

Housing Engagement Board
Minutes of the Quarterly Meeting
held on Thursday, 28 September 2023
from 2pm to 4pm via Zoom

- Attendees:** Cllr John Batchelor – Chair
Peter Campbell (SCDC – Head of Housing)
Dave Kelleway – Vice Chair
Bob Buss
Jim Watson
Les Rolfe
Margaret Wilson
Oana Sutherland
- By Invitation:** Julie Fletcher (SCDC – Service Manager – Housing Strategy)
Geoff Clark (SCDC – Services Manager – Tenancy and Estates)
Eddie Spicer (SCDC – Service Manager – Housing Assets)
Bronwen Taylor (SCDC – Resident Involvement Officer) – Minute taker
Gina Manderson (SCDC – Resident Involvement Communications Officer) –
Admin Support
- Apologies:** Cllr Mark Howell
Cllr Jose Hales (absent – no apology received)
Dave Armitage (SCDC – Resident Involvement Team Leader)

1. Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting at 2.03pm. He especially welcomed Bob Buss, the new tenant representative for the West.

Apologies were received from Councillor Mark Howell and Dave Armitage.

2. Quorum

The meeting was quorate.

3. Minutes of previous meeting – 17 July 2023

The Chair referred to the minutes of the meeting held on 17 July 2023.

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

3.1 Matters Arising from previous Meeting – 17 July 2023

The matters arising from the previous meeting are listed below.

Item 4.1 – Matters Arising from previous Meeting – 23 March 2023

Item 2 – Appointment of Chair

The Chair advised that at the previous meeting, the following amendment to the Terms of Reference document had been requested:

- Point 6.3 – the term of office for the Vice-Chair to be changed from 24 months to 12 months

Bronwen Taylor advised that a further point, under the above point had been added which read:

- Point 6.4 – The Chair and Vice-Chair will be elected every 12 months

Dave Kelleway said he thought there should be further minor changes as follows:

- Point 6.1 – SCDC will provide an experienced person to chair the meetings for the first year. Afterwards the HEB members will nominate and vote for a chair.

The point to be removed, as the first year had passed, and be replaced with:

- The Chair will normally be the Lead Cabinet Member for Housing and the Vice Chair will be an elected tenant representative unless none was available.

The following point to be amended as follows:

- Point 6.2 – The Vice-Chair will be an elected tenant representative unless none are available. Any HEB member, willing to undertake relevant training, may put their name forward.

The words “suitably trained” be removed from Point 6.3.

Dave Kelleway referred to point 4.1 and said that the make-up of the board should be reviewed as there were no guarantees that a leaseholder would always be a member, as we could end up with no leaseholders or all leaseholders. He thought that it should read:

- Two elected tenant representatives from each area plus one leaseholder from the district

Dave Kelleway said that this would ensure that there would be one leaseholder who would represent all leaseholders from the district. He added that the word “consecutive” be added after “two” in point 4.8 as it was not clear whether it was annually or consecutive.

The Chair said that the minor changes would be made and suggested that the make-up of the board be discussed at the next meeting.

Peter Campbell said a wider piece of work being done by Dave Armitage on the structure of tenant participation and this would be presented at the next quarterly meeting. He added that a politician had made a suggestion to allow for substitutions for councillors who could not attend these meetings and the current Terms of Reference was silent on this point, and he asked if this would be supported by the wider tenants group.

The Chair said that this issue would be discussed at the next meeting.

Dave Kelleway said that the difficulty for some councillors was that these were daytime meetings that clashed with other meetings and he did not think they would dispute the need that councillors substitute for each other as it was important to have attendance by councillors. He asked if he could propose that the changes to the smaller points referred to above be implemented.

The Chair said that there were no objections, however, the only issue that he had was that he was reluctant for the Lead Cabinet Member for Housing to always be the Chair as they should choose the Chair.

Dave Kelleway asked if point 6.1 could say “will normally be the Lead Cabinet Member for Housing” which meant that it would not always have to be.

The Chair said that he would prefer that it was elected and that the whole board was in favour of the Chair.

Dave Kelleway said that it was important for someone in his position to Chair the meetings as they would participate in and be fully engaged in the HEB.

Peter Campbell said that as the wider review on the structure was being conducted, he did not feel that major changes, such as the position of the Chair, should be made to the Terms of Reference document.

