

Housing Engagement Board
Minutes of the Quarterly Meeting
held on Monday, 8 July 2024
from 2pm to 4pm via Zoom

Attendees: Cllr John Batchelor – Chair
Peter Campbell (SCDC – Head of Housing)
Bob Buss (Co-opted Tenant Representative)
Jim Watson (Co-opted Tenant Representative)
Margaret Wilson (Elected Tenant Representative)
Oana Sutherland (Co-opted Tenant Representative)

By Invitation: Brian Burton (Tenant Volunteer)
Patti Hall (Tenant Volunteer)
Julie Fletcher (SCDC – Service Manager – Housing Strategy)
Geoff Clark (SCDC – Service Manager – Tenancy and Estates)
Eddie Spicer (SCDC – Service Manager – Housing Assets)
Uzma Ali (SCDC – Housing Development and Policy Research Officer)
Dave Armitage (SCDC – Resident Involvement Team Leader)
Bronwen Taylor (SCDC – Resident Involvement Officer) – Minute taker

Apologies: Cllr Eileen Wilson
Cllr Heather Williams (absent – no apology received)
Dave Kelleway (Elected Tenant Representative) – Vice Chair

1. Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting at 2.05pm.

2. Quorum

The meeting was quorate.

3. Minutes of previous Meeting – 28 March 2024

The Chair referred to the minutes of the meeting held on 28 March 2024.

Margaret Wilson to send a few typing errors to Bronwen Taylor. Subject to the corrections, the minutes were approved by the board as a true reflection of the meeting.

3.1 Matters Arising from previous Meeting – 28 March 2024

The matter arising from the previous meeting is below.

Item 4.3 – Resident Involvement Framework Review Update

Bronwen Taylor advised that Dave Armitage had sent the notes from the framework meetings to Cllr Batchelor on 29 April 2024 and that he would send the approved Resident Involvement Strategy to him after this meeting.

Income and Expenditure Statements in Communal Halls

Margaret Wilson raised the issue of Income and Expenditure statements and said that they still did not have them in the communal halls.

Geoff Clark said that he had offered to set up a meeting with her and the Housing Accountant to get a better understanding of how they were set up. He said he would arrange a meeting.

Action: Geoff Clark

4. Standing Items

4.1 Forward Plan 2024 / 2025

Julie Fletcher referred to the Forward Plan included in the pack and said that this was a standing item on the agenda and was an opportunity for everyone to say if they would like anything added. She said that we had added a couple of new items, namely the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy and the Assignment and Succession Policy, and only when the Policy Panel have a programme for review of policies, will they be presented to the HEB.

Julie Fletcher said that the Annual Tenant Satisfaction Measures and the Assessment of the Complaints Code both need to be added and discussed at the next meeting, and which need to be published by the end of June 2024. She added that they were going through SCDC's decision process and would be presented to the HEB at the next meeting. She referred to the items planned for the coming months, as follows:

- June 2024 – Communications Standard – Uzma Ali to provide an update at this meeting.
- June 2024 – Mutual Exchange Policy – Feedback to be provided at this meeting.
- June 2024 – Resident Involvement Framework – The Chair to approve the updated document following the changes agreed to in the framework at this meeting.

- June 2024 – Council Stock Condition Survey – Eddie Spicer to provide an overview report on the results of the survey at this meeting.
- October 2024 – Empty Property Re-let Disposal and Standards – To consider the findings and recommendations following the outcome of the project working group.
- TBC – Together with Tenants Charter – Review what actions are required to achieve the Together with Tenants Charter.
- TBC – Anti-Social Behaviour Policy – To approve the ASB policy following tenant consultation.
- TBC – Assignment and Succession Policy – Linked policy / procedure to Tenancy Policy.

The Chair asked where we were with the Empty Property Re-let Disposal and Standards findings which had been moved out to October 2024. He added that the Four-day Week Report had indicated that there were only two areas where the performance was not as good as prior to implementation of the four-day week and this was one of them.

Eddie Spicer advised that there was a sub-group who looked at every stage of re-lets and were looking at ways for it to be improved.

The Chair asked if we were working towards restructuring the targets.

