**Tenant & Leaseholder Scrutiny Group**

**Saturday 17th June 2023, 9:00am-1.30pm**

**Sandwell Council House**

**Chair – Phillippe Brown**

**Minutes**

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| **Circulation:****Scrutiny Members** |  |  |
| Ahmed AbdulrahmanAlison AllenAnthony AverisPhillippe Brown **Sandwell MBC** | Shenelee BrownStembile Mhlanga | Shefa NessaAynols ReidSue SmithDelroy Thomas |
| Marianne Monro (Support Officer)Nigel Collumbell Lee MliloPhil Deary Sarah Ager  | Yvonne Willetts (Minute Taker) | Ellen Fenton(SNAC Chair) |
| Manny Sehmbi**Apologies: None** |  |  |

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| **Items for Discussion** |
| 1. | Introduction to Formal Meeting * Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Formal introductions were made
* There were no apologies
* Chair ran through the agenda
 | Chair |
| 2. | Declaration of Interest* Delroy Thomas declared that he is involved in Digital Delivery as part of SCIPS. Delroy has no impact on decision making. The interest was recorded
 | Supporting Officer MM |
| 3. | First level proposals for the Asset management Strategy* SA presented the first level proposals for the Asset Management Strategy
* The previous strategy was dated 2020
* SA wanted to engage the TLSG from the start with the view to going to Cabinet in October
* The final document will be on the public website
* Louis Bebb is supporting with the development of the strategy
* LB presented a slide show giving the context and the purpose of the strategy
* Legislation and policies at a national, regional, and local level impact on the content and delivery of the Housing Asset Management Strategy

National* There have been significant changes to SMBC legal obligations, to ensure the safety of tenants and others, due to the Fire Safety Act 2021 and the Building Safety Act 2022
* The Regulator of Social Housing’s Home Standard requires that homes meet the Decent Homes Standard and have a repairs and maintenance service
* The charter for social housing white paper of 2020 will ensure that residents in social housing are safe, are listened to, live in good quality homes, and have access to redress when things go wrong.

Local* Within Sandwell Council’s stock, there are 29,598 properties - 27,277 of these properties are managed by SMBC.
* The scope of the strategy is not yet finalised but will include all HRA (Housing Revenue Account) properties
* Sandwell has a higher proportion of social rented properties in comparison to other Black Country local authorities
* Sandwell Borough has around 3,500 empty residential properties currently, according to council tax records
* Sales under the Right to Buy have accounted for the loss of 457 homes in 2019/20 and 2021/22. To counter these losses, during the same period 160 homes were added to the Council stock.
* Benchmarking will be done against other Local Authorities, but the strategy will be shaped to Sandwell

Content and Objectives* The proposed content and the overall objectives of the strategy was shared, and the key points were:
* **New and existing stock** e.g., regeneration and housing development, housing adaptations, sheltered and other specialist housing
* **Repairs and maintenance** e.g., repair times, disrepair and retrofit
* Detailing how SMBC will provide a reliable, trusted, and timely repairs and maintenance service based on agreed service standards
* **Housing safety** e.g., gas servicing, fire/electrical safety, and asbestos management.
* Detailing the legislation and policies at a national, regional and local level that will have an impact
* **Energy and sustainability** e.g., energy efficiency, damp and mould, renewable technologies, building new homes, decarbonisation
* Detail stock condition in terms of energy efficiency, health and safety, repairs policy etc
* **Investment planning** e.g., affordability, investment priorities, value for money.

Priorities need to be agreed. Whether work should be considered worst first basis or by area.Should there be investment in new build or refurbishing existing stockFunds may be available from the Combined AuthorityThe strategy will give oversight and accountability Next Steps* Housing Asset Management Strategy will be brought forward for formal adoption by the Council in the autumn. This strategy is likely to cover a period of 5 years
* The strategy will be underpinned by the condition of the stock. The stock condition survey needs to be done first to understand the financial impact. The stock condition survey is out to tender
* Workshops will be scheduled with the relevant services and individuals during June and July to co-create the draft strategy
* The Strategy will be taken to scrutiny panels such as the Strategic Neighbourhoods and Communities (SNAC) Board, Leadership Team, and Directorate Management Team.
* The draft strategy will be shared for feedback with various stakeholders

Strategy Consultation* As part of the Asset Management Strategy consultation, focus groups will be held with relevant stakeholders including the Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group
* SA asked if any members of TLSG would like to be part of a focus group to help identify priorities give a customer perspective.
* It was decided that the TLSG chair will work in partnership with SA and LB
* The draft strategy will be brought back to the group before it is finalised

Discussion * TLSG member raised the question of data around the members of households
* Stock condition data is poor and needs to be put in order first. SMBC is not yet in the position to identify tenant make up
* The Strategy will cover under/over occupancy of properties.

