

HOUSING LIAISON BOARD

Minutes of a meeting of the Tenant Participation Review and Development Group, named from this meeting the Housing Liaison Board, of the Bolsover District Council held in Committee Room 1, The Arc, Clowne on Tuesday, 16th July 2024 at 10:30 hours.

PRESENT:-

Members:-

Councillor Sandra Peake in the Chair

Councillors Janet Tait, Rita Turner and Jane Yates.

Officers:- Victoria Dawson (Assistant Director – Housing Management and Enforcement), Lesley Botham (Customer Service, Standards and Complaints Manager), Deborah Whallett (Housing Enforcement Officer), Alice Willoughby (Customer Standards and Complaints Officer), Jo Wilson (Housing Strategy and Development Officer), Amy Bryan (Governance and Civic Manager), Matthew Kerry (Governance and Civic Officer).

Tenants:- Mr. Steven Bramley, Mrs. Janice Payne, Mrs. Angela Sharpe, and Ms. Jackie Taylor.

Also in attendance at the meeting, observing, was Councillor Mary Dooley.

HLB1-24/25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Ashley Taylor, Andy Clarke (Head of Property (Repairs and Maintenance)), Mrs. Catherine Morley, and Mrs. Doreen Potts.

HLB2-24/25 MINUTES – 25TH MARCH 2024

Further to Minute 9 of the meeting held on 25th March 2024, the Assistant Director Housing Management and Enforcement stated the Tenant Conference, a joint project with Chesterfield Borough Council and Rykneld Homes, had taken place on Wednesday 15th May 2024 at Chesterfield Football Stadium and had been well attended. The Council had been able to network and share experiences and best practice with other local authorities.

A joint press release had been made and the Head of Membership Services at Tpas, which promoted tenant involvement in social housing across England, had stated they had been delighted to attend, that it had been great to see three local authorities come together to provide the opportunity and share good practice, and that tenant involvement was enhanced when different people from different organisations converged.

Whilst the Council had already been inspected a week before the conference, inspectors assessing Rykneld Homes had been present, providing an opportunity to speak. This participation would have hopefully been passed to the inspectors who had assessed the Council.

HOUSING LIAISON BOARD

Moved by Councillor Janet Tait and seconded by Mr. Steven Bramley

RESOLVED that the notes of a meeting of the Tenant Participation Review and Development Group held on 25th March 2024 be approved as a true and correct record.

HLB3-24/25 TERMS OF REFERENCE REVIEW

The Assistant Director Housing Management and Enforcement presented the report of the Terms of Reference, approved July 2023, to the Group.

It was best practice to review any group, so three substitute Tenant members had been recruited in the last year and, to formalise the Group, the Governance Team were now administrating meetings for greater visibility of the work being undertaken.

Attached at Appendix 1 was the previous Terms of Reference with suggested amendments, shown with track changes.

The membership would consist of the following: 5 Councillors (incl. the Portfolio Holder for Housing as the Chair); 5 selected tenants; and 5 officers from the Council and Dragonfly Management Limited. To make a meeting quorate, there would need to be 2 Councillors and 2 Tenants in attendance. There would also be three selected tenants to act as substitute members, in the event that one of the tenant members was unable to attend.

The Group discussed the future name of the meeting to match other local authorities and follow a recommendation from the Ombudsman. It was decided the name of the Group would become the "Housing Liaison Board".

Moved by Mr. Steven Bramley and seconded by Ms. Jackie Taylor

RESOLVED that the report be noted, and the name of the Group be changed to Housing Liaison Board.

HLB4-24/25 TENANT SATISFACTION MEASURES

The Housing Strategy and Development Officer presented the report of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) to the Board. The TSMs were introduced by the UK Government in April 2023, and was designed to monitor the provision of quality homes and services by landlords and understand how to make improvements.

For the last year, data on the tenant satisfaction surveys have been brought to the Board. Attached as Appendices 1 and 2 were the final reports outlining performance against the TSMs for 2023/24. Data was being gathered for 2024/25, with the survey to be sent to all tenants. An update on Q1 2024/25 data would be presented to the next meeting.