Eddie Spicer said that we were looking at efficiencies that could be made to each step of the process and not restructuring targets.

The Chair asked if the underlying problem was that 17 days was not achievable and nationally we were in the top quartile.

Eddie Spicer said that irrespective of what the target was, we were looking extensively to find efficiencies within that, however, he agreed that the target was not achievable.

4.2 Resident Involvement Framework Review Update

Dave Armitage referred to the Resident Involvement Framework Strategy document included in the pack and said it was presented and approved by Cabinet on 25 June 2024, subject to any minor amendments that the HEB may want to make to it. He added that Terms of Reference documents for each panel had been written up and agreed by tenant volunteers.

The Chair requested the sign off date to be changed to today's date and asked for clarity on how the Chairs for each panel was appointed.

Dave Armitage explained that initially we asked for volunteers to chair and then going forward and at the start of each financial year a new chair would be appointed based on either voting or agreement by each panel.

The Chair said that as the membership was flexible, would the chair of each panel be a fixed point and always attend their respective panels meetings.

Dave Armitage said that they would be a fixed point and attend their respective panels meetings however they could also be a member of the other panels.

Margaret Wilson referred to page 20 in the pack, Tenancy Standard and the words “ended by landlords”, as she was conscious of anti-social behaviour not only in her area but also in other areas, and asked how Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) was treated within this framework and if it could be looked at in more detail, with reference to ASB in the Tenancy Standard.

Dave Armitage said that this would be looked at by the Policy and Procedure Panel and would be one of the policies at the top of their list.

Julie Fletcher said that the Tenancy Standard wording was taken from the Consumer Standards document and these were what we had to do in compliance with the Consumer Standards. She added that the Neighbourhood and Community Standard would cover ASB in more detail.

Margaret Wilson said that she felt that we need to hold area meetings as it was still problematic that they were not being held. She also referred to the communal garden project in Girton, which was an ongoing project, and said that praise had been given to both Mears and Dave Armitage who had done a lot of work on this. She added that she and the residents were impressed with the standard of work, and she thanked everyone who had been involved in the project.

Julie Fletcher said that area meetings were covered on page 13 of the restructure document as “Other forms of tenant contact” and that Dave Armitage would work with tenant volunteers to arrange area meetings.

The Chair asked if the HEB were happy to approve the document.

The HEB approved the document.

Peter Campbell said the Chair would sign the document.

Action: Dave Armitage

4.3 Estate Inspections Report

Bronwen Taylor referred to the document included in the pack for noting and said that two inspections had been cancelled due to heavy rain, however, had been rescheduled for later dates in the year.

Margaret Wilson referred to one of the issues on page 35 of the pack, “Parcel of land behind No. 27 needs cutting. Not been cut with the rest.” and asked why the council was paying more for work that should have been done and was covered in the contract.

Geoff Clark said that part of the formal estate inspections was to make sure that the grounds maintenance maps were accurate and up to date. He agreed that if work was on the map as a scheduled program of works for SP Landscapes and they missed it and we asked them to come back to do the work, then it should not be an additional charge. He said he assumes that this particular issue would not be a piece of land that was on their schedule of works.

Margaret Wilson said that maps should be reviewed and agreed to when the contract was renewed and signed, as it would appear that they were not. She said that as long as it was noted that they needed to be kept up to date by both sides.

Geoff Clark said the maps were accurate and up to date, and we review them all the time. He added that small pieces of land do change over time in terms of responsibility and we amend them to make sure they were accurate.

5. New Matters

5.1 Contracts Review Panel

Dave Armitage referred to the Terms of Reference document included in the pack and said that officers and tenants had met and gone through the document.

The Chair approved the Terms of Reference document.

5.2 Policy and Procedure Panel

Dave Armitage referred to the Terms of Reference document included in the pack and said that officers and tenants had met and gone through the document.

The Chair approved the Terms of Reference document.

5.3 Tenant Satisfaction Measures and Key Performance Indicators Review Panel

Dave Armitage referred to the Terms of Reference document included in the pack and said that officers and tenants had met and gone through the document.

The Chair approved the Terms of Reference document.

