

Tenant Board Meeting

Wednesday 29th January 2025

Attendees:

Marcus Cooper	Tenant Board Member
Gerry Crease	Tenant Board Member
Liz Perryman	Tenant Board Member and Chair
Tony Cole	Tenant Board Member
Paula Warren	Tenant Board Member
David White	Housing Transformation Manager
Rob Longfoot	Tenant Services Corporate Manager
Georgia Mecoy	Tenant Engagement Co-ordinator
Kerry Lecomber	Tenant Engagement Co-ordinator
Cllr Richard Winch	Housing Portfolio Holder
Cllr Jessie Carter	Housing Portfolio Holder

Apologies

Deborah Fenton

Actions from last meeting and introduction

Georgia opened the meeting and took guests through the agenda.

Declarations of Interest

Not needed.

ASB Scrutiny Project

GM shared a presentation and took members through what had happened so far on the project, the decisions made by Board previously when reviewing ASB information, and what they wanted to scrutinise.

- There are now two focus group sessions booked, one is online in the evening and the other is in person during the day to try to ensure we're offering times and days that suit the most people. Tony is attending on 3rd, Marcus may come to 5th or 3rd, Paula is attending on 5th. For online have 12 other tenants interested and then in person have 15.
- Also HO, TE staff, officers and members.
- Will come out with an action plan afterwards.
- DW advised that tenants who attend will be getting gift vouchers as we want to try and increase tenant involvement.
- Feedback will be shared later in February for Board review. Officers will meet afterwards to understand what recommendations can be moved forwards.
- It will be a project that we will be carrying forwards and following up on.
- Recommendations will go to Overview and Scrutiny on 17th March.

Service Charges Consultation

RL took the meeting through the plans for introducing service charges. Have consulted with a large number of residents, some had a breakdown of costs that might be attributable to their communal areas and an idea of likely cost. A lot of other residents had a more general letter to get feedback on the principal. Very good responses in terms of how useful they were and were summarised and put to Cabinet along with the charges. The introduction

was approved with certain caveats for protection. Then did an affordability assessment on our tenants based on incomes and this proved they were affordable even on the lowest of incomes.

Now pulling the data together to ensure the right information goes out to each tenant and final agreement will be at full Council in February.

RL then took the meeting through his presentation.

PW: What happens if tenants query this after the charges go out? RL advised we have cleansed the data as far as we can and this was an exercise to help with that and if there are charges that are wrong we will be correcting that.

It's also been a good exercise in judging our very expensive buildings to run.

Will give feedback to tenants who engaged with this process.

GC: This will result in a lot of residents keeping a very close eye on what they're getting for the money. RL agreed and advised service charging is a way to both see what it costs but also a chance to look to tweak things for energy efficiency and other cost saving measures. Not setting Grounds Maintenance charge yet as we need to do more data work. But this is about a way to provide value for money and a way to feedback. We are expecting an increase in questions and queries which should be a chance to make improvements.

GM advised a handful of people telling us that lighting was being left on 24 hours a day and she and KL can go out and consult with tenants and look at ways to make improvements through the Greater Places project and giving more of a voice to more tenants.

MC enquired about the affordability methodology and if other factors were taken into account, such as people's individual circumstances. RL advised whilst we couldn't know absolutely everything, we do have a financial inclusion team who can assist. The analysis was done by someone in Housing Solutions who looked at everyone across the board. If anyone comes to us and advises they are experiencing financial difficulties we can help. However, most of these charges are eligible for benefits so those on very low incomes will have them covered within those.

LP: Benefits go up in April and charges go up in April along with Rent? RL explained that when you have a change in your circumstances you would update either HB or UC and they would adjust how much you are entitled to. If it's HB we tell them the increases and with UC the individuals tell UC how much it's going up by and the benefits increase to match them.

LP enquired about those paying bedroom tax. RL agreed it's a risk for those with spare rooms or those who are having their benefits reduced but we do have a lot of support for people.

