**Tenant & Leaseholder Scrutiny Group**

**Saturday 14 December 2024, 9:00am-1.30pm**

**Sandwell Council House**

**Chair – Phillippe Brown**

**Draft Minutes**

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| **Circulation:**  **Scrutiny Members** | |  |  | |
| Ahmed Abdulrahman  Aynols Reid  Shenalee Brown  **Sandwell MBC** | | Stembile Mhlanga  Phillippe Brown  Sue Smith | Anthony Averis | |
| Nigel Collumbell  Christine Davis | | Sarah Ager  Yvonne Willetts | John Hall | |
| **Apologies:**  Cllr Lewis  Cllr Dhatt | | Manny Sehmbi  Delroy Thomas | Alison Allen | |
| **Items for Discussion** | | | | | |
| 1. | **Introduction to Formal Meeting**  Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Formal introductions were made.  Apologies as above  There were no declarations of interest  The minutes from meeting 21 September 2024 had previously been circulated. No amendments were requested, and the minutes were agreed. | | | Chair | |
| 2. | **Response to Regulator of Social Housing**  Sarah Ager and Nigel Collumbell presented the Housing Improvement and Transformation report. The report was previously reviewed by the Safer Neighbourhoods and Communities Scrutiny Board (SNAC) along with the self-assessment action plan produced by Pennington Choices. The documents are being shared with TLSG to ensure that they are in possession of the same information. The documents were circulated prior to the meeting and brief summary of the background to the report was given.  On 30 October, the Regulator of Social Housing issued a Regulatory Judgement C3 to Sandwell Council in relation to consumer standards.  C3 means that there are ‘…. serious failings in the landlord delivering the outcomes of the consumer standards and significant improvement are needed….’  Plans are already in place and work has begun to address the issues identified.  The key failings are:   * ***The council was only able to evidence that around 2% of asbestos inspections had been carried out (target 100%)***   Data cleansing has taken place to identify where inspections are required. Work is ongoing and a third party has been engaged to review the asbestos monitoring process.   * ***Unable to report or monitor remedial actions arising electrical inspections.***   There has been development around extracting data, but triangulation has been difficult as the data is in several different places. Work is ongoing to amalgamate all data, which is mostly held on spreadsheets, to ensure there is one version of the truth.   * ***The council has more than 14,000 overdue repairs, with over 90% of these yet to be assigned for completion***.   An external contractor is being engaged to deal with the back log and it will be managed separately from new cases.   * **The lack of effective stock condition data.**   A second contractor has been approved and is due to start work soon. All surveys are due to be completed by the end of 2026.  As a result of the judgement, regular meetings are now held with the RSH so that they may monitor progress. The issues found in the judgement had been identified and self-reported by the council. The council will continue to self-regulate and report any further issues identified.  TLSG will be kept up to date regarding progress.  The group asked about the accuracy of data and whether the transfer of data into the new systems would be outsourced? They also asked whether any issues had been identified with moving from one system to another.   * A consultant company, ITICA, has been working with the team for the last six months to procure a compliance system. A contract has been agreed with C365 and the system should be in place by March 2025. * The compliance system is the smallest of the three systems to be implemented and will be the test. There will be inhouse checking during implementation.   More resources are needed for the formation of a dedicated team to work on the implementation of the new system. The structure of the Compliance team is being looked to see if capacity can be increased. A new team lead is being engaged to drive implementation and data cleansing. Staff training will also be taking place.   * Procurement for the asset management system will begin in the new year. * All the new systems for Housing should be in place in the next three years, either as one or separate systems. Training and resources for the three-year project are being considered from the outset and a plan is being drawn up. * Work is taking place with the provider of the current housing management system looking at interim measures until the new system is procured. * Data cleansing is taking place to ensure that data entered into the new systems is accurate * EICR checks are being monitored and will be put on the system once all related data has been linked.   The group asked about funding to address the issues identified by the Regulators.  Officers confirmed that   * Some aspects, for example asbestos, will be absorbed into the budget. * The capital budget will be used for the improvement upgrade elements. The capital budget enables borrowing which means that revenue can be used in other areas. * Revenue reserves will be used to invest in the stock conditions * Existing contracts are being reviewed and amalgamated to provide value for money. * The broader transformation should also provide efficiencies and enable better management of funds.   A question was also raised around whether the life span of the systems had been considered.  ITICA are experts in this field and longevity was included in the system specifications. There has also been soft market testing and ITICA made suggestions and recommendations around the various systems available.  Chair requested updates regard implementation of the compliance system ad would like to see a road map.  The compliance system will produce reports around performance and these can be shared with the group. | | |  | |
