

Housing Engagement Board
Minutes of the Quarterly Meeting
held on Thursday, 26 September 2024
from 2pm to 4pm via Zoom

Attendees: Cllr John Batchelor – Chair
Cllr Eileen Wilson
Cllr Heather Williams
Diane Hale (Co-opted Tenant Representative)
Jim Watson (Co-opted Tenant Representative)
Oana Sutherland (Co-opted Tenant Representative)

By Invitation: Brian Burton (Tenant Volunteer)
Julie Fletcher (SCDC – Service Manager – Housing Strategy)
Geoff Clark (SCDC – Service Manager – Tenancy and Estates)
Eddie Spicer (SCDC – Service Manager – Housing Assets)
Dave Armitage (SCDC – Resident Involvement Team Leader)
Bronwen Taylor (SCDC – Resident Involvement Officer) – Minute taker
Gina Manderson (SCDC – Resident Involvement Communications Officer) –
Admin Support

Apologies: Peter Campbell (SCDC – Head of Housing)
Dave Kelleway (Elected Tenant Representative) – Vice Chair
Margaret Wilson (Elected Tenant Representative)
Bob Buss (Co-opted Tenant Representative)
Patti Hall (Tenant Volunteer)

1. Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting at 2.08pm. He especially welcomed the newly co-opted tenant representative, Diane Hale, and Councillors Eileen Wilson and Heather Williams. He asked Diane Hale to introduce herself to the board.

Diane Hale said that she had lived in Bassingbourn as a leaseholder for two and a half years.

The Chair thanked Les Rolfe, who had recently resigned as a tenant representative, for his invaluable time and contribution to the board and to estate inspections.

2. Quorum

The meeting was quorate.

3. Minutes of previous Meeting – 8 July 2024

The Chair referred to the minutes of the meeting held on 8 July 2024.

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 matters arising from the previous meeting are below.

3.1.1 Item 3.1 – Matters Arising from the Meeting held on 28 March 2024

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 a meeting with the Housing Accountant and Margaret Wilson had been arranged for 8 October 2024.

Action: Geoff Clark

3.1.2 Item 4.2 – Resident Involvement Framework Review Update

Dave Armitage arranged for the Chair to sign the framework document.

3.1.3 Item 6.3 – Grass Cuttings

Bronwen Taylor emailed Margaret Wilson's photographs of grass cuttings to the Board on 9 July 2024. She said that Margaret Wilson had asked if any comments had been made on the photographs and there had not been.

The Chair asked if this was the issue about the landscape contractors not clearing grass cuttings.

Geoff Clark explained that the landscape contractors were not contracted to collect grass cuttings. He said that the weather conditions this summer had encouraged grass growth whereas previous years, it had not been as bad.

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. She said this was not only for officers, but was an opportunity for everyone to add items to be brought to the HEB.

Julie Fletcher referred to the items planned for the coming months, as follows:

- September 2024 – Annual Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) – to note the TSMs submitted to the Housing Regulator and feedback on the proposed targets.
- September 2024 – Ombudsman Code of Conduct Self-Assessment – to feedback any comments on the Ombudsman code of Conduct Self-Assessment.
- October 2024 – Empty Property Re-let Disposal and Standards – to consider the findings and recommendations following the outcome of the project working group
- December 2024 – Budget Update – to review the budget position for 2025 / 2026.
- TBC – Together with Tenants Charter – Review what actions were 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.

Julie Fletcher said that as the budget papers would not be ready in time for the December 2024 quarterly meeting, a separate briefing session with tenant representatives would be held in January 2025 to review the budget position for 2025 / 2026. She added that the tenant representatives may want to add the Tenant Scrutiny Project, that they wanted to bring to the HEB, to either the December 2024 or March 2025 meeting.

The Chair asked for an update on the Empty Property Re-let Disposal and Standards review and asked if this was still on track.

Eddie Spicer said that they were still going through the data on the re-let times which would feed into the work they were going to do on the re-let standards. He said that it was a complex process and there was still a lot of work to do on this. He added that they should have an end date by April 2025.

The Chair said that this meant that they would have been looking at this review for more than a year.

Eddie Spicer explained that initially they were only looking at the standard, for example leaving carpets, furniture, etcetera, however now they were looking at the whole process from start to finish.

4.2 Contracts Review Panel

Bronwen Taylor advised that Patti Hall was the only panel member at the meeting held on 29 August 2024 and it was agreed that she would arrange a meeting with the other two members to discuss which contracts they wanted to look into and a structure of what they wanted to do at the next meeting.

4.3 Policy and Procedure Panel

Brian Burton advised that at the meeting held on 20 August 2024 a discussion on which policies were up for review was held. He said they were advised that the Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) policy was currently in draft form and that they had asked for a copy so that they could offer input. He added that they had asked for a list of review dates for all policies which had been sent to them today. He said that as soon as they received the ASB policy, a date for their next meeting would be set.

