

**HOUSING MANAGEMENT ADVISORY BOARD
23RD MARCH 2022**

PRESENT: The Chair (T. Edwardes)

Board Members Davis, Hudson, Mason, Wright,
Capleton, Draycott and Seaton

Head of Landlord Services
Head of Strategic and Private Sector Housing
Landlord Services Manager
Repairs and Investment Manager
Democratic Services Officer (EB)

APOLOGIES: Board Members Ali and Riley

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.

39. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 12th January 2022 were confirmed as an accurate record.

40. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

41. CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY 2022-2025

The Head of Landlord Services submitted a report presenting the board with a draft customer engagement strategy that replaces the existing one. (Item 4 on the agenda)

The Landlord Services Manager attended the meeting to assist with the discussion of this item and gave an update as follows:

- i. A new four-year strategy for customer engagement had been produced. The previous strategy had been due to be renewed in 2021, however it had been delayed by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. All face-to-face engagement had had to stop as a result of the pandemic.
- ii. The Council was now in a position to resume full engagement and it was fitting to look at the entire strategy and produce a new one.
- iii. The Council had worked closely with tenants and leaseholders on producing the new strategy.

- iv. There had been a continuation of the core objectives of the previous strategy which had been taken into the new strategy as they were still relevant to the function of customer engagement. An action plan to deliver on objectives over four years had been developed.
- v. There has been a vacant position for a customer engagement officer post for two years. This had not been filled as there had not been the sufficient work at the time to usefully employ someone because of the restrictions imposed as a result of the pandemic. The recruitment process was now in progress as there was now the work for the officer to do. Interviews would take place over the following weeks and once the officer was employed, the capacity of the service for delivery could be increased.
- vi. The strategy had been considered by Charnwood Housing Residents Forum (CHRF) and changes had been made as a result. This was reflected in the report presented and a glossary of terms had been added to make the report accessible.

It was clarified by the Landlord Services Manager that CEO referred to Customer Engagement Officer rather than Chief Executive Officer.

Action: CEO to be added to glossary of terms.

In response to a query from the Board, the Chair informed those present that an article on the strategy would be published in the June newsletter including reasons why certain proposals had not been carried out and information on the Senior Citizens Forum and the CHRF.

In response to a query from Councillor Seaton, the Landlord Services Manager clarified that elected Members would be able to take part in estate walks and would be informed when they would take place.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the Board recommend adoption of the proposed strategy subject to any agreed amendments and cabinet approval.

Reasons

1&2. To acknowledge the Board's consideration of the matter.

42. STAR SURVEY 2021

The Head of Landlord Services submitted a report to consider the results of the STAR survey, and the actions in progress and proposed to support greater satisfaction with services. (Item 5 on the agenda).

The Head of Landlord Services gave an update as follows:

- i. The delivery of kitchens and bathrooms had been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and this in turn had an impact on tenant satisfaction. It was thought that as work resumed, satisfaction would increase.
- ii. As a new Customer Engagement Officer was recruited, capacity would increase.
- iii. The survey had identified that tenants reporting issues online were the least satisfied. As such it was concluded that those on a digital platform were feeling as though they were not being heard. In order to address this, the Customer Engagement Strategy had included a digital agenda.
- iv. The survey had found that those who had made an Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)-related complaint in the past 12-months were less likely to be satisfied. It was concluded that this had a significant bearing on activity and it was recommended that a report on Anti-Social Behaviour should be brought before the Board.
- v. Satisfaction had been lowest amongst those in Loughborough
- vi. Southfields, Loughborough Hastings and Loughborough Lymington. These areas covered the town centre. Estate walks with residents and Councillors were currently being re-introduced having stopped due to the pandemic. Customer engagement estate-based activities would be prioritised in these areas.
- vii. Tenants in Thurmaston were significantly less likely to feel the Council provides a home that is safe and secure compared to the other areas. This would be investigated.
- viii. With regard to Rent Value for Money, it was noted that rents for Charnwood Borough Council properties were lower than those in comparable authorities and as such feedback had likely been based more on quality of service.
- ix. Regarding repairs and maintenance, the attitude of workers was perceived highly by tenants (93%), however, perceptions amongst customers was lowest regarding the time taken for work to start. Recruitment was taking place to address resourcing issues. Repairs being carried out correctly first time had a bearing on the satisfaction of the service.
- x. The opportunity had been taken to ask specific questions about the service:
 - a. Questions were asked on the rent payment pattern, specifically whether tenants would rather pay a lower weekly rent rather than having some rent-free weeks. A majority of those surveyed favoured the current system and as such it would not change
 - b. When asked about priorities for investment, the following priorities were identified by those surveyed: acquiring more housing, replacing kitchens, bathrooms and heating and investment in sheltered housing.
- xi. 83% of those surveyed had thought it important to be able to go into Southfield's offices to consult with officers.
- xii. Overall benchmarking data showed there had been a drop in levels of satisfaction across landlords, with the lowest levels of satisfaction recorded in September where monthly perception surveys were

