

Tenant Board Meeting

Wednesday 30th July 2025

Attendees:

Liz Perryman	Tenant Board Member (Chair)
Gerry Crease	Tenant Board Member
Tony Cole	Tenant Board Member
Charmaine Jolly	Tenant Board Member
David White	Housing Transformation Manager
Georgia Mecoy	Tenant Engagement Co-ordinator
Kerry Lecomber	Tenant Engagement Co-ordinator
Cllr Ruth Hendry	Housing Portfolio Holder (Babergh)
Cllr Richard Winch	Housing Portfolio Holder (Mid Suffolk)
Deborah Fenton	Director of Housing
Jeni Smithies	Finance Business Partner (HRA)
Stella Morris	Tenant Observer (potential Board member)
Sara Szczepanski	Tenant Observer (potential Board member)

Apologies

- Paula Warren, Liz Perryman, Marcus Cooper and Tim Riach.
- Stella and Sara introduced themselves.
- Georgia took Stella and Sara through the other attendees and their roles.
- DF introduced herself and thanked the attendees for being part of Housing and all their involvement.

Actions from last meeting

- All actions completed from last meeting.

Declarations of Interest

None needed.

Housing Revenue Account

DF advised of how the two budgets work - the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA). HRA is ringfenced to rents and service charges which can only be used for tenant functions – repairs, maintenance, capital works, grounds maintenance and Greater Places. It also pays for the use of the Customer Services and service from Public Realm to cut grass on communal gardens.

SS queried what an Amortised Grant was which DW clarified as grant funding given to us to carry out a new service – in this case it was for our Tenant Satisfaction Measures. Also clarified that amounts in brackets were positive amounts.

DW clarified the difference between revenue and capital expenditure and what the Revenue Contribution to Capital meant.

JS took the meeting through the HRA accounts for 2024/25 for Babergh and then Mid Suffolk.

RW added that this information is very high level and he struggled to understand it initially but it's important that this financial information is shared with tenants as it shows what we spend their rent on.

CJ enquired what Voids meant which was clarified and asked what the turnaround was. DW advised it's as quick as possible and ideally a few days but sometimes the condition of the property means we have to do a lot of work which takes a lot more time. We quite regularly have voids coming in costing us £30k to £50k at a time. CJ enquired if it was contracted out as she saw one locally recently which was really impressive as they were working until 9pm. DW advised it's a new contract and having some teething problems and they are classed A, B or C depending on the amount of work needed. The contractor is then bound by the timeframe. DW advised that if the board was interested in the subject it's something we could come back and cover it at another meeting.

TC enquired about the depreciation figure as it was quite high and if there's a risk can be used to manipulate figures. JS advised it's a figure worked out by our assets team – it relates to kitchens, bathrooms, roofing etc. TC commented that property obviously generally appreciates in value.

JS then took the meeting through the changes that have happened over the last couple of months, especially the ones the government have announced in consultation. Took meeting through changes being proposed.

DW advised he will be setting up a session on our response to the government consultation.

DF advised in 1999 the government wanted to review the way rent for Councils were set so they took a basic value, looked at local differences in terms of earnings and bedroom sizes, and came up with formula rent which was a percentage below market rate. For years they've allowed us to increase it by CPI + a percentage. Couple of changes to that since 2012 – gov gave ten-year rent deal and then came in rent convergence which forced us to increase rents up at a different rate over a period of ten years. Then in 2013 there was a spending review and everything changed and they introduced a four-year rent reduction which means that for BMSDC our rents are at 70% of where they should be. That is the reason we can't invest in properties and had financial issues. All across the sector been campaigning that if we want to provide great places for people to live – homes, communities, communal areas – something needs to happen with these rents. So this latest consultation is to introduce this convergence so social rents, over time, get to where they need to be.

RW added what it means from a tenants POV – if inflation is 3% rents go up 4% plus a couple more pounds. The money from rents and service charges can't be spent on anything else in the Council – can only be spent to be ploughed back into the service and spent on homes.

DF added that, for her, she wants everyone who lives in our properties to be really proud to live in their home and be warm, safe and comfortable.

TC asked for clarification on the 70% which was provided.

JS asked the meeting to let them know either now or in the future what else they would like to know.

DW advised that the information from this is to inform what other things they would like to scrutinise in the future – so voids might be a subject for example but anything we spend money on can be looked into.

Complaints Scrutiny Update

KL took meeting through an update on the project and the action plan of recommendations will come to board at the next meeting and then go to the Overview and Scrutiny in October.

