

Bristol City Council

Minutes of the Housing Management Board

10 March 2021 at 6.00 pm



Members Present:-

Councillors: Alex Marsh (Chair), Charlie Bolton, Paul Goggin, Edwards, Christine Jory, Morris, Kerry Bailes and Ross Dallimore

1. Welcome, Introductions and Apologies for Absence

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

Apologies were received from Councillors Nicola Bowden-Jones, Harriet Clough, Richard Eddy and Helen Godwin (Cabinet Member – Women, Families and Homes).

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED - That the Minutes of the Housing Management Board of 10 December 2020 be confirmed as a correct record.

Matters arising

Minute No. 4 (iv) - pilot project and diversity action would be covered during MFT presentation at agenda item 4.

Minute No. 3 (b) – parking on dropped kerbs, Service Manager had liaised with tenant and had taken appropriate action. Noted that the Council would always respond upon information received.

Minute No. 5 (i) - Minutes distribution was done and would continue in future.

3. Public Forum

None received.

4. Accessible Homes and TEC



The Private Housing and Accessible Homes Manager outlined the details of the report to the HMB emphasising that the Accessible Homes and TEC Hub was a team in Homes and Landlord Services focussed on assisting people to remain independent in their own homes. The team carried out a range of interventions to support residents to remain living independently in their own home from equipment to bedroom and bathroom extensions. The team arranged and oversaw the repair of bathing adaptations and the servicing and maintenance of lifts in council properties. In January 2020 a new TEC Hub had joined the team and was responsible for assessing for and providing Technology Enable Care to support adult care in providing innovative solutions to care in people's homes. The team was made up of a range of staff including Occupational Therapists (OTs) and Occupational Therapy Aids (OTAs) who were responsible for carrying out assessments of people's needs regarding access to their home environment.

The Board was informed that the Accessible Homes team had not been able to deliver on its home adaptation referrals over the last twelve to eighteen months due to the ongoing Covid-19 crisis, chronic staff shortages and significant contractual issues.

To mitigate and resolve these ongoing issues there were now robust plans in place to significantly reduce current waiting times over the coming six to eight months and improve delivery of the service.

Arising from questions the following points were made/clarified –

- a) The service carried out repairs to homes of disabled council, housing association and private tenants and to homeowners. The budget was split between the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and the Government's Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) for disabled homeowners and private tenants.
- b) Both budgets were well overcommitted and likely to be overspent due to a 20% increase in referrals, however there had been some additional funding from government (DFG) sources. This was primarily due to the Government's aspiration to discharge as many people as possible from hospital as soon as practical to ensure better care and wellbeing for people by being supported in their own homes.
- c) Noted that the workload was increasing, and it was therefore essential that there was value for money to achieve good outcomes. To support this there was an assessment process designed to give a bespoke outcome, it was acknowledged that this was not necessarily the same as what tenants/homeowners wanted.
- d) New build homes were being adapted to ensure they were fully accessible for disabled people and where properties were re-let adaptations would be made at that time.
- e) Noted there were 202,000 homes/units in the city and many were being modified for improved accessibility, although it was acknowledged that most walk up blocks were not likely to be suitable for this as most disabled people would find them more challenging with access, unless they were on the ground floor.



- f) Regarding younger families with disabled children noted that their needs were more specific and bespoke eg, families wanted to live near schools and family/friends.
- g) Generic adaptations eg, wider doors, were being completed wherever possible as resources allowed. Limited accessible, housing stock made it more challenging.

The Board noted the report and comments made during the discussion.

5. Moving Forward Together - update

The Business Innovation Manager (Housing and Landlord Services) gave a presentation on the updated Moving Forward Together draft model.

The Board was reminded of the draft model's six key priorities –

1. Design services from the resident's point of view.
2. Provide services that are visible and local.
3. Rebuild trust and relationships.
4. Be a diverse and inclusive service that fully represents the city of Bristol.
5. Engage residents and employees in a creative and meaningful way.
6. Give back accountability and decision making to residents and employees.

Arising from questions the following points were made/clarified -

- a) The Covid-19 lockdown had a direct impact on Housing Officers being able to be visible on site and the Director of Housing and Landlord services had left at the beginning of 2021, so it was felt that it was not the best time to make changes to the working structure of the housing service.
- b) The MFT programme was not ending as it had city wide support including the Council's Cabinet members and senior managers. The next step was to focus on the priorities put forward by residents and what could be achieved whilst still under lockdown and moving forward after.
- c) One of the main feedback from residents was the difficulty they faced getting in contact with Housing Officers so to improve on this Board members were advised that a new process would



be introduced which delivered a more team led approach, rather than a bespoke housing officer for a particular address. Residents would be able to speak to any housing officer to resolve issues on a 'one and done' basis. If a site visit was essential this would be done within two days and would be facilitated by a Service Level Agreement.

