

**HOUSING MANAGEMENT ADVISORY BOARD
6TH SEPTEMBER 2023**

PRESENT: The Chair (T. Edwardes)
The Vice Chair (T. Riley)
Board Members Davis, Hudson, J. Wright, Goode
and Monk

Director Housing and Wellbeing
Repairs and Investment Manager
Landlord Services Manager
Democratic Services Officer (RD) and Democratic
Services Officer (LS)

APOLOGIES: Board Members Ali, D. Wright and Infield

12. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 12th July 2023 were confirmed as an accurate record.

Reference Minute 5, paragraph (iii), the Director Housing and Wellbeing would check and confirm whether appropriate provision re: redecorating had been included in the Damp and Mould Framework.

13. DISCLOSURES OF PECUNIARY INTERESTS, AND OTHER REGISTRABLE AND NON-REGISTRABLE INTERESTS

No disclosures were made.

14. HOUSING OMBUDSMAN'S COMPLAINT HANDLING CODE - SELF-ASSESSMENT

The Board considered a report setting out the outcome of Landlord Services' annual self-assessment of its complaints policies and procedures against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code (item 4 on the agenda).

Assisting with consideration of the matter: The Landlord Services Manager.

Summary of responses to questions and discussion:

- (i) There was now full compliance with the Code.
- (ii) The requirement that there be no more than 2 stages to the complaints process meant that the previous informal stage was no longer available, effect of that briefly discussed.
- (iii) Important to distinguish between service requests and complaints.
- (iv) Clear information on the complaints process was included in newsletter for tenants and on Council's website.
- (v) A tenant member of the Board had had a positive experience with the complaints process, another confirmed that checks were made with witnesses.

- (vi) Extent to which Ombudsman consulted Council in respect of policies/cases stated.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Reason

To acknowledge the Board's consideration of the matter.

15. RE-DESIGNATION OF STOCK (DECLASSIFICATION OF 45+ PROPERTIES)

The Board considered a report setting out the principle and approach to declassifying around 1071 Council homes (around 20% of the Council's stock) currently restricted for allocation to 45+ year olds (item 5 on the agenda).

Assisting with consideration of the matter: The Director Housing and Wellbeing.

Summary of responses to questions and discussion:

- (i) There was no proposed change to the designation of 60+ properties.
- (ii) 45+ properties were sometimes used for younger tenants, for example due to use as temporary accommodation or because of Right to Buy. There had been few anti-social behaviour complaints as a result of this that officers in the meeting were aware of, however detailed analysis had not been undertaken.
- (iii) The proposed additional anti-social behaviour officer was for a fixed term of 3 years, it would be financed from the Housing Revenue Account. Currently, 4 anti-social behaviour officers plus team leader.
- (iv) 45+ classification had been implemented some years ago, a number of possible reasons for this. The total stock was now much smaller, so proportion of 45+ now more significant.
- (v) Most of 45+ properties were 1 bedroom flats.
- (vi) There was likely to be some increase in rental income as a result of declassification.
- (vii) Declassification of the 45+ properties was very much supported as it would improve the current housing situation. Could the timeframe for implementation be speeded up? In response, reference to the importance of ensuring that there was not a negative impact on the position with voids, also that communication with tenants would need to be planned and sensitive. It was hoped that a report could be submitted to Cabinet before end 2023.
- (viii) The benefits of younger and older people living alongside each other were highlighted.
- (ix) Classification of sheltered accommodation was easier to justify given the housing needs specific to older people such as communal areas or wardens. There was a relatively small amount of 60+ stock and the intention was not that older tenants in 45+ stock would move to 60+, this was a reason why communication needed to be appropriate.
- (x) Noted that a small amount of flexibility re: age could be helpful.
- (xi) There was no intention to use flexible tenancies as a means of freeing up under occupied family accommodation. Indeed, the Council's intention to no longer use

flexible tenancies and the reasons for that had been considered and supported by the Board at its last meeting.

RESOLVED that the Board supports the principle and approach to declassification as set out in the report.

Reason

To reflect the Board's consideration and views on the matter, for reflection in any subsequent report to Cabinet.

16. SHELTERED ACCOMMODATION, UPDATE ST. MICHAEL'S COURT, THURMASTON

The Board considered a report providing an update on the proposed redevelopment of St. Michael's Court, Thurmaston (item 6 on the agenda).

Assisting with consideration of the matter: The Director Housing and Wellbeing.

Summary of responses to questions and discussion:

- (i) The information in the report was publicly available and could be shared.
- (ii) Those who had engaged previously and neighbours had been notified of the planning application and how they could make representations.
- (iii) It was hoped that a strategy re: remaining sheltered schemes could be brought forward soon.
- (iv) Parking provision was illustrated in the report, also provision for mobility scooters. Properties would be as accessible as possible, brief discussion re: this.
- (v) It was hoped that the scheme would be completed by Spring 2025 dependent on any unforeseen issues/challenges.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and the position welcomed.

Reason

To acknowledge the Board's consideration of the matter.

17. PERFORMANCE INFORMATION PACK

The Board considered a performance information pack for Quarter 1 2023-24 (item 7 on the agenda).

Assisting with consideration of the matter: The Director Housing and Wellbeing, the Landlord Services Manager, the Repairs and Investment Manager.

Summary of responses to questions and discussion:

- (i) Routine repairs were part of overall responsive repairs.
- (ii) New tenancy visits were now being undertaken.