completed, but there were clear messages from tenants arising from the Council's survey..

Councillor Seaton commented that the amount of Council housing was low in Thurmaston and as such the survey may be based on a small sample.

In response to a suggestion from the Board that tenants may not fully understand what constituted ASB, the Head of Landlord Services informed the Board that the Council website was part of the ASB review. It was planned for the website to contain 'tiles' that could be clicked on regarding issues such as noise nuisance and how to report it, drug abuse/dealing and how to report it to the Police, and neighbour disputes such as parking and how the Council could mediate. This would show what the council could and could not do in each circumstance. The Tenants Editorial Panel had been involved in setting this up.

The Board suggested that information on ASB would be needed in print for non-internet users.

The Head of Landlord Services added that the Customer Service staff from the Council could advise on the issue.

Action: Head of Landlord Services to produce printed information on ASB.

Councillor Draycott Raised the following points:

- With regard to the review on ASB she asked as to whether this applied solely to Housing or if it encompasses all ASB issues.
- Loughborough Hastings Ward had been declared a 'People Zone' by the Police due to high levels of crime, ASB, deprivation and poverty. Agencies had worked together with the Police on the issue and the situation had begun to improve. This work had stopped due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the area was no longer designates a 'People Zone'. As such she suggested that more estate walks were needed and coordination with the police was needed so that adequate notice could be given for them.
- An article in the tenants magazine on rent payments would be helpful to tenants due to inflation and increases in the cost of living. This article would need to be considerate as tenants often had limited means.
- The cleaning of communal areas had worked well.

The Head of Landlord Services responded:

- The ASB review would be across all services.
- The rota for estate walks would be issued.

The Cabinet Lead Member for Public Housing added part of the reason as to why the approach to reporting and actioning ASB was being reformed was due to the need for communication so that those with ASB complaints could understand how it was being dealt with.

The Head of Strategic and Private Sector Housing drew attention to the Corporate wide working group set up to consider the impacts and what advice and support the Council can provide to residents on the cost of living.

The Board raised the issue of fly-tipping and suggested that it had increased due to tenants now having to pay to have bulky waste removed. It was further suggested that vehicles needed to regularly tour estates to remove bulky waste and fly-tips. An additional suggestion was made that when Council workers came to estates to remove fly-tips, they talk to tenants so that they could be directed to the tipped waste.

It was further suggested that communal bins were regularly full and bulky waste was often left by them. It was also suggested that Housing Association properties had waste dumped outside of them and as such the Housing Associations should be made to pay for its removal.

The Head of Landlord Services informed those present that a truck visited estates each Monday to remove waste.

The Landlord Services Manager added that the Bell Foundry estate had been specifically targeted to remove fly-tips.

Councillor Draycott raised the issue that the process to get bulky waste removed was not user friendly

Action: Head of Landlord Services to investigate targeting fly-tips and the opportunity for dedicated trips to remove them.

Action: Workers removing fly-tips to consult with tenants so they can be directed to where the tips are.

