

**Agenda item 1b.****HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD****Minutes of meeting on Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> August, 17:00 – 19:00, Committee Room 3**

No.	Item	Lead
1a.	<p><b>Welcome, introductions and apologies</b></p> <p><b>Board Members in attendance:</b> Councillor Keith Miles (Chair – Cllr M), Chris Sanderson (Tenant - CS), Phil Simpson (Tenant - PS), Darrell Price (Tenant - DPr), Councillor Glenys Falconer (Cllr F), Councillor Stuart Yates (Cllr Y), Janice Bather (Tenant - JB), Christine Durrant (Executive Director - CD), Jane Davies (Service Director - Housing - JD)</p> <p><b>Board Members – apologies:</b> Councillor Jean Innes</p> <p><b>Officers in attendance:</b> Vanessa Watson-Hopkin (Head of Housing Assets – VW-H), James Crouch (Housing Strategy and Engagement Manager - JC), Graeme Young (Head of Housing Management - GY), Dave Poole (Head of Housing Property Services – DPo), Rachel O’Neil (Service Director – Digital, HR &amp; Customer Services - RON), Carolyn Szadura (Head of Revenues – CSz), Lindsey Phillips (Revenue Services Manager – LP)</p> <p>The Chair welcomed Councillor Yates as a new Board Member and Dave Poole and Graeme Young as new Heads of Service.</p>	
1b.	<p><b>Matters arising from previous meeting</b></p> <p>The minutes were reviewed and agreed as an accurate record.</p> <p><b>Matters arising:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The colours used on graphs have been changed to ensure accessibility.</li> <li>• An update on voids and rents performance are included on today’s agenda.</li> <li>• A workshop was held with tenants on the 2024/25 tenant satisfaction measures.</li> <li>• Housing managers have reviewed tenant comments on surveys to check for any actions required.</li> <li>• Amendments were made to Housing Ombudsman documents as requested at the special meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> June and JC will circulate the final submitted versions to HAB members.</li> </ul>	JC
2a.	<p><b>Tenant scrutiny review of rents</b></p> <p>RON presented a report on the outcomes following a tenant scrutiny review of rents – circulated prior to the meeting. The detailed information is contained in the report and key discussion points follow:</p>	

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good progress has been made against all actions identified under theme 1 – communications.</li> <li>• It was noted that the council is only able to extend introductory tenancies by a maximum of 6 months (18 months in total).</li> <li>• Tenants are keen to see the re-introduction of 'vetting interviews', and it was noted that we now have better checks and balances at every stage of the allocations process, with stronger communication between allocations, rents and tenancy support teams, to ensure sustainable tenancies.</li> <li>• GY is reviewing the new tenant visit process to ensure we are giving clear messages about expectations at the start of the tenancy.</li> <li>• It was clarified that PIP is not regarded as taxable income.</li> </ul>	
2b.	<p><b>Presentation on rents performance</b></p> <p>RON presented a set of slides detailing rents performance during 2024/25. These will be circulated with the meeting minutes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The amount of arrears only increased by 0.47% in 2024/25 which is positive compared to rises in previous years especially given that 2024/25 was a '53 rent week' year.</li> <li>• During 2024/25 the team focused on current rents arrears and achieved a reduction, it was noted that there is more work to do to reduce former tenant arrears.</li> <li>• The majority of arrears relate to tenants who have been in arrears for up to 4 weeks, which is often linked to Universal Credit.</li> <li>• Cllr M asked why there had been a marked reduction in the number of rent arrears appeals brought to the Appeals and Regulatory Committee (of which he is Vice Chair). The team explained that this is because we are much more proactive with early intervention and support, and also where Universal Credit is a factor we can usually pursue managed payments to reduce escalation of arrears.</li> <li>• The number of tenants in arrears for whom we have managed payments has increased significantly over the past year.</li> <li>• RON concluded by describing various service developments over the past year including upskilling of officers (able to deal with housing rents and council tax, providing a more holistic approach), extensive work with tenants to improve letters and general communications, and exploring and testing artificial intelligence / analytics to help us to identify people at risk of falling into arrears and taking early action.</li> <li>• The full detail is contained in the slides.</li> </ul> <p>The Chair thanked RON, CS and LP for their attendance and the informative presentations.</p>	JC
3.	<p><b>Quarter 3 performance report</b></p> <p>JD provided a summary of the performance report, circulated prior to the meeting.</p>	

