**Tenant & Leaseholder Scrutiny Group**

**Saturday 16th December 2023, 9:00am-1.30pm**

**Sandwell Council House**

**Chair – Phillippe Brown**

**Minutes**

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| **Circulation:****Scrutiny Members** |  |  |
| Ahmed AbdulrahmanAnthony AverisPhillippe Brown **Sandwell MBC** | Shenelee BrownStembile Mhlanga | Aynols ReidDelroy Thomas |
| Marianne Monro (Support Officer)Nigel Collumbell Dean Epton | Yvonne Willetts (Minute Taker)Sarah Ager Tom Hogan  |  |
| **Apologies:** Ellen FentonSue Smith | Alison Allen |  |

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| **Items for Discussion** |
| 1. | Introduction to Formal Meeting * Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Formal introductions were made
* Apologies from Cllr Ellen Fenton, Sue Smith, and Alison Allen
* Chair ran through the agenda
* The minutes from meeting 16th September had previously been circulated. No amendments were requested. Minutes agreed
* Shefa Nessa has resigned from the group and attended the meeting for a short time to say her goodbyes and then left.
* There will be a recruitment exercise in the new year for Shefa’s replacement
* There may be opportunities for Shefa to be involved in future projects
 | Chair |
| 2. | Declaration of Interest* No declarations of interest recorded
 | Supporting Officer MM |
| 3. | **30 Year Business Plan**Dean Epton gave a presentation of the Business Plan* The 30 year plan is still in progress and Dean shared a summarised version of the five year plan. This was presented at a recent Cabinet workshop and includes Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for 24/25 financial year

DE began by giving some context behind the business plan and the factors that will influence it**Consumer Standards*** The regulators will be introducing a set of Consumer Standards to be implemented from 1st April
* They will contain three principles
* Providing tenants with safe and good quality homes
* Good standard of housing services
* Treating tenants with respect, openness, and honesty – engaged

The principles will be underpinned by four standards which in turn will have a set of requirements sitting under them1. Safety and Quality Standard – 5 Requirements – Stock data

Data must be less than five years old and should be refreshed every five years. The stock condition surveys will provide relevant data and identify how much work is needed. The surveys will take 18 months to two years to complete.The data gathered must be detailed enough to analyseThe initial survey is being undertaken by an independent company but may eventually become business as usual for the council1. Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard – 7 Requirements
2. Neighbourhood and Community Standard – 4 Requirements
3. Tenancy Standard – 4 Requirements
* The new Consumer standards will lead to more engagement to ensure that services are delivered effectively

**Regulator of Social Housing (RSH)*** It will be the responsibility of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) as a landlord to demonstrate how it meets the Consumer Standards
* The requirements will be specific to individual landlords, not standardised. In Sandwell this will be agreed with TLSG and other tenant groups
* From April 2024 Regulator inspections will be carried out in a four year cycle and will be based on the standards published in February
* The order for inspection will be driven by the results of the Tenants Satisfactions Measure (TSM) survey, ombudsman referrals etc
* Landlords will be given six weeks' notice, and the process will take six weeks
* Regulators will speak to tenants and elected members to find out if the council are listening to tenants and taking action
* SMBC are unlikely to be at the top of the list for inspection due to the upcoming elections
* Landlords can be fined for non-performance and ordered to remediate
* The sector has had six years to prepare so no leeway will be given after April
* Local Authorities are working together to find solutions, holding workshops and seminars
* The Regulators have issued a list of risks which will need to be included in planning
* The council borrows money and inflation and borrowing costs are high. The books need to balance, and the council can only borrow what it can afford
* There is a shortage of skilled workers and materials are expensive
* There are safety checks that that need to be done frequently, at a cost.

An EPC rating of C to be achieved in all properties by 2030 or they cannot be re-let* There is a need to deliver new homes. There is a shortage of affordable homes and 1 million people on LA waiting lists.
* SMBC has 14,000 people on its waiting list. A Housing Needs report has already been written
* There are competing priorities and finances are tight. The council needs to be clear about priorities and deliver them.

**HRA Income & Expenditure Account 2024/25*** Funds will come from
* Rent and service charges
* Right to buy receipts
* Borrowing
* Government grants - £5.71m