Action: Bulky waste left outside bin-store to be investigated.

Action: Article to be published in newsletter on the issue of fly-tipping, including the hardship-scheme for free collection.

Action: Head of Landlord Services to consult with Head of Cleansing to make process for removal of bulky waste more user-friendly.

In response to a query from Councillor Seaton, the Head of Landlord Services clarified that there had been a number of respondents who had not expressed a view on Communal Cleaning Improvements. As such those who had not responded that they were satisfied with the service were not necessarily unsatisfied.

Councillor Seaton further suggested that the survey specifically target buildings and areas where communal cleaning had taken place.

The Landlord Services Manager added that the Tenancy Team conducted a regular sample of inspections throughout the Council housing stock using a rigorous scoring system on the standards of cleaning to score against the specification. The areas

inspected were largely found to be compliant and any complaints were addressed as formal complaints and as such the contractor would re-inspect.

Action: Head of Landlord Services to look specifically at the data on Communal Cleaning for areas where it had taken place.

In response to the issue raised of waste dumped in tenants' front gardens, the Head of Landlord Services clarified that this could be addressed as a breach of tenancy.

Councillor Capleton enquired as to the level of take-up on the bulky-waste collection service since charges had increased.

Councillor Draycott raised the issue that the general fund was benefiting from the bulky-waste collection charges, however, the Housing Revenue account (HRA) was picking up the cost of removing fly-tips.

Action: Head of Landlord to share cost information with Board Members.

The Cabinet Lead Member for Public Housing drew attention to the financial pressures faced by the Council as the reason for charges for bulky waste collection and suggested that the HRA paying for bulky waste collection on Council land was fairer as private tenants needed to pay for collections on their land and funding collection on HRA land from general taxation would be unfair on those not living on HRA land.

In response to a query by the Chair on the issue of voids, the Head of Landlord Services explained that properties could not be let without an Energy Performance Certificate. A new contract was being put in place to undertake this work which had previously been done by a different section of the Council. There had been a backlog in repairs on voids, but this was now being resolved with recruitment. In addition to this, age-designated voids were being re-assessed to optimise their potential occupancy.

In response to a further question from Councillor Seaton on the reasons behind void properties, the Head of Strategic and Private Sector Housing informed the Board that properties were advertised as soon as they were available, however, some properties were required major works and as such could not be advertised. When the review of the Allocation Policy was completed, the Council reduced the number of bands from 4 bands to 3. Therefore, all applicants on the register have a housing need, the Council are now seeing an increase in applications. All allocations must be made in accordance with the Allocation Policy and therefore direct matches to properties could be made outside of the Policy.

Action: Article in magazine to be produced on voids.

Action: Item on Housing need and Government Legislation to come to the Housing Management Advisory Board.

In response to a query on the prioritisation of voids, the Head of Landlord Services explained that repairs were prioritised based on need. The Head of Strategic and

Private Sector Housing further added that in terms of allocation housing was prioritised in terms of the need on the register.

The Cabinet Lead Member for Public Housing noted that some people were encouraged to look for housing via charities and the private sector as the Council did not have the housing to match the need. The Head of Strategic and Private Sector Housing added that CBC Lettings had been set up to help residents find accommodation in the private rented sector.

RESOLVED

1. That the Board note the STAR survey and the actions in progress and proposed to support greater satisfaction with services.
2. That a report on the Anti-Social behaviour review be brought to the next meeting of the Board.

Reason

1. To acknowledge the Board's consideration of the matter.
2. To allow the Board to understand the improvements being made through the ASB review.

43. DRAFT FENCING POLICY

The Head of Landlord Services submitted a report presenting the Board with a draft policy that sets out the council's position as landlord in respect of its provision and maintenance of boundary structures such as fences, hedges and walls. (Item 6 on the agenda).

