

Council Housing Management Board

Thursday 5 October 2023.

Meeting summary

Attendees:

Councillor Christine Warner – Chair and Cabinet Member for Homes, Planning and Safer Communities.

Antony Spurway – Vice Chair – tenant board member

Councillor Martin Loftus – Shadow Member for Homes, Planning and Safer Communities

Brian McGaw – tenant board member

Victoria Gabriela – tenant board member

Nigel Hickmott – tenant board member

Councillor Katie Kendrick

Councillor Keith Miller

Jo Worthington – independent board member

Paul Doherty – independent board member

Allan Batty – Cheshire West and Chester Council

Alison Amesbury – Cheshire West and Chester Council

Janet Lawton – ForHousing

Karen Craig – ForHousing

Apologies:

Jane Murray – tenant board member

Meeting Overview

The first Council Housing Management Board took place with board members being welcomed by the Chair Councillor Christine Warner, Cabinet Member for Homes, Planning and Safer Communities.

1. Terms of Reference

The board reviewed the draft Council Housing Management Board Terms of Reference with several suggestions being put forward as follows:

- 1.1 Include within the Terms of Reference an Equality Statement that makes reference to equality in relation to local government/public service.
- 1.2 Agree that Councillor Warner would as Chair of the Board and Cabinet Member for Homes, Planning and Safer Communities report to Scrutiny as required about the Boards work.
- 1.3 In line with the Terms of Reference, the Board agreed to review the Terms of Reference annually.
- 1.4 Board agreed to delay setting up the sub committees that are referenced in the Terms of Reference for up to 18 months.

Action: A copy of the Council Housing 30-year Capital Investment Business Plan to be provided to board members.

Action: Check that the term of membership of three years is enough in relation to the election of councillors.

Action: Terms of Reference to be amended, circulated and approved at next Board.

2. Reviewing performance

Members of the Board were informed that the Council monitors the performance every month using a robust framework which sets out in detail how ForHousing is to perform against a set of key performance indicators which had been developed since the start of the housing management contract. The Council manages performance and sets the targets with these being based on the Council's priorities. The Council, via the monthly contract meetings with ForHousing, provides all necessary checks and balances and will challenge where this is deemed necessary. The Board was informed that their role is not to monitor ForHousing performance, but to comment and make suggestions for the Council to consider at the annual review.

ForHousing went through all 12 performance indicators and explained that all but one was on target or within tolerance. The Board was also provided with an explanation of each performance indicator and there were detailed discussions between Board members and ForHousing staff to understand how the service is delivered.

Following a question from the Board about the benefit rules around tenants who are convicted and imprisoned, the rules are as follows:

A housing benefit claim can continue for up to 52 weeks before the tenant is sentenced. This includes prisoners on remand, and those awaiting sentencing. After receiving a sentence, a housing benefit claim can continue for 13 weeks if the tenant is expected to return within that time.

Action: ForHousing to provide further information on leaseholder income collection.

3. Council Housing Asset Management Strategy consultation

A presentation detailing the Council Housing Asset Management Strategy was delivered to the Board. Some amendments to the text were suggested which CWAC staff agreed to implement in the final version. A number of questions were asked, and subsequent answers provided as follows:

Q) How have tenants been involved in shaping this strategy? And what has been their input before going out to consultation to all tenants in West Cheshire?

A) The process of drafting the Council Housing Asset Management Strategy involved data gathering and analysis to understand the long-term maintenance needs of the properties. Staff then linked these to the Council's priorities, and

Council housing vision and objectives which are linked and aligned with the five key pledges in the Tenants Charter. The Tenants Charter has been extensively consulted on with staff, tenants and Members. All tenants can provide their views as part of the 12-week formal consultation, this process is in line with many other strategies the Council consults on.

Q) As a landlord there is no mention of how we should be supporting tenants as part of LS09001 requirements on capital work programme. Should there not be something in the strategy that states how tenants are to be liaised with when works are carried out to their home or neighbourhood?

A) The role of the Council Housing Asset Management Strategy is to set the vision, objectives and detail the commitments we are making to tenants. In terms of tenant liaison, the Council and ForHousing use a rigorous procurement process when selecting contractors for all capital works (and day-to-day repairs) which includes the need to liaise with tenants. An example of this is the onsite Tenant Liaison Officer at the Sutton Way development.

Q) What is the programme and how does it get inspected to get the right outcomes of shelf life of stock condition? How does the 20% of overall stock per annum get maintained to ensure this is right on the database when inspected and is this on a rolling inspection program for all housing stock?

A) This is a new commitment which will see every council property inspected over a five-year period or 20% annually over the five-year life span of the strategy. This is something that the Council was very keen to incorporate in this strategy as a key action in the strategy. ForHousing and the Council also want to make sure that all tenants live in safe homes and the inspection process allows them to monitor each home and then identify and programme in any works required.

Q) What is the true cost of the Sutton Way development? How do we ensure value for money and the quality of works is of a good standard for this project?

A) The total spend for Sutton Way is approximately £17.4m which will see the whole area redeveloped and 16 new homes built to help meet local housing need. The procurement process used by ForHousing and the Council requires that value for money is achieved for the council and its tenants. ForHousing and the Council meet regularly to review performance and budgetary spend with a view that the aims of the project are kept on track.

Q) Why are we not designing within our existing housing stock and new buildings to meet the needs of tenants with a disability or an impairment?

A) In terms of the existing housing stock, ForHousing through the Council commissioned HomesKey+ service will work with tenants to ensure their property meets a tenant's disability or impairment needs. In relation to new build housing, all the new council houses numbering 230 units of accommodation were built to Lifetime Homes Standards excluding the flats. The Lifetime Homes Standard is a series of sixteen design criteria intended to make homes more easily adaptable for

lifetime use at minimal cost. The concept was initially developed in 1991 by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Habinteg Housing Association. Further information about the Lifetime Homes Standards is available: [Lifetime Homes - CAE](#)

The Board was also informed about an upcoming Workshop for tenants to attend on Thursday 9 November, several Board members expressed a desire to attend the Workshop and requested invites be sent out to them.

Action: Invites to be sent to all members of the Board.

4. Election of a tenant as Vice Chair

Antony Spurway was unanimously elected as Vice Chair.

5. Any other business

5.1 Next Board Meeting

Is to be held on Thursday 7 December 2023 with agenda items agreed as follows:

- Approval of amended Terms of Reference
- Budget and Capital programme for 2024/25
- Invite James Latham from ForHousing to go through Asset Management Strategy investment plan and Damp and Mould

5.2 Getting to know you.

A suggestion was put forward for Board members to meet up outside of the formal Board meetings to get to know each other better. All members thought this was a good idea and planned to meet up.

5.3 Agenda items for future meetings

The Board discussed agenda items for future meetings with suggestions as follows:

- Data and discussion on complaints
- Further 'training' from ForHousing on performance
- Consumer standards
- Damp and mould approach

Our council housing vision

“We aim to provide affordable homes of the right type and quality to meet the housing needs of those who are unable to meet their own needs in the housing market now and in the future. We will work in partnership to support our tenants to prosper and improve their wellbeing and ensure neighbourhoods and communities are sustainable, safe and pleasant”.