The Chair said the original minor changes referred to earlier were to be made.

Actions by: Bronwen Taylor and Dave Armitage

Item 4.1 – Matters Arising from previous Meeting – 23 March 2023

Item 5.3 – Sheltered Housing Schemes Audit Accounts

Bronwen Taylor advised that Dave Armitage had confirmed that the statements would be displayed at all communal halls. She said that Marianne Crozier, Sheltered Estate Team Leader, was working on the format with Martin Lee.

Item 5.5 – Estate Inspections Report

Bronwen Taylor emailed the Estate Inspections Standards – Gradings document and the Estate Inspections Standards Questionnaire document to the board on 18 July 2023.

Item 6.1 – Co-option of New Member (West Area)

A letter of thanks, signed by Cllr John Batchelor, was emailed to Peter Tye on 27 July 2023 and a copy posted on 9 August 2023.

Item 6.3 – Policy Review

Mutual Exchange Policy

Julie Fletcher emailed the details on how to make a written statement to Cabinet and how to attend the Cabinet meeting to make a statement to the board on 2 August 2023.

Item 6.4 – Service Plan and Resourcing

- 1.) A report on the Reasons for Refusal was included in the agenda pack for noting.
- 2.) Julie Fletcher did not receive feedback on the Service Plan from the board.
- 3.) The following tenant volunteers gave input on the Aids and Adaptations policy:
 - Les Rolfe
 - Eleni Koutso
 - Patti Hall
 - Paul Bowman

Item 7.1 – Stock Condition Survey

Eddie Spicer received the details of the complaint from Les Rolfe and advised that he was happy with the service provided by the contractor.

4. Standing Items

4.1 Mears Repairs Contract – Performance Review Joint Working Group

Eddie Spicer referred to and apologised that the meetings for August and September 2023 were cancelled, the first one due to the bank holidays and the other as his father had passed away. He added that the contract was going well and things were improving.

Margaret Wilson referred to the installation of carbon monoxide detectors and said that she was appalled at the standard of work. She said that when her neighbour's detector was installed it was hung on the kitchen wall by a nail being knocked into the wall, as the Mears operative did not have the correct tools for the job, and that another had been hung on by a double-sided tape hook which fell off and broke an ornament. She asked what kind of oversight was there from SCDC for the standard and quality of repairs done by Mears.

Eddie Spicer said they did take on any comments that were made and also did some post inspections on repairs, however, they could not have enough resources to follow up on every repair that was carried out. He added that they did rely on feedback and of the 3,500 installations done to date, this was the first time that he had heard of problems.

Margaret Wilson said that the tenant whose repair she was referring to thought that this was what was expected from the council and did not bother to say anything about it.

The Chair suggested that the issue be reported.

Margaret Wilson asked what was being done to monitor work done by Mears.

Julie Fletcher said that since July 2023, M.E.L Research have been commissioned to conduct monthly satisfaction surveys on Mears repairs, either by text or telephone, and this information would be reported at the HPP quarterly meetings.

Margaret Wilson said that it needed somebody from SCDC to go around and check on random jobs done.

Peter Campbell said that this was why it was so important to report issues, and that if had been reported at the time of the repair, it would have been investigated.

4.2 Forward Plan 2023 / 2024

Julie Fletcher referred to the Forward Plan included in the pack and referred to the items planned for December 2023, as follows:

- Tenancy Policy – which is about not having fixed term tenancies and making sure that it was aligned with all the statutory legislation

- Introductory Tenancy Policy / Procedure – which feed into the Tenancy Policy
- Assignment & Succession Policy – which feed into the Tenancy Policy
- Homelessness Review
- Improvement Plan
- Resident Involvement Framework

She asked if there were any items that the board wanted added to the Forward Plan and brought to the meetings.

Dave Kelleway referred to the Mutual Exchange Policy and asked for a report to be presented and discussed at meetings.

Julie Fletcher asked how often the data should be presented and suggested every six months in order to have qualitative data. She added that the policy had been approved and the next stage would be to roll out training in the next month to all the housing officers and anyone else who would be involved in mutual exchanges.

4.3 Estate Inspections Report

Bronwen Taylor referred to the enclosed report for noting.

Les Rolfe asked why the Gradings for the inspection held on 24 August 2023 were missing.

