

**HOUSING MANAGEMENT ADVISORY BOARD  
14TH JULY 2021**

PRESENT: The Vice Chair (T. Riley)  
Board Members Davis and Hudson  
Councillors Radford and Bolton

Councillor Poland – Cabinet Lead Member for  
Public Housing

Landlord Services Manager  
Repairs and Investment Manager  
Group Accountant  
Senior Accountancy Assistant  
Democratic Services Officer (NC)  
Democratic Services Officer (EB)

APOLOGIES: Y. Ali, T. Edwardes and Councillor Seaton

The Chair stated that the meeting would be recorded and the sound recording subsequently made available via the Council's website. She also advised that, under the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014, other people may film, record, tweet or blog from this meeting, and the use of any such images or sound recordings was not under the Council's control.

1. CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR OF BOARD 2021/22 COUNCIL YEAR

The Board was asked for nominations for a Chair and Vice-chair for the Council year 2021/22.

**RESOLVED**

1. that Mrs T. Edwardes be elected as Chair of the Board for the 2021/22 Council year;
2. that Ms T. Riley be elected as Vice-chair of the Board for the 2021/22 Council year.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 12<sup>th</sup> May 2021 were confirmed as an accurate record.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

#### 4. DRAFT NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY

The Head of Landlord Services submitted a report providing the Board with the opportunity to comment on the draft new Neighbourhood Policy 2021-2025 before its likely progression to Cabinet (item 5 on the agenda).

The Landlord Services Manager attended the meeting to assist with the discussion of this item.

The Board were advised that:

- (i) The Neighbourhood Policy was required by the Regulator of Social Housing from 2012 as part of its Neighbourhood Standard.
- (ii) The Standard required the Council to have neighbourhoods that were safe, attractive and clean.
- (iii) The Standard did not refer to individual people's properties and homes but rather the environment in which they lived.
- (iv) Some aspects required by the Neighbourhood and Community Standard were covered elsewhere in policy and statements.
- (v) The Neighbourhood Policy fulfilled a regulatory requirement and set out the Council's position in creating clean and safe neighbourhoods.

In response to a question from the Board it was explained that the communal cleaning contract was going well. There had been a small number of complaints and there was a rigorous process for following up complaints. The current contract provided for an extension and as things stood this seemed prudent to do so rather than going out for re-procurement as there had been difficulty in initially attracting companies to bid for the contract. There was no reason to feel that the contract was not being conformed to, to the extent that it needed terminating. If the contract was in breach then the council would put it out for re-tender, but this was not currently the case.

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted

#### Reason

To acknowledge the Board's consideration of the matter.

#### 5. PERFORMANCE INFORMATION - QUARTER 4 2020-2021

The Head of Landlord Services submitted a report for the Board to consider performance at the end of Quarter 4, 2020-2021, up to the end of March 2021 (item 6 on the agenda).

The Landlord Services Manager attended the meeting to assist with the discussion of this item.

The Board were asked if they wished the performance information to remain a standard agenda item and whether they wanted any information added or removed.

The Board were advised that;

- (i) The performance information was being considered as part of the main agenda as opposed to going after the formal agenda as it had at previous meetings.
- (ii) A number of officers had compiled the information, including indicators on:
  - Repairs
  - Gas Servicing
  - Rent Collection
  - Rent Arrears Percentage
  - Tenancy Management
  - Anti-social Behaviour
  - Supported Housing
  - Customer Satisfaction
  - Rent Arrears and Universal Credit
  - Targets not met within a 5% tolerance
- (iii) Performance indicators were divided between those which had achieved a target and those which had not, along with explanations for why they had not.
- (iv) The indicators on rent arrears and Universal Credit were looked at in detail as there was comprehensive information on Universal Credit. Universal Credit had now become embedded within the system of rent payments and the balance of Universal Credit and Housing Credit was tipping in favour of Universal Credit. It was further thought that around 2,000 people on Housing Credit would move over to Universal Credit in future.
- (v) The Compliance Report mainly concerned gas servicing, electrical servicing and asbestos giving a position on a quarterly basis on how the Council was performing on these high-risk areas of compliance.
- (vi) Anti-social behaviour (ASB) was looked at in detail as requested by members and considered breakdowns of where ASB was happening, actions taken, the number of live cases and the number of closed cases and whether they were satisfactorily resolved.

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

- (i) Rent-loss from voids was unrecoverable, but in theory rent arrears were recoverable even if a tenancy had ended. The percentage recovered was reflected in the number of arrears at any one time. A more telling performance indicator was the percentage of rent collected, this was a corporate key performance indicator. The income team worked to get the rent in, this also included arrears brought forward. The percentage seen earlier in the report reflected a percentage of rent debit plus the brought-forward rent arrears.
- (ii) The ASB statistics reflected live cases that were open and involved a council tenant. There had not been a significant shift in resolution rates in the past 15 months during the Covid-19 pandemic, however, there had been a significant increase in caseload.
- (iii) ASB cases described as duplicate and/or entered in error were a consequence of the ASB case-reporting system. This system (Sentinel)

was a country-wide police system of case recording. When cases crossed into each other where there were multiple incidents that were part of the same case duplication occurred and this needed to be taken into account in statistics. Where there was a duplicate case it needed to be closed down.

- (iv) Under the rules for Universal Credit there was no default entitlement for the housing element to be paid directly to the landlord. Direct payment from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) could be requested in situations such as then there were high arrears or where there was a situation with a vulnerable tenant, however, such arrangements were temporary and open to review. Tenants could not voluntarily ask the DWP to directly pay rent.