- d) Improvements to the service would be supported by ICT delivery namely Windows 10 which would enable the new process to operate efficiently through improved communication facilities such as Microsoft Teams and as new devices would be 4G enabled allowing housing officers to work more effectively on site.
- e) Work was ongoing to bring housing estates up to a common and acceptable standard using pictures of estates and defining what needed to be done to achieve this. Arising from this a question was asked about EIB/NOIB bids not being actioned. The Head of Housing Management and Estates undertook to follow this up outside of the meeting. **ACTION: Head of Housing Management and Estates**
- f) It was considered essential that in tandem with the changes being made via the MFT programme that staff were supported and trained to ensure that moral was improved, and the success of the new system/process assured. The Board was advised that there was a training programme scheduled which encompassed customer service, collaboration, ownership, and feedback to enable learning.
- g) Regarding staff retention there would be changes made to enable professional housing staff to secure career progression and hopefully this would lead to more staff remaining with the Council.
- h) Only urgent repairs were being done at the present time due to the Covid-19 restrictions but moving forward work would be done in a more joined up way, actively avoiding 'silo thinking', improvements included phoning ahead of appointments to ensure access to homes was secured and avoid return visits and the associated work to do this.
- i) Post covid-19 tenants would be contacted to make progress on outstanding non urgent work and information published on the Council's website.
- j) The Board noted a comment on the recent rent freeze decision made by the Council and the lack of consultation about this with council tenants. The Board was advised that there was no legal requirement for the Council to consult on rent changes however it was acknowledged that the Regulator of Social Housing was seeking greater governance for tenants.
- k) Some specific examples of repair work were reported and the Service Manager (Responsive Repairs - Housing and Landlord Services) undertook to investigate them outside of the meeting. **ACTION: Service Manager (Responsive Repairs - Housing and Landlord Services)**

The Board noted the presentation and the comments made during discussion.

Ross Dallimore joined the meeting at this point

6. Covid-19 - verbal update



The Service Manager for Responsive Repairs gave a presentation updating the Board regarding the Council's housing service and its response to the Covid-19 crisis.

Key points summarised were –

- a) There was always a balance to be struck between the needs of the Council's residents and the safety of its staff.
- b) Mutual property exchanges had been limited due to the Covid-19 situation, but some were prioritised where the situation was serious eg, domestic abuse.
- c) Recognised that for each lockdown the Council had learned lessons from previous ones and improved on how it reacted. This enabled the service to build in more resilience.
- d) Regarding the repair service trials were underway using videos, photos, skype and zoom to make progress and act upon requests. Although the technology had yet to be refined that was the direction of travel that the Council wanted to pursue going forward. Future aspiration was an 'Amazon' style quick and efficient service via a quick online activity.

The Board noted and appreciated the work that had been done to maintain services during the Covid-19 period so far.

7. Date of Next Meeting

Next meeting to be held in mid/late July 2021, date to be confirmed.

8. Any Other Business

- a) Question about Local Area Forums and older people not able to attend online to express their views. Common rooms not available due to Covid-19 restrictions. Currently there was a free dial in option available which was being used and found to be increasingly successful. There were free Zoom training sessions for residents that wanted it.
- b) Letters from BCC had return address to Wakefield and use paper copies not compatible with green policies. Officers noted the comment.
- c) Issue of tenants who were on the sex offender's register being housed within 100 metres of a school, but law states minimum half a mile. Application on housing register does not require declaration of a sex offence. Could go on the register as a question but the question might not be answered accurately. If a known sex offender was to be housed police would make the final decision. If a high-risk offender, they were not allowed to bid for a home. Other suggestions about how this issue could be improved were discussed.
- d) Mutual exchanges were refused for various reasons namely property too big or small or around a court action. Other than that, could not prevent a mutual swap, if it was a criminal activity it



could be stopped. People have a right to be housed and sometimes it was preferable to know where they were. Noted that there were barriers to action at BCC that were allowed elsewhere. Information exchange might be a solution.

Meeting ended at 7.50 pm

CHAIR _____