For the perception report attached as Appendix 1, there were new regulations which required every landlord to provide information annually to the regulator on the set measures. The deadline on this had been 30th June 2024, and the Council had successfully submitted the data. This data had also been made available online for all tenants to access.

HOUSING LIAISON BOARD

Responses had been primarily from older tenants. Guidance from the Regulator of Social Housing stated results needed to be as representative of the tenant population as possible. To achieve this, the results had been weighted to adjust for correct proportions of respondents.

While the weighted results were lower than the original, all remained of a high level. When compared against initial summary data released by Acuity, all twelve perception measures (both unweighted and weighted) exceeded the average performance level. It was important to note that Acuity based their analysis on unweighted data. When comparing Bolsover's unweighted data to the upper quartile results in Acuity's report, five of the twelve perception measures did not perform as high as the upper quartile. For the weighted results (the Council's published figures), seven of the twelve did not perform as high as the upper quartile.

The Chair sought more information on 2 of the results that were above average but lower than the upper quartile. The Housing Strategy and Development Officer explained those that had fallen marginally below were TP05, "Satisfaction that the home is safe" (87%, with 88% being the upper quartile (the unweighted measure was 88.9%)) and TP08, "Agreement that the landlord treats tenants fairly and with respect" (83.8%, with 85% being the upper quartile (the unweighted measure was 85.2%)).

The Assistant Director Housing Management and Enforcement added the national data would also be reviewed by the regulator and published October 2024; this would enable the Council's performance to be directly compared with other areas more accurately.

The Chair and a Tenant sought to know why tenants were not satisfied that their homes were safe. The Housing Strategy and Development Officer reiterated that 87% was still very high, with the Assistant Director Housing Management and Enforcement adding comments could not be collected at the point of asking for feedback; the parameters of the survey required a level playing field for all tenants in all areas. However, the next survey would be sent to every tenant, and this would request the tenants' reference numbers to provide more background detail to each complaint.

The Chair and a Tenant agreed there remained the need to understand why a tenant might feel unsafe in the home. The Customer Service, Standards and Complaints Manager stated that the Contact Centre was the initial point of contact, and that live feedback was now being collected for email and webchat, with phone call feedback to be collected soon. This data would be reported to the Board and the Customer Services Scrutiny Committee in the future.

The Housing Strategy and Development Officer stated that after the 30th June 2024 deadline, Tpas had carried out a straw poll of 60 landlord websites. While landlords did not need to have their information on their websites for that deadline, almost half had nothing and for those that had the results were mixed. There were negative comments on how information was presented, concerns on the language, information being oversimplified, etc., and the reports did not necessarily provide the methodology to support results. The Council felt reassured its response to the criteria had been to a very high standard.

A Tenant asked if the Council would now address the areas it had fallen behind on (with the weighted results). The Assistant Director Housing Management and Enforcement explained there had been no referral with regards repairs to the Ombudsman, and that

HOUSING LIAISON BOARD

the Council investigated and responded to any/all complaints.

A Tenant theorised if, with regards Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB), the high number of complaints was because of residents not understanding due process.

To a Member's question in relation to satisfaction with complaints handling, the Housing Strategy and Development Officer explained the Council had received no response from those living in sheltered housing, hence the lack of data.

For the management information measures attached as Appendix 2, the Housing Strategy and Development Officer informed the Board with regards complaints responded to within Complaint Handling Code timescales, the previous policy had been 15 working days but was now 10; the Council had met its own timescale at the time the complaints had been received.

Other results in the tables listed on Pages 50-51 were classed as "amber"; these were just below set targets.

With the work being undertaken in the Independent Living Scheme, some homes without tenants were currently being refurbished, and in one building the lift check had not taken place (also due to refurbishment). As a result, while these did register as below standard, this was due to ongoing work delaying required safety checks.

The Chair stated some repairs often did not go ahead due to tenants agreeing on a time but then not being available; this was not necessarily the Council's fault but negatively affected the target result.

The Housing Strategy and Development Officer stated the results from surveys being carried might not correspond with the Board's meetings, but findings would still be reported at the following meeting.

