

MINUTES OF WILTSHIRE COUNCIL'S HOUSING BOARD

HELD ON MONDAY 25 JANUARY 2016

**AT 1.00 PM IN THE BOARD ROOM, SALISBURY CHURCHFIELDS DEPOT,
STEPHENSON'S ROAD, SALISBURY, WILTSHIRE, SP2 7NP**

Present:

Board Members: Councillor Richard Clewer (Chairman)

Robert Chapman

Cindy Creasy

Jacqui Evans

Lorraine Le-Gate

Emma Powell

Councillor Ian Tomes

**Council Officers: Janet O'Brien (Head of Housing – Strategy and Assets),
Nicole Smith (Head of Housing – Operations and People),
Leanne Sykes (Principal Accountant), Dot Krona (Resident
Engagement Manager), Guy Tribbeck (Tenancy Services
Manager), Ian Seeckts (Governance and Scrutiny Officer)**

Apologies: Angela Britten (Tenant Member, WCHB), James Cawley
(Associate Director – Adult Care Commissioning, Safeguarding
and Housing), Simon Haugh (System Support and Performance
Manager), Councillor Fred Westmoreland (Councillor Member,
WCHB)

Open Session

1. Welcome, housekeeping and apologies

The Chairman welcomed all to the meeting, noted apologies received and confirmed there were no planned fire drills.

2. Minutes of AGM, Previous Meeting both held on Monday 30 November 2015 and Away-Day #2 held on Thursday 7 January 2016

The minutes were agreed. Regarding Away-Day #2, The Friary desktop exercise was confirmed as relating to the whole of The Friary and it was understood that Councillor Tomes would be involved.

3. Matters Arising

Aster, GreenSquare and Selwood are discussing changing their tenure mix; members took the view that Aster is considering this more seriously than other providers; this is understood to be because of the 1% per annum rent reduction for 4 years. This may result in lower levels of rental properties and increased levels of sale or shared ownership properties. All are considering developing less. Providers' establishing 'sister' companies was discussed and how this can circumvent some of the rules. Board membership is linked to the local government electoral cycle; each 4 year appointment ends in 2017. A review of how the Board functions and its achievements will likely be conducted.

4. Budget Update (2015/16, Q3)

The Principal Accountant gave a presentation on the above topic, which covered the 2015/16 Q3 figures and Budget Setting for the year 2016/17. Members' attention was drawn to the profiled budget of £11.437 million and the actual to date of £10.291 million, giving a variance of £1.146 million. Revenue is still being reported on line and work is ongoing regarding coding of capital and revenue items. It is anticipated that there will be a slightly higher amount returned to reserves than forecast. Discussing capital budgets, members noted the budget of £12.2 million and the current spend is £7.7 million; forecasting is also on line and due to the review, there may be an under-spend.

In 2017/18, it is expected that the service will be in a better position in respect of reporting figures.

For the 2016/17 budget, the following were highlighted:

- 1% rent reduction per annum reduces rental income budget by £395.5 thousand and increasing garage rents by CPI plus 1% (which equates to 0.9%) increases rental income budget by £2.9 thousand.
- This reduces the rental income budget for 2016/17 by £392.6 thousand.

- Increase service charges by CPI plus 1% (which equates to 0.9%) – a review of service charges is being undertaken and the outcomes will be reported back to the Board to inform decisions regarding service charges for 2017/18 and beyond.
- The changes would reduce the amount returned to reserves by £392.6 thousand (which reduces the amount returned to reserves from £1,497,900 to £1,105,300).

Increase in pensions and national insurance amounts are to be factored in and the report updated. This information was unavailable at the time of producing the report. The figure is understood to be £130.7 thousand, resulting in a further reserve reduction to £974,600 (this figure was clarified as the actual amount expected to be returned to reserves next year). Budget lines for 2016/17 are expected to be amended, once the review is completed.

Explaining to tenants the reasons for increasing service charges was discussed, given falling utilities costs and some concern was expressed about the overall review outcomes and their implications along with timescales. Officers assured Board members that they would prioritise the review and explained that this would take at least another 3 – 6 months, given the need to balance managing the business operations alongside conducting the review. This would be reported back to the Board. Some regret was expressed about previous freezes, as this was viewed as merely a deferred increase. For repairs and maintenance, members had previously been told of a profiling issue, which the service confirmed was still the case, however some items that have been coded against the repairs line incorrectly when it should have been charged to capital, have been moved, resulting in the figure reducing. The 30 Year Business Plan will be reviewed; resource has been approved by the Associate Director – Finance. Members welcomed the service scrutinising the HRA and SAP was confirmed as the recording system used by the finance team.

