

**HOUSING MANAGEMENT ADVISORY BOARD
8TH SEPTEMBER 2021**

PRESENT: The Chair (T. Edwardes)
The Vice Chair (T. Riley)
Board Members Ali, Davis, Hudson, Wright, Bolton
and Seaton

Head of Landlord Services
Landlord Services Manager
Democratic Services Officer (EB)

APOLOGIES: None.

12. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 14th July 2021 were confirmed as an accurate record subject to the following amendment:

- (i) With regard to minute 1 Chair and Vice Chair of Board 2021/22 Council Year 'Ms T. Riley' be amended to 'Miss T Riley'.

13. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Mrs Yasmin Ali made a declaration concerning Exempt Item 11 – Future Arrangements for the Delivery of Planned Works, Voids and Associated Works. She would leave the room when that item was discussed.

14. BUDGET SETTING AND PRIORITIES FOR 2022/23

The Head of Landlord Services Submitted a report providing an overview of the budget setting process, and to enable members of the Board to consider initiatives / priorities it wishes to see budgeted for in 2022/23 (item 4 on the agenda).

The Board were advised that:

- (i) Each year the budget planning process for the next financial year started around this time of year.
- (ii) There was also a review of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) business plan focussing on a 30-year period.
- (iii) In November 2021, the Board would receive a presentation from Saville's on their business plan.
- (iv) Cabinet would consider a draft budget in December and the final draft would go to Council in February. It was recommended that the Board consider the budget in January before it went to Council.
- (v) Priorities included:
 - a. Maintaining the 'Charnwood Standard' whereby kitchens were replaced every 20 years and bathrooms every 30 years

- b. There would be a key focus on policies considered by the Board such as the Tenancy Policy and Tenancy Agreement. Both items would go to Cabinet later in the month.
- c. The HRA business plan would shape the medium-to-long term on spending on council housing stock.
- d. The Environmental Agenda would be considered.

In response to questions from the Board it was explained that:

- (i) In terms of how realistic it was to catch up with the Capital Programme by the end of the financial year, the main pressures concerned bathrooms. Targets on kitchens may be more achievable as the number was relatively low. Many bathrooms were due for replacement and a report was taken to Cabinet earlier in the year to highlight this difficulty. There was pressure on contractors, and it was considered best to have a smooth programme to avoid a big peak and to have a steady, manageable flow of works for contractors if possible.
- (ii) As well as a high-level programme of works, tenants were also written to informing them of works planned and showing where they were in the programme.
- (iii) Whilst contractors were busy, it was thought there was still capacity in the market for delivery.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Reason

To acknowledge the Board's consideration of the matter.

15. COMMUNAL CLEANING UPDATE REPORT

The Landlord Services Manager submitted a report presenting the Board with an update on the operation of the communal cleaning service (item 5 on the agenda).

The Board was advised that:

- (i) The contract had started at the end of 2019 and members were given an overview of how the current situation regarding the management of the contract.
- (ii) The contract allowed for a two-year extension and as things stood, the position was to recommend the continuation of the contract for a further two years.

In response to questions from the Board it was explained that:

- (i) The original decision to enter into the contract was not a result of direct consultation with tenants, rather it arose through STAR surveys that indicated low satisfaction with the cleanliness of blocks. Tenants were, however, consulted on the frequency of the cleaning. The latest STAR

survey about to go out to tenants and included questions on how tenants saw the service and asked them if they would consider paying more for additional services that could be added such as communal window cleaning, dry mopping and adding fragrance to cleaning products so areas 'smelled' clean. The contract served the purpose it was originally intended for.