The Landlord Services Manager and the Repairs and Investment Manager attended the meeting to assist with the discussion of this item and gave an update as follows:

- i. A new policy had been borne out of the desire to provide consistency to the issue of fencing that was contentious to both tenants and the Council as a landlord. A draft policy had been produced that sought to set out a position that the Council had previously held but never expressed explicitly.
- ii. The existing tenancy agreement does not mention fencing; the new tenancy agreement, however, is more clear on the issue as it refers back to the fencing and boundary policy.
- iii. The policy had been considered by the CHRF who had proposed changes, all of which had been accommodated.
- iv. Obligations had been set out in order to have a consistent approach.
- v. Scenarios had been outlined showing the responsibilities of the tenant and the council and actions that would be taken in certain situations. In situations where the set scenarios did not apply, matters would be settled on a case-by-case basis.
- vi. If a tenant wished to change a boundary, then they would need permission to do so from the Council.

- vii. The Council had the right to remove fencing if it was damaged or in a state of disrepair or if it had been erected without permission. Tenants could be charged for the removal of fencing erected without permission. This also applied to walls and hedges. If hedges were overgrown they could be cut back and re-charged.

In response to a questions from the Board, the Head of Landlord Services suggested it was feasible that tenants could pay for fences to be upgraded and that the Council would not unreasonably withhold permission if tenants wished to improve their fencing themselves as there was a general right for tenants to request permission to improve their dwellings.

In response to a question from the Board surrounding the responsibilities for each side of a fence that divided two properties, the Head of Landlord Services suggested that land on both sides belonged to the Council, and the fence was therefore a dividing one, and the intention is that tenants will be given shared responsibility for maintaining the boundary structure.

Action: Conditions of tenancy to be published on the Council website to clarify responsibilities for each side of a fence dividing properties.

Action: Situation to be monitored to assess how the policy was working.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the policy be endorsed.

Reasons

1. To acknowledge the Board's consideration of the matter.
2. To acknowledge the Board's approval of the policy.

44. SHELTERED HOUSING REVIEW - VERBAL UPDATE

The Head of Strategic and Private Sector Housing gave a verbal report on the Sheltered Housing Review. (Item 7 on the agenda).

The Head of Strategic and Private Sector Housing gave an update as follows:

- i. The review of sheltered housing started in 2009, which had included the conversion of bedsits to flats and the development of the Riversdale Sheltered Housing Scheme.
- ii. A Project Board and PID has been set and agreed. To date a Sheltered Housing Standard has been approved, all schemes have been assessed against the standard and prioritised.
- iii. The first scheme to be taken forward is St Michaels at Thurmaston, the Council are currently looking at options for the site and once this has been discussed and agreed at the Board a report would be presented to Cabinet.

- iv. Consultation with residents and HMAB will continue through this process.
- v. Work is underway to review the age designation on some of the Council stock, due to the level of voids.

In response to a query from the board it was clarified by the Head of Strategic and Private Sector Housing that the site at Thurmaston could be demolished and rebuild over 2-3 years.

RESOLVED

1. That the verbal report be noted.
2. That an update be brought to the Board at the meeting on 11th May 2022.

Reason

1. To acknowledge the Board's consideration of the matter.
2. To allow the Board to consider the scheme once it had been through the Sheltered Housing Board.

45. PERFORMANCE INFORMATION PACK - QUARTER 3 2021-22

The Head of Landlord Services submitted a report for the Board to consider performance at the end of Quarter 2, 2021-2022, April to June 2021. (Item 8 on the agenda).

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

Councillor Draycott noted the rise in ASB incidents reported on the Bell Foundry Estate from Quarter 2 2021/22 to Quarter 3 2021/22 and enquired as to the reasons behind it.

The Head of Landlord Services suggested that within the data there could be cases where many residents were reporting the same incident to the Council.

The Head of Landlord Services remarked the Council had obtained two closure orders at the location in the last few weeks.

Action: Head of Landlord Services to produce a breakdown of ASB reports.

With regard to a further query about ASB incidents the head of Landlord Services posited that there may be more reports of ASB where residents were living in close proximity to each other in areas where there were a lot of flats.

