

Housing Engagement Board
Minutes of the Quarterly Meeting
held on Thursday, 28 March 2024
from 2pm to 4pm via Zoom

- Attendees:** Cllr John Batchelor – Chair
Peter Campbell (SCDC – Head of Housing)
Dave Kelleway – Vice Chair
Jim Watson
Les Rolfe
Margaret Wilson
Oana Sutherland
- By Invitation:** 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:** Cllr Mark Howell (absent – no apology received)
Cllr Jose Hales (absent – no apology received)
Bob Buss (absent – no apology received)

1. Welcome and Apologies

The Vice-Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting at 2.13pm as the Chair was having issues logging into the meeting.

2. Quorum

The meeting was quorate.

3. Minutes of previous meeting – 14 December 2023

The Chair referred to the minutes of the meeting held on 14 December 2023.

Margaret Wilson referred to the Item 5.3 – Grounds Maintenance Contract under 3.1 – Matters Arising from previous Meeting and Item 5.1 – Homelessness Review under New Matters in the minutes from 14 December 2023, as follows:

3.1 – Matters Arising from previous minutes – Item 5.3 – Grounds Maintenance Contract

Margaret Wilson asked if the Grounds Maintenance Contract had been finalised and what amendments had been made.

Geoff Clark said that it had not been finalised however a project group would be meeting regularly to discuss the contract and bring forward alterations and improvements as they saw fit. He added that towards the end of last year they had met to discuss the service standards and that the meeting scheduled for February 2024 had been cancelled due to clashing with another meeting, however, he would be setting up another meeting.

Margaret Wilson said that as this contract had been awarded six months ago, why had it not been finalised.

Geoff Clark said that the contract had been finalised, however, the project group were working through the service standards to see if there were any services that we wanted SP Landscapes to focus on or anything that we wanted them to change, for example frequency of grass cuts. He added that the contract was in place until October 2026.

Dave Kelleway said that he understood that adding extra grass cuts would increase the costs, however, often on estate inspections ad-hoc quotes were requested for extra work to be done which added more costs. He referred to an overgrown shrub bed where he lives and said that although SP Landscapes sometimes trimmed the bushes, the brambles were so overgrown, they were over the grass, nearby flower beds and the pathway.

Geoff Clark said there were 12 grass cuts and that if more services were added to the contract, it would cost more money. He added that the project group would be looking at bringing in more efficiencies.

Cllr Batchelor joined the meeting and resumed as the Chair.

Margaret Wilson said that when the contract was being discussed and negotiated, tenants were not invited to be a part of this and when they asked why they were not

invited, they were told that it had already been awarded. She added that it did not seem logical to award a contract before looking at what services were provided.

Geoff Clark said that the contract was awarded based on the quality and value of work and SP Landscapes were by far the cheapest. He added that if we had gone with another contractor, it would have cost more for them to deliver the same services.

5 – New Matters – Item 5.1 – Homelessness Review

Margaret Wilson referred to the second bullet point, “Applicants may approach us when they were threatened with homelessness, ...”, on page seven of the previous minutes and said that she knew of private tenants who were being evicted due to the house they were renting being sold and they have been told that they were not high priority and the Council would not be helping them until they got the eviction notice to go to court. She said that this did not seem to correspond with what the document said and to work with them at the preventative stage. She said that they were on the Home-link system as they live in South Cambridgeshire and had applied for housing but had only been given priority and not high priority.

Julie Fletcher said that she assumed that they would be in discussions with the Housing Options and Homelessness Team in terms of the advice, and that it was not purely based on their application. She said it would depend on their circumstances which we were not privy to, however, we do work towards a prevention and relief stage, but there may be reasons that were not apparent in terms of that current situation. She suggested taking this issue offline and to look at it in more detail.

Margaret Wilson referred to the word “voids” and said that it had previously been agreed not to use this word to describe empty homes.