- (iii) The ability to meet repairs targets was being affected by the position with staff resources, commentary on that was set out in the report.
- (iv) Explanation of the graphs on agenda pages 70-73 was provided.
- (v) GN referred to General Needs. It was noted that use of acronyms should be avoided in reports to the Board where possible.
- (vi) Noted that there was an error in the % column on agenda page 74.
- (vii) The reasons for delays in work to tenants' properties were known, but it would be helpful if tenants could be kept informed of how long that delay might be. There were instances where this had not happened. T. Edwardes and T. Riley would discuss the matter with officers outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED that the performance information pack for Quarter 1 2023-24 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 previous decision, 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, a question had been submitted by P. Hudson as follows:

"Regarding the new communal areas cleaning contract, I am concerned that the Council and therefore tenants are sometimes paying for a service that is not being properly provided, an example being Chapman Street, so please could an update be provided on the position with this contract, including how tenants can get performance issues resolved?"

The Landlord Services Manager provided a response, summarised as follows:

A new contract had started 31st December 2019 initially for a three-year period. Contract due to end 31st December 2023. The existing contract had been let via a framework agreement and it was understood that there had been only one company within the framework that had been able and willing to tender; and contract had been let on that basis.

The Council was now in process of preparing a retender of the contract and wanted to widen the net to enable as many companies to tender as possible; so an open tender process would be used. As with the current contract, evaluation would be based on the specification drawn up through a rigorous quality assessment process.

There was currently a rigorous process of contract management to ensure compliance; this was briefly outlined, including monthly meetings that were recorded and inspections against the specification which were evaluated to judge whether they complied with the specification. This contract management would continue under the new contract.

Regarding dissatisfied residents, there was a clear channel by which complaints could be made to the Council. The contractor was notified as soon as a complaint was registered, to which the contractor could respond and would usually involve returning to the block to assess and reclean where it was agreed that the specification had not been met.

The Council had its own internal performance indicator, requiring a minimum of 10% of all scheduled cleans to be inspected; this was done on a random basis but avoiding repeats so all were inspected over time, although locations where complaints had been received were inspected more often. Inspections took place straight after cleaning in order to be objective.

Complaints were largely either that the cleaners had not visited or that they had not done a good job. The former could be checked via tracking devices in vans. All complaints were investigated and considered objectively.

When the contract had been put in place, there had been some opposition from blocks where tenants were already cleaning themselves, taking great pride and doing a very good job. Unfortunately, only a small minority of blocks had been doing that and so a cleaning contract paid for by a service charge on rent had been procured. Many complaints regarding the contract cleaning were from the blocks previously cleaned by tenants themselves. The Council had to assess the service based on the contract specification.

The Landlord Services Manager would be happy to discuss any specific cases outside the meeting.

Summary of responses to questions and discussion:

- (i) The Landlord Services Manager was not averse to tenants being appropriately involved in the contract process.
- (ii) It was important to consider the matter objectively/from both sides.
- (iii) P. Hudson remained of the view that the service was not always being adequately provided, with particular concern that inspections were missing clearly dirty areas, that complaints had not been resolved and that tenants were not sufficiently involved in that process.
- (iv) It would be useful to know how long contractors should be in attendance to clean. In response, the contractors were required to attend for as long as it took to fulfil specification.
- (v) Blocks were not permitted to “contract out”.
- (vi) Re-training had recently been provided to inspectors to ensure they were inspecting as required and against specification.
- (vii) Concern that trackers in vans were not sufficiently precise. In response, a degree of trust was necessary, monitoring was dependent on the finite resources available to do so. View that tenants knew contractor had not visited if block had not been cleaned.

RESOLVED

1. that the question and response be noted;
2. that the following item be added to the work programme:

Communal Areas Cleaning – Contract Management Arrangements and Criteria for New Contract (to be scheduled).

Reasons

1. To acknowledge the Board's consideration of this matter.
2. It is useful and appropriate for the Board to consider this matter at a future meeting.

19. WORK PROGRAMME

The Board considered a report to enable it to agree its work programme (item 9 on the agenda).

Assisting with consideration of the matter: The Director Housing and Wellbeing, the Landlord Services Manager, the Repairs and Investment Manager, the Democratic Services Officer (LS).

Summary of responses to questions and discussion:

- (i) It was noted that it was hoped to now move both the Housing Strategy and the Garages Review forward, interim Strategic Housing Manager appointed.
- (ii) Annual budget setting/priorities for next year report scheduled for next meeting, expected need to increase some budgets due to cost of materials increase.
- (iii) The Council was able to pay a market premia where recruitment had been unsuccessful, the criteria for doing so was briefly outlined.

RESOLVED

1. that the following item be added to the work programme:
Recruitment of Repairs Staff - Update (8th November 2023 meeting);
2. that the following already listed item be scheduled as follows:
Decant and Disturbance Policy - Update (8th November 2023 meeting);
3. that the Board proceed on the basis of the submitted work programme, updated to reflect work undertaken at this meeting and any amendments or additions agreed above or earlier in the meeting.

Reasons

1&2. It is appropriate and useful for the Board to consider these matters and to ensure that items already listed are suitably scheduled.

3. To ensure that the information in the Board's work programme is up to date.

20. EXEMPT INFORMATION

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

21. DELIVERY OF KITCHENS, BATHROOMS, MAJOR STRUCTURAL WORKS AND MAJOR VOIDS

Following J. Tomlinson (contractor) having gone into administration, the Director Housing and Wellbeing provided the Board with an exempt verbal update on the position with the future delivery of kitchens, bathrooms, major structural works and major voids.

RESOLVED that the position be noted.

Reason

To acknowledge that the Board has been updated on this matter.

NOTES:

1. No reference may be made to these minutes at the next available Ordinary Council meeting 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.