HLB5-24/25 ANNUAL COMPLAINT HANDLING AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENT REPORT 2023/24

The Housing Strategy and Development Officer presented the report of the Annual Complaint Handling and Service Improvement Report 2023/24 to the Board.

The Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code (the 'Code') had become statutory from 1st April 2024. The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 had placed a legal duty on the Ombudsman to monitor social housing landlord's compliance with the Code, with Section 8 requiring landlords to produce an Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report (the 'Report') for scrutiny and challenge.

The Report, attached as Appendix 1, provided an analysis of the complaints, comments and compliments received by the Council during 2023/24. The Council's annual submission was made prior to the 30th June 2024 deadline and would be required annually. The documents were available on the Council's website and within contact centres for tenants and residents to access.

Whilst the Report had to show the Council's performance against the new Code, some tables and charts presented data that enabled analysis against the Council's Complaints,

HOUSING LIAISON BOARD

Comments and Compliments Policy (the 'Policy'), which had been in operation during the transition period.

The self-assessment in the Report showed the Council considered the service was compliant with the Code. In 2023/24, there were 16 complaints categorised as Stage One, which were responded to outside of the Housing Ombudsman timescales (10 working days). However, all were within the Policy's timescale of 15 working days and in future, any complaints outside of the timescale would be documented and investigated. Measures would also be put in place to ensure complaints could be answered within the timescales contained within the Code.

The parameters on how to present the Report had been limited. Timescales for completion had also been constrained. However, the Council felt it had met the requirements in the expected detail.

For the common themes of complaints, they had been the behaviour of staff, quality of repairs, etc., but a large proportion of staff behaviour had been linked to Dragonfly Development Ltd., and so investigations could be focussed on this. A Tenant noted this was quite high, highlighting an employee of Dragonfly Development Ltd. had visited their home to carry out work and who's appearance was 'scruffy' with no identity lanyard present. The Tenant had not submitted a complaint, but another resident would likely have done so. The Chair voiced the Board's concern on the lack of a lanyard.

A Tenant added they were aware of a tenant on the Castle Estate, Bolsover, where work had been carried out externally with the requirement of scaffolding. The scaffolders, not employed by Dragonfly Development Ltd. but contracted by them, had jumped over the tenant's rear garden's locked gate to gain access. The Chair voiced the Board's concern that should never have happened. The Tenant added appropriate communication was not difficult to achieve.

The Housing Strategy and Development Officer highlighted Dragonfly Development Ltd. had received both the most complaints as well as compliments; there was good work being undertaken as well as issues that needed addressing. A Tenant stated they had exceptional work carried out to their home but had no opportunity to pass this on. The Chair noted the Tenant could have phoned the Contact Centre to pass on their thanks.

With regards a lack of communication, the Housing Strategy and Development Officer stated the Council would be making more use of email, the Gov.Notify service, and text messages to help communicate with tenants.

Current customer contact was equal across the District, but this information would be reviewed. Quarterly updates would be made to the Board on comments, compliments, and complaints from the Contact Centre in the future. Other local authorities had a dedicated tenant response group to review complaints; this was a possibility for the Council to explore.

A Tenant asked if there could be a breakdown of repair data, and the Customer Service, Complaints and Standards Manager explained this could be investigated in the future.

The Assistant Director Housing Management and Enforcement noted, following work with Tenants, a simplified tenant approved version of the Report would be made available, with key data the Tenants felt was important for ease of access.

HOUSING LIAISON BOARD

HLB6-24/25 HOUSING COMPLAINTS Q1 2024/25

The Customer Service, Standards and Complaints Manager introduced the Customer Standards and Complaints Officer and presented the report on the Council's performance in relation to its Customer Service Standards, Compliments, Comments and Complaints on behalf of Housing and Repairs to the Board.

Complaints should not be seen as a negative, but an opportunity for improvement.

For the issues raised previously in the meeting on Dragonfly Development Ltd., all third-party contractors were now aware of current policy and a report would be presented quarterly to the Board.

The Customer Standards and Complaints Officer noted that some customer contacts made Q1 2024/25 covered more than one service area; when analysing the data by Housing Teams these did not mirror the actual volume of contacts received.

