satisfaction compared to the previous year in the following areas:

- Being valued at work
- Workload
- Council communication
- Appraisal system

It was noted that some responses were affected by managerial changes within the organisation. Members raised questions about the nature and frequency of surveys and promotion criteria for managers. In response to these questions, it was indicated that staff surveys were currently done once every two years but there were plans to conduct the surveys annually. The Housing and Investment team carried out quarterly surveys, anonymous feedback and informal surveys. Members were also informed that the Council was using management competencies as part of the promotion criteria for managers. Officers were also offered mentoring before promotion. It was indicated that responses to the survey would be included in the May issue of the Housing and Investment newsletter.

It was **RESOLVED** that the questions and issues raised, and the responses given, be noted.

7 RIGHT TO BUY RECEIPTS

It was **RESOLVED** that this item be deferred to the next meeting.

8 FEEDBACK FROM EXECUTIVE

In view of the absence of the Housing, Health and Older People Executive Portfolio Holder, it was **RESOLVED** that the item be deferred to the next meeting.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Allocations Policy – Mutual Exchange/Local Connection

The Assistant Director (Housing and Investment) sought feedback from the Board regarding a proposal that those who have mutually exchanged into Stevenage, and who do not have the 5 year connection, be allowed to reapply for housing if their circumstances change and they require a different housing solution AND they have been living in Stevenage for twelve months.

Currently the Local Connection rule is five years. Following a recent Allocations Policy review, the Local Connection rule has been amended to five out of the last seven years, with no more than two occasions outside of the Borough.

This Local Connection rule is applied to ALL applicants including those that are Stevenage Borough tenants. Consequently a tenant who has mutually exchanged into a Stevenage Borough Council property from outside the Borough, who has never previously lived in Stevenage, would have to wait five years before meeting the Local Connection rule allowing then to apply for rehousing.

The Board was informed that under the current arrangement, if a couple exchanges into a one bedroom flat and have two children over the next two or three years, they would not be eligible for re-housing for a further two or three years until they have five years local connection. Stevenage Borough Council could therefore be challenged for ‘forcing’ a four-person household to stay in a one-bedroom flat.

This example could also be applied in the case of a household who have mutually exchanged into a second floor flat with no lift and one member develops mobility issues in the first year of mutually exchanging. Under current rules, the household would have to wait four years before being eligible to apply for housing. Again, Stevenage Borough Council could therefore be challenged for ‘forcing’ a disabled person to stay in a second floor flat with no lift.

It was indicated that either case could be brought to the Housing Panel, with it being highly conceivable that the Panel would agree to a move. The Housing Panel decisions set precedent so each case after would automatically be accepted and this justifies enshrining the Mutual Exchange exception in the Allocations Policy.

It was pointed out that Mutual Exchanges are a statutory right open to all permanent social housing tenants and therefore an exchange cannot be declined on the basis of Local Connection.

The Board sought clarification on the current criteria for Mutual Exchange and options available to overcrowded households. Members were informed that cases of overcrowded households were referred to the Housing Panel. It was indicated that:

- Those seeking to exchange need not necessarily have the same landlord
- Parties to a mutual exchange were permitted to have one room than they needed

- The council can refuse a request for a mutual exchange if either party to the proposed exchange has rent arrears or has had action taken against them in respect of anti-social behaviour

The Board indicated that allowing the Mutual Exchange exception could be used to circumvent the Local Connection requirement. Members highlighted the obligation to prioritise local residents and the risk of fuelling perceptions of housing queue jumping.

North Road Update

Members indicated that they had not received updates on the North Road site in recent months.

It was **RESOLVED**:

- That the Assistant Director provides Mutual Exchanges feedback to the Empty Homes Manager
- That the Assistant Director (Housing Development) be contacted for an update on the North Road site

10 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Date of Next Meeting: Thursday 21 June 2018, Shimkent Room at Daneshill House

CHAIR