EF - there are around 4000 properties that are over/under occupied* A key objective for the team is better use of stock
* The Housing waiting list will be included.

EF – Anecdotally it is believed that one third of current tenants need to be re-housed, visits may find that there are more* The group asked if residents are informed before maintenance work is done on lifts?
* There should already be notification but officers to see how this can be done better.
* The group asked where purchasing from the private sector sits in this strategy, and does it form part of the 30-year plan?
* The Asset Management Strategy pertains to existing stock but the strategies that cover purchase of private properties will be referenced
* There is a commitment in the 30-year plan to cover new builds – building can take place at any time within the 30 years. The current climate is not a suitable time for building
* There is restriction on new build which is based on SMBC ability to deliver. Lack of land is also an issue

EF – Clean-up of land also has a cost which can increase unit costs.* There are new build properties, but stock is lost with right to buy, and numbers are coming down
* The yearly average of right to buy homes purchased is 280 - 300
* Work is ongoing to get voids back into stock

The chair asked for any further questions to be put in writing | Sarah Ager/ Louis Bebb |
| 4 | Annual Report * The Annual Report is to be published and will be launched at the Tenant Conference 1st July
* The content was presented to the group. Comments were invited but no further changes can be made
* The draft is with the printers to have visuals added.

TLSG member - Content is not always accessible with the addition of visuals. Once the publication is live, TA (Tenant Auditors) is to check and contact Jenny Collins if there are issuesTLSG member – Asked for the housing stock to be displayed as a number rather than a percentage* There will be an evaluation and suggestions can be considered for next year.
* The group were asked to send comments once the final copy is issued.
* Comments from last year were listened to and have influenced the content of the new report
 | Nigel Collumbell |
| 5 | Action log on TLSG Previous work area * A report has been drafted to track the recommendations made by the group and the subsequent actions taken following the first two scrutiny projects
* A slide show was presented to the group and discussed
* Some actions have been completed and others are still in progress
* Regarding the point relating to residents without IT – EF asked if residents could be signposted to available resources e.g., cheaper tariffs and dongles etc
* NC (Nigel Collumbell) is working with Virgin Media to promote their cheaper tariffs
* Information around resources may not be part of the Home Check but may go out separately with rent statements – work is underway
* What forms of ID would be acceptable?
* There is a long list of acceptable ID. The first tier includes photo ID: passport, driving licence. Other documentation such as bills, and invoices are also acceptable. The lower the level of assurance the more documents will be needed.

Garages* The question regarding garages has been included in the Home Checks. Officers to be briefed and will include in checks from July
* Training
* There is an outline training plan, but it is not yet ready to be shared
* All delivery dates have not been scheduled
* NC to share with the group within the next six weeks
* Availability of evening and weekend Home Checks
* A need for out of hours Home Checks has not been identified but this will be kept under review. There is existing flexibility where necessary.
* The group asked for ‘need’ to be defined as anyone working 9 – 5 would ‘need’ an evening/ weekend Homecheck
* These can be considered and would be demand driven as the need has not yet presented
* If officers are not able to carry out checks a more flexible approach may be needed

Housing Hub and Contact Centre* Some of the recommendations of the group require council wide consideration
* There is a board that is working on improving the ‘Customer Journey’ and NC attends this as a Housing representative. He may have input in decisions but is unable to implement recommendations without corporate agreement
* The decision around the contact centre has been pushed back until the back office has been redesigned
* Cost of the service
* Unit cost of calls to the hub are £2.60 per transaction