Action: Landlord Services Manager to update Councillor Bolton on resolution rates for ASB and how they compare with previous years.

The Vice-Chair praised the work of the service, particularly those in customer service and the rent team, for their good performance and helping people to get on-track during a difficult time.

The Vice-Chair requested that the number of kitchens, bathrooms and roofing completed by the new contractor along with the contractor's social value in terms of what it had done for the community be added to the performance information.

## **RESOLVED**

1. that the report be noted.
2. that the works completed on bathrooms, kitchens and roofs by the new contractor be added to the performance information.
3. that the social value of the new contractor be added to the performance information
4. that Quarterly Performance Information be added to the Board's Work Program as a main item.

### Reason

1. To acknowledge the Board's consideration of the matter.
- 2&3. The information had been requested by the Vice-Chair.
4. The item had been requested by the Board.

## 6. STAR SURVEY - VERBAL UPDATE

The Landlord Services Manager gave a verbal update on the STAR survey (item 7 on the agenda).

The Board were advised that:

- (i) A tenant satisfaction survey was conducted every two years. The last one had been conducted in 2018. The current survey had been postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- (ii) The procurement process had been undertaken to employ a suitable contractor to carry out the survey. MEL Research Ltd. had won the contract. A meeting had been held with them on 8<sup>th</sup> July 2021 and a further meeting would be held on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2021 to finalise the questions to be asked.
- (iii) The questions would be in three categories: Firstly, five core questions to gauge overall satisfaction and to benchmark the Council against other organisations. Secondly, a choice of 20 recommended questions based on various aspects of the service broken down into questions on 'perception' (how people felt about a certain aspect of the service) and 'transaction' (based on people's actual experiences). Thirdly, questions that the Council wanted to ask themselves.
- (iv) Tenants would be given an opportunity to say if they wanted specifications on the contract to be enhanced, for example, whether they wanted window cleaning to be added to the contract.
- (v) Tenants would be asked how they felt about the service that had been given to them throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.
- (vi) Tenants would be asked about how they felt about the future of service delivery and whether they wished to return to pre-pandemic methods of communication.
- (vii) Tenants would be consulted on how they wished to communicate with the Council, acknowledging that some may not have access to a computer or a smartphone.
- (viii) Tenants would be asked about the magazine and its new format.
- (ix) The survey would go to a statistically-appropriate sample of tenants throughout the summer and tenants would be alerted to the fact that they may be contacted. The survey would also take place online. Face-to-face surveying would be avoided due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- (x) Results were expected to be reported back to members towards the end of 2021 or the beginning of 2022.

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

Reason

To acknowledge the Board's consideration of the matter.

7. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT OUTTURN POSITION 2020/21

The Head of Finance Submitted a report detailing the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) outturn for 2020/21 for revenue and capital expenditure (item 8 on the agenda).

The Group Accountant and Senior Accountancy Assistant attended the meeting to assist with the discussion of this item.

The Board were advised that:

- (i) The budget had initially been set prior to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. It was then revised in August and September of 2020 and went back to Cabinet. The positions on rent arrears and rent voids had been reset.
- (ii) There had been a surplus of £3.4million, primarily since the Capital Programme had been cut due to workers being unable to enter properties to conduct repairs. As a result, the amount that had funded Capital from Revenue was significantly lower. The surplus money would be rolled forward and spread over the coming years.
- (iii) Work had been conducted on the HRA Business Plan with a 30-year financial projection. The figures in the report would be the start of this and this and would feed into the budgets for the next year and for future years.
- (iv) There were £79.190m of loans in the HRA and the Business Plan Model would look at whether these loans would be paid back or taken out again.
- (v) Many of the variances in the year were to do with salaries.
- (vi) There had been an underspend on repairs and maintenance.
- (vii) The figures in the report on rent arrears covered all rent arrears and not just those of current tenants.
- (viii) The budget for the STAR survey had been carried forward into the new year at the request of officers.
- (ix) The Capital outturn was £4million against a budget of £9million.
- (x) Properties had been acquired through gifted properties and from Right to Buy '1 for 1' receipts.
- (xi) Fewer properties had been sold due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Councillor Bolton stressed that the £3.4million surplus could not be used for anything other than what it was originally intended for.

Councillor Bolton further enquired as to why there was £62,000 more from shop and garage rent than had been in the budget.

Action: The Group Accountant would respond by email and the Democratic Services Officer would circulate the response to the Board.

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

Reason

To acknowledge the Board's consideration of the matter.

## 8. 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 no questions had been submitted.

## 9. WORK PROGRAMME

The Board received a report of the Head of Landlord Services to enable the Board to agree its Work Programme (item 10 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.

## **RESOLVED**

1. that the Cleaning Contract be added to the Board's Work Programme for September.
2. that Quarterly Performance Information be added to the Board's Work Program as a main item.
3. that the Board's Work Programme be updated to reflect all decisions made above and earlier in the meeting.

### Reasons

1. so that it can be considered by the Board.
2. the item had been requested by the Board.
3. to ensure that the information in the Work Programme is up to date.

## 10. 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 livestream was switched off.*

11. 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 12 on the agenda).

The Repairs and Investment Manager attended the meeting to assist with the consideration of this item.

A summary of the Board's discussion on this matter is provided in the exempt minute (Housing Management Advisory Board 11E. 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.