

**Housing Engagement Board**  
**Minutes of the Quarterly Meeting**  
**held on Thursday, 12 December 2024**  
**from 2pm to 4pm**  
**in the Monkfield Room, South Cambridgeshire Hall, Cambourne**

- Attendees:** Cllr John Batchelor – Chair  
Cllr Eileen Wilson  
Peter Campbell (SCDC – Head of Housing)  
Dave Kelleway (Elected Tenant Representative) – Vice Chair  
Bob Buss (Co-opted Tenant Representative)  
Diane Hale (Co-opted Tenant Representative)  
Margaret Wilson (Elected 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
- Apologies:** Cllr Heather Williams  
Jim Watson (Co-opted Tenant Representative)  
Patti Hall (Tenant Volunteer)

**1. Welcome and Apologies**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the last meeting of 2024 at 2.03pm.

The Chair also welcomed Ellie Haines, Development Officer – Climate and Environment, who would be giving a presentation on the Climate and Nature Strategy.

**2. Quorum**

The meeting was quorate.

### **3. Minutes of previous Meeting – 26 September 2024**

The Chair referred to the minutes of the meeting held on 26 September 2024.

The minutes were approved by the board as a true reflection of the meeting.

#### **3.1 Matters Arising from previous Meeting – 26 September 2024**

The matters arising from the previous meeting are below.

##### **3.1.1 Item 3.1 – Matters Arising from the meeting held on 8 July 2024**

###### **Matter Arising from the meeting held on 28 March 2024 Income and Expenditure Statements in Communal Halls**

**Action:** Geoff Clark said that a meeting to discuss the Income and Expenditure Statements in Communal Halls with the Housing Accountant and Margaret Wilson had been arranged for 8 October 2024.

**Report back:** Geoff Clark advised that the meeting was held on 8 October 2024 and that the Accountant would look at producing more detailed statements. He said he had asked the Accountant for an update earlier in the week, which they did not have, however he would follow up with them the following week.

Margaret Wilson said there should be a record of all income received.

**Action:** Geoff Clark

##### **3.1.2 Item 5.1 – Annual Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs)**

**Action:** Julie Fletcher to send a link of the full Tenant Satisfaction survey results, which showed the percentage split between “very” and “fairly”, to the board.

**Report back:** The link was emailed to the board on 27 September 2024.

For noting.

##### **3.1.3 Item 6.1 – Co-option for Leaseholder (West)**

**Action:** Dave Armitage to amend the Terms of Reference document to increase the number of elected tenant representatives from six elected tenant representatives, including one leaseholder, to six elected tenant representatives, two per area, **plus** one leaseholder representative.

**Report back:** Julie Fletcher advised that the Terms of Reference (ToR) document had been amended and was included in the pack for approval.

The Chair asked if the board were satisfied with the changes and asked for their approval.

Dave Kelleway said that he was satisfied with the amendments to the ToR document, however, the Co-option Policy document would also need to be amended and he suggested having a Teams meeting in either January or February 2025 to discuss this.

Peter Campbell said that a small number of our properties were owned and suggested that point 4.1, fourth bullet point in the ToR document be amended to read “resident leaseholder”.

Dave Kelleway referred to point 6.5 – Maximum term of office for Vice-Chair will be four years in total. – in the ToR document and suggested that this point be removed. He explained that should a board member, who had already served four years as the Vice-Chair, and an inexperienced board member both be nominated for the role of Vice-Chair, the former would not be able to stand due to this rule. He offered to make amendments to both the ToR and Co-option Policy documents.

Julie Fletcher said that the Resident Involvement Strategy document would also need to be amended.

Margaret Wilson suggested putting this issue on the agenda for the Coffee morning meeting to be held in February 2025.

Peter Campbell said that the coffee morning would be an informal meeting for tenants to meet tenant representatives.

Julie Fletcher added that the coffee morning was an opportunity to test the success of these meetings.