Bronwen Taylor advised that Andrew Cole had conducted the inspection on behalf of the HSO as she was on sick leave. She added that she had asked her to update the worksheet which had since been done.

Les Rolfe referred to the inspection held on 27 July 2023 and the issues for Cannons Close where Andrew Cole had said that he would remove the weeds when he was next in the area.

Geoff Clark explained that HSOs often did small jobs such as this on their estates.

Les Rolfe said that although that was good, it was work that should have already been done by SP Landscapes and they should not be asked to quote on such jobs.

Geoff Clarke said that it appeared that this was for work that was beyond the contract or for work that we were asking for SP Landscapes to attend to that was scheduled at a certain time of the year and not every time they were out. He added that he would be discussing this later on in the agenda.

5. New Matters

5.1 Aids and Adaptations Policy

Julie Fletcher advised this was a review of the Aids and Adaptations Policy which was highlighted in the Ombudsman case about communicating better in terms of time scales when we were looking at disabled adaptations. She said a workshop was held with members of the HPP to review the document and that she had received constructive feedback and comments which were incorporated into the policy. She added that it was being brought to the HEB for either approval or any further comments.

Dave Kelleway referred to the following bullet point of item 11, Refusal of Adaptation, in the policy document and said he thought it was appalling and should not be in the policy.

- Where a resident or their family is deemed to be under occupying by one or more bedrooms. And where suitable alternative accommodation will likely become available within 12 months.

Julie Fletcher clarified that this only applied to “significant” adaptations, and that these were examples of refusals and gave an example of when it could be used. She said we were being pragmatic in making best use for meeting those needs.

Dave Kelleway said the policy did not state what type of adaptation would be refused. He added that it needs clarification as we need to think about tenants and we should not force them to move.

Julie Fletcher said she would make the changes to the policy.

Action by: Julie Fletcher

5.2 Damp and Mould Policy Update

Peter Campbell advised that this policy was 95% completed and that a workshop with tenant volunteers would be held. He said that they did not want to wait until the next meeting, therefore, after the workshop, the document would be circulated for comments after which it would be taken through the formal approval process as soon as possible in order for it to be implemented. He asked for volunteers to contact him.

The Chair said that he had seen statistics from the Stock Condition Survey on mould which was running at 1.5% with some issues.

Peter Campbell said we were confident that we were dealing with known cases of damp and mould quickly, however, what had come out of the survey was that there were a small

number of tenants who had extreme issues of mould but had not made the council aware. He added that it was allowing us to address these and to make follow up visits to these cases.

5.3 Grounds Maintenance Contract

Geoff Clark said that he acknowledges that they should have done more to involve the tenant representatives in the procurement of the grounds maintenance contract. He added that it was a joint procurement with Cambridge County Council which included their park and ride sites and the guided busway. He said that the winning contractor provides a service for both elements of the contract, and what they deliver and what we deliver were managed completely separately. He said that SP Landscapes was awarded the contract and that there was one other contractor who was close, however, they were three times more expensive.

Geoff Clark said that the service standards needed to be refreshed and they would have the opportunity to do this at the beginning of the contract. He asked for volunteers and said he was looking at a meeting on 11 October 2023, where they would explore all the options available.

Margaret Wilson said the grounds maintenance maps needed to be updated and suggested that they be displayed in communal areas. She also suggested incorporating doubling nature in the SP Landscapes contract.

Geoff Clark said our maps were quite accurate and SP Landscapes knew our district well. He agreed that there were some changes that we had not made and said that the new Lands Officer would make sure the maps were accurate. He said SP Landscapes were willing to work with us with doubling nature and were already involved with tree planting, delivering labour to plant trees free of charge, working at weekends, watering new trees and identifying areas for wild-flower planting.

Les Rolfe said they had still not had sight of the previous service standards document. He added that the maps were not accurate as when he had walked along a footpath with staff from SP Landscapes, they were not aware that it existed even though it was on the map. He said that hedges, shrubs and footpaths were also on the maps which they should be looking after yet SCDC were still asking them to quote for work on these issues.

Geoff Clark said that with the weather we have had this year, trees, shrubs and hedges had grown a lot more than last year. He added that SP Landscapes do a cut of shrubs and

hedges at the beginning and end of each season, so if they were growing in between that time, they were not going to cut them unless it was a health and safety risk and we asked them.