Communication scrutiny scope

GM requested that the project could be extended by a month to ensure that it's given enough time to be carried out fully and properly. All happy to add another month into the timeframe for the project.

SS enquired as to the mystery shopping element which GM advised on and described what was planned.

GM advised that we need to consider how we carry this out – first time resolution, wait times etc.

CJ advised perhaps a bit of a role play with customer service agents being interviewed by tenants. TC enquired if they could use genuine issues they could call up about and enquire so it's real-life issues. DW advised that would be great and we might potentially do a range of this. Could also just do some queries about services to rate their information and knowledge.

RW advised in his working life did a lot of time listening in to Customer Service calls and will pick up all sorts of things you wouldn't have thought of.

DW advised can use recordings and bleep out names and addresses or transcripts. Need to work out the final details but it's a wider subject matter.

All confirmed that they're happy with how things are going and like to have the multi-layered approach. DW advised it's also a popular subject with our Cllrs and he has liaised with Sam Lake, the head of customer service and she is really keen for this to happen.

Upcoming scrutiny projects

Communications will run from August to October and from November onwards will look at the Grounds Maintenance service on communal areas.

Another couple of ideas have come up and DW advised he would like one of our board members wanted to get more involved in procurement of our contractors and service providers. He has been working with a company who are helping us with procurement and they have offered to provide some training for tenants to get involved. They're going to provide a menu of options which he'll forward on. We will also be requiring all of our contractors to sign up to the Stop Social Housing Stigma campaign as we know one issue that always comes up in complaints is contractors turning up to appointments at any time they want and it needs to be rooted out. Would like to add in questions from tenants that all contractors will have to answer and be scored on when tendering for our contracts.

TC advised would it be an idea to attend a tenant board meeting too? DW said absolutely and there are loads of opportunities to bake into their contracts.

DW advised he would also like to arrange training for tenant inspectors so tenants can go in with Surveyors to carry out inspections to check – how did they arrive, were they respectful, did they show you ID, were they neat and tidy.

GC enquired why we were using an external company to help and not just do it in house. DW advised that over the last couple of months there were over 30 new contracts to get in place so didn't have the capacity in house to do it and the RSH would not have had any interest in us having an excuse. We are not using FTT forever – they are a necessity to get through the volume of work and then once the contracts in place our internal procurement team will be able to deal with the steady flow of renewals etc.

Celebrating the good

CJ advised that after the complaints workshops it came to her that there are good things about repairs – can we scrutinise something that's doing well and celebrate it and learn from it.

TC advised all his experiences have been positive too.

DW advised that scrutiny is decided upon by the information they are given and they can look at things are working well to see if there's any learning. In the future if you want to look at other things you can. Through that complaints scrutiny you found some good things so we need to ensure we talk about the things that were done really well and reported on in the output reports.

CJ advised looking at Customer Services other services can make them look bad. DW advised that was the case and those points of failure could be scrutinised too and there's an element of internal communication to be looked at too.

Action: GM and KL to ensure reports pick out the positives as well as the negatives and celebrate them.

SM advised that if you don't look at the good as well as the bad you never get the full picture.

DW advised of a similar position previously in Complaints Taskforce meeting and feeling of deflation after meetings. We now pick out compliments and go into them as well.

Discussed the new software being used by Repairs and Maintenance and DW advised there is a benefits register which he can share with the Board so we can demonstrate improvements to services.

Action: DW to share Total Mobile benefits tracker.

Questions around transactional survey presentation

No questions on the presentation. TC advised the information was useful and quite easy to understand. DW advised he feels the information is useful but can't always be in the right mindset for it and if we're presenting it in the wrong way or wrong bits of detail we can alter it as directed – want to ensure it's what you all want and how you want to see it.

RW enquired if there could be a one slide – executive summary – for tenants.

DW suggested perhaps a summary and then the detail following if they want to keep reading they can.

Action: Exec Summaries to always be supplied.

Any Other Business

GM took meeting through a list of AOB.

All agreed an online workshop should be added to the Annual Report and Service Standards meeting.

DW took meeting through the recent Regulator for Social Housing gradings publications. CJ enquired if we'd done a gap analysis and DW advised there are 67 different standards and we can very nearly evidence we're meeting all those standards and anywhere we're not meeting we have action plans in place to improve them. Aiming for a C1 but at the very worst would be a C2.

Advised of MC leaving the tenant board and doing a card.