The total generated will be £151.11m for 24/25* The expenditure will be repairs and maintenance, refitting kitchens, and bathrooms. Interest on loans is an additional expense - £2 million is spent on interest
* More money may become available for landlords to bring homes up to standard. Some grants may be match funded. Grant money may need to be returned if the requirements are not met
* The group asked if there was a possibility that the council might not meet the required standard when inspected
* An affordable and deliverable plan is being drawn up – work will be prioritised and there must be enough money to cover it
* The biggest problem is having a skilled workforce to deliver the work
* If right to buy receipts are not spent within 5 years, they must be returned to the Government. Under right to buy 250 houses can be sold - they are not always replaceable with new builds, and this is factored into the plan
* Officers confirmed that houses sold by the council could be bought back by the council
* The group asked if blocks would be demolished if they are too expensive to repair
* Officers confirmed that an option appraisal would be done, and demolition would be considered if it were the most cost effective option
* It was confirmed that all regulatory requirements will be met in new homes – there is a specific New Homes Standard
* The stock condition survey is up and running and is on track – as a landlord the council are behind on understanding the data
* There is a manager working with the contractor ensuring that work does not fall further behind
* There is £41m held in HRA reserves, this is being held to fulfil the findings from the stock condition survey, approximately £25m
* The reserves can also be used to pay for borrowing
* HRA funds cannot be used for other areas, it is ringfenced

**HRA Capital Programme 2024/25 to 2028/29****New Build Programme**Grants £38.525mRight to Buy 1-4-1 Receipts £33.030mPrudential Borrowing £55.000mTotal Funding Available for New Build Programme £126.555m**Investment in Current Stock** Major Repairs Reserve £90.181mCapital Receipts £20.000mPrudential Borrowing £39.819mFunding Available for Investment in Current Stock £150.000mTotal Funding Available 2024/25 to 2028/29 = £276.555m* A lot of work is needed to achieve safety compliance and meet Consumer Standards
* Savings can be made from improving day to day services. Approx. 20% is wasted in service failure delivery. Work is needed to deliver an efficient and effective repair service
* A 30 year plan is required but can be flexible as there are expected to be many changes

Chair stated that the presentation was helpful. The group would use the information when looking at the areas that they would like to scrutinise and asked for a steer regarding priorities.Officers stated that the Consumer Standards had 20 requirements, and this should be the focus. The order does not matter, and the group could decide what to look at first. | Dean Epton |
| 4 | **Tenant Satisfaction Measures****Leaseholder Satisfaction Survey*** The Regulators will require tenant satisfaction data each year
* The 2023 survey aims to capture the 12 Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) to report back to the Regulators by 30th June 2024
* Acuity carried out the 2023 survey for SMBC
* Questions are worded by the Regulators and the number of questions is determined by the size of the organisation
* There is a formula to calculate the number of residents surveyed based on factors including, type of property, age, and towns. There is representation from all six towns and from people of different ages and backgrounds
* The survey was carried out between 8am – 8pm Monday to Saturday and several attempts were made to contact residents. If residents did not respond the company did not question the reason, they moved on
* When looking at results it is important to consider national context and external factors e.g. cost of living crisis, uncertainty about the future
* This survey is a perception survey but there are other transactional surveys that can also be done
* The SBMC TSM survey 2023 document was circulated and discussed

Overall satisfaction* The overall satisfaction level for SMBC was 74%
* This figure is an increase from last year which was 68%
* Over a longer period of the satisfaction level has dropped from 84% in 2011
* By town – Smethwick was the most satisfied 77% - Tipton least satisfied 69%

Keeping Properties in Good Repair* Homes well maintained 71% - slightly lower than last year
* Safe in home 77% - There were many comments around this question, and they will be looked at
* Damp and mould reports increased, which may be due to the higher level of awareness
* Tenants provided 1095 comments

Respectful and Helpful Engagement* SMBC easy to deal with 67% this is up 1% from last year
* Satisfied with the handling of complaints 28% - this is 3% lower than last year
* The level of dissatisfaction is higher than the council would like. The role of Head of Customer Experience – Housing was created to find out why. Communications and customer service need to improve
* There are comments around phone calls not being answered – feeling that no one is in the office to answer phones. There is more demand for phone calls as people are not walking into offices
* The issue has been recognised and a new telephone system is to be introduced. Currently there are limited licences and not everyone is able to get on the system. With the additional licences more calls will be taken

Recommending Sandwell MBC* Recommending Sandwell MBC is not one of the questions required by the Regulators. Acuity recommended asking the question for comparison with other businesses. Best practises can be taken from other sectors
* Recommend SMBC
* 39% promoters
* 28% passives
* 33% detractors
* There were differences of opinion dependant on age, location, and length of tenancy
* People living in Tipton/ Great Bridge, under 25 or 45-54 with a tenancy of 4 – 10 years were most dissatisfied with services and least likely to recommend SMBC
* Changes in the workforce may have had an impact on services and consequently the level of dissatisfaction

Improving Services* There were 1998 general comments made around how SMBC could improve services
* The main areas for concern are
* Customer service and communications.

