

Tenant Board Meeting

Wednesday 31st July 2024

Attendees:

Gerry Crease	Tenant Board Member
Marcus Cooper	Tenant Board Member
Liz Perryman	Tenant Board Member
Zoe Martin	Tenant Board Member
David White	Housing Transformation Manager
Kerry Lecomber	Tenant Engagement Co-ordinator
Georgia Mecoy	Tenant Engagement Co-ordinator
Cllr Mary McLaren	Overview and Scrutiny Member
Cllr James Caston	Overview and Scrutiny Member
Cllr Jessie Carter	Housing Portfolio Holder
Rob Longfoot	Tenant Services Manager
Paul Heaney	Rents and Service Charges

Apologies

Tony Cole

Actions from last meeting

1. Overview and Scrutiny Members attending this meeting.
2. DW advised that we will be able to present overall figures but might not be able to divide it out. However, due to HRA position all Interims and Consultants will cease to be used from September. We may need to use them in future as sometimes their independent expertise is required.

Overview and Scrutiny introduction

DW advised that as part of work to strengthen the board and provide RSH with assurance that we have right level of oversight and tenant voice through our governance structure, we'll be working more closely with O&S Committee and Cllrs Caston and McLaren who are co-chairs of the Committee. We will be bringing a report to O&S twice a year to update them on our Scrutiny activities and Engagement work. They can then make their own recommendations to this Board.

Cllr Caston advised that he has been on O&S for about 9 years and co-chair in second year now. He is a farmer in Somersham and excited about this new process. O&S aren't a decision making body, they are advisory but do get listened to by Cabinet and can hopefully help this board achieve what they want.

Cllr McLaren is on her second term as Cllr and in last year has been co-chair of O&S. Her background is in Health but as a Regulator so Scrutiny and Audit are things she is experienced in. O&S looks at what's happening and the range of parts in a council; the people, the systems and the building. Shared the acronym the CQC use:

Safe **Caring** **Responsive** **Effective** **Well-led**

She was advised to follow those standards and you can't go wrong.

Questions

LP enquired if we might be able to scrutinise something together with the two groups working together? DW advised that O&S decide their roadmap for the year and we will do something similar. For example, one thing they're looking at is if we're inspection ready for RSH which has led to this work together. Definitely worth looking at their findings to learn from and get the tenant voice. MMc advised that her and JC wrote a members report and

would be worth sharing with this Board. Also O&S is a public meeting so anyone can attend or view over live stream.

Action: Share O&S reports with Board members and direct them to find live stream etc.

MC questioned where we're finding land to build on so asked JC if he'd sell. JC advised you can only sell it once so done on an opportunity basis. The Council does buy land from Farmers but they don't offer the market rates. Point about lack of affordable housing – need the right type of houses. Need to look at the NPPF and housing supply and land supply.

Service Charges – Paul Heaney

PH shared his presentation and took the meeting through it. It went through the issue of Service Charges in general needs and the background to it.

Questions

GC enquired as to the term 'consultation' – have to do this by law but isn't it just a paper exercise. PH advised yes it is with a small c under the Housing Act but he will be listening to feedback. DW advised ultimately it's a Cabinet decision for members.

LP enquired if grass cutting was included and PH advised it would and LP advised she didn't think it would be covered under benefits. PH thanked her for that information. RL advised that a lot of landlords do charge for service charges and he will follow it up and make sure we have the right information.

MC enquired as to 40% reduction in Government funding and asked if it was challenged. PH advised it was during the period of austerity brought in by previous Government. DW advised that when Govt impose legislation the sector bodies will get together and lobby the Government to express concerns and dissatisfaction. However, it's still up to the Government as to whether they listen to those bodies.

MMc enquired if we would be contacting Parish and Town Councils. RL advised on process to get in contact and we will be writing to all of our tenants.

MC advised it depends on the type of tenant so maybe online and a physical copy. DW advised that we are legally obliged to write to all. What we need from the Board is an idea of how you would feel about it. Clarified point about it's about charging for services that are received. At the moment all tenants are paying for those services whether they get them or not. GM advised MC's point was very good that we really need to be very clear about the fact we're not actually making money out of it. DW advised we obviously need to be explicitly clear about why we haven't done it before and the background.

ZM advised clarity on why it hasn't been done up to this point and why it's needed now. A lot of older generation will appreciate a letter but social media for younger tenants may get the message much better as it can be a bit more visual. So perhaps a video or someone in person. DW advised that adds to MC point and assumes there will be a comms plan around it. RL advised it's important to make it interactive. By law has to be a letter but perhaps a video could be added in for impact.

GC advised need for being very careful about this as there are areas around him where the land is HRA but looked after by tenants. DW advised that we know our services aren't good enough in certain areas but our budgets are very tight. Went through difference between Bronze and Gold services and guidance needed from tenants along with SLA and clarity around what will be done and tenants can hold us to account on performance. Also clarified that this is just for general needs blocks of flats, we already have service charges for Sheltered Housing.

DW advised another thing to pick up on is that we need to manage expectations for communal areas in terms of cleaning etc.

LP advised she would willingly pay a service charge to have the grass cut outside her own property but do not want to pay for lighting for a block of flats elsewhere. PH advised that it will only be the people who are benefitting from the service that pay for it.

ZM advised she thinks it's a good thing and as long as it's in black and white and people know they're paying for things they're actually getting then they can't complain.

JC enquired if tenants would have the opportunity to not have the service or change the level and PH advised they are conversations to have in the future. If we're providing services not wanted we could stop, it's only if it's statutory that we have to. DW clarified communal cleaning would be a good example.

Tenant Handbook Scrutiny Project update

GM advised that feedback was greatly appreciated and most of the recommendations have been pulled together and most have been included in the handbook.

Action: KL to share list of recommendations and results.

We are looking at having a separate handbook for Sheltered and Air Source Heat Pumps information in the handbook.

Annual Report Scrutiny

GM reported on findings from Board Members reviewing our annual report and the alternative ones and what will happen next.

She then went through the findings from the surveys.

GM requested for offers to write message from the Board and Liz and Zoe both offered.

Stop the Stigma Campaign

DW took the meeting through the campaign and our sign-up to it. This is a group of tenants who have come together nationwide working with University of Durham and Sheffield to try and turn the narrative around. A lot of things in the press and TV programmes etc. We want to be part of the solution to this and we are signed up to be one of their pioneer travellers. They had lots of urban councils and Housing Associations but wanted some more rural. They will probably want to speak to the Board and will hopefully be able to showcase some of the work we're already doing – Stigma training for staff. Also a chance to learn from others.

LP has already joined it and they interviewed her online and has been to two webinars and had very lively and informative discussions. Also 4 million homes project is really good and interesting.

Action: GM will resend the information and resources from that and other sources in terms of a resource list.

Action: DW to look at them attending and presenting to Cabinet.

AOB

GM: 1. Questions for Arthur in September – reminder to bring questions beforehand.

3. 1:2:1s – please respond and let us book them in.

4. Ad going out in Tenant Newsletter wanting more Board members in Mid Suffolk as slightly uneven so will be in next week or so.