**STRATEGIC TENANT AND RESIDENT PANEL MEETING**

Wednesday 13th January 2021

6.00pm-7:30pm

Virtual Microsoft Teams Meeting

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| MINUTES | ACTION |
| **Present:**  **STAR Panel Members**  Cllr Louise Mitchell – Chair  Bert Morris (BM) – Vice Chair  William Wood (WW)  Iraah Wehner (IW)  Jurgita Stirnaite (JS)  Bernadette Christie (BC)  Teresa Spratt (TS)  Barry Coppock (BS)  **Officers**  Shahid Mallam (SM) – Inclusion & Engagement Manager  Rumana Akthair (RA) – Housing Engagement Officer  Farzana Kahair (FK) – Housing Engagement Coordinator  Jane Martin (JM) – Divisional Director Housing Operations  Julie Curtis (JC) – Senior Finance Manager  Richard Tomkinson (RT) – Independent Consultant  Luke Chiverton (LC) – Interim Strategic Finance Advisor  **Apologies:**  Sumitra Gomer (SG) - Divisional Director Housing Assets  Juli Ozer (JO) |  |
| 1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES |  |
| Cllr Mitchell welcomed all to meeting and introductions given. |  |
| 2. REVIEW OF LAST MEETINGS MINUTES |  |
| All actions responded to.  Minutes agreed.  Government green scheme - Funding became available (1 million) which was secured by Housing Strategy team. Some will be used on council homes, some in the private rented sector and some privately owned occupied homes. Projects on EPC (energy) rating, to move proportion of all home from rating of E to a rating of C. Install energy efficiency measures and loft insulation in a street property council home in Walthamstow. Using this as a template to see what we are aiming for.  JM said this could be a possible future agenda item – housing strategy team to lead on this.  SM talked about MS energy café and energy grant scheme relying on referrals to help give additional support. | FK |
| 3. HRA RENTS & SERVICE CHARGES |  |
| * From 2020/21 local authorities and registered providers have had the ability to increase social rents in line with the newly issued Rent Standard * This allows for rent increases up to a maximum of CPI + 1% for 5 years (with 2021/22 being the second year of this regime) * The rent standard stipulates that September CPI should be used to inform rent increases. September 2020 CPI was 0.5%, which allows for a maximum rent increase of **1.50%** in 2021/22 * HRA Service Charges are also reviewed annually to ensure they remain aligned to actual costs – the average increase for 2021/22 is projected to be **1.46%** * The report also covers charges in respect of Temporary Accommodation and the Travellers’ Site. This rental income (along with the associated expenditure) is captured within the Council’s General Fund budget   JC shared table which shows increase in rents depending on bedroom size on the property  Rent money is spent on the following:   * Majority going into capital investment – ensuring properties are safe with a high percentage going into new homes. * Interest and debt charges - returning any borrowing done previously * Salaries – staff and allow you to make contact * Supervision management services * Repairs as repairs are logged * Recharges goes towards central services e.g. HR and Legal   Service charges don’t generate any profit, it is used to cover costs only.  Services charges are being maintained to a level to ensure they are covering all costs.  On 3rd December, Cabinet agreed a standard inflationary increase of 3% to be applied corporately for all Council fees & charges (unless there are valid exceptions).   * **Garages and Parking** – an increase of 3% * **Heating Charges** – an increase of 3% * **Sheltered Charges** – it is proposed that an exception is made, and these fees are to be increased by 2.75%. These charges are supposed to be done at cost recovery, and this reflects the expected staff pay inflation for a service that is mostly driven by staff costs * **Temporary Accommodation (TA) Rents** – it is proposed that all TA rents are tied to the prevailing Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate from 1st April 2021. This covers all forms of TA provision, including hostels and regen units that are sourced from HRA stock. Most TA households are eligible for Housing Benefit which is linked to LHA rates and will ensure that tenants will not be worse off as a result of this change to the rent mechanism. * **Traveler’s Site** – site rents will be increased by 3%, this will see them rise to £90.04.   Next steps   * All proposals in this report are consistent with the assumptions included in the HRA Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and 30-year business plan which was presented to Cabinet in October * The proposals will be subject to formal ratification by Cabinet in February 2021 as part of the 2021/22 HRA Budget and Rent Setting report that will be presented for approval * All new rents and charges will be introduced from April 2021   BC – concerned about the increase for TA residents due to the pandemic there is a large shortfall. There is an increased number of people with notice of possession. Housing benefit phased out into universal credit and that will affect council tax and bedroom tax.  LC responds that it is quite a big jump but we have models and seen what impact it would have. Most residents are usually eligible for some sort of housing benefit of some kind – either full or partial.  Concerns around arrears and affordability of the rent – arrears should be unaffected by the increase of the rent.  BC - After the pandemic there will be a large amount of people in debt due to the change of circumstances.  LC says we are trying to minimise and absorb the impact on TA residents and plan for that situation.  TS – increase for sheltered housing is a little less due to staffing costs, what does that mean?  JC- costs are mostly for the enhanced housing management service – most costs are with staff. Therefore, it is only needed to be able to cover the staff salary increases.  TS – Do staff get paid directly from the rent?  JC – an element of the staff get paid from the rent. Enhanced housing management cost is collected through the recovering service charge. Standard housing management service is through the rent.  BC – What is the 30-year business plan?  JC – HRA is a self-financed account since 2012. This required local authorities to produce a 30-year business plan, this looks at investment requirements. Business plan is directly from data council holds on its assets and data of the cycle of when the investment will be required and plugged it into a model so we can see the impact. We aren’t formally audited on this, but it is expected for local authorities to have this plan.  