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	<p>The main points noted were that higher performance has been maintained with responsive repairs, and disrepair cases and claims are continuing to slowly drop (with an underspend against the budget at the end of the quarter).</p> <p>The team are continuing to produce personal housing plans for new applicants to the housing register and the number of referrals to tenancy support remains high.</p> <p>There was an increase in the number of new tenancies during quarter 1 (126), which is linked to the reduction in the number of void properties.</p> <p>The ongoing challenge with voids was discussed and JD noted while the overall number of voids is still too high, performance is going in the right direction (402 at the end of June compared to 471 at the end of December 2024, a reduction of 69). The team has challenging targets in place to reduce the number of voids by 20 each month, so that the rent loss budget pressure is removed from 2026/27 onwards. This is 20 additional voids, on top of the 'normal' amount of voids, which can be anything between 40 and 65 each month.</p> <p>Actions taken so far, which have enabled the reduction by 69 voids over the past 6 months, have included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commissioning an external contractor, CLC, to help address the backlog – they have completed 114 so far and will have completed a total of around 200 voids by the time the contract ends.</li> <li>• Approving some additional agency staff to work in the in-house team to cover absence and address some of the resource gap. This helped the team to increase their monthly output by 15-20 voids per month.</li> <li>• Improved reporting and oversight.</li> <li>• Introduction of pre-termination visits by housing officers.</li> <li>• Improved partnership working across Housing Services, alongside the delivery partner and other council services.</li> </ul> <p>The new repairs IT system, Total Mobile, will also help to improve efficiency in the voids process.</p> <p>Performance on complaints has fallen during quarter 1 due to not having key customer care officers in place but additional resources have been identified and it is anticipated that performance will improve during quarter 2. Update to be provided to next Housing Advisory Board meeting.</p>	JC
4.	<p><b>Landlord safety and compliance performance update (June 25)</b></p> <p>VW-H provided an overview of safety and compliance indicators for June.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Solid fuel appliance testing, lifts, water, fire and asbestos safety indicators were all at 100%.</li> <li>• Gas servicing fell slightly below 100% due to 2 addresses where access had been an issue but these were resolved and performance returned to 100% during July.</li> </ul>	

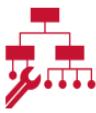
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There was one out of date smoke alarm due to 4 missed appointments at this address, but the team is returning tomorrow (6<sup>th</sup> August) to complete.</li> <li>• VW-H explained the work done in respect of damp and mould to ensure compliance with Awaab's Law and noted that we have excellent information about reported damp and mould in council properties.</li> <li>• DPr asked whether extractor fans are mandatory in all properties – DPo advised that these are replaced when kitchens and bathrooms are renewed and repaired where possible when faults are reported.</li> </ul>	
5.	<p><b>Outcomes from workshop with tenants to review tenant satisfaction measures</b></p> <p>A workshop was held on 31<sup>st</sup> July to present the TSM results to tenants, share an update on progress made over the past year with actions identified in July 2024, and ask their views on key topics and themes. The event was extremely useful.</p> <p>The full results have been circulated to HAB members. Overview of progress made since last year:</p> <p><b>After last year's event we prepared an action plan to look at areas where we could improve. So <u>far</u> we have:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>Procured a new ICT system for repairs to improve efficiency and communications with tenants</b></li> <li> <b>Implemented a new asset management system to record more accurate information on our homes and better plan investment</b></li> <li> <b>Employed an external contractor to work with us on reducing the numbers of empty void homes</b></li> <li> <b>Provided more regular information for tenants on safety checks and compliance</b></li> </ul>	