The organisation is hard to contact, phones are not answered. There are issues around not being listened to and lack of empathy and queries taking time to resolve.* Day to day repairs

The main issues were around the difficulty of reporting repairs, getting appointments, the length of time it took for jobs to be completed and the quality of the work.* Property condition / Home improvements

Properties are in poor condition with issues of damp and mould, needing new doors and windows kitchens and bathrooms* Neighbourhood / Communal areas

The main issues are ASB, lack of carparking poor grounds maintenance. Benchmarking* The satisfaction level of 74% puts SMBC about middle of the table overall. Within the sector this is good
* Compared to similar landlords SMBC is in the top quartile for most areas apart from ASB and complaints handling
* The issues around handling complaints are not clear, the council need to find out what tenants are unhappy with.
* Other organisations have a dedicated complaints team and SMBC is now mirroring this. New members of staff will be starting in the new year and Tom Hogan will keep the group informed
* The council want to build a better relationship with the Ombudsman. A meeting has been arranged with the Ombudsman in January to explain the new roles and ask how services can be improved. The Chair encouraged everyone to attend and a link for the meeting was sent.
* SMBC survey findings will be published.
* The group asked if the benchmarking data could also be shared as this would help with context. This was agreed but it was pointed out that other organisations may not be named
* Survey results will be shared with wider staff
* Information about how the survey was done will also be published
* The Regulators may be more prescriptive about how surveys are done – the method might affect the outcome
* Chair – There is a lot of good work taking place in Sandwell and this needs to be publicised. The area needs to promote how it is changing and this includes taking the customer on the journey

Key Driver Analysis* The Key Driver analysis is unique to each landlord. It examines the elements which contribute and determine the level of satisfaction

What really matters to residents and where improvements should be focussed* The key driver for SMBC is officers listening and acting when residents contact them this was the lowest scoring area
* Followed by the repairs service – linked to a safe and well-maintained home

Year on Year Change* There are no significant changes in the survey results from last year
* Overall satisfaction is higher – repairs is lower

Town differences* The ratings for people living in Smethwick were highest
* Tipton ratings were much lower in many services.
* The figures mirror the corporate survey
* Work is being done in Tipton to understand what needs to be done
* Tom will come back to the group with updates

Summary* Satisfaction has increased since last year and performance is strong when compared with similar landlords
* There are some areas with issues that need to be addressed
* There is a large number of dissatisfied tenants
* The key driver for overall satisfaction is listening to tenant views and acting on them
* Customers can be contacted directly regarding comments made
* Satisfaction varies slightly depending on ethnicity, age, and town
* When asked about the services to be improved repairs and customer services were top of the list
* There were much lower ratings from online surveys versus telephone

Recommendations* Customer service & communications & complaints identified as the key areas for improvement
* Listening to residents
* Review comments with staff to find what the barriers are
* Repairs and maintenance service
* Catch up on outstanding work
* Find out what the transactional ratings are
* Be more proactive in promoting good service
* Complaints handling
* Review complaints handling process
* Customer recovery
* Follow up comments and reconnect with residents who are happy to be contacted

Sandwell PFI* Residents at Riverside PFI were included in the survey
* The Riverside estates are in Wednesbury. There are two estates with 1000 tenants
* Satisfaction level was higher than the general tenant population
* Overall satisfaction 86%
* Satisfaction is lower for the handling of ASB and complaints
* Recommend landlord to other people 53%
* Improvement to services – there were 74 comments. Many comments were positive, but others would like outstanding repairs dealt with, work completed quicker and for staff to listen and treat residents with respect
* Complaints received the lowest level of satisfaction 36%

LeaseholdersLeaseholders are not covered by the regulations, but the council chose to include themIf leaseholders are dissatisfied it would give insight into issuesThere are contacts with TPAS - the Chair and a group member* Less than half the residents are satisfied with the overall service provided by SMBC – 45%
* Most dissatisfaction relates to accessibility and the way residents can communicate with the council
* Leaseholders do not feel that they are being listened to – 28%
* The major works process may need focus
* Leaseholders frequently mentioned the following areas for review
* Customer services, communications, and information
* Complaints handling
* Grounds maintenance

Discussion* The presentation was transparent and gives the group and idea of how SMBC compares with other authorities. The comparison is helpful and gives context. SMBC can be seen in a more positive light
* TLSG are keen to help and want to know what they could look at. The council are not yet able to report why tenants are dissatisfied.
* It was suggested that the group could look at ‘listening and acting upon’ drill down and give insight from experience
* The group could look at accessing services - for example phone calls not being answered
* The group could also be involved in mini independent surveys
* TPAS survey results may also give insight
* Scrutiny may be difficult with all the changes that are taking place. There will be ongoing changes so TLSG will need to find a way to work with it.
* NC will share the Improvement Plan with the group
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| 5 | **Community Involvement update*** Community activity links with the Consumer Standard relating to Neighbourhood and Community
* The focus is on tenants and leaseholders and links to the Regulator standards
* The group have agreed a Terms of Reference and are looking to appoint a new chair as the previous one had to step down
* As part of good practise there is a regular review by TPAS
* The relationship with TLSG to be considered to avoid duplication of work

Tenant Audit Programme* The group are about to implement their next audit which will focus on Repairs Complaints
* Surveys will be sent to tenants who have raised a complaint in the past 6 months
* They have already met with members of the customer feedback team and a manager from the repairs team.

