

Housing Engagement Board

Minutes of the Quarterly Meeting held on Wednesday, 22 June 2022 from 13:00 to 15:00 via Zoom

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| Attendees: | <p>Dave Kelleway – Vice Chair</p> <p>Peter Campbell (Head of Housing)</p> <p>John Taylor</p> <p>Les Rolfe</p> <p>Margaret Wilson</p> <p>Peter Tye</p> <p>Julie Fletcher (Services Manager – Housing Strategy)</p> <p>Geoff Clark (Services Manager – Tenancy and Estates)</p> <p>Eddie Spicer (Service Manager – Housing Assets)</p> <p>Bronwen Taylor (Resident Involvement Officer) – Minute taker</p> <p>Gina Manderson (Housing Communications Officer) – Admin Support</p> |
| Apologies: | <p>Cllr John Batchelor – Chair</p> <p>Cllr Jose Hales</p> <p>Cllr Mark Howell</p> |

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| 1. | <p>Welcome and Apologies</p> <p>Dave Kelleway advised that he would be chairing the meeting as Cllr Batchelor was on leave. He welcomed the members to the meeting at 13:00. He especially welcomed Jim Watson, the newly appointed tenant representative, to the board.</p> <p>Geoff Clark introduced Tara Nutbeam-King and advised that she would be giving a presentation on Key Amnesty in relation to Tenancy Fraud (item 5.2).</p> <p>Apologies were received from Cllr John Batchelor, Cllr Mark Howell and Cllr Jose Hales.</p> | - |

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| 2. | <p>Quorum</p> <p>The meeting was quorate.</p> | - |
| 3. | <p>Minutes of previous meeting – 24 June 2022</p> <p>The Chair referred to the minutes of the previous meeting and asked for approval. They were proposed by Peter Tye and seconded by Les Rolfe.</p> <p>Matters Arising from previous meeting</p> <p>Item 4.5 – Complaints</p> <p>Bronwen Taylor confirmed that Democratic Services had included the Estate Inspection schedule in their weekly bulletin to members on 30 March 2022.</p> <p>Item 6.1 – Resignation of Wendy Head – Co-option process</p> <p>Bronwen Taylor advised that the issue with one of the applications had been clarified by the Monitoring Officer and that Jim Watson had been co-opted onto the board at a meeting held on 20 April 2022.</p> <p>Julie Fletcher said that there was a need to review the current policy and it would be added to the Forward Plan.</p> <p>Item 6.3 – Update on Doubling Nature Project</p> <p>Geoff Clark advised they were in the process of finalising the tree audit as they were adding some areas to the audit, and they have not yet shared the information with Parish Councils and the County Council.</p> <p>Dave Kelleway said that there were some trees in his village that had been planted by the Parish Council some years back and he asked that when the council chop them down, to please advise the parish, as residents were blaming each other for removing them.</p> <p>Peter Tye suggested copying the parish clerk in the email to SP Landscapes when work was scheduled on trees.</p> | J Fletcher |

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| | <p>Eddie Spicer said it was 5 years with the option to extend based on a performance basis. He added that SCDC were in control of the contract.</p> <p>Margaret Wilson said that some tenants as well as some members on this board thought that it would be better to have this service in-house, and she asked if the council were still considering this. She added that tenants should be advised of the new contract and its advantages in their rent statements.</p> <p>Eddie Spicer said that a sub-group were looking at the communication for the contract.</p> <p>A discussion on the pros and cons of having an in-house service was held.</p> <p>Peter Campbell said that to bring it back in house would be a significant investment and a high risk investment.</p> | |
| 4.2 | <p>Asset Management Strategy Action Plan</p> <p>Julie Fletcher referred to the action plan included in the pack and said that this was being brought to the HEB to note the progress being made on the Asset Management Strategy Action Plan, and was approved earlier this year together with the Asset Management Strategy. She advised that it sets out the actions we plan to take to improve our landlord services in both the properties and the customer facing roles. She said that some items could not be started until others were completed.</p> <p>Jim Watson asked why sheltered estates were not included in formal estate inspections.</p> <p>Julie Fletcher explained that each sheltered estate had a dedicated estate officer who should be picking up any issues on the estate. She added that sheltered estate residents had the facility to report issues to</p> | - |