| 3. | **Housing Transformation and Improvement Plan**  **Wider Transformation Plan**  The wider transformation plan includes projects across the entire Housing service.  There will be a new mission statement and key performance indicators.  The outline plan and risk register will be shared with SNAC in the new year and details will also be shared with TLSG.  More consultant support will be engaged to get a view of best practise in other places and give advice and support with changes.  A procurement exercise for this will start in a few weeks.  **Tenant Engagement**  The Regulators require the council to demonstrate that it is listening to tenants and acting in response. Engagement is going well but more could be done.  SNAC members are satisfied with the direction of travel regarding managing risks, managing training, and clearing the repairs backlog.  There are currently resources to do the work, but they may not be in the right places. Also, work is passed around manually and there is an amount of double handling. Some remodelling of teams is taking place, and the introduction of the new systems may release resources that can be moved to wherever required.  There will be recruitment to the Tenants Engagement team and the Complaints team. | | |  | |
| 4 | **Repairs Improvement Plan**  John Hall – Head of Repairs attended the meeting to discuss the Improvement Plan for Repairs which was put in place to identify issues.  The biggest issue was the backlog of repairs - 17,000 jobs out of time. After data cleansing, this figure was brought down to 13,000 and this was reported to the Regulator.  Letters were sent to affected tenants 12 December advising that the team are aware of the outstanding jobs and that they will be dealt with. There will be further communications.  All cases that involved damp and mould and any that involved vulnerable people have been identified and appointments made to carry out the work in-house. The other non-urgent jobs will be completed in the next 12 – 14 months by an external contractor. The contract is out to tender.  Any properties with more than one job will be done first and as part of the contract the contractor will do all jobs in one visit. If the repair becomes worse, it will be brought forward.  Once engaged the contractor will be based at Roway lane. They will be trained to use relevant council systems and will be monitored by nominated officers.  Contracts are being tightened up and must demonstrate value for money and contractors will have the same KPIs as council staff.  The issues will eventually be put on the new system and trades operatives will be trained to use it.  Chair asked if there was anything in place to hold operatives to account for their work.  John confirmed that performance measures are being put in place to look at productivity of operatives. The job descriptions have been reviewed to make responsibilities clearer and slight changes have already led to increased productivity.  Every operative is a risk manager and this needs to be embedded into the work culture.  Jobs will be allocated in as close proximity as possible to cut down on travelling and operatives will go wherever needed. The system will eventually be able to track vehicles.  The performance dashboard will also display if an appointment has been attended, if notification was sent for a change of appointment, and if the measure was met.  Performance data will be brought back to TLSG.  Repairs is part of the Transformation Plan, and the key objectives are   1. Write new policies 2. Maximise resources – including more training 3. More tenant engagement 4. System development 5. Review of voids standard 6. Audit – self audit to identify issues, work on complex cases, lesson learnt.   Weekly meetings will be held where the team report to the Head of Repairs and look at lessons learnt. They will investigate cases to find the details and implications e.g. time and money lost.  There is a short-term plan to work with residents and tenant engagement groups; bring people into the office so that they can look at processes and comment. The next meeting is due to take place in January.  The perception is that people are generally happy with repairs but are dissatisfied with the communications beforehand and the time taken to complete jobs. There were two thousand feedback messages last month and the lowest scores are being looked at.  