22 written compliments were received 1st April 2024 to 30th June 2024. Dragonfly Development Ltd. (Housing Repairs and Maintenance) received the most compliments with 14.

Whilst repairs and maintenance featured heavily as a core reason for complaint, a tenant's experience of the service influenced their response to the Council.

For M.P. enquiries, the most common themes were in relation to Housing Applications, including new applications and tenant applications to facilitate a property move.

32 Stage One complaints were recorded 1st April 2024 to 30th June 2024. 100% of Stage One complaints had been responded to within the Council's customer standard and the Housing Ombudsman Code of 10 working days. The largest proportion related to Dragonfly Development Ltd. (Housing Repairs and Maintenance) and Tenancy Management with 13 Stage One complaints.

Four Stage Two complaints had been recorded between 1st April 2024 to 30th June 2024; all of which had been responded to within the required 20 working days. The largest proportion related to Housing Allocations, which received two Stage Two Complaints. Both related to eligibility, likely due to the Council's revised Housing Allocation Policy.

The Housing Ombudsman had reviewed one complaint during the period. This complaint was still being investigated and all data had been given to them on 19th June 2024.

To identify service improvements from feedback received, the Dragonfly Service Review would be taking place on the 25th September 2024 and the Housing Service Review was on the 30th September 2024.

Compliments were mostly made by phone and complaints by email. When analysing the data on who was making the compliments, comments, M.P. enquiries and complaints, the Council found that tenants (58%) made over half of these reports compared with residents.

Examples of compliments and complaints were presented in the report.

HOUSING LIAISON BOARD

The Customer Service, Standards and Complaints Manager and Customer Standards and Complaints Officer left the meeting.

HLB7-24/25 CHALLENGE AND CHANGE - UPDATE ON IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM REVIEW OF THE VOID PROCESS

The Housing Strategy and Development Officer gave a verbal update on the implementation of recommendations from the Review of The Void Process (the 'Review') to the Board.

Two of the Tenants at the meeting had been involved in the Review. The Review was now at the stage of delivering recommendations; the concept of decorating vouchers, performance data and tenants being involved in the monitoring of cleaning contracts were being considered and a tenant friendly version of the lettable standard created.

The Assistant Director Housing Management and Enforcement stated 18 tenant satisfaction responses had been submitted from new-build tenants, mostly from Shirebrook: 15 were very satisfied with information, advice and updates received; 2 fairly satisfied; and 1 very dissatisfied of the entire process. More information would be provided on identified issues and shared with the Board at the next meeting.

The Housing Strategy and Development Officer would speak with the Head of Property (Repairs and Maintenance) to provide more information at the next meeting.

HLB8-24/25 STOCK CONDITION SURVEY

The Assistant Director Housing Management and Enforcement presented the report on the Stock Condition Survey (the 'Survey') to the Board.

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 (the 'Act') was introduced to improve the quality of social housing for tenants by tightening regulations of the social housing sector. Inspections of Local Authority Registered Housing Providers, at minimum every five years, would ensure conformity, as would the consequence of unlimited fines.

The Regulator for Social Housing had updated the Consumer Standards with effect from 1st April 2024. The Safety and Quality Standard required Registered Providers to know the condition of their stock.

The Act had also introduced "Awaab's Law".

It was imperative the Council had accurate data regarding its stock, and whether there were any hazards under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) and the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) ratings.

The last Survey was carried out in 2014; approximately 70% of internal surveys and 100% of external surveys had been completed. Where access had not been granted, assumptions had been made based on similar properties. Due to its age, the stock condition database was unreliable and in June 2024, the Council had agreed a budget to undertake a 100% stock condition survey.

HOUSING LIAISON BOARD

The proposed survey would capture the following:

1. A physical Stock Control Survey to facilitate a 30-year investment programme;
2. EPCs to be completed for all properties;
3. HHSRS assessments with an emphasis on damp and mould;
4. Tenant validations;
5. Decent Homes Standard assessments which can inform an assessment of stock viability;
6. Safeguarding issues (vulnerability of tenants, hoarding issues, untidy properties); and,
7. Photographs and floor plans to be provided.