**Action:** Dave Kelleway, Julie Fletcher and Bronwen Taylor

## 4. Standing Items

### 4.1 Forward Plan 2024 / 2025

Julie Fletcher referred to the Forward Plan included in the pack and the items planned for the coming months, as follows:

- 2 December 2024 – Consultation on the Future Social Housing Rent Policy – a meeting was held with tenant representatives to discuss the Future Social Housing Policy and Council’s proposed response.
- 2 December 2024 – Consultation on the Right to Buy – a meeting was held with tenant representatives to discuss the Right to Buy and the Council’s proposed response.
- 12 December 2024 – Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report 2023 / 2024 – to note the complaints performance for 2023 / 2024 and any lessons learnt.
- 12 December 2024 – National Policy Changes – Briefing note outlining the national policy changes affecting the Housing Service following the Autumn Budget 2024.
- January 2025 – Budget Update – to review the budget position for 2025 / 2026 – a meeting with all tenant representatives had been arranged for 20 January 2025.
- 27 March 2025 – Anti-social Behaviour Policy (new policy) – To note / provide further comments on the ASB policy following tenant consultation through the policy panel.
- 27 March 2025 – Communal Room Charging Policy (new policy) – To note / provide further comments on the Communal Room Charging policy following tenant consultation through the policy panel.

Julie Fletcher said that the Communal Room Charging Policy meeting may help answer Margaret Wilson questions.

- 27 March 2025 – Service Plan – To review the service plan for 2025 / 2026.
- 27 March 2025 – Relets Process Analysis – To note the findings and actions as a result of an internal process mapping review of our relets process.
- June 2025 – Empty Property Re-let Standards – Project group to be set up to look at the Empty Property Re-let Standards which would be taken forward by the Voids and Operations Manager once in post.

HEB to consider findings and recommendations from the project group.

A separate piece of work, looking at internal process mapping to help improve our relet times, was currently underway.

- June 2025 – Assignment and Succession Policy (existing policy) – To note / provide further comments on the Assignment and Succession Policy following tenant consultation through the policy panel Linked policy / procedure to Tenancy Policy.
- June 2025 – Communal Areas Policy (new policy) – To note / provide further comments on the Communal Areas Policy following tenant consultation through the policy panel.
- September 2025 – Asset Management Strategy (existing policy) – Review and update of the existing Asset Management Strategy.
- TBC – Together with Tenants Charter – Review what actions were required to achieve the Together with Tenants Charter.

Julie Fletcher said that the Together with Tenants Charter had been superseded by new regulations and initiatives, and therefore was not necessary to be looked at and would be removed from the Forward Plan.

Dave Kelleway agreed that the Together with Tenants Charter should be removed from the Forward Plan.

Peter Campbell asked for an additional column with the Outcomes to be added to the Forward Plan so that we would have a record of what had happened over the year.

**Action:** Julie Fletcher

#### 4.2 Contracts Review Panel

Geoff Clark advised that as Patti Hall was the only tenant representative who attended the meeting held in September 2024, they were unable to move forward with any discussions. He said that he had contacted her the previous week to set up another meeting however she was unable to as she had been unwell. He added that she said she was hoping to set up a date early in the new year.

Geoff Clark said that the Emergency Lifeline Contract which was a system set up for sheltered housing tenants was up for renewal on 31 January 2025 and that tenant input would be needed for the procurement of the new contract. He added that he would contact all tenant representatives for their involvement in the process.

Margaret Wilson asked if the contract could tick over on a monthly basis in the meantime.

Geoff Clark said he would like to start the process as soon as possible, however, it could tick over on a monthly basis in the meantime.

### **4.3 Policy and Procedure Panel**

Brian Burton said that they had had a couple of meetings on the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy and he referred to the notes of the meeting held on 13 November 2024, which were included in the pack. He said they had given a great deal of feedback to Martyn Hilliam and that they were waiting for further information from him regarding the recommendations they had put forward. He said a meeting was being arranged for January 2025 to discuss the amendments that had been requested.

