



Minutes of the Housing Tenancy Board

*Minutes of a meeting held on 19 September 2011
at the Civic Offices, Fareham*

PRESENT:

Councillor P J Davies
(Chairman)

Councillors: T J Howard, D L Steadman and Mrs K K Trott.

Co-opted members: Mr M Busby, Mrs P Weaver and Mr G Wood.

Also Present: Councillor B Bayford, Executive Member for Housing (for minutes 7 and 10).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Alderman Crouch and Mrs Eileen Bailey.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Housing Tenancy Board held on held on 11 July 2011, be confirmed and signed as a correct record (attached – [ht-110711-m](#)).

3. CHAIRMANS ANNOUNCEMENTS

(a) Change of dates of meetings for 2011/12:

The Board was given early notice of proposed changes to future meetings of the Housing Tenancy Board in November 2011, January 2012 and March 2012. Subject to the approval of the Council at its meeting on 20 October 2011, the proposed meeting date changes are:-

- Thursday 24 November 2011 (original date was Monday 14 November 2011);

- Thursday 2 February 2012 (original date was Monday 23 January 2012); and
- Thursday 29 March 2012 (original date was Monday 19 March 2012).

Members were requested to note the proposed new dates in their diaries, which will be confirmed, following the Council meeting; and

(b) Outreach work at Highlands Hub - Piloting a new Service

The Chairman advised the Board that every week at Highlands Hub there will be housing advice and council tax benefit advice available to tenants. On alternative Wednesday afternoons, Tenant Services representatives will also be available to provide outreach work.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at this meeting.

5. DEPUTATIONS

There were no deputations made at this meeting.

6. HOUSING TENANCY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME 2011/12

The Board considered a report by the Director of Community and Streetscene which reviewed the Board's Work Programme for 2011/12 (copy of report - [ht-110919-r01-jsh](#) circulated with agenda and appended to signed minutes).

The Board was advised that an additional item regarding mobility scooter storage, would be included in the work programme for November 2011.

It was AGREED that the Work Programme for 2011/12 be confirmed, subject to the addition of an item regarding mobility scooter storage to be considered on 14 November 2011.

7. WELFARE REFORMS - UPDATE ON GOVERNMENT PROPOSALS

The Board considered a report by the Director of Finance and Resources, which provided information about proposals for Welfare Reform, the potential implications for Fareham Borough Council and the potential impact on residents currently living in Council owned accommodation, receiving assistance towards their rent and Council Tax (copy of report - [ht-110919-r07-cqu](#) circulated with agenda and appended to signed minutes).

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Executive Member for Housing addressed the meeting during consideration of this item.

The Head of Revenues and Benefits circulated a paper detailing proposals from Lord Best suggesting a clause be included in the Bill, as follows:-

"Payment of housing costs:-

- (1) This section applies to payments of the housing cost element of the universal credit.
- (2) Payment of the housing costs element of the universal credit must be made to a person's landlord where—
 - (a) that person has requested or consented to such payment;
 - (b) where paragraph (a) does not apply and the person is in arrears pursuant to the terms of the tenancy agreement between that person and the landlord of an amount equivalent to four weeks or more of the amount they are liable to pay to their landlord as rent.
- (3) Regulations made by the Secretary of State may prescribe the circumstances in which subsection (2) does not apply.
- (4) Regulations made by the Secretary of State shall prescribe the person who is to be treated as the landlord for the purposes of this section and shall make provision as to the discharge of liability consequent upon the making of any payments to the landlord."

The Chairman asked the Tenant Representatives of the Board for their views on the above.

A Co-opted member asked if the Head of Revenues and Benefits could attend a Tenants' meeting to explain the proposals in more detail. The Head of Revenues and Benefits undertook to do this, at the appropriate time.

The Board was of the opinion that if housing benefit was paid directly to some tenants, then arrears would increase as the rent may not be paid. It was therefore felt that it was better to make the payment directly to the Local Authority, as landlord, as it is at present.

The Board felt that online claims would not work because of claimants' limited access to the internet, and recognising that the Government had been notoriously poor in its online applications in the past (an example quoted was the NHS online scheme). This would also not be a good idea for people with learning disabilities and / or poor literacy and numeracy skills. The onus would fall on their carers / supporters and it was not clear what support would be available, if any, from local authorities or elsewhere.

The Board also expressed concern regarding under-occupied properties and felt that if housing benefit was reduced to people living in accommodation larger than they need, they may fall into arrears with their rent and ultimately face eviction. Furthermore, concern was expressed on the availability of smaller accommodation, for under-occupying tenants to move to. The Chairman

stressed that this was a Government proposal and not that of Fareham Borough Council.

The Board agreed that a presentation to tenants was not required at this time as there was still a lot of information to come forward.

It was AGREED that the comments of the Board be included in the Council's response to the Government.

8. PERFORMANCE MONITORING - BUILDING SERVICES 2011/12

The Board considered a report by the Director of Finance and Resources which set out Performance Monitoring data for Building Services covering all aspects of the service delivered to residents (copy of report - [ht-110919-r05-cne](#) circulated with agenda and appended to signed minutes).

Concern was expressed about the low number of satisfaction cards issued to monitor contractors' performance. Officers undertook to investigate this further. It was also agreed that the design of the customer satisfaction cards/letters should be reviewed and approved by the Editorial Panel of the Tenants' Forum.

