

# Bristol City Council Minutes of the Housing Management Board

29 July 2020 at 6.00 pm



## Members Present:-

**Councillors:** Paul Smith, Charlie Bolton, Harriet Clough, Paul Goggin, Jo Sergeant, Pete Daw, Kerry Bailes, Christine Jory and Ross Dallimore

## Officers in Attendance:-

Steve Gregory (Democratic Services Officer), Julian Higson, Sarah Spicer and Liz Cheetham (Community Development Officer)

### 1. Election of Chair

Following one nomination being received for the position of Chair of the Housing Management Board it was unanimously -

**RESOLVED – That Alex Marsh be elected Chair of the Housing Management Board.**

### 2. Welcome, Introductions and Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Richard Eddy, Susan Houghton, Juliette Henderson (*received after the meeting due to technical difficulties*);

The Board noted that Richard White (Tenant representative) had resigned from the Board due to other commitments, a replacement member would be found in due course.

### 3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

**RESOLVED - That the Minutes of the Housing Management Board of 7 January 2020 be confirmed as a correct record.**

#### Matters arising

- i. Fire safety updates – a report back to the HMB would be given once the new regulations had been analysed and understood;



- ii. Officers were continuing to look into the issue of lawn mowers being stored under stairwells, which was not permitted under the Council's policy. Any outstanding issues would be acted upon as soon as possible.

#### 4. Public Forum

The Board received questions in respect of how noise nuisance/antisocial behaviour and other associated aspects were investigated and dealt with by the Council. The questions and the Council's reply are as set out in the Appendix to the Minutes.

A tenant representative emphasised that a number of properties had serious noise transfer problems. The Director (Housing and Landlord Services) was asked to give specific attention to this ongoing problem.

#### 5. Report back from Bristol Homes Board - verbal update

Pete Daw reported that the Bristol Homes & Community Board had met on 25 June and all the papers relating to the meeting were on the Council's website. The main topic was themed around sustainability and the Fuel Poverty action plan, also discussed was the One City climate strategy and issues relating to the ecological emergency. The next meeting would be held on 8 October 2020.

#### 6. Housing and Landlord Services Covid-19 update

The Director gave a presentation updating the Board on how Housing and Landlord Services had been affected by the Covid-19 lockdown period of April to May 2020. It was emphasised that due to the flexibility and goodwill of staff in all teams an outstanding performance had been achieved enabling much needed emergency and safety related housing services to be provided and specifically to the most vulnerable tenants.

Tenant representatives emphasised their thanks to the housing teams for their hard work during the period.

In response to the presentation the following points were made:

1. The Repairs backlog had been significant but all emergency repair work had been undertaken. Since the end of May the non-urgent repair work had been brought up to date;
2. All repairs work had been done sensitively having regard to social distancing and other infection control measures;
3. Adaptations to accommodation had been experiencing significant delays beyond the three month period allocated to the service. Councillor Clough commented that this issue was currently being discussed with the Director for Adult Social Care and asked that any further cases be made known to her as this would be helpful; *Action: Pete Daws and Councillor Clough to liaise by e-mail;*



4. The Board noted that delays for adaptation assessments could be caused by the unavailability of contractors to carry out the assessments. Work to address this was ongoing;
5. Councillor Jo Sergeant proposed and seconded by Councillor Cough to formally thank the teams hard work during the crisis, this was agreed;
6. The Board agreed that it was crucial to learn from the experience gained during the Covid-19 crisis so that it could be used to improve the housing service generally. The Director for Housing confirmed that this process had already started citing examples such as more personal contact with tenants and more flexible working arrangements, these would be expanded on, going forward, to further improve the service;
7. Obtaining Disabled Facilities Grants for adaptations were a problem beyond just council tenants (e.g. housing associations). This item to be put on as an agenda item for the next meeting so that the Board could comment on, as appropriate; *Action: Director of Housing*
8. With regard to upcycling and setting up of tenancies, delays could mean some tenants having to borrow money to pay for furniture/white goods. The Director of Housing confirmed that this particular issue was being looked at and the housing service was working closely with Bristol Waste to obtain adequate standard items for new tenant homes in good time. The Board also noted that there were a number of Bristol based charities that could perhaps help with this.

## 7. Moving Forward Together

The Director of Housing gave a presentation on the Moving Forward Together draft model which sought to become a world class housing service. Key to the model was that its findings were derived residents and staff and not from senior managers within the housing management team. Co-design was seen as a fundamental and integral part of developing the Model.

The draft model comprised of 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.