Julie Fletcher said that this policy would be presented to Cabinet in May 2025.

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

Margaret Wilson apologised as she had not had a chance to draft the notes from the meeting held on 5 December 2024.

Dave Kelleway asked why the minutes / notes of the meetings were taken by tenant volunteer members of the panel and not the officers. He said he was aware of a dispute with the minutes from one of the previous meetings and although the minutes were clear and concise, support from officers would mean the minutes would be more consistent. He added that the tenant volunteers would then be able to concentrate on participating in the meeting.

Julie Fletcher said that the way the panel meetings were structured was that they were led by tenants rather than led by officers and this had been agreed to by the tenant volunteers at the structure meetings held earlier in the year. She added that we did not have the capacity and that Bronwen Taylor was the only available officer. She suggested that we have clear action points rather than full minutes and she would discuss this with Dave Armitage, however, capacity was an issue.

Margaret Wilson said that it was difficult to chair a meeting and take notes at the same time, and although these were informal meetings, accurate notes were still needed. She said that there was also technical help available where one would speak and notes were written. She added that there could be inaccuracies in the notes, but as long as the audio recording was kept and should queries arise, we could revert to the recording. She said the recording could be sent to the Chair or Bronwen Taylor who could correct any inaccuracies.

Julie Fletcher said she would look at what options were available.

Peter Campbell said that the council were looking at an additional version of Teams, with no additional cost, which produced a summary of meetings and this could be an appropriate way of recording the meetings. He added that there was other software available, however the difficulty was that it was a programme that was either switched on or switched off for the entire system. He said that quite often it was stored abroad, usually in America, and the terms of use was that the recordings, which could contain confidential and sensitive information, could be listened to by people who owned the company. He said that although there was not that level of confidentiality in this group, there was elsewhere in the council and we had clear instructions from our IT department that no other software must be used. He added that he was certain that Teams would do what we required.

Margaret Wilson said that at one of the ARCH conferences she had attended, it was said that landlords must find resources, as per regulation.

Peter Campbell said it was in respect of resources to do jobs that were important and to take minutes for meetings for services within the council. He added that when officers had internal meetings, apart from official council meetings, they took their own minutes. He said it would need a substantial amount of funding to get in additional resources.

**Action:** Julie Fletcher

#### **4.5 Estate Inspections**

Bronwen Taylor referred to the estate inspections held in September and October 2024, which were as follows:

- 19 September – Swavesey – Home Close and Whitton Close
- 24 September – Barrington – Malthouse Way
- 17 October – Waterbeach – Harvey Way, Coronation Close and Chapel Close
- 24 October – Sawston – Lynton Way, Vicarage Avenue, Martindale Way and Uffen Way
- 31 October – Linton – Tower View and Chalklands

The Chair said that previously a more detailed report was included in the pack.

Bronwen Taylor said we had stopped including a detailed report as it contained sensitive information, however, the detailed Issues and Actions report was sent to the Tenant Volunteer Inspectors regularly for their information.

Geoff Clark advised that a senior manager from SP Landscapes would be accompanying us on some estate inspections in 2025. He said it would be advantageous and useful for them to see some of the grounds maintenances issues that were raised at inspections.

Dave Kelleway said that Peter Tye was available if more tenant inspectors were needed.

## **5. New Matters**

### **5.1 Tenant Scrutiny Project**

Julie Fletcher referred to the scrutiny documents included in the pack and said the Regulator was looking for proper scrutiny at councils. She said she had been having conversations with Dave Armitage about bringing a consultant in to assist tenant representatives and to guide them.

The Chair asked if the forms were prescribed.

Julie Fletcher said they were not and could be changed.

Margaret Wilson said that CHS Group was a local independent housing association and she had a contact on their scrutiny panel who would be willing to assist. She reported that at both the conferences she had attended, a large emphasis had been placed on scrutiny. She added that this applied to both Local Authorities and Housing Associations.