The Chairman thanked the Principal Accountant and the Board agreed the following:

To receive an updated report with pensions and national insurance figures.

To receive the updated budget lines for 2016/17 at its May 2016 meeting.

To receive, in 3 months, a report on or an update regarding the HRA, impact of the changes, and if available at that time, a first draft of options and savings proposed for 2017/18 and priorities.

5. 2015/16 Q3 Performance Report

In the absence of the System Support and Performance Manager, the Chairman took the item and provided a comment from a non-attending Board member around the 'Percentage of tenants satisfied with planned maintenance' being 100%. This

number was suggested as inaccurate, perhaps due to tenants not providing fair feedback, a low response rate which was understood to usually be around 20% and the feedback exercise being paper based, rather than similar to the newly introduced telephone survey for 'Percentage of new tenants satisfied with the lettings service overall', which is not performed by the Neighbourhood Officer involved with the letting, but an independent Lettings Officer.

'Percentage of Stage 1 complaints upheld (fully or substantially)' referred to those in favour of the complainant and proposed targets for the year 2016/17 will be presented at the May 2016 meeting; the percentage of rent due and arrears, are impacted by when the payment is received.

(Note after Board meeting: Payment by Direct Debit is available to tenants for collection on five dates during the month. Due to the nature of collection, the Direct Debits have an effect on our arrears figures and throughout the month inflate the arrears totals.

For example, those that choose the 28 of each month are always in arrears (from 1 to 4 weeks) depending on the position in the month. Collection is made to calculate a zero balance by 31 March. Therefore, the last collection on 28 March ensures the account has a zero balance at the end of the rent year.

This affects all accounts that are not collected on the 1 of each month, which will always be in credit. Accounts with a Direct Debit Collection of 8 will show 3 weeks in credit / 1 week arrears, 15 will show 2 weeks credit / 2 weeks arrears and so on, as illustrated in the following table.

DD Collection Day	Effect on Rent Account			
	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
1	Credit	Credit	Credit	Credit
8	Arrears	Credit	Credit	Credit
15	Arrears	Arrears	Credit	Credit
21	Arrears	Arrears	Arrears	Credit
28	Arrears	Arrears	Arrears	Arrears / Zero balance

Whilst these are technically arrears as the Direct Debit payment is never guaranteed, we do expect the vast majority to be received. If we classify these committed payments as non-arrears they have an interesting reducing effect on our arrears figures.

This effect is negated at year end as all direct debits account are reduced to a zero balance presuming full payment and no returned or cancelled mandates. Any arrears present on Direct Debit accounts are included in the total arrears figures.)

Members noted the positive overall picture and took the view that this was a significant improvement on previous years.

The Chairman thanked the officers present and the Board agreed the following:

For the Head of Housing – Assets and Strategy to investigate how the Planned Maintenance feedback is captured.

For the Boards' praise to be passed on to officers.

6. Resident Engagement – Elderly Accommodation Council's Report

The Resident Engagement Manager referred to her report and explained that the Elderly Accommodation Council's report is based on a game that the Resident Engagement Officer and Neighbourhood Officer, both assigned to sheltered housing, took to our properties. Residents played the card game which asks questions around the residents' lifestyle, their home and the services they receive; this can be performed individually or in a group; the results are added to a sheet which is provided to EAC, which in turn provides its findings to the service in the form of individual reports for each scheme and a summary document, all of which had already been circulated to the Board. Reports have been shared with the schemes and the findings are the views and perceptions of our residents. Officers have then met with residents to find a solution to any problems. Some residents gave low markings for having a poor view or a lack of shops in the locality, which the service has zero control over and in turn could skew the figures somewhat. Concerns around security at Castle Meadow, is likely due to a general needs home in the middle which was a former wardens property; there are 2 residents and a noted level of anti-social behaviour which sometimes impacts on residents; members were informed that some residents have inadvertently created or encouraged some of the anti-social behaviour, due to paying the 2 residents to perform certain jobs for them.

An action plan has been produced to address concerns, including working with Health Trainers who will be visiting our properties to encourage people to sign up and engage in exercise classes; art classes are being arranged and a 'Casserole Club' is being established, whereby residents cook an extra meal which is delivered to someone else in the community, who may be unable to cook for themselves or be socially isolated. This will be publicised during the next round of Local Housing Panel (LHP) meetings and the service has also met with the Adult Social Care Commissioner for Older Peoples' Services.

