Bristol City Council
Minutes of the Housing Management Board

7 January 2020 at 6.00 pm

Tenant/Leaseholder Representatives: Pete Daw, Juliette Henderson, Christine Jory and Richard White, Ross Dallimore
Chair: Professor Alex Marsh, University of Bristol
Councillors: Paul Smith (Cabinet Member for Housing), Charlie Bolton and Jo Sergeant
Officers: Liz Cheetham (Senior Tenant Participation Officer),
Gillian Durden (Service Manager, Planned Programmes)
Corrina Haskins (Democratic Services)
Julian Higson (Director: Housing and Landlord Services) and
Sarah Spicer (Business Planning Manager, Housing and Landlord Services)
Also in attendance: Pat Donovan, Philip Morris and Stephen Newton

1. Welcome, Introductions and Apologies for Absence

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies for absence were reported from Councillors Harriet Clough, Richard Eddy and Paul Goggin.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Tenant representatives requested that the minutes be circulated to them at the earliest opportunity to allow them to feedback to their Area Forum meetings.

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the Housing Management Board of 8 August 2019 be confirmed as a correct record.

3. Public Forum

The Chair confirmed that there was no public forum statements, questions or petitions submitted in advance of the meeting.

4. Report back from Bristol Homes Board

Pete Daw confirmed that he had been unable to attend the previous meeting of the Bristol Homes Board (BHB) and suggested that a Deputy be appointed in the event of him not being able to attend future meetings. He confirmed that he was available to attend the next meeting on 16th January and would ask BHB to agree the principle of him sending a Deputy. It was agreed that, in the event of him not being able to attend, he would advise officers who would contact other Members of the Housing Management Board to see if they were available. Christine Jory expressed an interest in deputising, but she would be unable to do so until later this year.

In response to a question about the remit of the BHB, Cllr Smith confirmed that it brought together various representatives of the Housing Sector including the Council; developers; private landlords; Shelter; St Mungo's; Acorn; business; Bristol University to seek to influence housing outcomes in Bristol.

5. Fire Safety Update

The Service Manager (Planned Programmes) presented a report to update the board on fire safety in Council housing, particularly in the context of the Grenfell Tower fire and the publication of Phase 1 of the report into the events on the night. She drew attention to the following:

- Bristol City Council (BCC) owned and managed housing for 62 High Rise blocks, the definition of High Rise being 5 storeys or more;
- None of the buildings owned or managed by BCC had the same type of cladding that was on the Grenfell Tower Block and this was an important message to be communicated to tenants;
- BCC's blocks were proven to perform very well in the event of a fire.;
- The seriousness of the Grenfell fire was due to factors other than just the cladding such as quality of fire doors and BCC tenants had been reassured that their properties had good quality fire doors which had been tested independently;
- BCC worked closely with Avon Fire and Rescue Service (AF&RS) and AF&RS inspected tower blocks regularly, offering advice and support for residents;
- In relation to the recommendations of the Phase 1 report, BCC was either already carrying out the recommendations or looking at how the recommendations could be implemented;
- No issues had been raised by BCC tenants following the publication of the so far following the publication of the independent checks reports on their individual blocks;
- Phase 2 of the Grenfell Inquiry would look at the building, the cladding refurbishments and the activities that led to the fire spreading and **officers would report back to the Board on any further recommendations arising from the publication of the Phase 2 report**.

In response to questions raised by Board Members, it was reported that:

- Although there were no BCC owned properties with the same cladding as the type used on the Grenfell Tower block, there were a couple of private blocks in Bristol with this type of cladding and the private landlord/s would be required by law to ensure the safety of these buildings;

- BCC had an evacuation plan and gave residents simple instructions to follow which were displayed near lifts. In response to a comments from a tenant representative about these notices not being securely fixed, **officers undertook to look into this issue**;
- BCC did not hold fire drills as this was not recommended for tower blocks, but had experienced fires in BCC properties which had tested the agreed procedures;
- Where fires had occurred in BCC tower blocks, they had been contained in a small area and had not spread;
- Cladding was not just used for aesthetic reasons, in the case of BCC properties, it was used to provide insulation and protect the structure of the block;
- BCC did inspect stairwells for safety and **officers undertook to look into a concern about a petrol lawnmower being kept in a stairwell**;
- Residents were informed about what to do in the event of a fire via briefing meetings and newsletters and AF&RS provided additional professional advice about fire safety;
- The recommendations in the Phase 1 report were mainly related to tower blocks but some of the recommendations were relevant for all properties, e.g. smoke alarms.

6. Rent Standard and Regulation

The Business Planning Manager reported on the new national Rent Standard Regulation that would take effect from 2021 and drew attention to the following:

- April 2020 rents could increase by a maximum of CPI+1% (Consumer Price Index, which is a rate of inflation) following a 4 year Government mandated 1% annual rent reduction;
- Individual rents could not increase above the rent cap or above the 2020 limit;
- Landlords could apply 5% flexibility on formula rents (10% on supported housing);
- There were exclusions to the standard.

In response to questions, officers confirmed:

- A CPI+1 increase would amount to just under £3 a week rent increase for all properties;
- Tenants claiming Universal Credit or Housing Benefit would receive a corresponding increase in Housing Benefitbenefits and so would not be directly affected by an increase;
- Almshouses did not apply as they were covered by different legislation;
- Income raised by rent increases could only be used in the Housing Revenue Account and as such could only be spent on activities of BCC as a landlord such as investment and repairs;
- It would be difficult for BCC to review and improve property and service standards invest in improvements and provide a good quality services without the rent increase;
- An increase in rent would allow more money to be invested to support tenants, such as investing in the Welfare Rights and Money Advice Service and investing in innovations e.g. energy efficient properties which would make housing more affordable for tenants.

Tenants expressed concern that even a £3 increase a week could impact on low earning tenants who would not have the increase offset by Housing Benefit. It was also suggested that BCC look at increasing revenue in other ways e.g. increasing laundry charges.

7. Estate Safety Progress Report

The Director of Housing and Landlord Services gave an update on the Estate Safety project since the previous meeting and drew attention to the following:

- There had been a further two meetings of the project;
- There was a pilot if 4 blocks 2 in the south of the city and 2 in the central area;
- There had been a number of short term actions such as introducing security patrols, improvements to lighting, pruning of trees, planting and rubbish clearance to discourage anti-social behaviour;
- The project was considering longer term options such as better security doors; CCTV; higher visibility of the Housing Service;
- In terms of next steps, the project was looking to secure better representation from other agencies.

Tenant representatives agreed that anti-social behaviour was the main concern raised by tenants and shared their personal experiences of living with this problem. It was acknowledged that it was difficult for the Council to secure an eviction but tenants agreed that action should be taken against tenants breaking the law and this may need the support of other agencies. Officer agreed that more work could be done to reach out to the third sector to help address issues associated with anti-social behaviour in housing estates.

8. Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting would be held in March before the start of the pre-election period (23 March) and Board Members would be canvassed about a suitable date.

9. Any Other Business

Tenant/Leaseholder representatives were advised that development training was available to them and training dates would be circulated.

Meeting ended at 7.43 pm

CHAIR _____