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

3.1 Matters Arising from previous Meeting – 14 December 2023

The matter arising from the previous meeting is below.

Item 6.1 – Accounts in Communal Halls

Geoff Clark advised that he had shared additional information with Margaret Wilson and had offered for her to have a conversation with colleagues in Accounts.

Margaret Wilson said that these were to be published in every hall so that all tenants could see the accounts and how their money was spent.

4. Standing Items

4.1 Repairs Performance Group

Eddie Spicer advised that due to the new framework, the group had been disbanded and the monthly meetings had stopped from the beginning of this year therefore there was no update.

4.2 Forward Plan 2023 / 2024 and 2024 / 2025

Julie Fletcher referred to the Forward Plan included in the pack and said that this document was for everyone to add suggestions on items that they wanted to be presented to the Housing Engagement Board (HEB). She went through the items planned for the coming months, as follows:

- March 2024 – Tenant Satisfaction Survey – the results were presented by M.E.L Research the day before.
- June 2024 – Communications Standard – Uzma Ali has arranged a meeting with the tenant volunteers to discuss this item.
- June 2024 – Mutual Exchange Policy – to give a follow up report six months after implementation. A report would be sent to the board.
- June 2024 – Resident Involvement Framework – to approve the updated document following the changes agreed to in the framework and to provide a document of activities for Resident Involvement.
- June 2024 – Council Stock Condition Survey – to provide an overview report on the results of the survey.
- TBC – Anti-Social Behaviour Policy and Assignment and Succession Policy – these would be looked at once the Policy and Procedure Panel was established.
- TBC – Together with Tenants Charter – Jennifer Perry had been keen to look at this as a type of accreditation which Dave Armitage would now look into.

The Chair asked about the findings of the Empty Property Re-let Disposal and Standards project and asked if the date of October 2023 was correct.

Eddie Spicer said that they were still busy collating the information and that the standards were in the process of being put together. He added that the date should read October 2024.

The Chair said that a lot of items were going to be presented at the June 2024 meeting.

Julie Fletcher said that there were a lot of items and as we would be working with tenant representatives on these documents, there would be no surprises when they were presented to the HEB for sign off. She added that she was not sure if the Council Stock Condition Survey report would be ready in June 2024.

Eddie Spicer said that the overview report of the survey would be ready, however, the finer details and analysis of what was being planned for the future would be an ongoing project.

Dave Kelleway said that he was concerned that the Empty Property Re-let Disposal and Standards project had been going on for a long time. He added that tenants had a number of concerns about relets in terms of the amount of wastage, the ability to recycle and the lack of coordination with other authorities. He added that he felt that there should be some tenant input.

Eddie Spicer said that were busy collating the background data on the Empty Property Re-let Disposal and Standards project.

Geoff Clark said that if the floor coverings were in a good condition when properties became empty, they tried to re-use them instead of removing them.

4.3 Resident Involvement Framework Review Update

Dave Armitage advised that meetings to discuss and finalise the structure of the new framework were held with officers and tenant representatives on 5 February 2024 and 6 March 2024. He said the Housing Performance Panel had held its final meeting on 14 March 2024 as it would be replaced by the new structure made up of the following three panels:

- Contracts Review Panel
- TSM and KPI Review Panel
- Policy and Procedure Panel

Dave Armitage said the panels would feed into the HEB who would then form Task and Finish Scrutiny Groups on issues they felt were necessary. He said each panel would be Chaired by existing tenant representatives and we had a volunteer to Chair for each panel, and most of the tenant volunteers had advised which panel they would like to be a part of. He added that each panel was not exclusive and tenant representatives could join any panel that they had an interest in. He said this structure had been agreed by tenant representatives and senior management within Housing. He added that Eddie Spicer had

agreed to send out information to the Contract Review Panel as and when it was needed for their meetings.