Julie Fletcher asked the tenant representatives to look at the forms and provide her with feedback.

**Action:** Dave Armitage

### **5.2 Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report 2023 / 2024**

Julie Fletcher referred to the documents included in the pack for information and said that part of the requirement from the Regulator and the Housing Ombudsman was that we got a response to the report from the Lead Member for Housing as well as from the HEB as a collective.

The Chair said that although the “Satisfaction with the landlord’s approach to handling complaints” measure of 29% for “very or fairly satisfied” was not good, this was a national figure and we were not out of kilter.



Julie Fletcher said that nationally this indicator was poor, however over the last year we had done a great deal on our complaints process. She said these figures were from the 2024 Annual Tenant Satisfaction Survey which would be done again in January 2025.

Cllr Wilson asked what the response to the survey was as a percentage in accordance to the number of residents and if the numbers reflected that people were more likely to respond if they were not happy with the service.

Julie Fletcher said that the response rate was about 33% which was quite good and that M.E.L, the external consultants who did the survey, said that it was a robust response. She added that she was not sure why the complaints measure was low and that we would need to add another question to the survey to understand this. She said that we had worked really hard since quarter four to increase our response rate and to make sure that we were in line with time scales.

Margaret Wilson said that one big issue was that M.E.L were not consistent in asking the question about “The satisfaction of the repair.” She explained that Mears had been out to Paul Bowman’s house for the same repair job about six times before it was resolved, however, he had only received a satisfaction survey call in connection with the last visit. She said that this would reflect a satisfied customer but what about the previous visits for the same issue where he had not received a call. She said that this was where another question could be added.

Eddie Spicer said that when the Mears contract started, Mears had devised and sent out the customer satisfaction surveys, which the tenant representatives who were involved in the tender process were not happy with. He said that SCDC had invested about £40,000 for an external company to conduct the surveys based on the questions put forward by the tenant representatives. He added that we had made some changes in the background in order to filter the data further to break it down into the types of jobs, etcetera. He said he did not understand where the complaint was coming from.

Margaret Wilson said she was only reporting on what she had been told and that it appeared that M.E.L were only interested in the last visit and not how long it took to do the repair.

The Chair reminded the board that this was in respect the satisfaction of handling complaints and not about the actual complaint.

Bob Buss asked what we should set the goal to be.

Peter Campbell explained that SCDC went through the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) and agreed to a set of principles which would set the targets. He said that where we were performing in the top quartile, we would remain in that, and the TSMs would give us targets that were challenging. He added that we wanted to be as good as three quarters of landlords. He said that what was interesting with surveys was that sometimes people felt obliged to answer questions and that if the numbers were looked at, more people were dissatisfied with the way that we handled their complaints than the number of people who made complaints which meant that there could be other factors influencing this. He added it was a very challenging target to change because it was one of perception rather than a measure of reality.

Julie Fletcher said that the report was presented at the last HEB meeting and the target that we were aiming for in respect of satisfaction of complaints handling was 31%.

Dave Kelleway agreed that further questions were required as this information appeared to be meaningless.

Peter Campbell said that it was a prescribed question which was asked by all landlords and that it was a general industry wide acceptance that councils did worse on this than housing associations. He explained that with a housing association there was only one service, however, with councils there was a range of services which meant that when the survey was done, tenants could be influenced by other services. He said that when we set our targets, we based them on other local authorities and not the wider industry.

Julie Fletchers said that we needed a response from this meeting, in terms of the report, which we would submit to the Housing Ombudsman together with the report.

Dave Kelleway said that we could advise that we would be adding another question which would ask for the main reason on why they were either very satisfied or very dissatisfied.

### **5.3 National Housing Policy – Update**

Julie Fletcher referred to the Briefing Note document included in the pack for information and said that a great deal had happened since the last meeting. She said that some of the items were about the Rents Policy and the Right to Buy Policy and we had received consultation from government. She said that she had met with Dave Kelleway and Ivor Grant for a session on both policies which was very helpful. She added we were in the process of drafting a response which would be sent back to government.