DW advised that as part of the work on affordability they looked at the different kinds of tenure and Social Rent is the most affordable so the likelihood of them being unaffordable. Also we did consult with yourselves and the fact is these services are having to be paid for and that has to come out of general rents. This is therefore a fairer way of doing it as those not benefiting are no longer subsidising them and gives us more money to spend on property.

TC: What kind of figures are we talking about – is there some sort of average? RL shared his screen and took them through the various charges.

Action: KL to share these afterwards.

TC: How will these be charged in arrears? RL advised always a year behind as based on last year's charges and looking at building the process to refine all the time to try and improve how it's charged. Also will have flexibility to go to market working with tenants to improve our estates in terms of places to live. And if tenants don't want to have a monthly cleaner but will do it themselves we can change to reflect that.

RW: Wanted to highlight that this is a really difficult thing to have done. The only way we can get money to repair and improve our homes is through rent and service charges. Rents are all capped at 3% and the principal of service charging is very sound. If you get a service you should pay for it or someone else is. It is very complicated however and can be difficult but we have agreed to phase it over 5 years in the business plan. There is also the financial inclusion team for those anomalies. Ultimately it will enable us to improve services and be a lot fairer.

Tenant Engagement Strategy

Took a good look at the 2022 tenant engagement strategy with a view to compare it to new consumer standards.

This year we will take another look to check progress. GM took meeting through slides. DW advised of delay to My Home Portal and that this is part of our ageing housing management system. Can use it to check rent and balance but that's about it. A proper tenant portal would allow you to book repairs, check your safety certificates etc.. We are looking at future IT services.

LP: She uses the portal every week and it doesn't show up how you can see your housing costs properly – shows the whole total. DW advises it's to do with how we receive the information from the DWP and how often it's processed. LP advised it doesn't even show it a month later. **DW will look into that and respond.**

PW advised that hers does, she pays by DD and it shows a couple of days later. LP advised it shows payments but not housing costs. DW advised we're hoping to make a big improvement by implementing a new IT system.

DW advised of new accessible tenancy agreement now approved to be available today.

PW: Can tenants request a physical version? DW advised we need to put them down as digitally excluded on the system and find out what their needs are and can print off and post to them. As we build a better picture of our tenant data we may decide to send 6 months' worth twice a year.

In terms of you said, we did, nothing in significant delay and only one slightly delayed with everything else ongoing.

Slight delay to stigma awareness campaign due to joining Stop Social Housing Stigma (SSHS) campaign. Have a training module for staff, councillors etc. Data collection is constantly being updated.

PW advised doing work on 19th February with Customer Services team on stigma awareness and putting some pledges together. **Action: Follow up on this.**

SSHS is getting Parliamentary recognition and we may be involved.

Looked into carrying out tenant and leaseholder census at a cost of £40k, but that generally only get about 66% of information and it's out of date as soon as it's done. Need to change the culture so data is collected constantly.

Significant delay to setting service standards as it's a lengthy and complicated process but GM and KL will be taking forwards from April when they have new targets.

Only delay is gaining TPAS accreditation. We can apply for this but we're looking at the costs and the amount of work. GM advised of link between being TPAS accreditation and a C1 from the Regulator so worth bearing in mind.

LP: Is getting the TPAS a second step after worrying about the Regulator? DW agreed – much more important to be complying with the standards, with a C1 be very happy and with a C2 will have a list of things to do.

HRA Business Plan

DF unable to attend so moved to next meeting.

Any Other Business

GM advised that Nottingham City Council just had their grading back as C3 and Regulator wasn't sure tenants were involved in decision making and challenging. Can everyone have a think about what they would like to enable you to challenge us? Is there anything you've wanted to challenge in the past but couldn't?

MC: When reporting repairs online it still says significant delays due to pandemic. **Will get it changed.**

MC: Due to have repair a certain day but because he had a call out the night before can't do any repairs the next day? Why wasn't there a contingency? Why was he on call-out if he had a full day of repairs. DW advised there is an on-call rota which all our operatives can go on. If you're on call you're not excluded from work the next day. Will look into and see. **KL will look up on Open Housing and give DW information.**