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| | <p>their sheltered estate office where the general needs did not have dedicated officers.</p> <p>Jim Watson said that some sheltered residents had asked why their sheltered estates were not included in estate inspections as some sheltered officers was not doing her job in reporting back on issues raised.</p> <p>Bronwen Taylor added that sheltered tenants pay service charges which includes a charge for general maintenance.</p> <p>Les Rolfe said that sheltered estates were often not completely separate from a housing estate and that they should be included in the formal estate inspections.</p> <p>Julie Fletcher said that this should be reviewed and we would have a discussion with officers and tenant representatives outside of this meeting.</p> <p>Geoff Clark said that he saw no reason why sheltered estates should not be included with formal estate inspections, together with tenant representatives, Sheltered Estate Officers and Housing Service Officers.</p> <p>Margaret Wilson said the overwhelming number of complaints that she received were about the lack of response by sheltered estate officers and agreed that sheltered estates should be included in formal estate inspections.</p> <p>Dave Kelleway said that some items in the document were important and he wanted to make sure that they would be presented to the HEB before any decisions were made, as it was important that tenants were involved in the decision process.</p> <p>Peter Campbell said that this document was to ensure that a culture of working together with tenants was the norm rather than the exception.</p> | |

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| 4.3 | <p>Service Plan</p> <p>Peter Campbell referred to the Service Plan included in the pack and said that this was an internal document. He said that the board would have already seen a lot of the items in more detail as part of the project documents, examples being the Repairs Contract and the Asset Management Strategy. He added that this is a standard template which is used by all the other departments in the council and went through each section. He said that as there would be budget training in the near future, he would not go through the finances.</p> <p>Dave Kelleway asked the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The reason for the increase in staffing costs? 2. Was inflation factored into the “Interest payment on the PWB Loan”? 3. How much was in reserves? Why a deficit and where was it shown? 4. Asked for an explanation of the third bullet point on page 36, “As the new Build service...”. 5. Asked about the funding for Northstowe? Was it from the HRA? 6. Asked about the preparation for digital change over on page 41? 7. Asked about promoting apartment living? <p>Peter Campbell responded as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This was due to a combination of an increase in staff and the increase in the cost of living. 2. It is a basket of loans with different maturity dates on each, and when the loans were taken out, there were better deals on shorter term loans than longer term loans. 3. The reserves were not shown, however, it was £17m for this year and was a general council reserve. 4. It was a mixture of affordable rent and shared ownership properties, and we have an agent who deals with these. | - |

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| | <p>5. This was delivered by SCDC with skills in the New Build team and was not from the HRA. He could not say too much about it as it was being presented for scrutiny at council the next day.</p> <p>6. Over recent years there had been a wider adoption of a standard of lifeline equipment provided by different companies, which brought the cost down.</p> <p>7. Given the demand for properties and the cost of land, more apartments were being built. As we are a rural community, when people applied for housing they expected houses and were disappointed when offered apartments, however, we were now managing peoples expectation and making it clear that they could get an apartment. If they did not want an apartment, then they could and bide their time and wait for a house.</p> | |
| 4.4 | <p>Forward Plan</p> <p>Julie Fletcher referred to the Forward Plan document included in the pack and said that this would be a standing item on the agenda. She went through the next items that were due, as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • STAR presentation – to confirm the 29 July 2022 with the consultant • Communal Areas review – September 2022 • Policy review – September 2022 – this may be delayed slightly as we do not have a policy officer, however, we are looking to employ a contractor • Empty Property Relets – September 2022 • Stigma project – September 2022 <p>Julie Fletcher said that the Co-option policy and the Equity Share policy would be added to the document, and that if the board wanted to add any issues in the future, to let us know so we would add it to the plan and provide the necessary documents for discussion.</p> | - |

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| | <p>Dave Kelleway said the co-option policy needed to be done sooner rather than later. He added that anything that was sensitive and would affect tenants needed to be added.</p> <p>Julie Fletcher said the Garage & Land Review was scheduled for December 2022.</p> <p>Peter Campbell said that items that are brought to the HEB should be items that can influence tenants.</p> <p>Peter Tye asked if the Mutual Exchange policy had been included in the document.</p> <p>Julie Fletcher said that it was one of the first policies that she wanted the policy officer to look in order for it to be presented to the HEB in November 2022.</p> | |
| 5. | New Matters | - |
| 5.1 | <p>Estate Inspection Policy</p> <p>Julie Fletcher said that the whole policy had not been looked at and only the wording in point 3.4, the number of estate inspections, had been amended as it was ambiguous. She added that we would look at including the sheltered estates in the policy.</p> <p>Les Rolfe said that he would like the proper definition of estate as the inspection carried out the day before in Silverdale Avenue, Coton was one long road but did not include Whitwall Road, which had about half a dozen council houses in it. He said it should have been included as one estate as we would not be going there again just for that road.</p> <p>Julie Fletcher asked what input they got in terms of which estate was being inspected or where they told before the inspection what would be looked at.</p> | |

