

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**HOUSING MANAGEMENT ADVISORY BOARD
MINUTES**

Date: Thursday, 19 July 2018

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Shimkent Room - Daneshill House, Danestrete

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

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

Also in Attendance: Councillor Jeannette Thomas (Executive Portfolio Holder - Housing,
Health and Older People) and Neil Baker (Community Development
Manager)

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 7.40pm

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

Apologies were received from C Anderson, Cllr L Martin-Haugh and Cllr S-J Potter.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Assistant Director (Housing and Investment) provided an update on the issue of customer care training that was raised at the previous Housing Management Advisory Board (HMAB) meeting. Four external providers had expressed interest in providing training for SBC staff. A meeting to discuss customer care training had been arranged for the 25th of July 2018.

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the HMAB meeting held on 21 June 2018 are approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair subject to recording the presence in attendance of the following:

Cllr J Thomas – Housing, Health and Older People
Neil Baker – Community Development Manager
Rob Gregory - Assistant Director (Communities and Neighbourhoods)
Gill Laurence – Resident Involvement Officer
Guru Lota – Resident Involvement Officer

3 **REVENUE AND CAPITAL QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE UPDATE**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Revenue and Capital Quarterly Performance Update be deferred to the August meeting of the HMAB.

4 **HOUSING SERVICE PERFORMANCE QUARTERLY REPORT**

The HMAB received an update on Housing Service Performance for Quarter Four. The Corporate Performance and Improvement Manager made the following proposals for presentation of performance information:

1. Printed overview report summarising performance status and key areas of focus
2. Printed appendix of full set of measure results with comments
3. On screen focus on measures not achieving target – additional graphical representations that help to present a picture of performance would also be available

The Corporate Performance and Improvement Manager highlighted the following benefits of the InPhase Performance Reporting on-screen presentation:

1. The interactive functionality allows a variety of graphical and dynamic representations of measure status to be viewed
2. The system provides latest updates regarding measures
3. Environmental saving on printing of paper of approximately 24 pages per report
4. The system enhances efficiency relating to officer resource

The Assistant Director (Direct Services) welcomed the use of the InPhase reporting system. Members were informed that in general, Voids and Repairs performance had improved over the past six months. There were still issues regarding re-letting of some void properties. It was indicated that the Council had a programme to re-design some bed sits so as to make them attractive to bidders. The re-development of sheltered housing schemes such as the properties in Kenilworth Close was part of the Council strategy on hard-to-let properties. The Assistant Director (Direct Services) assured Members that key performance indicators were subject to quarterly review by the Senior Leadership Team.

It was **RESOLVED** that the proposals for presentation of Housing Performance information be adopted.

5 **HRA BUSINESS PLAN QUARTERLY UPDATE**

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan update for the fourth quarter highlighted Housing Development, Housing Investment, Housing Management and

Maintenance Services and Financial Assumptions.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Q4 Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan report is noted.

6 **MAJOR REFURBISHMENT CONTRACT UPDATE**

The Capital Programme Manager informed Members that:

- The Major Refurbishment Contract (MRC) mobilisation is progressing as planned and detailed design surveys have commenced
- The contractors were working closely with SBC's project managers to address the requirements of the Council and its residents
- Pilot properties have been identified for blocks in Broadwater Crescent, Southend Close and Splash Drive and tenants of these blocks had been consulted
- A communications strategy had been developed and was being implemented
- Contract governance and reporting arrangements had been agreed and the teams are currently developing supporting documentation and process maps

It was indicated that work was scheduled to commence on 30 July 2018 at the Broadwater Crescent blocks and 08 August 2018 at Splash Drive.

It was **RESOLVED** that the MRC project team monitors the distribution of the information packs to ensure that all affected residents received up-to-date information.

7 **UNIVERSAL CREDIT UPDATE**

The Universal Credit/Welfare Reform update covered the background to Universal Credit (UC), timetable for implementation, impact on claimants, SBC position, impact of UC on rent arrears, support provided by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and SBC and current initiatives by the Council.

Universal Credit first went live in Stevenage in February 2015 and the pilot involved single claimants. The full service roll-out for new applicants and change of circumstance cases was due to commence on 03 October 2018. Members commended the work done to support those affected by welfare reforms. However, it was acknowledged that some Universal Credit recipients did not prioritise paying rent. Members sought clarification on issues of rent arrears and staff resources assigned to deal with the welfare reforms. In response to the questions, the Housing Operations Manager stated that SBC provided a home visit service to those claimants who required assistance in making claims or for discussion about financial matters. Members were informed that the Council worked collaboratively with Citizens Advice Bureau, the Department for Work and pensions and credit unions to support residents with rent arrears. The Council was involved in the anti-loan shark

campaign and employment initiatives.

It was indicated that SBC staff intervene at the earliest signs of financial stress. The Council considered eviction only as a last resort and in exceptional circumstances. SBC evicted less than twenty (20) tenants per year. Some of these tenants abandoned the properties before the end of the formal eviction process. Members were informed that the Council informed social services and other relevant authorities whenever tenants were evicted.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Universal Credit/Welfare Reform update is noted.

8 **TENANCY AGREEMENT UPDATE**

The Tenancy and Income Manager's Tenancy Agreement update covered the background to the current tenancy agreement, issues that had driven the tenancy agreement review, parties involved in the review, main subject areas and key dates for the review.

Members were informed that the last review had been done in 2013. The current review was aimed at addressing recent changes in housing-related legislation and other issues such as independent living, access to property, health and safety of staff, termination of tenancy and anti-social behaviour. It was noted that the proposed introduction of fixed-term tenancies was likely to affect the stability of some families.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the Customer Scrutiny Panel and resident forums be consulted on the tenancy agreement
2. That consultation on the tenancy agreement be widened to include social gatherings such as the Teddy Bears' Picnic at Hampson Park
3. That the tenancy agreement clarifies that in relation to birds and vermin, the Council would not take action unless there was a real nuisance created

9 **FEEDBACK FROM EXECUTIVE**

It was **RESOLVED** that the feedback from the July Executive meeting be deferred to the August meeting of the HMAB.

10 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Chair accepted an urgent item regarding annual gas inspections. Several members of the Board expressed concern that engineers from the gas contractor, Liberty, were insisting on turning up at properties on the original date of the annual check even though residents had cancelled and rescheduled the appointments. This practice was reported to be widespread.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Gas Compliance Manager provides an update on the

performance of the gas contractor at the next HMAB meeting.

11 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Thursday 16 August 2018, 1800hrs, Shimkent Room

CHAIR