The group reported that sometimes operatives arrived unprepared as the full details of the job had not been recorded.  They also thought that notification could be better and that further messages should be sent if an operative were going to be late or not able to come at all.  This is on the radar and will be looked at as part of the review which includes:   * Priority will be given to vulnerable people. * Budgetary meetings are taking place to concentrate resources where needed. * Data gathering around the type of queries to help with the process. * Communication is key and this will be looked at. * Both Housing areas will work closely together, and John will act as liaison between Nigel and Sarah and the team. * Repairs policies and tenant handbooks are being re-written to clearly define expectations. * The service will become more flexible and will change constantly to meet demand.   The group asked if there would be sufficient resources to prevent a repairs backlog building up again once the contractors finished.  John confirmed that resources could cover new work and that the backlog was the issue.  Damp and mould is the biggest issue. In future when operatives visit a property, they will conduct an inspection and report any issues found. They may not be able to complete the work at that point, but the report will have been logged and will be followed up.  The group thought that more messaging was needed, around damp and mould to make tenants aware that they should highlight issues.  Home checks will also be used to identify issues and can be used for conveying messaging.  Chair - Thanked John for the presentation of the Improvement Plan and looks forward to future updates around progress. | | |  | |
| 5 | **TLSG Year to Date Review**  Following an evaluation conducted by TPAS the TLSG decided to review how it will work going forward. The group looked at ways to improve best practises and how to build and strengthen partnerships with the council.  A document has been produced and will be reviewed regularly as the group progresses.  New Terms of Reference have been developed for the TLSG and for the Tenant Auditors Group.  Chair gave an overview of the activities undertaken by the TLSG during 2024.  The focus was the priorities of the Housing Strategy 23 – 2028 beginning with *Quality Housing for All*  The first priority was review of the results of the stock condition survey, but this had to be put on hold due to insufficient data.  The group looked instead at **Housing Disrepair (HDR)** Claims.  A presentation was given to the group by Inderpreet Jagpal, the HDR process was scrutinised and recommendations made.   * Residents to be made aware that a complaints process exists within the council and how to access this. * Residents to be encouraged to engage with the council in the first instance and use SBMC complaints process rather than contacting a solicitor straight away. * To create a user-friendly guide for educating tenants in the pre-action protocols stage of litigation. * Tenants to be made aware of the implications of making a claim. The balance must be right so that tenants make informed decisions, but the council cannot be seen to direct people. * Council officers to use data around an issue to find out if it is replicated elsewhere in a building or estate and be more proactive.   Departments are working together to improve the system.  Jim Brennan presented the **Good Neighbourhood policy** at a previous meeting and the group provided feedback.   * Requested clarity on the support for people with disabilities * How will the policy work if only applied to new tenants. To whom will the policy apply?   More work is being done and the recommendations will be considered, and this will be brought back to the group.  **Rent and Service Charge Increases**  Members of the group met with the Income Management team to discuss the proposed rent increases and service charges. Sonia Ward and Kelly Robinson presented the proposals and comments and suggestions from the group were reflected in the final report.  **Leaseholders**  Ian Carpenter from the Home Ownership Team has been in touch to set up a leaseholder conference, possibly in March, and asked if there was anything of concern that should be added to the agenda. A member of the group suggested including services charges. Also, the cost implications to leaseholders of fire door roll out and how that can be managed.  There has been more regular interaction between leaseholder groups and the Home Ownership Team, and this was seen as positive.  A standing item will be included in the TLSG agenda to update on leaseholder engagement.  The TLSG have the opportunity to engage with other tenants and leaseholders at the **Tenants Conference.**  The group also gave feedback on the **Annual Report.** They requested more notice going forward to allow more time to read and digest the information.  Regular updates have been requested on **Damp and Mould** and this will remain on the tracker for further updates.  **Future activities** will include   * Continuing to monitor *Quality Homes For All* agenda * Track progress of the implementation of agreed recommendations.   The tracker is filed on the Teams page.   * Work with SMBC Housing to agree expected outcomes from improvement activities * To receive regular updates of Housing engagement with tenants, particularly regarding young people * Provide feedback on the policies that are being developed   Chair expressed thanks to Nigel and Sarah for their transparency in allowing the group to have sight of policies even in the initial stages of development.  The Asset management strategy was approved at Cabinet last week and will be circulated to the group.  Chair also thanked the group for all their hard work during the year and hoped that collaborative work would continue to progress in the coming year. | | |  | |