Building Safety Board* Officer group continues to meet to ensure Sandwell is prepared for implementation of all legal requirements.
* The recruitment of a resident board member is still being explored.
* A resident has expressed an interest in building safety and could take on the role. Experience of living in a high rise would be helpful

Building Safety Working Group* The face-to-face consultations with residents in SMBC high rise buildings has been completed and reviewed.
* Chris Davis is working with Lee Mlilo and Abdul Khan to develop the resident engagement strategies for each block
* Consultation for the draft strategies will begin in January and cover a four week period
* Once feedback has been collated from individual blocks a final version of the strategy will be put together and posted to all residents as well as being available online and in local libraries

Task and Finish Groups* In October, a small focus group took place to discuss the draft asset management strategy.

Tenant Conference * A copy of the Tenant conference report for 2023 was circulated to the group
* Discussions have started on planning for conference 2024
* Tenants will be consulted on developing the conference and feedback was invited from TLSG
* The date for next year's report has not yet been decided, possibly September 2024

Tenant & Resident/Community Groups – Delivered by SCIPS* SCIPS continue to provide support and training to groups
* Work is being done around digital inclusion.
* Plans are being developed to hold an event bringing all the TRAs together in Jan/Feb
* There have been two new TRAs
* The satisfaction survey for SCIPS also took place and the satisfaction level from those who participated was over 90%.
* Only a small group was surveyed
* Not everyone is connected or able to engage digitally and a multifaceted approach is needed

Additional Tenant and Resident Activity * The Community Partnerships team have been supporting wider community with Safer 6 initiatives including hosting a very successful Prevent session (preventing extremism) in Smethwick.
* Some residents in Oldbury took the opportunity to undertake Bleed Kit training.
* They have also been working with veterans’ groups and arranged Oldbury Community Awards.
* The Team have also been supporting several groups with funding applications either from the council or signposting to other streams.
* Also, the team continue to support tenants in flat blocks/communal areas to build community activity.

Upcoming Activity* Smethwick Community Awards is in the pipeline and nominations have been received.
* Sandwell will be 50 years old in 2024 and there are plans for a get together with tenants
* No budget has yet been agreed
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| 6. | Checklist for TLSG taking on a topic* The checklist was reviewed
* The flow chart to be restructured to reflect the overall aim and goal of the group
* The amended document will be circulated to officers for feedback before it is finalised
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| 7. | **Action Log Update*** The action log was reviewed – completed items removed and other items will be carried forward for further action
* Reminders to be sent to officers regarding outstanding actions
* Chair suggested a tracker to monitor recommendations and when actions taken
* Marianne and Yvonne to look at the tracker used by Democratic Services
* **6th August 2022**

Services outside working hours.Office opening hours has been regularly discussed. Officers thought that the matter had been closed as a response was given at the meeting 16th September. Data does not support the need for additional hours. There is already enough flexibility to operate outside normal hours if the need arises.This can be looked at again if the group want to scrutinise. The group appreciated the comments but insisted that there are instances when appointments are made when residents are at work.Chair suggested that members should log any issues and submit in writing to be looked at separatelyIt was suggested that this could be linked to Consumer StandardsThis was discussed by the group and the Chair is to email Nigel to ask if the question around opening hours could be added to the survey or investigated to find the extent of the issue.This is to be put on a future agenda* **29th October 2022**

Additional amendments required to the Terms of Reference* **1st April 2023**

Recognising householder not named on the tenancy agreement. The issue regarding the status of tenants/ residents is constantly arising. This needs to be defined and a system put in place to recognise occupants. There also appears to be disparity between the various service areas within HousingMarianne to draft an email to TomTo be put on the agenda for March 2024* **17th June 2023**

Building safety to be put on the agenda for March 2024* **16th September 2023**

Home checks to be put on March 2024 agenda* Ensuring all documents are accessible - to be put on March agenda
 | TLSG |
| TLSG Members Business |
| 14. | Any other Business * Group development/ reflection to be added to the agenda of all informal meetings – 30 minute slot
* Consumer Standards to be looked at in the next meeting – January 2024.

TLSG will look at where issues sit and what the group focus will be* Evaluation to be put on the agenda for January
* Emma Gilpin to be invited to February meeting
* Marianne told the group that the officer who was recruited to replace her has declined the role, and she will be staying in post
* The volunteer hours were reviewed
* A laptop is being sourced to suit Tony Averis’ specific needs

  | Marianne Monro  |
|  | **Date of next formal meeting:** - Saturday 16 March 2024 |  |