A video provided by the supplier would help explain to tenants what the Survey entailed. The Survey would also enable the Council to visit every single tenant, update records and provide further support/adjustments.

The Housing Services Manager stated this would be a large piece of work; it would increase the work of the Council but ensure all properties were up to standard and tenants looked after. The data, once available in 2025, would provide the baseline.

The Chair noted this was an expensive Survey, but that the baseline was needed and would help the Council carry out its work internally in the future.

Moved by Ms. Jackie Taylor and seconded by Mrs. Angela Sharpe
RESOLVED that the report be noted.

HLB9-24/25 HOUSING ANNUAL REPORT

The Assistant Director Housing Management and Enforcement presented the Housing Annual Report (the 'Report') to the Board.

Last year the Board considered several reports from other local authorities and decided what style, format and content was preferable for the Council's own Report. This resulted in a 4 page document contained within the Bolsover Homes newsletter.

The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard 2017 specifically required landlords to provide performance information to support effective scrutiny by tenants of performance. Such provision had to include the publication of an annual Report which should include information on repair and maintenance budgets.

The Council now had to annually publish performance information regarding compliance with the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs). As a result, the Landlord Management Data and the Tenancy Perception Survey were published on the website, along with information provided to the Regulator of Social Housing.

It was the Council's intention for a Report to be produced, focusing on achievements over the past financial year as well as planned priorities for the coming year.

From the work achieved, there was little else the Council needed to do for the requirements of the Report.

HOUSING LIAISON BOARD

The one thing that needed reporting was the income spent. The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was the capital received from rent to spend on the upkeep of the Council's housing service.

The Board discussed the proposed new article for the newsletter and agreed the graphics remained viable and would help remind tenants, with the Chair noting it might be beneficial to include the process of when the Council handled instances of ASB. A Tenant added any information provided needed to remain clear and concise.

Moved by Ms. Jackie Taylor and seconded by Mr. Steven Bramley
RESOLVED that the report be noted.

HLB10-24/25 HOUSING STRATEGY 2024-2029 - PLANNED CONSULTATION

The Housing Strategy and Development Officer presented the Housing Strategy (the 'Strategy') to the Board.

Strategy 2021-2024 was due to expire; a revised Strategy was required. The proposed Strategy would cover 2024-2029 but take the Council beyond this point, allowing the incoming Council of 2027 to formulate their new Council Plan. A longer Strategy lifespan allowed the alignment of existing District and countywide strategies, as well as a longer public consultation period to take into account the revised timescales for completion of the Housing Needs Study.

In the timetable provided, it was noted the Parish Council Liaison in July 2024 would not take place in person; a paper consultation would be carried out in its stead.

The Strategy of 2021-2024 had identified key strategic housing policies:

- Key Priority 1 – Provide Good Quality Housing;
- Key Priority 2 – Enable Housing Growth; and,
- Key Priority 3 – Support Vulnerable and Disadvantaged People.

The Strategy of 2024-2029 would add:

- Key Priority 4 – Maintaining and improving property and housing management standards and ensuring that standards and living conditions in the district contribute towards better health outcomes for all.

Work on the draft Strategy had begun April 2024, with content based on the existing policy framework, District profile data, and the commissioned Local Housing Needs Study (joint with Chesterfield Borough Council).

Moved by Mr. Steven Bramley and seconded by Mrs. Angela Sharpe
RESOLVED that the report be noted.

HLB11-24/25 COMMUNITY GRANTS 2024

The Assistant Director Housing Management and Enforcement provided a verbal update on the Community Grants 2024 (the 'Grants') to the Board.

HOUSING LIAISON BOARD

The Board decided that rules would be established so those who had benefitted from the Grants previously would not be eligible to reapply this time. A bidding process would be employed to ensure high quality applications and the Grants provided would be substantial enough to benefit the groups in receivership.

HLB12-24/25 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Board agreed the following meetings would take place in Committee Room 1, The Arc, Clowne on the following dates and times:

- Tuesday, 22nd October 2024, at 10:30 hours;
- Monday, 13th January 2025, at 10:30 hours; and,
- Tuesday, 22nd April 2025, at 10:30 hours.

The meeting concluded at 12:04 hours.