Cost of face-to-face delivery on the Housing reception is £25-£26 per transaction. The Housing Hub is more cost effective than a resource sitting in reception.* Data has been collected across March, April and May regarding first contact resolution and is around 60% for the Hub. This could be improved with training and onboarding more resources
* Avoidable contact regarding progress of queries is being monitored and during April-May was 74 -77%. This will help to inform improvement work
* The group felt that there is still a need for face-to-face contact
* Face to face is part of the review of the ‘Customer Journey’
* The receptions are open in the three local offices
* There are pilot Community Hubs in operation in West Bromwich and Rowley Regis– resourced by officers from the Housing Hub
* Customers may visit out of preference because they are not confident in the phone system or due to digital poverty
* Work is being done by the Community Partnerships to support residents and help build confidence and increase independence.
* Putting customers at the heart of everything, looking at things from the customer point of view will help deliver efficiency.
* A member of the group stated that the out of hours service is not efficient
* Officers are holding a Business Continuity meeting and will cover the out of office service
 | Nigel Collumbell |
| 6. | Customer Experience updateRecruitment* The advert for the Head of Customer Experience has now closed
* The role is building capacity to work through customer issues such as avoidable contact
* The Housing Hub will report to the officer
* The other key area that they will oversee is complaint resolution
* There are three candidates for interview, and someone should be in post in the next few months
* They will be introduced to the Tenants & Leaseholder Scrutiny Group
 | Nigel Collumbell |
| 7. | Engagement with Tenants in high rise blocksBuilding Safety* Resident Engagement is specific to high rise/ high risk buildings and is a requirement of the Building Safety Act.
* A survey was conducted last year that was not successful. The survey was mostly done online. From the 3000 high rise homes there were only approx. 80 returns.
* Earlier this year a pilot study was carried out. One block in each of the six towns was chosen for home visits by the Resident Engagement officers
* Two questions were asked of residents
1. What does building safety mean to you?
2. How would you like to be engaged?
* The answers help with understanding how involved residents want to be, how they want information communicated, whether they want to be part of a panel and steer the strategy.

Only 33% of residents stated that they wanted to be involved in the development of building safety services. Work is ongoing to understand how residents want to engage so that this number can be increased* Under the Building Safety Act a plan is needed for each individual block
* There are 55 blocks in Sandwell, 54 are managed by the council and one is managed by Riverside, which is a private company. All 55 blocks will be visited by the end of August
* In Sandwell, the definition of **high rise** is any building more than 5 storeys high
* In the Safety Act the definition of **high risk** is any building over 18m or 7 storeys
* In Sandwell 52 of 55 blocks are **high rise/****high risk** buildings but all blocks will be treated in the same way
* Maisonettes are classed as low rise – under 5 storeys
* Care homes are only captured by the Building Safety Act until they become occupied at which point, they move to the Clinical Care Commissions remit of safety
* Lee Mlilo is a Resident Engagement Officer and he presented feedback from the 6 pilot blocks
* A total of 138 responses were received
* Addenbrooke Court 15
* Elmcroft 18
* Lancaster House 48
* Nelson House 16
* Russell House 24
* Wimberger House 13
* Survey times were varied, and notice was given prior to visits. Some surveys were done by phone call
* People were asked if they felt safe in their homes. Some did not feel safe for a variety of reasons including
* Non-residents try to access
* Drug use
* ASB (Anti-Social Behaviour)
* Crime/fear of crime
* The slide covering the conclusions and recommendations for residents not feeling safe in their homes was discussed
* Residents are encouraged to report all incidents of ASB especially anything fire related
* The group was advised that there a several avenues that can be used to report incidents
* 0121 569 6000
* Local Housing Office
* ASB team. There is a specific online tool for reporting ASB
* Home checks team
* A member of the group asked if the Tenancy Agreement for residents in high rise blocks outlines their responsibilities.
* There is only one Tenancy Agreement for all residents but there may be conditions more relevant to those living in different properties. The handbook is broken down and there are items that apply more specifically to residents in blocks.
* A group member asked if there is a system of relaying the outcome back to the person who reports an issue
* There are different approaches to the response depending on the issue reported. Repairs may be done without reporting back but cases of ASB would have a built-in response mechanism
* A group member whether there was fear of crime or was there evidence of actual crime
* SMBC would seek to give assurance that action is being taken where there is a perception of crime.