| 6. | **Tenant Engagement Framework**  The Tenant Engagement Framework update document was circulated and discussed at the meeting.  **Tenant Audit Programme**  The Tenants Auditor Group are finalising the anti-social behaviour (ASB) audit, and the report will be circulated shortly.  Nigel advised the group that an independent consultant had carried out a health check of the ASB service and a meeting was held 13 December looking at improvements. The Tenant Auditor group report will be included in the action plan.  **Building Safety Board**  The Building Safety Plan is still in progress. A tenant member is still required for the board. It was suggested by a member of the group that a tenant Champion could join the board. Officer group continues to meet to ensure Sandwell is prepared for implementation of all legal requirements  **Resident Building Safety**  The Building Safety forum took place on 27 November and seven tenants attended. Tony Thompson Fire Safety, Facilities & Premise Manager joined the meeting and covered many aspects.  CCTV roll out was discussed.  In the long term the meetings will be tenant led and they will set the agenda.  Meetings are scheduled every six weeks until June. The times and days of the week will be varied to make meetings more inclusive.  A team of five building safety managers is being appointed. They and a team leader will take responsibility for specified blocks and be the point of contact for residents regarding building safety.  **Consultations**  Feedback from the mobility scooter consultation has been collated and recommendations have been pulled out including developing a policy that relates to e-scooters and e-bikes.  Concern was raised regarding e-scooters filtering into Sandwell from Birmingham. The impact on the wider estate will be looked at but for the moment the focus will be on scooters in properties.  Currently consultations are underway in relation to, the Domestic Abuse Policy, Tenancy Fraud Policy, and Tenancy Sustainment Policy  A workshop with tenants is also due to take place on 6 December 2024, which will contribute to the drafting of a new Repairs Policy.  **Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPS)**  Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans have been transferred to housing Management and will form part of the Home Checks. Training has been completed. Priority will be given to people living in high rise buildings. Guidance and support will be offered to people in low rise buildings, but they will not have a PEEP for the time being.  The information held in the box onsite will be details of the property and will state the resident is vulnerable but will not state the name or the nature of the disability.  **Repairs**  A workshop with tenants took place on 6 December 2024, this will contribute to the drafting of a new Repairs Policy. A follow up meeting will be held 6 January.  **Tenant & Resident/Community Groups – Delivered by SCIPS**  In September SCIPS arranged a special meeting for the chairs and vice chairs of those TRAs based in high-rise blocks. This was to update them on legislative changes and provide them with an opportunity to raise any issues with SMBC Tenant Engagement Officer.  A networking meeting also took place in October 2024 again supported by SMBC staff.  A survey is currently underway to measure the satisfaction levels of SCIPS members.  A new model constitution for Tenants and Residents Associations has been agreed.  **Staffing**  Bal Dhillon has been appointed as a new Tenant Engagement Officer (fixed term)  Two permanent Tenant Engagement Officer Posts have been established and the recruitment process has commenced.  **Upcoming Activity**   * Arrange for the newly appointed Tenant Engagement Officer to meet the groups * Recruitment to vacancy in TLSG * Recruitment of new members to TAG * Review and of the Resident Engagement Strategies including consultation with residents * Further workshops for housing staff relating to resident engagement * Consultation on the draft repairs policy * Completion of the webpage to highlight the work being done by Tenants and Residents, including TLSG, TAG, TRAs and other community activities to be progressed * Tenant Engagement Officers x 2 to be appointed | | | CD | |
|  | The formal part of the meeting was concluded. | | |  | |
|  | **Date of next formal meeting:** - 22 March 2025 | | |  | |