Les Rolfe said there were some hedges at blocks of flats that had not been cut in years and he felt that they were not doing what they were contracted to do.

Geoff Clark said he acknowledged that maps used at the inspections were not truly accurate and the recruitment of the Lands Officer would bring about real improvements in terms of how we maintain the maps and make sure they were as accurate as possible.

Dave Kelleway said the one problem was that they were not doing what they should be and the other was the number of cuts being done a year, which could not be reduced. He asked if it would not be more efficient to put more money into the contract and get the jobs done properly than having to pay for ad-hoc work to be done, which cost more.

Geoff Clark said that it was something that they could look at. He reminded the board that the grounds maintenance budget would not be fully HRA funded and there was cross funding from the general fund, therefore if the grounds maintenance budget were increased, it would have an effect on the general fund as well.

Action by: Geoff Clark

5.4 Proposed revised Consumer Standards and Fees payable to the Regulator

Julie Fletcher said the Consumer Standards and Fees payable to the Regulator were being revised since the implementation of the Social Housing Regulator Act and she felt that the consumer standards were being tightened making them much more robust in terms of what was expected from landlords in terms of providing housing.

Julie Fletcher said that they were not going to respond to the consultation as there were no concerns and our focus was working towards making sure that we could implement them. She said that many officers within housing were also part of different working groups within the Chartered Institute of Housing or the Housing Quality Network, and were feeding into those consultation responses. She added that she had sent the link to the consultation as the board may want to collectively respond to it. She added that they were having in-house training on the proposals the following week.

Julie Fletcher said there was also a consultation on how the regulator would be paid and there were some proposals put forward in terms of how the regulator would charge fees to all housing providers. She said that previously only housing associations paid the fees and

as local authorities were regulated differently, we did not pay them. She reported that now there was a proposal that we would also have to pay a fee between £7 and £8 per property per year, which totalled approximately £40,000 per year for us. She said that we would be responding to this proposal.

5.5 Access to reports and confidential matters

Margaret Wilson said that this issue had been raised as they had been made aware of an Ombudsman report, which they were refused sight of when asked to see it, and they had not had sight of the grounds maintenance tenders due to data protection. She said that she thought it was important for tenant representatives who were representing all tenants to have sight of confidential information and referred to item 19 in the table on page 16 of the Taroe Trust report included in the pack. She said she thought that at least one tenant representative had access to data protected information in order for tenants to have a meaningful part of any process where data protection was an issue. She added that they should be trusted to sign a confidentiality agreement in order to have access to confidential information and thought they should have a discussion on this subject.

Peter Campbell said that he agreed that an environment of openness was important and he was happy to work together with tenant representatives and our data protection officers to work out a protocol for when sharing information was appropriate. He referred to the two issues raised, those being the grounds maintenance contract and the Ombudsman case, and said that some of the data for the grounds maintenance contract was not ours and the Ombudsman case had very personal information about somebody's health issues. He said they needed to have clear guidance and suggested that Dave Armitage work with our Data Protection Officer to outline what was possible, and have a working group to look at this issue to report back to the board.

Action by: Dave Armitage

5.6 Tpas National Tenants Conference – Reports

The Chair referred to reports from Jim Watson and Paul Bowman included in the pack for noting. He asked Jim Watson if he had any further comments to add.

Jim Watson said that the conference was interesting and it was always good to keep up to date with changes in legislation.

6. Any Other Business (AOB)

6.1 Stock Condition Survey and Energy Certification

Margaret Wilson referred to the Stock Condition Survey and the Energy Certification, and said she would like to see the list of the measures and criteria used for both. She said that when she had the energy certification, she asked the technician about cavity wall insulation and he said that she had it as there were two concrete plugs in the outside wall. She added that she asked the technician how he knew the condition of the insulation and his reply was that it had been done and if she wanted to have it checked to make sure it was working efficiently, she would have to pay for the survey.

Margaret Wilson said that another tenant who had had problems with the cold had removed some bricks and it did not look as though the cavity wall insulation was very effective. She asked if the council had records of cavity wall insulation and of repairs done in properties, and asked if the HEB could have sight of the questionnaires that were completed for these surveys.