LC – there are assumptions and estimates toward the end of the plan. We focus on the first 5-10 years and we prepare for the 30 years.  LM - MTFS – this looks at the next 5-10 years and this is updated regularly. A lot of this money is spent on building safety and high rise and high priority blocks.  IW has looked at the MTFS report - no one was able to plan for covid19. Report highlighted the provision for the waking watch for building and fire safety. Replacing doors has been shifted due to covid19.  There are currently claims from previous supplier and what is the plan for this?  Budget for parking is £463,000. Consultation last year wasn’t correct and new one is going on this year. Is the room in the budget, because this may require more money due to current situation.  JC- resources for the fire and building safety are in the MTFS. This investment is being prioritised over everything else. If that needs to be juggled, then that will be done to ensure this is complete. We are aware of the impact of covid19 and the priority for the fire safety works team will be able to deliver what needs to be done.  Have extra in the budget for the parking project which hasn’t been finalised yet. But there is a placeholder for a large amount for that project to go ahead. Not sure how the project has been affected by covid19.  LC – there is an estimate for waking watch cost. Now that we have more info on how long we need the waking watch we are now adjusting the profile in the MTFS. We are thinking about making funding available, but we also need to ensure we are making value for money. Parking and fire safety – allowances have been put in but due to the delays we have the budget and we will be able to successfully fulfil this.  Osbourne claim – we have been aware of this for a long time and have set money aside to deal with whatever comes out of this claim and we are confident we have set enough aside and hopefully this will not have any effect on the HRA rent.  LM – we are prepared for the contractor claim but we are trying to reduce it. This will be a long process and possibly could end up in court before a case like this is lifted. Neither parties would like to drag this out for too long.  WW – there are current unexpected events over taking the budget.  TS – What is Waking Watch? LM explains we have waking watch service at Wigg and Walsh because they are over 18 metres high. Due to the Grenfell incident there have been several risk assessments on this. In order to be secure and safe, we have people that are trained to fire watch and they will ensure they provide security 24/7 to reduce fire risk. We have had the waking watch service since June 2020. We have given a waking watch service at all blocks over 6 stories and 18 metres high until we are able to complete remediation works including smoke alarms in corridors, sprinkler systems, replacing doors and windows. |  |
| 4. STAR RECRUITMENT |  |
| Prior to Christmas we had a meeting regarding STAR. Paper circulated after proposal for recruitment and selection went to HSLT and was approved.  How proposal impact on the TOR and how the onward process will work.  Discussed the process around the need to refresh the panel while maintaining consistency. Also, due to this year not being a usual business year – membership will be retained for another year so it will be a 4 year term instead of 3 year and all members have agreed this.  Main change to the TOR is related to section 3.  3.1 as a result of opening membership to tenant management of organization, this will increase number of members from 10 to 12. Haven’t discussed if it will be a straight nomination process, it has been suggested that they simply nominate.  3.3 retain members for an extra year term. Standing down and becoming eligible for reelection after 12 months  3.3.1 4 members will stand down annually  3.3.2 anyone who stands down or is unsuccessful becomes part of a talent pool. This provides opportunity for the future to fill spaces without going through selection process again  3.6 initially agreed cabinet member for will chair for 12months and resident as vice chair and this will switch after. However as this hasn’t happened so point 3.6 has been changed to reflect that.  WW – How many TMOs are there in the borough.  RT - There are 2 TMOs so they will have 2 representatives from each one.  LM - the 2 we have are very far apart and differ largely in size so having 1 representative for both would be difficult so we have decided to proceed with 2.  IW – Is there any provision to capture those properties outside the borough, a possible representative for those?  RT- this has been discussed previously but we haven’t been able to successfully meet this as it is very difficult to fulfil this. Potentially with digital meeting this may make it easier.  RT requests all members to agree the TOR. Members have accepted.  3.1.4 we would look to adapt based on the circumstance around the selection process. We have had several people that have expressed interest, but this may not be the case always.  We are looking to recruit 8 people this year – 2 for immediate start, 2 TMOS reps, 4 to replace those that stand down.  If we can gain 6 people in this recruitment. We have 6 people stand down instead. No selection process in 2023 with a 1 year gap so we can allow for a 3 year term.  2 existing members are standing down from Sept 2021 – Barry and Terre.  Others that would like to stand down include Jurgita, Iraah and Bernadette. RT would like to have individual conversations with those who would like to stand down.  SM - we are hoping to have continuity and support. Staggered step down allows for this because we want to provide support to new members, and this will help refresh the panel. Hoping that TMO members will give it a different dynamic and we will plan the stepping down process.  Recruitment process will allow for us test out the abilities and help make panel most effective.  SM - There are other opportunities available for members after stepping down from the panel and would love for members to get involved in other projects. | RT |
| 5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS |  |
| To be added to the forward plan:   * Green Investment Fund * Social Housing White Paper   IW informed members about Complaints process white paper event tomorrow so would like to know if anyone from WF is attending and if she is eligible to attend.  BM - Possibly someone from Billericay to join STAR panel. LM said this is a good idea and we can encourage people to take part. | FK  SM |
| 6. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING |  |
| TBC | FK |