5.4 Mutual Exchange Policy – Monitoring Report

Julie Fletcher referred to the documents included in the pack. She said that the Mutual Exchange Policy was reviewed in September 2023 and that following the implementation of the policy, we would present a monitoring report to the board. She said that between October 2023 and March 2024, a six-month period, there had been 22 successful mutual exchanges and this compared with 25 in 2018 / 2019 and 40 in 2021 / 2022, which were one-year periods. She added that with the current information available, the number of mutual exchanges had increased slightly.

She referred the financial incentives to downsize and said that they felt that there was some ambiguity in terms of who could qualify for the financial incentives. She referred to point 10 of the report on page 50 of the pack and asked if the text in bold below could be added to item 6.7 in the Mutual Exchange Policy, to read:

To incentivise **existing council** tenants to downsize through Mutual Exchange, SCDC will provide financial incentives **to its council tenants who are downsizing** based on the number of bedrooms released. For every bedroom released, **council tenants exchanging to a smaller council property within the district will receive £1,000** and **council tenants downsizing to a housing association property or to another council will receive £500. Payments will be** payable upon successful exchange.

Where those in receipt of the financial incentive to downsize, then go on to move again within a year, the financial incentive will be repayable.

Julie Fletcher explained that this was to make it clear that this was only applicable to our own council tenants.

Margaret Wilson said that Dave Kelleway was instrumental in this policy, and it should be noted that his influence, together with the rest of the tenant representatives seemed to be positive and was having a positive effect so far.

Julie Fletcher said that the amendments to the policy would need to be made by decision notice and for the Chair to sign. She added that following what Margaret Wilson said, it

would be really good to publicise this in newsletters in that we have worked together with tenant representatives and this was the outcome.

Geoff Clark asked that a report back to compare the figures be given in 12 months' time.

The Chair agreed and said that we did have a communications drive to encourage tenants to go the mutual exchange route.

Geoff Clark said that we continue to advertise this in tenants and leaseholders' newsletters.

5.5 Communications Charter

Uzma Ali referred to the documents included in the pack and said that the Communications Charter was developed following tenants feedback to us through surveys conducted in 2022 and 2023, where communication was a key response and was scored quite low for satisfaction. She said the charter had been developed in response to that and to provide clarity and consistency in communication with tenants and leaseholders, which included the standard for communicating with clear information and the response times.

Uzma Ali said it was developed with feedback from tenants and leaseholders through a focus group, which was held with tenant representatives and housing managers to gather feedback. She said the aim was to roll out the charter to all housing staff with clear guidelines on style, language and response times, and to also look at internal communication guidelines. She added that the charter would also include contractors and those working on behalf of the council. She said that this would be measured by annual satisfaction surveys.

Uzma Ali said that the document would be presented to Cabinet in about September 2024.

Margaret Wilson said that at the meeting the issue of an internal call log was raised and asked if there had been further progress on this.

Julie Fletcher said that an email audit trail workflow system was on the Housing Systems team's list to do. She explained that the reason for promoting generic email inboxes was to ensure that queries were managed as officers were not always be available and this would ensure that they were attended to.

Margaret Wilson said that this must not be allowed to get lost.

Eddie Spicer said that we were doing a great deal of work in the background to ensure that the workflow system ran smoothly.

Uzma Ali said that this document was intended to improve internal communications and the document would be publicised by way of newsletters and on the website.

The Chair asked if contractors would be signing up to this.

Eddie Spicer said that the standards within the contract and their expectations were already included in the charter and they would be expected to agree with what was in there.

The Chair asked how this was done and if they were presented with this charter.

Eddie Spicer said he did not think that this had been agreed or discussed at the moment.

The Chair said he thought that it would form a part of the contractual arrangements.

Eddie Spicer said that the arrangements that were in the contract exceeded the requirements of this charter. He added that the charter could be included as an add-on in the contract or the charter could be signed.

5.5 Council Stock Condition Survey

Eddie Spicer referred to the document included in the pack and said that a great deal of work had been done on this survey. He said that from the data that we had, he was doing a great deal of work within our internal systems on costings, etcetera for the Forward Plan. He added that one of the comments made was that South Cambridgeshire District Council's stock was probably one of the better condition stocks in the country and that it was a very worthwhile exercise.

