

Bristol City Council Minutes of the Housing Management Board

27 November 2018 at 6.00 pm



Members Present:-

Councillors: Paul Smith, Harriet Clough and Richard Eddy

Tenants: Kerry Bailes, Peter Daw, Juliette Henderson, Christine Jory and Richard White

Leaseholder: Judith Davis

Officers in Attendance:- Liz Cheetham (Tenant Participation Team), Julian Higson (Director of Homes and Landlord Services), Sarah Spicer (Business Planning Manager) and Corrina Haskins (Democratic Services)

1. Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

Julian Higson, Director of Homes and Landlord Services, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Nicola Bowden-Jones, Paul Goggin and Jo Sergeant.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Public Forum

There was no public forum.

5. Purpose of the Housing Management Board and Terms of Reference

Councillor Paul Smith, Cabinet member for Housing, outlined the history of tenant/leaseholder participation in the Council and the reasons for re-establishing the Housing Management Board at this time:

- The previous Housing Management Board had not met for some time and its membership had included tenants/leaseholders appointed by Housing Officers;



- In re-establishing the Board, the Council wanted to give it higher prominence by:
 - convening it as a public meeting under the Council's committee structure;
 - ensuring that tenants/leaseholders agreed their own representatives on the Board at the six new local Area Housing Forums;
 - appointing a representative from this Board to sit on the Bristol Homes Board, which was a partnership of representatives from private and public bodies with an interest in housing, including private developers, housing associations, homeless charities, Bristol Disability Equalities Forum and Triodos Bank;
 - giving tenants/leaseholders the opportunity to influence decisions and identify priorities in a formal setting following the Government decision to remove the cap on Council borrowing to build new homes;
 - enabling tenants/leaseholders to challenge him in his role as Cabinet Member for Housing;
 - enabling tenants/leaseholders to consider the future direction of the service, following Julian Higson's recent appointment as Director of Homes and Landlord Services and his subsequent evaluation of the service and proposals for change.

The following points were raised:

- In relation to the new Local Housing Forums, it was noted that attendance had been low at the first meeting and that this could be the result of the closure of the area housing offices and increase in online transactions which had led to a decrease in the visibility of the Council for tenants. Councillor Smith responded that the Council's Housing Scrutiny Panel was looking at the issue of tenant participation and how to engage with tenants, and the Council would be continuing to produce paper copies of newsletters for those who were not online as well engaging with those who were via social media;
- It was noted that there were six councillors on the Board as well as the Cabinet Member, to reflect the political proportionality of the Council, many felt that this was top heavy and may be overwhelming for tenants/leaseholders. Councillors accepted this point and reassured tenants/leaseholders that they welcomed being challenged and acknowledged that tenants/leaseholders were bringing their own expertise to the Board;
- In relation to the suggestion that a tenant could be appointed as Chair of the Board, concern was expressed that chairing a meeting would inhibit a tenant from participating in the discussion and it was agreed that an independent chair be sought;
- It was agreed that a Council Tenant representative should be sought to sit on the Bristol Homes Board in the future and it was noted that meetings of that Board were open to the public and anyone was welcome to attend as an observer;
- It was agreed that any further comments on the terms of reference be forwarded to Sarah Spicer.

Actions:

- (1) An independent Chair to be sought for the Housing Management Board;
- (2) The Housing Management Board appoint a representative to sit on the Bristol Homes Board at a future meeting;



(3) Any further comments on the terms of reference to be forwarded to Sarah Spicer.

6. An introduction to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) - Julian Higson, Director of Homes and Landlord Services

Julian Higson, Director of Homes Landlord Services gave a presentation on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), and drew attention to the following points:

- The definition of HRA was the money ring-fenced to spend on Council Housing including new housing, management repairs and associated community facilities;
- The Government decision to remove the rent cap and the Social Housing Green Paper had opened up more opportunities for the service, but there were still considerations such as the right to buy, bedroom tax and benefit caps;
- The annual report had revealed that satisfaction had increased from previous years in terms of new homes, caretaking and repairs, but the comments were less satisfactory in relation to anti-social behaviour complaints being resolved;
- Emerging priorities included reviewing the service to look at why, how and to whom homes were let and assessing the current stock to see what was and wasn't fit for purpose;

The following points, questions and clarifications were raised:

- Although the level of satisfaction with council housing was high overall, the Council recognised the need to increase standards and expectations;
- It would be useful for the Board to receive the quarterly performance indicators to monitor the service;
- In response to a question about whether tenants would be evicted if they had gone into arrears as a result of the changes to the benefit system or the introduction of the bedroom tax, JH confirmed that tenants would not be evicted for these reasons;
- The high cost of private housing had an impact on the availability of Council housing as fewer people were able to move out of council housing to buy or rent from a private landlord;
- There was a particular shortage of smaller properties available for young people as these types of properties were often earmarked for older people and also a shortage of properties accessible to disabled tenants;
- In response to a question about whether there was a register of adapted properties suitable for disabled tenants, JH responded that it was difficult to keep a register as adaptations were different depending on an individual's needs;
- In response to a question about the number of tenants with mental health problems, JH stated that it was difficult to map as tenants may not share this information, but he recognised that it was a significant proportion of tenants. Tenants agreed this was an increasing problem due to pressures on mental health care services and preventative support, and that the implications had a ripple effect on other tenants;
- In response to a question about whether the Council's new housing company Goram Homes would help with the shortage of affordable housing, it was noted that this company would operate outside the HRA, although it would help increase the availability of affordable housing in Bristol in the future;



- There is a difference between affordable housing and social housing, Bristol City Council lets their Council homes at social rent;
- In addition to the Goram Homes project, the City Council had a programme of building Council homes using the HRA;
- In response to a tenant's concern about consultation on the building of a wall around Council housing in Shirehampton, JH undertook to investigate further.

7. Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting should be in late February or early March, to feed into the next round of Area Housing Forum meetings, from 6pm-8pm with a pre-meeting for tenants at 5.30pm

8. Any Other Business

a) 100 Year Anniversary of Homes for Heroes Celebration

Tenants/Leaseholders were informed that:

- the Council would be marking the 100 year anniversary of the 1919 "Addison Act" legislation, which led to building of the first Council houses and celebrations would be taking place in the estates built following the act in Sea Mills, Hillfields and Knowle;
- the Council had applied for a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

b) Bristol's Plans to be Carbon Neutral by 2030

In response to a comment about how any new council homes would need align with the Council's plans to be carbon neutral by 2030, JH acknowledged this and confirmed that some of the council homes had already been built at the required standard.

c) Use of Resident Rooms and Community Spaces

In response to a concern about resident rooms and community spaces not being available to use at their full potential, tenants/leaseholders were advised to submit proposals to the Mayor of Bristol in response to his request for "big offer, big ask" suggestions from residents.

Meeting ended at 7.51pm

CHAIR _____