Comments made were:

- a) Long term sickness absence had been a problem in the past so having named officers might be challenging;



- b) It was very important that support to housing officers was available for this to work. The Director of Housing clarified that more housing officers would be needed for the model to work effectively. This would be done by reviewing the number of specialist teams and services provided. This would not cost the service more;
- c) Regarding staff absences, staff would be put in local teams with agile management for most effective deployment of the staff resource, to mitigate shortages workforce planning would become central to the management of housing officer availability;
- d) Access to housing officers was crucial with examples of tenants and other service users unable to communicate with housing officers. The Director of Housing confirmed that this was not acceptable and all efforts were being made to improve this;
- e) It was important to also meet the needs of those outside of the service e.g. applicants applying for housing services;
- f) Need better contact systems to connect with housing officers;
- g) Housing officer skills needed to be more generic to cover wide range of issues e.g., evictions, rent arrears, noise complaints, a smaller patch based role was the best way to achieve this;
- h) Part time housing officers not always practical due to limited availability, local residents need a local dedicated housing area officer;
- i) The costs relating to the new model would not be known for some time however it was anticipated that this was not likely to be a major concern, as savings could be made from addressing demand failure;
- j) Specific buildings for locating housing staff was not necessary as experience has shown that an agile and effective service can work without this as it's more about customer care and having robust systems in place to ensure services are maintained e.g., daily check-ins, close team working, utilising a combination of council/community buildings and high a quality management structure;

The Board welcomed the draft MFT Model and were advised that further feedback outside of the meeting would be very welcome. It was also suggested that input to it be sought from the BAME community, the Councils youth parliament members and youth mayors. This was fully supported.

## 8. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Housing Management Board would be held in November 2020, date to be confirmed.

## 9. Any Other Business

- i. Replacement of former member for Area 1 be given priority as lack of attendance at local tenant forums was often poor, it was hoped that the Zoom facility might encourage participants who found travel to City Hall difficult.



- ii. The Board was informed that a meeting was taking place in September about replacement HMB members and would include looking at new technology options for encouraging greater participation at board meetings.
- iii. Noted that it was important to avoid clashing of dates for meetings, e.g. HMB with local forums.
- iv. A pilot scheme was underway regarding broadband connection for Sheltered Housing tenants, this was to enable better participation.

## Appendix

### HOUSING MANAGEMENT BOARD PUBLIC FORUM 29 JULY 2020

#### Questions from Ryan Miles

I have points that I would like put to the board, regarding noise nuisance/antisocial behaviour & how certain aspects are investigated & dealt with by the Council.

The Council's own tenancy agreement lists door slamming as an example of antisocial behaviour & yet the noise nuisance team do not deem it serious enough to warrant taking action against the perpetrators. Door slamming can cause major disturbance to tenants at all hours & can have a major detrimental effect on their quality of life & their mental health. How can victims be protected from such disturbance & antisocial behaviour, when the very people responsible for taking action against the perpetrators of it, don't regard it as serious enough?

How also can victims prove their case, when the app recommended by the Council for recording noise, is not fit for the purposes for which it was designed?

Door slamming according to the noise nuisance team, does not constitute statutory noise nuisance, as per the environmental protection act & therefore rarely if ever results in them taking tenancy action.

Yet it is listed as antisocial behaviour in the tenancy agreement & can therefore be actioned under the antisocial behaviour, crime & policing act, so why doesn't this happen? & why are tenants not properly supported in making it happen?

Noise nuisance such as this, is a major issue on our estates & can have devastating effects on the lives of those on the receiving end. The entire noise nuisance policy & procedure in general, can be a very lengthy & frustrating experience for tenants & I'm sure for Housing Officers too & is in dire need of review.

#### Council Officers Reply

Poor sound insulation between adjoining properties is a cause of many complaints throughout the country. It may make every day sounds of ordinary living; for example children playing, footsteps across a floor and doors banging, intolerable. It is a particular problem in premises originally constructed as single household dwellings, which have been converted into self-contained flats and in buildings constructed during the 1960s when standards for noise attenuation were not as good as modern day standards.

Following the common law cases of Southwark v Mills, Baxter v Camden LBC and Vella vs LB Lambeth it was found that a lack of sound insulation between premises leading to noise nuisance cannot be remedied under the Environmental Protection Act 1990.



These cases found that it is not reasonable to expect neighbours to behave especially quietly because sound insulation between their properties is poor. Therefore normal, everyday noise will not constitute a statutory nuisance.

To meet the threshold for serving a CPW/CPN the officer must be satisfied that the conduct of the individual or body:

- is having a detrimental effect on the quality of life of those in the locality
- is of a persistent or continuing nature
- is unreasonable

This test is very similar to statutory nuisance but broken down more. The above factors relating to statutory nuisance would apply in this test in addition to the test if the conduct is “unreasonable behaviour”. In the case of banging doors it is often the fact that the conduct of the tenant is the moved around the property or coming and going from a property which is not unreasonable. Fire doors and poor sound insulation is the common theme across banging door complaints.

In relation to dealing with complaints of tenant’s door slamming this will form part of the role of Estate Management alongside Noise Pollution to look at the whole picture of the complaints raised during an investigation.

A recent example - Carpentry were sent to a report of noise nuisance from door slamming, they looked at the door and adjusted it but it was the family's life style which was the issue. This was included in an injunction but only formed part of a much bigger picture of the Investigations especially when domestic concerns form part of the nuisance behaviour linked to the tenancy agreement which isn’t deemed solely as ASB.

Meeting ended at 8 pm

**CHAIR** \_\_\_\_\_