The Chair said that there was a great deal of focus on “Right to buy” however there was a consultation going on at the moment saying that there should not be a right to buy. He added that government had reduced the maximum discount from £102,000 to £34,000 which should reduce the number of right to buy properties. He asked, in principle, should there be right to buy.

Margaret Wilson said that she was not opposed to the right to buy, however she felt that there should be some control on the length of time for a tenant living in a council property, for example 10 years, before being allowed the right to buy.

Dave Kelleway said that there should not be a right to buy as social housing should be used for what it was designed. He said it had created a tremendous amount of homelessness and we desperately needed more social housing. He added that about a third of sold social housing was now being privately rented, which doubled or tripled the rent with worse services.

Julie Fletcher said that the same issues were picked up at the meeting in that a tenant should be invested in a property in terms of having lived there for a certain number of years before being allowed the right to buy. She said that a copy would be circulated once they had completed the draft.

The Chair asked if there was a particular rule that applied to new properties.

Julie Fletcher said that one of the proposals, which we supported, was whether new build properties could be exempt however the question was what we classified as a new build and how long before it was not a new build. She suggested that any dwelling built after 1 April 2025 be exempt from the right to buy.

Peter Campbell suggested that our response be that we would prefer government to stop the right to buy.

A discussion on Right to Buy was held.

#### **5.4 Leasehold Properties Policy**

Margaret Wilson said that she had asked for this topic to be included in the agenda pack as she felt that the whole policy as well as the handbook were confusing. She said that there should be a clear policy and that there should be a review of leasehold properties. She referred to the issue of a leasehold property on her estate which was going to wreck and ruin as it had been empty for about seven years.

Geoff Clark asked why she thought the leasehold scheme was not effective and not working.

Margaret Wilson said that there were too many differences on how properties were overseen. She referred to the issue at her estate and explained that there had been an alteration to the property, which was in breach of the lease as there was no record of the alteration, and it was stated in the lease-holders handbook that one could not do anything to the property without written permission from the council.

Peter Campbell said that we should ask the Policy Panel if they would want to look at the policy and if so, what priority did they want to give this issue.

Geoff Clark asked if this was a government initiative around supporting leasehold equity share as he understood it to be a local agreement that was set up by this council in 1994. He said he did not believe that there were any other local authorities that operated a scheme such as this one, however, he did support reviewing the policy.

The Chair asked if this policy had been reviewed regularly.

Peter Campbell said that we did look at policies on a regular basis, however, the complication was that we had a range of the different lease agreements and we did not have a process for reviewing each type of lease agreement on a regular basis. He said that as the lease agreements were intended to be permanent arrangements, we would not normally change them.

The Chair asked if the board were happy for the Policy Panel to review this policy to which they all agreed.

**Action:** Geoff Clark

## 5.5 Climate and Nature Strategy

Ellie Haines, Development Officer – Climate and Environment, went through a presentation on the Climate and Nature Strategy.

Bob Buss asked how this would tie in with governments plans.

Ellie Haines said that we had to be mindful of what government brought in, however, we had to be in line with local plans.

The Chair asked if this was a part of the planning policy.

Ellie Haines said that it would tie in with the planning policy.

Margaret Wilson asked why they had a broad range of what they were investing in. She asked about electric vehicles and said that they did not store electricity, and that there needed to be care about what was being done.

Ellie Haines said that they always looked at research and guidance and made sure that it fed into the strategy.

Cllr Wilson said that people in Cottenham with allotments had asked for a communal fridge in order to store fresh produce to avoid wasting it.

Ellie Haines said that that was useful to know.

The Chair thanked Ellie Haines for her presentation.

## **5.6 ARCH Tenants Group Conference Reports**

The Chair referred to the reports from Margaret Wilson, Jim Watson and Paul Bowman who attended the ARCH Tenants Group Conference in Rotherham on 3 October 2024 and thanked them for the good reports.

