

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
HOUSING MANAGEMENT ADVISORY BOARD
MINUTES

Date: Thursday, 21 November 2019

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Shimkent Room, Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: **Councillors:** John Lloyd (Vice-Chair in the Chair) and Margaret Notley.

Resident Members: Len Saunders (Chair) (Tenant), Fiona Plumridge (Tenant) and Jon Thurlow (Leaseholder).

Staff Member: Jaine Cresser (Assistant Director – Housing and Investment)

In attendance: Elizabeth Ddamulira (Tenancy and Income Manager), Di Dharmasuriya (Service Delivery Manager – Property Repairs), Ryan Foss (Housing Development Project Officer), Chloe Norton (Corporate Performance and Improvement Officer), Keith Reynoldson (Finance Business Partner – HRA) and Katrina Shirley (Corporate Policy and Business Support Manager).
Councillor Jeannette Thomas (Portfolio Holder – Housing, Health and Older People).
Sam Goodwin (Tenant Participation Advisory Service).

Start / End Start Time: 6.00pm
Time: End Time: 7.57pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor John Lloyd (Vice-Chair) in the Chair.

Apologies for absence were received from Craig Miller (Assistant Director – Stevenage Direct Services) and Councillors Liz Harrington and Lin Martin-Haugh.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - 12 SEPTEMBER 2019

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Housing Management Advisory Board meeting held on 12 September 2019 be approved as a correct record and be signed by the Chair.

3 HOUSING SERVICE PERFORMANCE Q2 REPORT

The Corporate Performance and Improvement Officer presented an update on the Housing Service Performance report for the Second Quarter of 2019/20 (July – September 2019). Of the 42 performance measures, 7 were at red status and 3 were at unknown status, with the remaining 32 at green status, having achieved or exceeded their targets.

Compliance

The improvement focus would be on:

- Assets 5b: Percentage of Council assets known to be health and safety compliant – the contractor has provided assurances that the tasks for this performance indicator had been completed, although certification had only been supplied for 49% of the tasks.
- RTB1: Percentage of Right to Buy notices responded to within statutory timescales – 36 RTB notices were sent out, with 33 being responded to on time. The delays on the remaining 3 cases were due to tenants denying access.

Customer Service

There were no red or amber measures within the Customer Service theme within Quarter 2.

Homelessness and Housing Support

The improvement focus would be on:

- NI156: Number of households in temporary accommodation – 81 were achieved against a target of 75. These cases were being reviewed and a programme was in place to rectify the issues, starting in early 2020.
- HHA1 and HHA2 – these two measures, relating to homelessness prevention, could not be reported as there were currently no targets available for these measures.

Income/Spend

The improvement focus would be on:

- LHSC: Percentage of Leasehold Service Charges collected – it was expected that income collection would improve and outstanding balances would be collected over the next two quarters.
- LHMW1: Leasehold major works charges collected as a percentage of charges due – this was below target and outstanding cases related to an account payable by arrangements set by the Court and where the property was under a grant of probate.

Repairs and Voids

The improvement focus would be on:

- In Quarter 2 the only Sheltered Major Works void had a catastrophic leak from the property above whilst void, and was required to be shut down for a couple of weeks to dry the property before works could resume; additional work was required to rectify the damage caused by the leak.

Voids sheltered was still 20 days over target. However, due to collaborative work with other teams, it was now 40 days less than the same time last year. The Assistant Director (Housing and Investment) clarified that the building works to turnaround voids were mostly completed within timescales, but delays often occurred between the date of handover and the properties being relet due to a lack of demand for some properties.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Housing Service Performance report for the Second Quarter of 2019/20 (July – September 2019) be noted.

4 TPAS BRIEFING

The Chair introduced and welcomed to the meeting Sam Goodwin from the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS).

Sam informed the Board that she had been asked by the Assistant Director (Communities and Neighbourhoods) to look at how the number of tenants/leaseholders that engaged with the Council could be increased. She had recently attended a Customer Scrutiny Panel meeting, which had supported a trial proposal to organise a series of one day resident involvement workshops, the topic for the first one being the Gas Servicing Contract / Home MoTs.

Sam advised that a start had been made on planning the first workshop, which had been scheduled to take place on Saturday, 18 January 2020 from 10.30am to 1.00pm at the Ibis Hotel in the Town Centre. All Council tenants/leaseholders would be informed of the event in writing, through the Council's website, and on social media. She would be meeting with officers again shortly to firm up the details of the workshop. She felt that it would be important that, amongst the officers in attendance, there should be senior managers with suitable authority to provide tenants/leaseholders with yes or no answers to their questions and queries.

Sam explained that she envisaged that one of the roles of the Customer Scrutiny Panel going forward would be to agree topics for future workshops and monitor the outcome of workshop sessions.

It was **RESOLVED** that the update on the involvement of the Tenant Participation Advisory Service in increasing tenant/leaseholder engagement be noted.

5 HRA BUSINESS PLAN REVIEW

The Assistant Director (Housing and Investment), assisted by the Housing Development Project Officer and the Finance Business Partner (HRA), gave a presentation on the proposed revised Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan. The Board was provided with a re-cap of the 2018 Business Plan and context and challenges for the 2019 Plan.