Julie Fletcher said that the ASB policy was in draft and being reviewed by officers and would be sent to the panel for their input before being approved.

Brian Burton said they understood that procedures needed to be followed, however, their concern was that this panel would be sidestepped and ignored. He added that it would be useful if they received a copy before it was ratified as it would confirm that they were being listened to.

Julie Fletcher confirmed that they would receive a copy of the policy before it was ratified.

4.4 Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) Review Panel

As Margaret Wilson was unable to attend this meeting, Dave Armitage reported on her behalf. He advised that the discussion on the repairs service took up most of the meeting. He referred to the notes Margaret Wilson had sent him and said that the panel members were not happy that they had received the reports the day before the meeting, however,

we did explain that they would not be in future. He said the following issues were raised and discussed:

- Repairs / maintenance (Mears' satisfaction data)
- MEL data results
- Council acronyms / jargon
- Complaints definition
- Contract management (especially SP Landscapes)
- SCDC Website

Dave Armitage said that the panel had asked for a scrutiny of the Mears KPIs as they felt the need for an in-depth investigation of the audit trail of data collection that was used to compile the Mears KPI and TSM report. He said they want to investigate that the data was accurate and was a true reflection of their performance, and that the performance matches up to the promises agreed in the contract offering.

Julie Fletcher said that there was a process to follow and that the panel needs to submit a formal proposal advising what that project would be and what specific issues they wanted to look at. She said they need to advise what the evidence was behind the issue in terms of why they wanted to look at it. She added that as we know, our satisfaction performance with Mears was high therefore we need to understand the reasons for the scrutiny. She said it would then come back to the HEB with a proposal who would decide if this were the scrutiny task and finish group they would want for this year. She added that only one or two scrutiny exercises, depending on the size of the project and capacity available, should be held per year.

The Chair said that if this was a long process and if approval was needed, to bear in mind that we only met four times a year.

Julie Fletcher advised that the proposal and task and finish scrutiny group could be given approval by the Head of Housing.

Eddie Spicer said that it would appear that this was turning into a vendetta against the repairs service and to bear in mind that the tenant representatives had been closely involved throughout the whole tender process of the repairs contract, including the first 15 months of the actual contract. He added that external third-party customer satisfaction surveys were being conducted, with good levels of service. He said that some members of the panels had reported that the service had improved over time, however, they were still unhappy. He said that they would get to a point where the level of involvement of his team in the scrutiny could be detrimental to the actual service.

The Chair said this called into question the purpose of these panels and that there needed to be some independence on what they wanted to look at and within reason.

Julie Fletcher said that in respect of the panels, we also have a Contracts Panel and that we need to understand that what was requested from this panel, could be done by the Contracts Panel. She added that without knowing the scope of what it was in terms of what they wanted to achieve, it was difficult to understand how it fitted with the contracts panel.

The Chair said that with all these panels, it would appear that we were still in a learning process.

Eddie Spicer said that the scrutiny should be balanced across the whole housing service as it appeared that there was a lot of concentration on the repair's element and nothing on other services in housing.

The Chair said that the repairs was the front-line and this was what people saw, however, it had always been an issue with this board.

4.5 Estate Inspections

Bronwen Taylor referred to the estate inspections held from June to August 2024, as follows:

- 20 June – Orwell – Lordship Close, Meadowcroft Way and Fisher Lane
- 25 June – Bourn – Hall Close
- 11 July – Balsham – Mays Avenue, Dolls Close, Princes Close and Paddock Close
- 18 July – Whittlesford – Lettice Martin Croft, The Lawn and Butts Green
- 25 July – Great Shelford – Chaston Road and Grain Close
- 22 August – Willingham – Osborn Close, Lordship Close and Haden Way
- 29 August – Litlington – New Close, Chapel Close, Abington Rad and Church Street

Bronwen Taylor said that the detailed Issues and Actions report was regularly sent to the Tenant Volunteer Inspectors for their information.

5. New Matters

5.1 Annual Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs)

Julie Fletcher said that each year we were required to conduct an Annual Satisfaction survey, which formed part of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) reported to the Social Housing Regulator each year, and that the next one would be done in January 2025. She referred to the document included in the pack and said that the data shown from point 12 on page 27 sets out the information provided on the Tenant Satisfaction Measures for the year 2023 / 2024 and this had been submitted to the regulator. She added that going forward in terms of looking at performance against this benchmarking as our first one, we wanted to set some targets for those performance measures. She explained that to set those targets we look at benchmarking data which we get from HouseMark who collect information from all housing providers and we have looked at benchmarking against similar organisations.