In response to a query regarding how the Council approached rent arrears for tenants on Universal Credit the head of Landlord Services explained that the Council tried to intervene as early as possible and there was a dedicated Universal Credit Officer and Tenancy Support Officers to help tenants claim if needed. It was further clarified that enforcement ran in parallel with support.

The Cabinet Lead Member for Public Housing added that it was in the interest of the council to be compassionate to those on Universal Credit who were in rent arrears as the Council needed to avoid tenants becoming homeless.

The Landlord Services Manager further explained that in cases of rent arrears an Income Officer would visit a property following the second letter issued. If the officer knew the tenant and their historical pattern of payment, they may intervene earlier.

The Board drew attention to the number of tenants in arrears on Universal Credit compared to those not on Universal Credit. The Landlord Services Manager noted that whilst the balance of those in arrears on Universal Credit was higher and was increasing, this was due to more tenants going on to Universal Credit and the balance of those on Universal Credit was not increasing by as much as it had previously.

The Board raised the issue that it was the responsibility of a Universal Credit claimant to arrange direct payment of rent from Universal Credit payments and this was often unfamiliar to claimant as they did not have the experience of the system which could lead to the claimant being in rent arrears.

The Landlord Services Manager further explained that the ability of the Council to intervene on rent arrears to get payments made directly from Universal Credit was limited by criteria based on the vulnerability of the tenant. If a tenant was in eight weeks or more of arrears, direct payment from Universal Credit could be requested. All arrangements were temporary and subject to periodic review and at any time the Department for Work and Pensions could return the payments of Universal Credit to the claimant.

The Board raised the issue that some vulnerable tenants may not appear vulnerable

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Reason

To acknowledge the Board's consideration of the matter.

46. 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 Councillor Draycott asked the following:

- (i) Regarding the sheds at Moria Street flats. With many problems of misuse, Anti-Social Behaviour, drug dealing, personal safety risks, damage including fire could it be seriously considered as to whether they any longer serve the original intention?

- (ii) Regarding the disabled adaptations back log. Could the number and type of disabled adaptations required be provided and listed with the year requested?

The Head of Landlord Services provided the following responses:

- (i) The use of the sheds at Moira Street Flats would be investigated. An initial review had identified several leaseholders and the sheds may be part of these leases. This could give rise to potential legal issues. The Tenancy and Estates Team Leader was investigating the sheds and would advise Ward Councillors on the issue.
- (ii) There had been 410 minor adaptation requests and a small number of these had been cancelled. 17 of these requests were with the in-house repairs team. There was a backlog on major adaptations. Of 287 major adaptation requests, 140 had been completed and 147 were outstanding. A plan was in place to clear the backlog and the first properties were programmed in for survey in April 2022.

Councillor Draycott thanked the Head of Landlord Services for his response and added that the push for completion of major amendments would improve the quality of life for tenants.

Councillor Seaton asked whether Charnwood Borough Council funded adaptations.

The Head of Landlord Services confirmed that adaptations at Council stock were funded through the Housing Revenue Account.

47. 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.

Summary of discussion:

- i. The final draft of the Housing Strategy was yet to be completed.
- ii. The draft Garages Review had been completed in 2020. In terms of properties that could be delivered a review was needed in terms of voids and rent loss to ascertain whether draft recommendations were correct and if there would be a waiting list. An assessment of how many tenants needed garages would also be needed. Planning constraints would need to be assessed. The majority of garage sites that could be developed had been developed, however, some may involve compulsory purchase orders to ensure access. This would need to be analysed prior to reporting.

RESOLVED

1. That the Housing Strategy, Re-designation of Stock, Approach to Damp and Mould and Anti-Social Behaviour Report be added to the Board's Work Programme for the meeting on 11th May 2022.
2. 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. To ensure that the information in the Work Programme is up to date.

48. 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 stopped.

49. UPDATE ON 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).

A summary of the Board's discussion on this matter is provided in the exempt minute (Housing Management Advisory Board 49E. 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.