

## MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of the **JOINT HOUSING BOARD** held at the Council Chamber, Mid Suffolk District Council Offices, 131 High Street, Needham Market, on Monday 19 June 2017 at 2.15pm.

### PRESENT:

#### Councillors:

#### Mid Suffolk

Nick Gowrley  
Lesley Mayes  
Sarah Mansel

#### Babergh

Jenny Jenkins  
Jan Osborne (Chairman)

#### Tenant Representatives

Keith Wykes  
James Taylor

Michael Berry  
Roger Chapman

#### In attendance:

Councillor Jill Wilshaw  
Gavin Fisk – Corporate Manager - Income and Tenant Services  
Kevin Jones – Interim Strategic Director  
Sue Lister – Corporate Manager – Housing Options  
Justin Wright-Newton – Corporate Manager – BMBS  
Ian Winslet – Investment and Development Consultant  
Ann Hunter – Improvement and Involvement Officer  
Rob Carmichael – Governance Support Officer  
Henriette Holloway – Governance Support Officer

### 19 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Tony Bavington and Tenant Representatives Maria Hilton and Steve Phillips.

### 20 TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY OR NON PECUNIARY INTERESTS

Councillors Nick Gowrley, Jenny Jenkins and Jan Osborne declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item JHB/17/5 on account of being Members of the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Districts Cabinets and agreed not to vote on this item.

### 21 JHB/17/1 - TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 24 APRIL 2017

Councillor Jan Osborne informed members that an email had been received from Councillor Tony Bavington regarding JHB/18/17, and he would like it noted that this Item was deferred so that the Rental Exchange could be discussed at the Tenant Forum.

### RESOLUTION

*The minutes of the meeting held on 24 April 2017 be confirmed as a correct record.*

**JHB/17/2 - COUNCIL HOUSING ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR POLICY**

Gavin Fisk, Corporate Manager – Income and Tenant Services, introduced the Council Housing Anti - Social Behaviour Policy and outlined how the policy would come into effect for both Councils and would be replacing the previous out of date policies. There were three key principles to the policy:

- Self Service
- Transparency
- Focussed Resources

The new policies had taken into consideration the responses from the Tenant Consultation Events and feedback from the residents and were to be updated as work progressed. The Anti-Social Behaviour policy was intended to be a fluid document to be able to be innovative and supportive to tenants in relation to Anti-Social Behaviour.

Some Members were concerned about how communication was conducted with tenants, who had difficulties to communicate their complaint. The officer explained that the Councils as Landlords were interested in early intervention and would become involved as early as possible once a complaint had been received through any of the available communication channels.

Councillor Nick Gowrley asked clarification on Members' involvement in anti-social behaviour in the community. The Officer responded that the Members' roles would be to communicate the policy to tenants and to manage expectations. It was also important for Members to be involved in consultations and briefings. Similarly, Tenant Representative could provide friendly critical information and skills which could support the tenants.

The policy aimed to clarify areas in which the Councils would not become involved in Anti-social behaviour complaints, but it was recognised that some consideration had to be made with regards to safeguarding in the community. Communication was still considered the best form of prevention.

Some Members felt that it was difficult for the Board to agree to an implementation of a policy, which had areas that had yet to be developed.

Councillor Jan Osborne proposed that a change to the recommendation should be made.

By a unanimous vote

**RESOLUTION**

*To agree implementation of the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy in principle and any associated procedures subject to an update from Report Authors to be provided at a*

*future meeting*

23 **JHB/17/3 - UPDATE ON TENANT SCRUTINY REPORT ON VOID MANAGEMENT**

Sue Lister, Corporate Manager - Housing Options, provided an update on Tenant Scrutiny on VOID Management based on a review conducted by Officers, which had generated an action plan. Babergh and Mid Suffolk Building Services (BMBS) had changed the way VOIDS were managed and its effect on VOIDS would be reviewed regularly to assess the performance.

In response to questions from Members, it had not been possible to compare performance measures and management of VOIDS with other councils. Work was being undertaken with Suffolk County Council on how to improve and manage VOIDS and currently Officers were concentrating on improving performances in the Districts. One way forward was to develop a pre-VOID service to shorten the length of time of repair once the property was vacated.

Tennant Representative Roger Chapman asked if benchmarking from other councils could be used for comparison for Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council. Officers responded that the Councils no longer used HouseMark data but relied on local information to create realistic performance indicators. A Performance Indicator Report was due at the next Joint Housing Board Meeting in July.

By a unanimous vote.

**RESOLUTION**

*That the updated action plan be noted.*

24 **FIXED TERM (FLEXIBLE) TENANCIES - VERBAL REPORT**

Sue Lister, Corporate Manager – Housing Options, gave a verbal update on Fixed (flexible) Tenancies and Secure Tenancies, outlining to Members how they operated across the Councils.