Julie Fletcher went through the report and said that when setting targets, and where we were in the top quartile of performance, the focus was on maintaining that performance, however, we needed to be realistic and reasonable in setting targets where we did not meet the top quartile.

The Chair asked that when we compared the top quartile against our peer groups, was this on a national basis, to which Julie Fletcher said it was.

Geoff Clark said that where we used the word “maintenance” should that not read “maintain” and asked for clarity.

Julie Fletcher said that it although we put it under maintenance, it did mean that we were maintaining that top quartile performance.

The Chair said that the handling of complaints and the attitude of landlords was poor.

Julie Fletcher said that with complaints there were two measures and explained that one of the measures was satisfaction with complaints, which nationally was quite low, and the other was timescales of completing complaints which were monitored corporately.

Eileen Wilson said that she had picked up on the handling of complaints and asked if there was feedback when asking tenants what they were dissatisfied with and what the causes of the dissatisfaction were, otherwise, there was no way of improving.

Julie Fletcher advised the questions asked in the TSMs were standard questions and we could not deviate from them, however, what we could do was ask additional questions. She said we had a contractor who did the annual surveys and she had spoken to them about how we could extract the information needed to understand what the causes of dissatisfaction were.

The Chair said that the issue was that this was completed by all tenants and not those who had experienced complaints, therefore some of it was perception. He added that we needed to do something about our image.

Eddie Spicer said that this followed on from what was said earlier about wanting to scrutinise. He added that the results from the TSM on repairs were showing real results.

Jim Watson referred to the report and asked what the percentage split between “very” and “fairly” satisfied was.

Julie Fletcher said that the actual survey was split and this was how we had to report it to the regulator, however, she would send a link to the full survey which showed the split between “very” and “fairly”.

Action: Julie Fletcher

5.2 Ombudsman Code of Conduct Self-Assessment

Julie Fletcher referred to the document included in the pack for information and said that we were required to complete this annually in terms of how we were meeting the code of conduct for complaints from the Housing Ombudsman. She explained that the assessment was an explanation of how we were meeting the requirements. She added that the council had a corporate complaints policy which differed slightly to the Housing Ombudsman’s requirements for a housing complaints policy, which local authorities could have. She said that where we were slightly different, it was referred to in the self-assessment, however, we were compliant with the requirements of the housing code.

5.3 Tpas National Tenants Conference – Reports

The Chair referred to the reports from Margaret Wilson, Jim Watson and Paul Bowman who attended the Tpas National Tenants Conference in Coventry on 10 and 11 July 2024 and thanked them for the good reports.

Jim Watson said it was a good conference with a lot of information.

6. Any Other Business

6.1 Co-option for Leaseholder (West)

Dave Armitage referred to the recent co-option for the West and said that a proposal had been made to have six elected tenant representatives, two per area, plus one leaseholder representative on the board. He said although we were successful in co-opting a leaseholder from the West area, this would broaden the field in future, and we would always have a leaseholder present. He added that this meant a change in the policy.

The Chair said that as elections were due next year, the policy would need to be amended before the next meeting. He asked Dave Armitage if he would arrange the amendment.

Dave Armitage said that he would arrange for the necessary changes to be made to the policy.

Action: Dave Armitage

6.2 SP Landscapes Cyclical Work

Dave Armitage said that Margaret Wilson had asked for this to be raised and minuted.

Geoff Clark had responded by email and advised that this topic was being discussed as part of the project group, with Paul Bowman and Jim Watson, who were reviewing our grounds maintenance contract. He said that any grounds maintenance works that came forward as a result of an estate inspection would be outside of the cyclical work SP Landscapes were responsible for delivering, and they were essentially responsive works, that is, one off jobs. He added that what we were looking at were opportunities to turn some of those responsive works, particularly where there was repetition, into cyclical works and they would then be attended to on a regular basis. He reported that the project group were meeting with SP Landscapes in the next few weeks and they would talk this through with them.

6.3 Review of Heating Arrangements for Communal Halls

Dave Armitage said that Margaret Wilson had asked for Eddie Spicer to report on this issue.

Eddie Spicer said they were in the process of reviewing all the communal rooms in terms of energy efficiency of heating systems and tenants were aware of this.

The Chair asked if a report would be available in due course, to which Eddie Spicer said that there would be.

6.4 Internal Call Log

Dave Armitage said that Margaret Wilson had asked for an update on the internal call log.

Julie Fletcher said that this came back to the conversations that were had on the Communications Charter in terms of logging and tracking calls. She said that we had advised that a system would be looked at, however, at the moment our priority was reviewing our tenant and property data and making sure it was accurate. She added that the internal call log was part of a much larger systems review project and the process would take at least one to two years to complete.

7. Proposed Meeting Dates for 2024 / 2025

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

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

8. Closing

There being no further business to discuss, the Chair thanked everyone and the meeting ended at 2.48pm.