16 schemes participated; some schemes, for example Graham House, chose not to. Repeating the exercise this year was suggested as a way to encourage people to participate and compare and contrast the findings, 1 year on. 1 of the schemes was highly commended and the service has been invited to an awards show in February 2016; the service also won a Legal and General award.

Members noted that service and consultations figures were quite low; clarifying the responsibilities of the service and the 'Help to Live at Home' provider will be addressed through discussions with the Adult Social Care Commissioner for Older Peoples' Services. It was expected that Housing Support Officers, under the 'Help to Live at Home' service, would have been providing a number of these services.

The Chairman thanked the Resident Engagement Officer and the Board agreed the following:

For the activity to be conducted again, although after November 2016.

7. Housing Assurance Panel (HAP) – Management Response to the HAP's 'Introduction to a Tenancy' Report – Update

The Tenancy Services Manager referred to his report and drew members' attention to the table in the appendix. Producing a DVD of the Tenants Handbook was relatively inexpensive, however content was considered less than engaging. The handbook is reviewed on a quarterly basis; a live link will be placed on the website, hopefully within 1 month. When communal sign-ups are in place, the service is minded to introduce a promotional DVD explaining what the incoming resident can expect of the service as its landlord, although it is some way off realising this at the moment. A pilot is underway about sign-ups being in the office, this will continue until March 2016. Decorating all properties would be exceptionally expensive and figures presented only relate to the schedule of rates, that is, the figures do not take account of re-plastering, etc. It was suggested that reviewing the Voids and / or Letting Standard, may be helpful. For the tenant 'mix' document, the service does not have reliable data that would be representative; the service was not persuaded that this recommendation could be implemented; some nervousness was expressed by Board members, as had been the case on previous occasions. Including refuse dates in the 'Welcome Pack' has been adopted and implemented. Members discussed the appropriateness of redecorating an entire property if it was a 'hard-to-let' property and whether this would encourage their being let; it may also be helpful in encouraging those under-occupying to move to a smaller property, if it is well decorated; extending the handyman service was also discussed.

The Chairman thanked the Tenancy Services Manager.

8. Risk Register and Minutes of the Working Group

The Chairman took the item and the Governance and Scrutiny Officer explained that the latest Risk Register had been supplied to the Head of Business Change,

Performance and Governance, and that feedback from the Corporate team was awaited. The Chairman highlighted that until such comments were received, there was little to be discussed; members were informed that the flooding item on the Risk Register may need to be amended, once comments are received.

The Chairman moved to the next item, with the Board's agreement.

9. Complaints – Comparison with other Providers

The Chairman took the item in the absence of the System Support and Performance Manager and Board members noted that the service appeared to be performing well in comparison to its peers; although it was noted that it is difficult to establish if the figures suggested Aster's overall performance was worse than Housing Services, or if Aster were simply better at capturing complaints compared to Housing Services. Members discussed the level of complaints that the service upheld, compared these to other providers and were satisfied that the service appeared to be performing well.

The Board agreed the following:

To take no further action; it was not necessary for the HAP to conduct a scrutiny on 'Complaints', at this time.

10. Under and Over Occupation

Presenting her report, the Head of Housing – Operations and People asked for any questions from Board members and sought clarification over what the intention was to do with the information requested. Members explained that this was a part of the overall Asset Management Strategy and about the best use of stock. Some data is captured at the beginning of a tenancy, however due to the changing nature of a household it is unlikely that our data is reflective of households at the current time. Most people who wanted to move, were understood to have moved already; those that have not, are understood to be prepared to make up the rent or benefit shortfall. The majority of people under occupying were of pensionable age and therefore not impacted by current changes, however they have been reminded that their overall utilities costs would likely be higher in a larger property. When an individual who is struggling financially, is known by us, we take action to assist that person; some people choose not to contact the service and we are therefore unaware of them, except when identified via tenancy inspections, which are infrequent. When identified, members enquired if alternatives are presented; the service does identify sheltered accommodation and general needs, from a list they have each week, to try and encourage residents to move to more appropriate accommodation.

Downsizing from a 3 bedroom property to a 2 bedroom property is only possible if the person has an identified need for 2 bedrooms; that is, if they have a 1 bedroom need, they would not be able to make such a move, at this time, however a policy change is being considered for those of state retirement age, given they would have the opportunity to stay in that property for longer. Members were advised that in

approximately 2 weeks, the situation may change. Allowing any person of state retirement age to bid on a 2 bedroom property was a Key Decision for the Council; it had to be added to the Cabinet Forward Work Plan for 28 days, followed by another Paper as it would be a Cabinet Member Delegated Decision, therefore it is currently on our website for a 7 day period, after which we need to permit 7 further days for any challenges, and then it can be adopted.