## **6. Any Other Business**

### **6.1 Annual Allowance**

Dave Kelleway said it was good to see councillors at the meeting. He referred to the £400 per annum allowance for elected and co-opted tenant representatives which had been set four years ago, with no provision for any increases, and said that he thought there should be an automatic increase after each election every four years. He proposed that it be increased to £500 and that it be linked to the increase in Councillors allowances.

Julie Fletcher said that the request sounded reasonable.

The Chair said that a debate was always held for Councillors allowances.

Peter Campbell said that members allowances were subject to an independent report and rubber stamping, and for transparency an elected or co-opted tenant volunteers' allowance should also be scrutinised and rubber stamped by an external body, however, he would need to check this with legal.

**Action:** Peter Campbell

## 6.2 Repairs Service

Eddie Spicer said that he was disappointed in general with the attitudes and approaches we had been receiving from the tenant representatives were with the repairs service. He said he had viewed the video of the TSMs & KPIs Panel meeting held the previous week and he was really disappointed in how it came across, which was very negative and detrimental to the repairs service, and there were a number of comments made that had taken him some time to reply to. He said that the comments were unjust and inaccurate and he felt they were based on opinions and rather than fact or evidence that was available. He said one of the comments made was that the councils wasted money on doing chemical damp proofing injections and he said he could not remember the last time this was done. He said another comment made was that an electrical test had not been done after living in a property for 14 years, however, we had evidence that it had been done as recently as 2022.

Eddie Spicer said that the overall negativity was not helpful and it was putting a lot of pressure on a service that we were trying to deliver and wasting our time answering questions which were raised through opinions and not on facts. He added that he was happy to have a session with tenant representatives to explain what his team did, how they went about tasks, etcetera, so that there was that level of knowledge but what he was not prepared to do was fight back on detrimental comments made, which were not very nice and having a poor effect on our service. He said if this was the attitude and opinion being spread amongst the tenants, then he was not surprised that our surveys were going backwards.

Bob Buss asked if it would help if the tenant representatives had a list of officers, what they did and their contact details, in order to send queries to the correct person.

Julie Fletcher said that we did have a document and we could add more detail as to what each section did. She referred to the online portal system that we tried to set up for tenant representative to submit queries, however, from feedback received, it was a bit awkward to use. She added that if tenant representatives were not sure who to raise a query with, they should email the Resident Involvement team.

Peter Campbell said that very few issues fell solely into one section and could fall across more than one team.

Dave Kelleway said that this was not an unfamiliar issue and agreed that it could be ignorance or inexperience and said that it was no use to get angry but to first ask questions and make sure that facts were correct. He said that if someone came to him and

made accusations without facts, he would not listen to them and we had a right to ignore them.

Margaret Wilson admitted that she was one of the people who did not recall having an electrical test done, however, when she had the gas checked every year, she always received a report of the outcome. She said she had never received a report for the electrical safety test until she questioned it and received one by email a few days earlier. She added that she felt that it was a communication issue and asked why a record of the test was sent to all tenants.

Eddie Spicer advised that it was not a requirement to send a record of the electrical test.

Julie Fletcher asked about internal training and for thoughts on what we could do better.

Eddie Spicer said that we should provide training on internal processes for tenant volunteers who were on the panels and that one of the issues was the acronyms we used. He said he was more than happy to spend time educating the tenant volunteers on the processes in his team.

Geoff Clark said that he was happy to support training tenant volunteers on what an officer's role was.

Peter Campell said that all new members were given a presentation and he suggested that we repeat that for new tenant representatives.

**Action:** Julie Fletcher

## 7. Meeting Date for 2024 / 2025

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

- 27 March 2025 (Virtual on Teams)

## 8. Closing

There being no further business to discuss, the Chair thanked everyone and wished them a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. The meeting ended at 3.45pm.