Concern was also expressed about the lack of bin storage facilities at Frosthole Close and some works required in communal areas. Officers undertook to investigate this further.

The Board congratulated officers on a very comprehensive report, which was in a new format. The Board agreed that the new format was very good and much easier to understand.

It was AGREED that the information contained in the report, be noted.

9. ANNUAL REPORT TO TENANTS

The Board considered a report by the Director of Community and Streetscene regarding the draft annual report for 2011, the final version of which is to be made available to tenants from the beginning of October 2011 (copy of report - [ht-110919-r02-jsh](#) circulated with agenda and appended to signed minutes).

The Board was advised that this was a draft report and amendments were still required.

The Board suggested that the font size of the document be increased to Aerial 12 to make the document easier to read. The Board thanked Officers for an excellent report.

It was AGREED that the annual report be noted.

10. IMPLEMENTING SOCIAL HOUSING REFORM: DIRECTIONS TO THE SOCIAL HOUSING REGULATOR - CONSULTATION

The Board considered a report by the Director of Community and Streetscene regarding the Council's proposed response to consultation on the Government's proposed fundamental reforms to social housing and outlined the key policy changes (copy of report - [ht-110919-r08-afi](#) circulated with agenda and appended to signed minutes).

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Executive Member for Housing addressed the meeting during consideration of this item.

The Board expressed concern about the Government's proposals for a Tenant Cashback scheme which could lead to the Council having to carry out even more remedial work. Issues relating to health and safety would also need to be addressed.

The Board was also concerned about the possible unintended consequences of the Government's proposals for Flexible Tenancies, which may increase the Right to Buy sales of larger family houses, as tenants at risk of having to downsize could exercise their Right to Buy and thus further reduce the Council's ability to provide social housing for families in the future. The Board expressed the view that Local Authorities should have freedom to determine the local policy on Right to Buy.

It was AGREED that the comments of the Board, set out below, be included in the Council's response to the Government.

- (a) the Board is concerned about the tenant cashback scheme, which could lead to the Council having to carry out even more remedial work. Issues relating to safety and security would also need to be addressed; and
- (b) the Board is also concerned about tenants at risk of having to downsize exercising their Right to Buy and thus reducing the Council's ability to meet the housing needs of families in the future. The Board would like Council's to have greater freedom to determine the Right to Buy policy at a local level, having regard to local housing need and costs.

11. A NEW MANDATORY POWER OF POSSESSION FOR ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR - DRAFT RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION

The Board considered a report by the Director of Community and Streetscene which outlined a draft response to the Government's consultation on the introduction of a new power of possession to help tackle Anti-Social Behaviour (copy of report - [ht-110919-r09-jsh](#) circulated with agenda and appended to signed minutes).

It was AGREED that the draft responses, set out in the report, be endorsed and the Executive be advised accordingly.

12. REVIEW OF HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY - FROSTHOLE CLOSE

The Board considered a report by the Director of Community and Streetscene members which provided feedback from the consultation with residents regarding proposed changes to the housing allocations policy at Frosthole Close and also addressed issues raised by members of the Housing Policy Development and Review Panel regarding the accommodation (copy of report - [ht-110919-r06-jsh](#) circulated with agenda and appended to signed minutes).

The Tenancy Services Manager drew the Board's attention to the table set out at paragraph 14 of the report.

Members agreed with the comments set out in the first two rows of the table but had concerns regarding the proposal to let all future vacant two bedroom second floor maisonettes to families with children aged over 5 as a preference, or where there is no demand to families with children under the age of 5. The Board felt that this could result in a conflict of lifestyles between young families and older people.

Following a full discussion, the Board reluctantly agreed the above proposal.

On being put to the vote, it was unanimously AGREED that:-

- (a) the outcome from consultation with residents be noted; and
- (b) the proposed changes to the allocations policy be endorsed and the Executive be advised accordingly.

13. REVIEW OF SHELTERED HOUSING SERVICE AT LINCOLN CLOSE, TITCHFIELD

The Board considered a report by the Director of Community and Streetscene which advised members of proposed changes to the sheltered housing service provided to sheltered tenants at Lincoln Close and includes the results of tenant consultation carried out in June/July 2011 (copy of report - [ht-110919-r04-jsh](#) circulated with agenda and appended to signed minutes).

It was AGREED that the Executive be recommended to approve the proposed changes, set out in the report.

14. PERFORMANCE MONITORING - TENANCY SERVICES 2011/12

The Board considered a report by the Director of Community and Streetscene which set out Performance Monitoring data for Tenant Services covering Current Tenant Rent Arrears and Repossessions, Void Property Management including Void Rent Loss, Estate Inspections and Satisfaction levels for Estate Services, Anti-Social Behaviour, Tenant Consultation and Involvement (copy of report - [ht-110919-r03-jcr](#) circulated with agenda and appended to signed minutes).

A Co-opted member requested that feedback cards be put through tenants' letterboxes when the grass has been cut so that they know the work has been done and can comment on it.

The Board thanked officers for a very comprehensive report.

It was AGREED that the information contained in the report, be noted.

The meeting started at 6:00pm
and ended at 8:35pm).