

LANDLORD SERVICES ADVISORY BOARD

28 January 2022

NOTES

Present:

Cllr Paul Rivers (Chairman)
 Terry Daubney, Waverley Tenants' Panel
 (Vice Chairman)
 Cllr Jacquie Keen
 Gillian Martin, Waverley Tenants Panel
 Danielle Sleightholme, Waverley Tenants
 Panel

Apologies:

Councillor Simon Dear

16 Apologies for absence

Councillor Paul Follows explained that Councillor Anne-Marie Rosoman, had stepped down as Portfolio Holder for Housing due to her health. She will remain a Councillor. He thanked her for the work she had done in the housing role over the last three years. He stated that there was now Co-Portfolio Holders for Housing. Councillor Nick Palmer had the role for developing new social housing and Councillor Paul Rivers had responsibility for the management and maintenance of homes and chairing the meeting.

The group introduced themselves. There was Terry Daubney who was the chair of the Tenants Panel, Gillian Martin from the Tenants Panel, Hugh Wagstaff Head of Housing Operations, Annalisa Howson the Housing Service Improvement Manager, Danielle Sleightholme from the Tenants Panel, Jeanette Engelfield the Tenant Involvement Officer, Jacquie Keen councillor for Haselmere Critchmere and Shottermill, Councillor Paul Follows Leader of the Council and ward member for Godalming Central and Ockford, Peter Vickers Head of Finance and Property, Andrew Smith Head of Housing Delivery and Communities.

Apologies were received from Councillor Simon Dear.

17 Minutes of the previous meeting

Regarding Paragraph 11, the Chairman wanted to check that the Affordable Homes Delivery Strategy consultation had started. The Housing Service Improvement Manager confirmed that the consultation had been launched on 27 January and was available online. Direct approaches had been made to various charities and stakeholders.

Regarding item 12, board members were asked to feedback any other comments regarding the Tenant Satisfaction Measures Consultation to officers and a draft consultation response incorporating comments put forward to be circulated to board members for final comments. Annalisa stated that they'd received further comments from Terry Daubney and they were having a focus group with tenants at the beginning of February 2022. The consultation responses were not due to be

submitted till the 3 March so the documentation would be shared with the board mid to end of February.

Regarding item 13, it said they agreed that the Landlord Services Advisory Board would have the opportunity to meet with the new responsive repairs and voids contractor and with TFL who will carry out satisfaction. Annalisa stated that she'd agreed with Heather Rigg, the Property Services Manager, that TFL would present to the Board on 31 March 2022 and the Responsive Repairs and Voids contractor would present on 28 April 2022.

Regarding item 14, the work programme, Terry Daubney asked for a report back on the senior living consultation as a few issues had been raised with the panel. Annalisa stated the report was on the Board's agenda for the next meeting on 28 February.

The minutes of the meeting from 10 January 2022 were then approved.

18 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

19 Service Plans 2022 - 2025

Annalisa Howson outlined the service plans. She said each service within the Council had an annual service plan that set out what they wanted to achieve in the coming year. It was recognised that not everything was completed in a year so they were rolling programs for three years. In the autumn the housing team reviewed the current service plan and did some horizon scanning about what issues were going to come up in the future. They took feedback from the tenants panel at their partnership meetings. They looked at tenants' feedback from STAR (tenant satisfaction survey) and they looked at compliments and complaints they'd received. This was all set within the wider context of the Charter for Social Housing Residents White Paper that was released in 2021. They'd kept the same themes for the service plan.

The first theme to ensure that the service was financially robust; to have at least two million pounds in reserve to deal with any natural disasters or unforeseen consequences. There were three actions to make sure they were financially robust and there are plans for a strategic review of the HRA Business Plan in the new financial year. The Asset Management Strategy was in development and it was due to be presented to the board in March.

The second theme was about meeting the needs of tenants. That involved communication. They had received STAR results and the consultation feedback from the senior living scheme and wanted to make sure there were lots of opportunities for people to work with them and give feedback so they could make sure that the service met people's needs.

The third theme was for the service to be professional and put residents at the heart of what they did; to have good retention of staff and make sure that they had the capacity within the team to deal with all the things that were arising. Also working with the Chartered Institute of Housing looking at the professional attributes that a

social housing officer should have and they were working with people to ensure they have access to ongoing learning and development and professionalism.

The fourth theme for the service plan was to be a recognised partner as they needed to work with other organisations and statutory agencies to improve lives and seek opportunities to promote any initiatives.

Fifthly they wanted to make sure that our customer experience was good for our residents so they would continue to monitor satisfaction and develop performance management.

The sixth element which was in the Housing Delivery and Community Service Plan was about delivering new homes.

Overall the team's priority was to improve responsive repairs. They had a new contractor starting in April and improve communications

ACTION - The Board would receive service plan updates in the quarterly performance reports but also a more detailed update in six months' time on progress with all the service plan actions in October

Councillors wanted to know if there was any money in the budget for all the extra work. Hugh stated that they had three quarters of a million pounds and a line in the budget for fire safety work. There was also money in the development program to build new flats within one of the schemes. There was also quite a lot of money going into the senior living schemes within the 2022/23 budget.