- (ii) Walls were only detailed in the specification as being washed up to five feet owing to considerations around the use of equipment in the delivery of the contract.
- (iii) It was very important that the comments of residents were communicated to Landlord Services about concerns regarding the failure to meet the contract specification. The service operated a rigorous programme of inspections on a planned basis and were based on a schedule of cleans that was drawn up at the beginning of the contractual year. The target was for 10% of blocks to be inspected per month. A contract meeting was held every month and complaints were a standing item on the agenda, however, a contract breach could only be enforced if a default can be identified from evidence of a breach, therefore the service relied on residents contacting the Council when not happy. If the cleaning of a block had not met specifications, contractors would re-visit and inspect and sometimes re-cleaning would occur as a result. However, such inspections needed to happen shortly following the initial cleaning had taken place in order to get an objective assessment of compliance with the specification.
- (iv) Approximately 12 tenant inspectors had been recruited at the beginning of the contract and had been trained. Unfortunately, very shortly after training had been completed, lockdown began and it became increasingly difficult, because of the restrictions, to maintain the support and continual training of the inspectors that was needed. Restrictions had now been lifted and engagement officer was now in post, part of whose brief was to reinvigorate the tenant inspector programme. It was desirable for tenants to become actively involved in the service that they were paying for and it was important that they were given appropriate training so that they could be objective in their inspections.
- (v) An article would be published in the next One Charnwood encouraging feedback and informing tenants on how to give it.
- (vi) The addition of the dates of cleaning to the website was in progress. It featured a list of all blocks being cleaned and scheduled cleaning dates throughout the year. However, it was not yet searchable and so users would need to manually scroll through.

The Vice-Chair raised issues about an unresolved complaint.

Action: Vice-Chair to contact the Landlord Services Manager to inspect.

Board Member David Wright expressed his satisfaction with the service.

Councillor Bolton suggested that tenants could speak to Councillors if they did not feel they could talk to Council officers directly.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted.
2. That an article be published in the next *One Charnwood* about the cleaning contract, informing tenants on how to give feedback.
3. That Board Members e-mail Landlord Services about any concerns about on the cleaning contract.

Reason

1. To acknowledge the Board's consideration of the matter.
2. To encourage feedback from tenants to the service could be improved.
3. So that the agenda could move forward.

16. VOIDS UPDATE

The Head of Landlord Services submitted a report providing an update on the position in respect of voids (item 6 on the agenda).

The Board were advised that:

- (i) Voids fell into two categories: Standard Voids and Major Voids that needed structural repairs.
- (ii) Most work on voids was done by the internal voids team.
- (iii) A low number of void works were outsourced.
- (iv) Some months had more voids than others.
- (v) In terms of performance, Standard Voids were just above the target and Major Voids were fairly well over target.
- (vi) Pressure on resources had been exacerbated by workers having to self-isolate.
- (vii) There were two distinct teams, one doing responsive repairs and another that dealt specifically with voids. Some workers from the voids team had needed to move temporarily to the repairs team as needed.
- (viii) A contract on ad hoc responsive repairs as well as on major void work was being procured.
- (ix) There had been difficulty in letting age-restricted properties due to some not meeting aspirations as well as a potential lack of demand for properties limited to those aged 45+. A review of sheltered accommodation was in progress and St Michael's Court was being considered for development and a review of age-restricted properties would consider a broader range of ages.
- (x) More detailed information on accessibility was needed to allow easier matching of applicants to properties. As such, more information was being obtained.
- (xi) Some properties had been bought from the open market which required adapting. An adaptations contractor was being procured.
- (xii) Where works were so disruptive as to require a tenant to move out, suitable properties needed to be identified for them.

In response to questions from the Board it was explained that:

- (i) Data was being studied regarding the potential removal of age restrictions on properties. This was a work in progress.
- (ii) Age restrictions could potentially be dropped a little, however, with accommodation designed for the elderly, there was a view that there should be an age limit to preserve the image of sheltered accommodation, however, alteration of age restrictions was being considered for certain flats. The Head of Landlord Services would discuss options with the Head of Strategic Housing, and proposals would be brought forward to the Board where changes were planned that required Cabinet approval.
- (iii) The rule on age restrictions would still be applicable in cases of households of three generations.