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	<p> <b>Reviewed and developed new anti-social behaviour letters in collaboration with tenants</b></p> <p> <b>Carried out a further review of communal cleaning to ensure improvements are embedded</b></p> <p> <b>Increased the number of tenancy support officers to work with new tenants</b></p> <p> <b>Installed new noticeboards and information in all blocks of flats</b></p> <p> <b>Improved complaint handling with dedicated complaints officers appointed</b></p> <p> <b>Introduced new housing advisory board to provide tenants and elected members oversight of the service</b></p> <p> <b>Letter to all tenants sent out twice per year with key information including fire safety, damp and mould, tenant engagement opportunities, how to find out more etc</b></p>	

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	<p><b>Ongoing actions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>Reshape of repairs management team</b></li> <li> <b>Make it easier for tenants to find out when improvements will be carried out in their home or block</b></li> <li> <b>Complete the implementation of the new repairs ICT system</b></li> <li> <b>Further improvements in our ICT systems to ensure we have a single view of tenants and their requirements</b></li> </ul> <p>Tenants participated in 3 workshops and a brief summary of their suggestions and priorities follows:</p> <p><b>Keeping tenants informed about things that matter to them</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Video/audio updates and sending out good news stories about the housing service</li> <li>• Calling tenants back when they've contacted us</li> <li>• Respecting and following tenants' communication preferences</li> <li>• Keeping tenants informed at every stage about their repair</li> <li>• Making it easier for people to find out about voids in their area and when they will become available (and what we're doing to reduce them)</li> </ul> <p><b>Treating tenants fairly and with respect</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Code of conduct for staff developed with tenants</li> <li>• Be consistent and transparent with our procedures</li> <li>• For example simplified version of bandings / allocations</li> <li>• Communication – key themes were listening, being impartial, taking into account individual needs and communicating with respect</li> <li>• Deliver on promises – discussions were had around the importance of accountability and ownership and not 'being passed about'</li> </ul> <p><b>Making a positive contribution to the neighbourhood</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve appearance of estates/grounds maintenance</li> <li>• Improve visibility of housing staff on estates</li> <li>• Clearing up waste immediately – especially if it is waste left by our works department</li> <li>• Improve communication – to manage expectations about what we as a Landlord can do and to promote the work that we are doing e.g. decarbonisation projects, refurbishments</li> </ul>	

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Need for Housing Service to be part of wider community activities and events</li> </ul> <p>It was noted that more work is needed on ASB and GY is working with the tenant engagement team on a plan for additional work so we can be sure the changes have made a difference.</p> <p>Cllr M noted that as well as keeping tenants informed about planned work and improvements, this needs to be shared with Elected Members and staff – VW-H to ensure information is circulated.</p> <p>CS noted that some areas of the borough are much less likely to see Housing Officers (Rangers) as their work tends to be concentrated on estates and in blocks. Housing management to consider how we can ensure better visibility of housing staff in all areas.</p> <p>JD / JC to work on a plan to action the outcomes and suggestions from the workshop and provide an update to the next HAB meeting.</p>	VW-H JD JD / JC
6.	<p><b>Future meeting dates</b></p> <p>JD proposed the next two meeting dates: 18<sup>th</sup> November and 17<sup>th</sup> February. JC to send out invitations and check numbers available to attend.</p> <p>CS requested that where possible, we avoid scheduling HAB on the same day as tenant performance meetings as this can make for a very long day for tenants attending both sessions.</p> <p>JD reminded HAB members that if they would like to suggest any specific topics for additional meetings in between HAB meetings, the team will facilitate this.</p>	JC JC
7.	<p><b>Any other business</b></p> <p>JD / JC will circulate a questionnaire to enable us to review the effectiveness of the Housing Advisory Board and see if any changes are required.</p> <p>JC noted that government is consulting on rent convergence, the new decent homes standard and a minimum energy efficiency standard for social rented homes. The housing service's responses will be shared with HAB members for information.</p>	JD / JC JC
8.	<p><b>Next meeting – to be held on 18<sup>th</sup> November, 17:00 – 19:00 in committee room 3.</b></p>	