RESOLVED

The Board:

- considered the service plans for 2022-2025 and agreed with the service plan themes and actions,
- confirmed the quarterly reporting cycle with an in depth six month review in October, and
- noted any service plan action could be requested as a future LSAB agenda item.

20 Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan - Revenue Budget and Capital Programme 2022/23

Hugh acknowledged that two meetings previously the Head of Finance and Property Peter Vickers gave an in-depth analysis of the housing accounts and the challenges

Peter Vickers stated that it was a budget that looked to the long term. There was a 30-year business plan.

Waverley had to take a mortgage out of £189 million paid to the government to free themselves from the government's financing system. The business plan was designed to mitigate against moderate shocks, but had to be reprofiled due to the four years of rent reduction. This really hit the business plan because not only did the rents reduce but the plan had assumed rent rises above inflation which was what the government promised.

Rather than review the numbers, Hugh explained what the budgets would deliver and the challenges to the service. Covid had impacted on the service causing a lost rental income as homes were unable to be let during lockdown and had impacted resources and capacity. They also had issues with contractors, inflating costs and resources. The budget also supported the net zero decarbonisation agenda.

There was huge investment in the next year's budget to run a pilot at Ockford Ridge to retrofit seven homes, to assess green initiatives. For most homes insulation is the most effective way to reduce carbon and use the fabric first approach. The service has 800 properties that were pre-second world war, that are not possible or practicable to make zero carbon.

The budget has additional money to do works at one of the senior schemes to complete works required to meet new building standards. Work required would be identified through fire risk assessments. £0.75m has been allocated over three years to complete that work.

The budget proposes a rent increase of up to 4.1%. The rent rise equated to £1.61 per week. This is necessary to resource this year's projects and services but also support future investment in the homes services. Hugh acknowledged current challenges following the pandemic and increasing cost of living. He noted that there was a Government Household Support Fund distributed by Waverley to assist those facing money problems. A letter was being sent to all their tenants promoting the scheme and letting everyone know help is available to pay for heating, food and other essentials. The rent team had also been proactive in looking at records of everyone who had gone on to universal credit during the pandemic.

The government household support fund finishes in March 2022. To support tenants who may be financially challenged by the rent increase a new Hardship fund has been created within the HRA. The board thought the hardship fund needed to be ongoing and not just for one year as cost of living rises were increasing with food and fuel and National Insurance going up. They also felt the fund needed to not be stigmatised and eligibility criteria needed to be clear. It was noted that the Tenants Panel already met with the Rents Team regularly to ensure there was a softer side to rent collection.

ACTION - The team would work with the Tenants Panel to develop simple eligibility criteria, easy application process and compassionate language in communications.

Peter Vickers stated that the report committed Waverley to reviewing the hardship fund during the year so it was not just a one-off cash injection it was an active thing. They didn't know if £30,000 was enough.

Reviewing the recommendations for Council, the Board questioned whether the rooms should be rented out to the residents or whether they should be free. They also wanted to know about the policy for outside agencies using them for community activities. They said they had seen instances of where residents were charged to use the community rooms. It did appear that the budget line made two distinct references for residents and non-residents. It was suggested that it depended on the purpose of renting the room and whether it was commercial or not.

ACTION

The Board advised that the recommendation be altered to reflect commercial and non-commercial use. It was suggested that the third line which said community room residents also be removed.

Officers to ensure residents not charged for personal use of communal rooms and availability of rooms promoted following pandemic restrictions.

RESOLVED

It was recommended that the Landlord Services Advisory Board made comments to the Executive on the proposed recommendations. The Board wished to make the recommendations detailed above about the use of the Community Rooms. They also asked that a summary of their discussions be added to the report including about establishing the criteria for the hardship fund by working with the Tenants Panel.

21 Work programme

It was stated that the O&S group wanted to do a joint working group regarding the Housing Revenue Account which was subsequently articulated as housing. The group asked that when they established it that its terms of reference did not clash with the Landlord Services Advisory Board.

There was also one item on the work programme against 10 January that Councillor Keen and Terry Daubney were to meet with Alice Lean and Esther Lyons, the Housing Strategy and Enabling Managers to review the consultation documentation and feedback on behalf of the Board. That was happening on 8 February.

The Chairman was asked when the contractors representative was to come in to talk to the Board. It was confirmed that the contractors who were doing the responsive repairs feedback survey were coming on 31 March and the responsive repairs and voids contractor was coming on 28 April meeting.

The board confirmed that there would now be more than five meeting a year, as previously planned. The Board meetings are planned for the last Thursday of the month, but no meetings in August or December. It was also agreed that the Board would look at no more than three or four items per meeting so they had a chance to look at things in depth.

It was stated that the Asset Management Strategy was coming to the Board in March. It would look at how Waverley managed its homes into the future to make sure they were safe, warm and greener and more efficient and a good place to live. It was not just about decarbonisation, it was also about recognising the rising cost of energy and the cost of living for tenants and that needed to be given a lot of weight too.

22 Date of next meeting

The next meeting would take place at 10am on 24 February.