The policy change was considered due to a surplus of 2 bedroom bungalows which were difficult to let, as were some 2 bedroom sheltered housing; it is the priority of the council to look at allocating an older person a property that they could stay in, for the long term. Whether this would encourage more people into the system was discussed by members; the requirement for a need to be established and for a local connection will remain in place. Financial incentives to encourage people to move property have not been utilised for some time. The feasibility of knocking 1 bedroom properties together, to create a 2 bedroom property was discussed; there are considerable costs associated with this, for example, the cost of the work, the rental loss and the debt already attached.

Regarding Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP), it was explained that not every person cited would be in receipt of this, although some would be; originally people were given 6 – 12 months to address their circumstances and members noted that the rules around this are being tightened as it is not intended to be an ongoing payment, however the officers can award the payment for longer, if they deem it appropriate. Targeting assistance to those in receipt of DHP was discussed; the service uses 'Who's Home' to identify people with a tenancy discrepancy, which can include occupancy issues. The service does not currently seek out those in receipt of DHP for additional support. Members were concerned about the implications of welfare changes; officers reminded members that the changes are wider than simply those in receipt of benefit and that taking a view of the overall situation is sensible.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Housing – Operations and People and the Board agreed the following:

To receive a report about the impact of Welfare Reform, in the future.

For the Board to prioritise what work it expects the service to do, including but not limited to, preparing budgets.

11. Wiltshire Council's Housing Board – Work Plan

The Chairman asked members for their comments on the work plan and the Board took the view that it was a broad brush document with headlines, which required the work of the Heads of Service to be included as supporting elements, for example, the Housing Strategy, HRA Business Plan and Asset Management Strategy, with timescales of when the Heads of Service expect to complete certain work. Members

were informed of the Housing Partnership Board being extremely critical of the time it is taking to produce the Housing Strategy.

The Board agreed the following:

To receive what the Heads of Service consider are the main 5 priorities, at its May 2016 meeting.

Private Session

12. Procurement Panel

The Chairman took the item and Board members were asked for their input into the report, prior to it going to Cabinet, and were asked to consider tenant input; the document was confirmed as a draft which had not yet been presented to Cabinet. Members discussed that the Associate Director – Adult Care Commissioning, Safeguarding and Housing had invited the Board to be represented in the procurement process, at a previous meeting. Members were unsure if they had been provided with the document already. (**Note after Board meeting:** the document was circulated on 19 January 2016 and the email explained this was with a view to incorporating Board member input.) Cabinet approved the WoS decision ‘in principle’, but further work was to be undertaken; the Board considered that ‘going live’ in June 2017 may be ambitious; current contracts can be extended.

The Board agreed the following:

For Board members to read the document, consider their views and supply their comments to the Governance and Scrutiny Officer, by 29 January 2016.

For the Associate Director – Adult Care Commissioning, Safeguarding and Housing to:

- **Confirm the expected Board input.**
- **Explain how tenants will be involved in the process.**

13. Restructure Proposals

The Head of Housing – Strategy and Assets and the Head of Housing – Operations and People referred to their report and attached structure charts, and explained that Housing Services’ officers now sit under one of them, except for the System Support and Performance Manager and the Governance and Scrutiny Officer, both of whom now sit below the Head of Business Change, Performance and Governance. Heads of Service manage elements of the general fund and HRA. All 3 Heads of Service report directly to the Associate Director – Adult Care Commissioning, Safeguarding and Housing.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Housing – Strategy and Assets and the Head of Housing – Operations and People and the Board agreed the following:

To de-list Restructure Proposals from all future agendas.

14. Any other business

Using 'Right to Buy' receipts by a set deadline is proving challenging, due to stringent rules, for example only being allowed to use 30% of the money received and not being permitted to mix the money with grant funding; if this proves to be the case, then the monies will have to be paid to central Government.

4 council owned sites, were discussed, which the service wants to offer to housing associations to build extra care housing on. Regarding the Salisbury site, the service is trying to negotiate an extra care housing scheme through a developer, which will be council owned, however the service wants to have the option to utilise a Salisbury care home site, should the project be unsuccessful.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Housing – Strategy and Assets and the Board agreed the following:

To receive a brief update paper on 'Right to Buy' receipts and their use.

15. Date of Next Meeting

Members noted the next meeting is on Monday 21 March 2016, it is to be held in the Board Room at the Salisbury Churchfields Depot and it is due to start at 1pm.

The meeting ended at 2.40pm.