Eddie Spicer said that it was a standard set of government questions that could not be changed. He advised that this was a non-intrusive survey which meant that they would not take out bricks in walls or look in boarded lofts to check the insulation. He said we were conducting investigations which was in relation to another project where we were looking at cavity wall insulation that may have de-graded, and that may need to be extracted and re-done. He said that once all the worst performing stock was brought to a satisfactory level within our targets for 2030 of an average Band C, we would then start to look at the rest of our properties and do a more intrusive survey into the cavity wall to see what improvements we could make on those properties.

Eddie Spicer referred to the Stock Condition Survey and said there were three categories which were condition, risk and energy. He said it was purely a visual survey to determine the condition and suggested lifespan of items which were currently in the property and from that we could plan work replacements in the future. He added that they were also conducting a Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) survey to identify any hazards, for example, trip hazards, banisters removed from stairs and damp and mould, which as landlords we need to be aware of. He said the third area was to collect data on the energy data. He added that it was all standard government information gathering.

Margaret Wilson asked why they could not have sight of the questions.

Eddie Spicer said that they could and he would send them to the HEB.

Peter Campbell added that the Stock Condition Survey looked at all elements of a property, which are, the walls, roofs, windows, doors, etcetera, which gave us several metrics being the size, the type and an estimate of the remaining life. He said this information would be shared with all tenant representatives.

Dave Kelleway asked what records were held by the council, for example, the age of the property, when major repairs such as new bathrooms were fitted, etcetera and if this information was given to the surveyors.

Eddie Spicer said that we did have the full information on all our properties but did not give it to the surveyors as they wanted the properties to be look at “with fresh eyes”.

Action by: Eddie Spicer

6.2 Policies on Net Zero

Dave Kelleway said some TPP members were concerned about what they read in the media about net zero, in terms of heat source pumps, air source pumps, etcetera, and had asked for a report on the Council’s policies on progressing towards this. He added that people were worried that this would be imposed on them.

Peter Campbell said that this was outlined in a great detail in the Asset Management Strategy and said our first approach was to make the houses as well insulated and as easy to heat as possible. He added that the information Stock Condition Survey and some of the trial work that we were doing would help to inform the next steps to renewable heating systems.

Dave Kelleway asked if there were currently any plans in terms of renewable energy systems.

Peter Campbell said with new builds and when we replace heating systems, we look at viable alternatives. He said that when looking at alternative heating systems, what was needed as a prerequisite was a warm, well insulated property and in the early years of the Asset Management Strategy, our focus was on providing that so that we were reducing energy use. He added that in the later days, when the heating systems need replacing, we would be in a better position to replace them with one that was “green”. He added that the net zero target from the council was 2050.

Dave Kelleway asked Peter Campbell if would send an email to all the tenant representatives advising that this issue had been raised and explaining what the policy was.

Peter Campbell said that tenant representatives were involved in the progress of the strategy and signing it off at the time, however, he would send an email with a link to the strategy.

Eddie Spicer said that with technology constantly changing, the council were continuously monitoring the performance of heat source pumps. He added that any decisions or plans that were made and put in place, were cost effective to tenants.

Action by: Peter Campbell

6.3 Structure of HEB

Julie Fletcher referred to the restructure of the HEB, of having different member input into the meetings and the timings of meetings, and said that we would look at that these as part of the review which was on the Forward Plan for December 2023. She said that we would have further meetings before December 2023 to discuss the structure.

6.4 Tenant Satisfaction Survey

Julie Fletcher referred to the structure of the Tenant Satisfaction Survey and said that we were about to start the Tenant Satisfaction Survey which we had to conduct in terms of the new regulations. She said that there were a set of questions that we had to ask which could not be changed, however, we did have the opportunity to ask additional questions and she would be in contact with all the tenant representatives to ask for any questions they would like to include in the survey.

Action by: Julie Fletcher

6.5 Decoration Grants

Jim Watson said he had been approached by a few elderly residents in sheltered housing asking if the council offered decoration grants. He said that many years ago the council did offer them and asked if they were still available.

Eddie Spicer said that we did have the handyman service which could be utilised and he was not aware of any decoration grant, however, he would check and advise the HEB.

Action by: Eddie Spicer

7. Proposed Meeting Dates for 2023 / 2024

The Chair referred to the proposed meeting dates for 2023 / 2024 as follows:

- 14 December 2023 (Zoom / venue to be confirmed)
- 28 March 2024 (Zoom / venue to be confirmed)

8. Closing

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting ended at 3:51pm.