Councillor Seaton raised the issue of suitability of tenants to certain properties and expressed the need for pragmatism.

The Vice-Chair requested to meet with the Head of Landlord Services following the meeting in order to clarify the data.

Action: Head of Landlord Services to meet with the Vice-Chair following the meeting.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the Head of Landlord Services discuss options on age-restrictions with the Head of Strategic Housing.

Reason

1. To acknowledge the Board's consideration of the matter.
2. To explore ways to maximise occupancy of properties.

17. PERFORMANCE INFORMATION PACK - QUARTER 1

The Head of Landlord Services submitted a report for the Board to consider performance at the end of Quarter 1, 2021-2022, April to June 2021 (item 7 on the agenda).

In response to a question from the Board it was explained that, regarding rent arrears and the loss of income for those on universal credit because of the impending end of the additional £20 per week payment given throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, there were supportive income, financial inclusion and tenancy support teams which could advise people on maximising benefits and making payment plans for paying rent. The housing allowance element of universal credit had not changed: the £20 increase was to the personal allowance. Those experiencing hardship as a result of the loss of the £20 would be offered help, support and advice. In terms of directly paid rent, the Department for Work and Pensions had a set of criteria for direct payments for a temporary period and this was subject to review. This had not changed and was strictly defined. It could be requested in arrears exceeded eight weeks' or more or if

the claimant was classified as vulnerable. The principle of universal credit was that people would be responsible for their money and how it was spent.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Reason

To acknowledge the Board's consideration of the matter.

18. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE BOARD

In accordance with the Board's decision at its meeting on 22nd March 2017 (HMAB Minute 24.1), members of the Board had been asked in advance of the agenda being published whether they had any questions on matters within the remit of the Board that they wished to ask, for response at this meeting.

On this occasion the Chair asked the following: Could residents be informed of budget setting and priorities ahead of the next meeting of the Board?

RESOLVED that the Head of Landlord Services produces notes for the Senior Citizens Forum and the Charnwood Housing Residents Forum.

Reason

To give notice to residents of budget setting and priorities.

19. WORK PROGRAMME

The Board received a report of the Head of Landlord Services to enable the Board to agree its Work Programme (item 9 on the agenda).

Members of the Board could identify matters that they considered required looking at over the next few meetings of the Board, including any already listed on the Work Programme but not yet scheduled. Officers present could provide advice as to whether items might be appropriately considered at the time proposed.

Summary of discussion:

- (i) It was clarified that the performance criteria listed on the workplan was now considered as a regular agenda item so Board Members could decide which criteria they wanted to see on an ongoing basis.
- (ii) Landlord Services followed the Council's Tree Policy.

RESOLVED

1. that the Budget Update be added to the Board's Work Programme for the meeting of the Housing Management Advisory Board on 12th January 2022 as an annual item.

2. that the STAR survey be allocated to the meeting of the Housing Management Advisory Board on 12th January 2022.
3. that the Board's Work Programme be updated to reflect all decisions made above and earlier in the meeting.

Reasons

- 1-2. so that it can be considered by the Board.
3. To ensure that the information in the Work Programme is up to date.

20. EXEMPT INFORMATION

It was resolved that members of the public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the item on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, and the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

At this point in the meeting the recording was stopped.

21. FUTURE ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE DELIVERY OF PLANNED WORKS, VOIDS AND ASSOCIATED WORKS

An exempt report of the Head of Landlord Services was considered (Exempt item 11 on the agenda).

A summary of the Board's discussion on this matter is provided in the exempt minute (Housing Management Advisory Board 22E. 2021/22).

NOTES:

1. No reference may be made to these minutes at the next meeting of Full Council unless notice to that effect is given to the Democratic Services Manager by five members of the Council by noon on the fifth working day following publication of these minutes.
2. These minutes are subject to confirmation as a correct record at the next meeting of the Housing Management Advisory Board.