The Chair said that there were forward numbers for investment which was estimated at £240 million over the 30 years and asked if it was a separate entity to the green agenda. He said that in the business plan the figure was approximately £400 million over 30 years.

Eddie Spicer said what this survey related to was purely the element replacements and maintenance, which were considered standard, for example bathrooms, roofing, structures. He explained that the greening work, which was separate, was the upgrading to standard properties, for example, additional insulation, different types of heating solutions, solar panels, and would be in addition to the current maintenance plan.

The Chair asked if this estimate was in addition to the £400 million.

Peter Campbell said that we had to overlay the majority of the green issues on top of this and take account of the extra cost. He said that his understanding was that the total cost would not be one plus the other as there was already an allowance in Eddie Spicer's figures. He added that there was some availability for some external funding for greening,

however, this may change with the new government and that we need to look at the information from the Stock Condition Survey. He said that tenants and members agreed an Asset Management Strategy about two years ago and we had to apply those principles to the data that we have now and produce a costed business plan.

The Chair said that this was an excellent report and a great deal of work had gone into it. Margaret Wilson referred to the Greening policy, which fitted into this survey, and asked what the rush was to install air source heat pumps as they were not good for properties that were not built to passive house standards.

Peter Campbell said the Asset Management Strategy recognised this entirely and that we were going to concentrate on the insulation for each property and getting houses ready to receive the next steps when the next steps were due.

Eddie Spicer explained the new generation of air source heat pumps were high temperature heat pump systems which meant they worked a lot more in tune with what a gas boiler was and the circulation temperature was up to 65°C, whereas the standard current boilers was 55°C which meant they took longer to heat which people did not like. He said technology was improving all the time and they were trialling high temperature ones at the moment.

Eddie Spicer said the next steps was looking at smoothing so we did not have huge peaks and troughs on expenditure, starting with the five-year plan and then he would extend it to the 10, 15 and 30-year plans. He added that it was a huge piece of work to undertake in addition to the day-to-day workload, however, there would be a revised report.

6. Any Other Business

6.1 Heating System in Communal Halls

Margaret Wilson said that they have had nothing but problems with heating systems in communal halls and she would like to suggest that the whole system be revised as they were difficult to monitor. She asked that they be reviewed and that the people who have to operate them were listened to and that the tenants who used the halls were consulted.

Eddie Spicer said that the council were conducting a complete review of all the heating systems in all communal rooms.

Margaret Wilson asked that tenants be consulted during the review.

6.2 Policy Panel

Margaret Wilson asked for the policy on leasehold properties to be included on the Policy Panel's agenda and that this policy be reviewed as she felt that there were unintended consequences arising from the current lack of a definitive policy.

Dave Armitage said that it would be included on the list of policies to be reviewed.

Geoff Clark asked Margaret Wilson if she was referring to equity share leasehold or leasehold properties in general.

Margaret Wilson said that it was mostly equity share leasehold and added that she was aware of some issues with leasehold properties. She said that it appeared that there was no definitive policy.

Julie Fletcher said that historically tenants were on different leases, which would depend on what the rules and regulations were for them. She said there was not a "one size fits all" policy, as there were different leases depending on the legislation at the time. She added that we could look at it as part of the policy review programme, however, we would need to decide where it sat in terms of priority as we had a number of health and safety policies coming through from the Social Housing Regulator, as well as the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy.

6.3 Grass Cuttings

Margaret Wilson referred to tenant dissatisfaction in all areas due to the grass cuttings being left behind after the grass had been cut. She referred to the recent grass cuts at the estate where she lives and said that it had been left looking like a hay field, and that there were dead patches of grass under the cuttings left behind. She added that she had sent photographs to Bronwen Taylor and asked if they could be circulated as she would like the board to see them, as some people did not understand the mess she was referring to.

The Chair said they could be circulated.

Action: Bronwen Taylor

7. Proposed Meeting Dates for 2024 / 2025

The Chair referred to the proposed meeting dates for 2024 / 2025 as follows:

- 26 September 2024 (Zoom)
- 12 December 2024 (Monkfield Room, 1st Floor, SCDC, Cambourne)
- 27 March 2025 (Zoom)

8. Closing

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting ended at 3.12pm.