Acting as a signpost to other agencies that deal with crimes and ensuring that there is a feedback loop to person who raised the issue* Housing have linked with the ASB team and there is a campaign around Safer 6 – community and block specific safety
* Fear of fire within the home is dealt with by the fire risk assessor explaining processes and how residents can live more safely
* More engagement and officer presence will help to give assurance and reduce fear
* The group asked if residents could speak directly to officers present in the blocks
* Officers want to engage with residents and are happy to be approached directly if on site
* As part of the engagement exercise there has been liaison with Neighbourhoods officers, staff in the offices have knowledge of the profile of residents
* The result of the survey showed that some people do not know what to do in the event of a fire
* The instruction is to stay put
1. The fire prevention measures should stop fire spreading
2. People trying to exit could prevent the fire service getting access to the location of the fire
* The council is working on ways of communicating with residents when there is a fire

The fire service is the first to know and do not always advise until after the eventThe council are on ways of communicating with the fire service to advise where vulnerable people are and would like them to liaise with the concierge service in blocks so that building CCTV can be used to help with incidents* Feedback showed that some people wanted full CCTV coverage in buildings and a similar number did not. There is opportunity to have CCTV for specific cases of ASB

People are also installing camera doorbells but these need to be confined to the boundary of individual properties. This may cause an issue if other residents complain* There are cameras across 50% of the high-rise stock covering entrances stairwells and lifts
* CCTV, intercom, and concierge service with 24-hour monitoring, operating from Roway Lane, is being rolled out to the rest of the blocks
* A member of the group expressed concern that the council are not aware of all the people living in blocks and the conditions that they are living in
* Home checks will help to address this but are only accurate up to the point when the check is carried out. The is an obligation for residents to let the council know when their circumstances change
* High rises are a priority for Home Checks especially the vulnerable people within those blocks
* There will be regular updates regarding Building Safety Engagement
 | Lee Mlilo & Phil Deary |
| 8. | **Housing Community involvement update*** Manny Sehmbi presented a paper giving a snapshot of activities

Tenant Auditors Group (TAG)Engagement with Tenants in high rise blocksBuilding Safety* The Tenant Auditors (TAG) have recently completed their audit on fire safety in tower blocks.
* They spoke to residents and tenants and thoroughly reviewed the paperwork to help understand the area
* They had over 80 completed surveys
* They made recommendations and are working closely with Phil’s team in terms of moving those forward
* Chris Davis, is part of the Community Partnership team, has been working with Phil and Lee as well as supporting the processes

Task & Finish Groups* Some one-off ad-hoc pieces of work have been completed through the Task & Finish groups
* There have been contributions in the Annual Report
* Chris has facilitated consultation and review of the previous audits
* The same process will be followed with the Building Safety Audit which will help with the continual learning and development process
* There are a further seven tenants who have shown an interest in joining the Auditors group

Neighbourhood Partnerships Team* Neighbourhood Partnerships Team have been running a series of focus groups in relation to the Tenant Satisfaction Survey
* A range of activities have taken place in different venues and different times of day to capture and understand, from a resident’s perspective, the scores and figures from the survey

Tenant Complaints and SatisfactionThe table below details tenant complaints and satisfaction recorded across the housing service and repairs for the last financial year as at 28.03.23:

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| --- | --- |
| Stage 1 complaints | 905 |
| Stage 2 complaints | 80 |
| Compliments  | 203 |

* Stage 1 is the initial enquiry – this is investigated and responded to
* If the resident is not happy and asks for further investigation or wishes to appeal the decision, the enquiry then becomes stage 2.
* The second stage is looked at by an officer who has not previously been involved
* A breakdown of the categories or enquiries was shared with the group
* The Customer Services would come along to give more detail around processes if invited by TLSG

Tenants Conference* The Tenants Conference will take place 1st July
* It will be a celebration of the tenant community and an opportunity to share key areas of Housing and strategies
* The Elected Member and the Director of Housing will be there
* There will be keynote speakers including
* TPAS, they have helped to form the agenda, will attend and be actively engaged
* Kwajo – helping to raise awareness around some of the challenges that tenants face and taking questions
* To date 97 people have booked to attend – the capacity is 300
* There was an issue around the QR code – Christine Davis was looking into this
* There is also a number that residents can call to register
* There will be a marketplace that tenants can go to for information

Tenant & Resident/Community Groups – Delivered by SCIPS* SCIPS has recently secured lottery funding to provide residents with the opportunity to develop their digital skills
* Digital Delivery will be working in partnership with SCIPS and St Albans
* The project is being run with support from the Council and TRAs
* The project will run for 12 months and ends April 2024
* SCIPS have identified a block to carry out a pilot and are in the process of identifying other suitable blocks across the borough.
* The community rooms in blocks will be used for a 12 week programme
* As well as training, residents will be able to borrow equipment
* SIM card tablets are used for residents who do not have Wi-Fi at home
* A training package around using MySandwell to report ASB, repairs etc is being developed
* Digital Champions will be recruited within the local areas. They will help with digital support going forwards and network with other communities to develop continual learning
* The council have been given digital resources, through the Combined Authority, to be used in areas that fit specific criteria
* A map showing the areas allocated for new digital equipment to help with digital inclusion was shared with the group. Selected areas marked in blue
* There is also Digital Donation scheme, and the council is working with partners to provide equipment to areas not included in the Combined Authority scheme
* SCIPS continue to support tenants and residents in their development
* They are looking at recruiting new members.