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| | <p>Dave Kelleway asked how the issues from informal inspections were reported and Les Rolfe asked where their notes are recorded.</p> <p>Geoff Clark said that they were part of their normal functions and they have spreadsheets where the issues and actions were recorded.</p> <p>Eddie Spicer said that they could look at a digital platform as an option to feedback to the tenant representatives.</p> <p>Julie Fletcher said there were a number of issues that she would refer to the Housing Management Team. She asked if the board were in agreement with the amendment to the policy.</p> <p>The board agreed that they were happy with the amendment.</p> | |
| 5.2 | <p>Key Amnesty in relation to Tenancy Fraud</p> <p>Geoff Clark said that was an initiative by Tara Nutbeam-King to combat fraud in our council homes and it was being presented today to talk about the concept and to give advanced warning of what our plans were.</p> <p>Tara Nutbeam-King advised that previously each type of fraud would be handled by the individual service department and now they were being consolidated into the Corporate Fraud Service team. She presented her slides and explained the process of the Key Amnesty, and said that tenancy fraud was estimated to be the second largest cause of local government fraud losses. She said during the amnesty, which would be for a set period of time, tenants who were committing tenancy fraud would have the option to surrender their keys without facing prosecution. She explained why we were offering an amnesty and asked the board for ideas on how to reach all residents of South Cambridgeshire, and how to best deliver this message to make this initiative a success.</p> | |

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| | <p>Dave Kelleway asked if this had been successfully trialled by other councils.</p> <p>Tara Nutbeam-King said that in October 2020 Southampton had conducted a key amnesty and they had recovered four properties, and they estimated a savings of approximately £12,000. She added that Barnet was about to embark on another key amnesty and that in 2013 they ran a key amnesty where they recovered 17 properties. She said that in 2021 Hillingdon in London had recovered 3 properties with a saving of £54,000 and that Camden had recovered 13 properties. She provided the key contacts as well as the Fraud email address, which was Fraud@scambbs.gov.uk.</p> <p>Margaret Wilson asked if tenants who rented their properties as Air B&Bs or let out spare rooms were covered in the tenancy agreement.</p> <p>Geoff Clark said that tenants were allowed to rent out a spare room as long as the council were advised of the extra income and as long as they were not overcrowding the property or receiving benefits. He added that they were not allowed to rent out the property when they were not living there.</p> <p>A discussion on empty properties and repairs was held.</p> <p>Geoff Clark said that he would arrange for Rebecca Gane to present on this topic at a future meeting.</p> <p>Tara Nutbeam-King said that Environmental Health was in the process of employing an officer who would be tasked with identifying empty properties across the district.</p> <p>Dave Kelleway thanked Tara Nutbeam-King for an informative presentation.</p> | <p>G Clark</p> |

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| 6. | Any Other Business | - |
| 6.1 | <p>Fencing on Council properties</p> <p>Peter Tye asked who was responsible for the fencing between two council properties and if the policy would be changed.</p> <p>Geoff Clark said that we are not responsible to repair or fence in gardens of council properties.</p> <p>Peter Tye said that one of his neighbours was having problems with his fence.</p> <p>Geoff Clark said we could check and remove the fencing, however, would not replace it.</p> <p>Peter Tye asked what was done for tenants who were unable to look after their gardens due to age or a disability.</p> <p>Geoff Clark said that we have a welfare fund to assist tenants who were unable to tend to their gardens.</p> | - |
| 6.2 | <p>Area Meetings</p> <p>Margaret Wilson asked if hedge trimmings and the instructions on the using the new heating system could be included in the agenda for Area Meetings. She said that there was a lack of communication and feedback from Sheltered Estate Officers and said that this needed to be addressed.</p> <p>Geoff Clark said that if they were having issues, to either raise it with the senior officers or himself.</p> | - |

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| 7. | <p>Meeting dates for 2022 / 2023</p> <p>The Chair referred to the following meeting dates for 2022 / 2023:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 21 September 2022 (Zoom / venue tbc) • 21 December 2022 (Zoom / venue tbc) • 23 March 2023 (Zoom / venue tbc) | - |
| 8. | <p>Closing</p> <p>Peter Campbell congratulated and thanked Dave Kelleway for successfully chairing the meeting in the absence of Cllr Batchelor.</p> <p>There being no further business to discuss, the Chair thanked everyone for their attendance and contribution. The meeting ended at 15:12.</p> | - |