Dave Armitage said the Resident Involvement team would look at suitable meeting dates for each panel in order to feed into the HEB in a timely manner and that some topics would have more regular meetings than others. He added that we were looking at other activities to get tenant involvement and suggestions were using comms, having armchair readers on specific policies who did not want to join a panel but wanted a more flexible interaction, area action days in areas with high volumes of litter or fly tipping, and getting out to the estates with tenant volunteers to make ourselves more visible.

Dave Armitage said this had been agreed to in principal and that there may be some changes as we went along. He added that this would be implemented from 1 April 2024 when the new legislation came into effect and the Terms of Reference documents for each panel would be presented at the next HEB meeting for approval. He said that he would send the notes from the last meeting to the Chair.

The Chair asked to whom the sub-groups would report.

Dave Armitage said the Chair of each panel would report to the HEB at the quarterly meetings.

Julie Fletcher said the new structure would be in place by the June 2024 meeting and that the framework document would be presented at the meeting for approval by either the HEB Chair or by Cabinet. She added that the agenda would be slightly different.

Geoff Clark asked if future HEB meetings would be in person or over zoom.

Margaret Wilson asked to have one meeting in person and suggested December 2024.

Julie Fletcher said that we would also be looking at the time the meeting was held as some councillors were unable to make the afternoon meetings.

Dave Kelleway suggested asking the councillors if the time was a problem or if they were not interested in attending.

Margaret Wilson said that she believed that they worked full time and were unable to attend the meetings.

Peter Campbell said that Cllr Batchelor was the Chair as he was the portfolio holder, however the other two councillors were appointed by their respective party leaders which was an annual appointment, and therefore the new appointments would need to be done through Councillors Bridget Smith and Heather Williams. He asked Dave Armitage to draft a briefing note for them.

Les Rolfe said to ask the party leaders to nominate people who could regularly attend the meetings.

Action: Dave Armitage

5. New Matters

5.1 Tenant Satisfaction Survey

Julie Fletcher said that M.E.L Research had presented the findings of the recent Tenant Satisfaction Survey the day before and she advised that she had sent the full report and recording to all tenant representatives earlier. She reported that the overall feedback was positive but there were a few areas that we needed to concentrate on, for example, complaints. She said that a lot of work had been done internally in terms of complaints over the past few months and our complaints champion was meeting regularly with service managers to go over complaints and to make sure that we were responding to them in terms of time scales, etcetera.

Margaret Wilson asked how SCDC measured complaints and if it was through the official complaints system or if it was something else.

Julie Fletcher advised that they were measured through the official route. She said there were different stages of complaints and different ways of complaining, for example, in person. She added that we need to make sure we point people in the right direction and encourage them to complain if they were not happy.

5.2 Tpas Webinar – Housing Ombudsman – Annual Complaints Review

The Chair referred to the report from Eleni Koutso (HPP member) who attended the Tpas Webinar – Housing Ombudsman – Annual Complaints Review (online) on 7 February 2024 for noting and said it was a good report.

5.3 HQN Residents Network Annual Conference

The Chair referred to the reports from Oana Sutherland and Eleni Koutso (HPP member) who attended the HQN Residents Network Annual Conference (online) on 20 February 2024 for noting and said they were good reports.

Oana Sutherland said that she was impressed with the amount of work that was being done in the background.

6. Any Other Business

None

7. Proposed Meeting Dates for 2024 / 2025

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

- 27 June 2024 (Zoom / venue to be confirmed)
- 26 September 2024 (Zoom / venue to be confirmed)
- 12 December 2024 (Zoom / venue to be confirmed)
- 27 March 2025 (Zoom / venue to be confirmed)

The Chair said that he would be on leave for the June 2024 meeting and asked the Vice Chair to chair the meeting in his absence.

Dave Kelleway said he would chair the meeting, however, he may be away for the September 2024 meeting.

The Chair confirmed that the new structure would be in place from the June 2024 meeting.

8. Closing

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting ended at 2.55pm.