Summary on warm spaces* An action from the previous meeting was a request from TLSG for feedback on Warm Spaces
* An evaluation from Public Health was shared with the group
* There is preparation to provide warm spaces in the forth coming winter
* The evaluation will help with future planning
 | Manny Sehmbi |
| 9. | TLSG BusinessSNAC Update – Future meetings/Attendance* Cllr Fenton will remain the chair of SNAC and gave an update
* The work programme has been set and MM will circulate to the group
* Building Safety Reviews, Responsive Repairs and Customer Satisfaction will be removed as TLSG items and will be discussed when TLSG are ready.
* Responsive Repairs and Customer Satisfaction and will probably be picked up by SNAC. They will work with TLSG, and members will be invited to meetings
* HMO and additional Licensing – Article 4 is on the agenda. This relates to a part of planning legislation which if enacted would ensure every HMO would require a licence
* There is a pilot scheme in West Bromwich
* From initial data it appears that the larger HMOs, that already require a licence, are the cause of issues
* Local Authorities need to do rigorous checks to ensure that money is spent as intended and occupants are given the support they need
* SNAC will scrutinise documents and decide whether they should consider if every HMO actually needs a licence or should they look more closely at how HMOs are spending money
* Borough of Sanctuary is on the SNAC agenda - Brushstrokes will lead on this
* Local Authorities can bid to become a Borough of Sanctuary and work with other organisations – health, voluntary etc to help newcomers settle and raise awareness
* Financial support is available – for example with the cost of converting qualifications which can be between £5000 – £10,000
 | Delroy Thomas |
| 10. | Open Discussions* The Chair lead the conversation; asking everyone how they felt the TLSG was going and if they were happy with the structure of meetings
* After discussion that following points were agreed
1. Papers to be circulated at least two weeks before meetings. This will enable the group to read and digest and consider any questions they may have beforehand.
2. All officer presentations to have a written report
3. Presentation at the meeting to be a brief verbal summary without the use of jargon.
4. Presentations restricted to a maximum of 10 minutes and 6 slides.
5. The group requested scrutiny the training run by Alex Goddard
6. The group want to feel empowered enough to challenge officers
7. The Chair to lead agenda setting meetings and set agendas
8. All documents to be formatted so that they are accessible to all members of the group
 | Chair |
| 11. | Meeting on Wednesday 21 June- Focus?* The first Teams meeting will be held Wednesday 21 June
* Future meetings can be used as pre-meetings to the formal meetings – members can come together after reading reports and formulate questions
 | Chair |
| 12. | Update on Tenant ConferenceQuiz Questions & Agreement* At a previous meeting it was decided that the TLSG presentation would include a fun quiz
* Some questions will have four possible answers – three outrageous and one true
* This will be used as a way of sharing information
* The focus will be around the TLSG – who the members are and what has been achieved so far
* It will be an interactive quiz done on mobile phones – attendees will be asked to download the App as they join the conference
* Some members of the group expressed concern that it may be too complicated to do this
* It was suggested that as an alternative the questions could be read out by a member of the group and participants would answer with a show of hands
* The group decided that they would take their presentation to the organisers who would be responsible for resolving any technical issues
* The quiz was reviewed, and feedback given
* Some of the questions were reworded and Sue was asked to amend this

Members Attending Stands* It was decided that there is no need for the group to have a stand as details will be given at the presentation
* It was also decided that there would be no questions from the floor
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| 13. | Any Oher Business * Any questions that were not answered at the formal meeting could be carried for discussion at the Teams meeting on 21 June
* The Chair suggested regular Teams meetings in preparation for formal meetings
* John Swann to contact the Chair and invite her SNAC agenda setting meetings
 | All |
|  | **Date of Pre-meeting:** Wednesday 21st June 2023 6.30-7.30pm on Teams**Date of next 2 TLSG meetings:** Saturday 15th July and 19th August**Date of next formal meeting:** - Saturday 16th September 2023 |  |