It was pointed out to Members that The Secure Tenancy could only be terminated by the Council by a court order and only if the tenancy conditions had been broken or in circumstances such as redevelopment. The Fixed Tenancies were for a minimum period of two years and had the same tenancy rights as Secure Tenancies, the exception being that Fixed Tenancies also had the additional rights to improve, be compensated for improvements and to buy their properties.

The recent Housing and Planning Act 2016 had made provisions for preventing local authorities in England from offering secure tenancies in most circumstances, and it was expected that the Government would approve the necessary regulation later this year to confirm these provisions. This would have consequences for the current Flexible Tenancies and would require:

- A new tenancy agreement
- Amendment to IT Software
- Updated tenancy policy to take account of government regulations
- New processes for carrying out reviews during the fixed term and at the end of the tenancy.

## **RESOLUTION**

*That the verbal report be noted.*

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### **JHB/17/4 - UPDATE ON BMBS BUSINESS PLAN AND IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS**

Justin Wright-Newton, Corporate Manager - BMBS, introduced the report and the tabled paper. He updated Members on the development and status of BMBS, and said that in the beginning the focus had been on recruiting local people and apprentices, as well as looking for local vehicle suppliers. He continued by updating Members on:

- The development of diagnostic tools
- Providing additional support to call centre staff
- Improving mobile working technology, which would reduce the service's carbon footprint and increase efficiency.
- A training plan was being brought forward to all operational teams and team leaders to develop the service.
- A review was being carried out of the original business plan and an improved version was currently being drawn up.
- New scheduling software was to be introduced as well as a SMS Text Messaging service to remind tenants of appointments to reduce the numbers of inaccessible properties.
- The depot was to moving to Creeping Road, Stowmarket, later in the year.

Tenant Representative Roger Chapman raised concerns about the Customer Service number, as some tenants had found it difficult to get through to BMBS. He also pointed out that some residents were unable to use computers and could therefore not complete e-forms. Officers responded that the service had experienced some problems in April but staff was now fully trained to deal with the needs of the tenants contacting BMBS. An automated response email was also to be set up to acknowledge receipt of e-mails, so tenants knew that their requests had been received.

The Corporate Manager - BMBS enquired if a working group could be set up, consisting of Members and Tenants, to provide a steer for BMBS. Members felt that this could provide an opportunity to identify the areas most needed to be addressed.

Councillor Nick Gowrley proposed and Tenant Representative Michael Berry seconded the motion that a working group be set-up to provide a steer for BMBS.

By a unanimous vote

#### **RESOLUTION**

*That the Update on the BMBS business plan and integration programme be noted*

#### **RESOLUTION**

*That a working group consisting of Members and Tenants be set-up to provide a steer for BMBS*

#### 26 **JHB/17/5 - JOINT HOUSING BOARD FORWARD WORK PLAN**

#### **RESOLUTION**

*The Forward Plan be noted.*

#### 27 **MOS/17/4 AND BOS/17/4 - THE HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT 30 YEAR BUSINESS AND FINANCIAL PLAN UPDATE 2017**

Kevin Jones, Interim Strategic Director, presented the report and outlined the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan to the Board which explained the financial situation of the HRA and the possibility of the Debt Cap being breached in 8 to 9 years. The 30 Year Plan outlined the strategy for the efficiency savings to prevent this. The Plan was a living document and would be monitored annually to ensure it was still fit for purpose

In response to members questions the Interim Strategic Director, said that the dates outlined in the Appendix A were target completion dates and that the funds in both HRA Accounts were ring fenced and could not be shared with any other budgets.

As the Babergh District Members had agreed not to vote on this item the meeting was not in quorate and no vote was taken

*The Report was noted and comments will be forwarded to Cabinet.*

#### 28 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS RELATING TO JOINT HOUSING BOARD**

Councillor Jan Osborne informed Members that she had received an email from Liz Perryman, Chairman of the Tenants' Forum referring to five complaints received in connection with the Rental Exchange scheme. The e-mail would be forwarded to

Members upon request.

Gavin Frisk – Corporate Manager Income and Tenant Services, informed Members that in the wake of the Grenfell Tower Fire he would like to assure Members that a Fire Risk Assessment of the housing stock was already underway, in line with the request received from the Government.

Gavin Fisk, also requested that a room be booked for the Tenants' Representatives to hold their pre-meeting before the Joint Housing Board. Ann Hunter – Improvement and Involvement Officer to book the rooms.

The Business of the meeting concluded at 15.40.

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Chairman