The presentation included the following key points:

- As at July 2019, there were 2,187 housing applicants; in 2018/19 there were 1,268 homelessness and housing advice presentations (a 33% increase on 2017/18); and the rough sleeper count at November 2018 was 11 individuals.
- The Business Plan anticipated a total of 345 homes delivered over the next 5 years.
- The HRA Asset Management Strategy had highlighted a number of known Revenue and Capital pressures, which additional borrowing would allow the Council to address.
- The Business Unit review in Housing and Investment aimed to improve service delivery to customers.
- The proposed revised Business Plan indicated £322M borrowing over the next 30 years, including £66.7M additional borrowing over the next 10 years, with the revenue contribution to capital reducing from £51M to 0 in Years 1-5; £646M housing development funding over the next 30 years, including £64M additional development funding for 271 additional new homes; £835M stock investment funding over the next 30 years, including £56.7M additional stock investment funding for building safety, new decent homes standard, cyclical works etc; and £979M housing management and repairs funding over the next 30 years, with a savings target reduced to £100,000 per annum and a responsive repairs efficiency target of 2%.
- Uncapped borrowing allowed debt repayments to be spread evenly; the cost of servicing debt to be proportionate to income; loan periods optimised to minimise interest payments and allow capacity for future borrowing; and allowed the creation of a £5M reserve to cover interest rate risk.
- A series of presentation slides showed proposed new debt levels, outstanding HRA debt and new development and disposal over the 30 year life of the Plan.
- The risks to new borrowing included potential Rent Policy changes resulting in reduced rental income, meaning debt cannot be repaid; increase in building and maintenance costs; higher interest rates than the average assumed in the Plan (possible future PWLB increases); the impact of Universal Credit; Right to Buy legislation changes; and any underachievement of Collection of Section 20 monies (£22M).

In summary, the Assistant Director (Housing and Investment) stated that the Business Plan provided for an accelerated development programme; increased investment in the existing housing stock; and a prudent approach to future proof the Plan. However, the increased borrowing brought increased risk, and the Plan would inevitably be subject to the impact of future Government legislation. Officers would also review the Business Plan on an annual basis.

The Chair thanked the officers for an excellent presentation. The Leaseholder representative commented that actions relating to the next 5-10 years would be crucial, and flagged up a further issue, namely the currently unknown impact on the housing stock of Climate Change requirements.

It was **RESOLVED** that the presentation on the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan Review be noted.

6 RENT POLICY

The Tenancy and Income Manager (Housing and Investment) presented a report regarding proposed amendments to the Council's Rent and Service Charge Policy.

The Tenancy and Income Manager advised that the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 had required social landlords to reduce rents by 1% for 4 years from April 2016. In October 2017, the Government announced plans to permit registered providers to increase rents on social rent and affordable rent properties by up to CPI+1% each year from 2020, for a period of at least five years. It was proposed to amend the Council's Rent and Service Charge Policy accordingly.

The Assistant Director (Housing and Investment) commented that the Rent and Service Charge Policy would be incorporated within the HRA Medium Term Financial Strategy.

It was **RESOLVED** that the update on the draft Rent and Service Charge Policy be noted.

7 REPAIRS AND VOIDS UPDATE

The Service Delivery Manager (Stevenage Direct Services) advised that the update on Repairs and Voids performance had been covered by the Corporate Performance and Improvement Officer under the previous item. She informed the Board that the service was carrying out a Lean Process Review, with the aim of instigating a Digital Transformation Project to streamline and modernise service provision.

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

8 UPDATE FROM EXECUTIVE MEETINGS

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health and Older People advised that the Executive, at its meeting held on 20 November 2019, had considered and approved the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy. The associated Action Plan had various aims, including a reduction in the numbers of rough sleeper to zero, and the desire to build additional social/affordable homes and to increase the supply of emergency accommodation to help tackle the homelessness crisis and avoid the need for bed and breakfast costs. A further aspiration was for the creation of a Women's Hostel in Stevenage. The Action Plan would be reviewed on a Quarterly and Annual basis.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health and Older People agreed with the comment made by Mr Jon Thurlow (Leaseholder representative) that homelessness and rough sleeping needed to be tackled using a partnership approach between the Council, County Council, Health providers and the Police.

9 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(1) Resignation of Assistant Director (Stevenage Direct Services)

The Assistant Director (Housing and Investment) advised the Board that Craig Miller, Assistant Director (Stevenage Direct Services) had recently resigned and would be leaving the Authority to take up a Director post with the London Borough of Barnet. The Council was advertising for a replacement.

(2) Leaseholders

Mr Jon Thurlow (Leaseholder representative) referred to the recent Leaseholder meeting held at the Council Offices, attended by over 80 leaseholders, at which the issue of the payment of Leaseholder maintenance charges in relation to the Major Repairs Contract was discussed. He was disappointed that the Council's website had not been updated with the minutes or a summary of the issues raised at the meeting, and was conscious that there had been limited feedback to leaseholders.

The Assistant Director (Housing and Investment) advised that there had been a staff de-briefing session following the meeting. She acknowledged that the information of the website required improvement, and she was looking at ways of communicating with tenants and leaseholders in a more modern way. She undertook to ensure that the website was updated and information and outcomes from the meeting fed back to the leaseholders who had attended. She further advised that the leasehold service needed additional resource and therefore an additional post was shortly to be advertised to help address the concerns of leaseholders. She also accepted that more senior officers should be required to attend future leaseholders meeting to support officers in the Leasehold Team.

10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday, 16 January 2020, 6.00pm

Shimkent Room, Daneshill House, Danestrete

CHAIR