



HMB Annual Review 2015/16

Message from the Chair

Welcome to the Housing Management Board's (HMB) Annual Review 2015-16

Since our inception as a fully operating board in June 2014 we have had a very busy two years. The board has been absorbing a great amount of information about all aspects of local government housing; including financial, operational and strategic.

The three tenants and one leaseholder on the board have proved invaluable by offering a customer perspective of housing. Whilst the councillors have a different way of looking at things we also do expect a great deal of our officers and they invariably rise to the occasion. The three groups work together well to find an agreed way forward.

Two 'new' councillors, Michelle Gardner and Sarah Mead joined the board in May 2015 and we are about to welcome a 'new' tenant member to replace Gervase Muller, who retired due to ill health. We would like to take this opportunity to thank Gervase for his work and support for the HMB and wish him well in the future.

Our new members of the board have not had the benefit of the extensive training the original members undertook together. As a consequence we feel the need to spend a day together this year, reevaluating our position, our constitution and cementing the relationship between the tenant, leaseholder, councillor and staff members. This will help ensure that we all know and understand what we, as a board, are seeking to achieve. This work is especially significant with the demise

of the councillor run Housing Scrutiny Panel as we want the board to discuss how they can do more than simply comment on the present housing situation.

The board's aim is to become a knowledgeable, reasoned and reliable source of opinion to assist the Executive Councillor for Housing and the Executive committee to arrive at the best possible decisions for housing in Stevenage. We want to help ensure that these decisions include the views of tenants, leaseholders, the councillors and council staff.

At the same time I see us as a link between the tenants and the council, situated between the Executive and the Customer Scrutiny Panel. This relationship has proved that information needs to flow well in both directions for effective decision making.

I would like to pay tribute to the Customer Scrutiny Panel, who have become experts at evaluating aspects of council housing in Stevenage and I look forward to working more closely with them in the coming year.

I am looking forward to planning for the HMB's future and moving on into the next year with a clear focus. I hope you enjoy this report.

Councillor Carol Latif
Chair of the Housing Management Board



Introduction

It was agreed by Council in late 2013 to set up the Housing Management Board (HMB) as part of the council's governance structure. Following a recruitment process for the HMB members and debate on the objectives and remit of the HMB, terms of reference were agreed. The principle behind the HMB was to ensure council tenants and leaseholders could have real impact at a strategic level on how council housing services are delivered.

Setting up the HMB links to the registered housing provider's regulator, the Homes and Communities Agency, and the 'regulatory standards' that all registered housing providers must meet. The 'tenant empowerment and involvement standard' emphasises the concept of 'co-regulation' and seeks to ensure that landlords work with their tenants and are held to account by them. This is achieved through strong tenant involvement and tenant scrutiny of housing services. Involving tenants and leaseholders is also associated with the principles behind the Localism Act 2011, which emphasises the principle of involving local people in decision making.

The Housing Management Board also embodies the partnership element of the 'co-operative council' principles, by encouraging joint discussion, debate and a level playing field between the HMB members who comprise of elected members, customers, including leaseholders and senior housing staff.

Following recruitment and full training, the Housing Management Board started to operate fully in June 2014. Early meetings concentrated on providing the HMB with a broad range of information to allow the HMB to have reasoned debate on strategic housing issues.

The draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan and budgets for 2015/16 were key documents for the HMB to influence. Discussion more recently has included work on mitigating the implications of the government's announcement to reduce rents by 1% for the next four years.

Training programme for the original HMB members

Topic	Outcomes	Length
Introduction to the Housing Management Board <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet the HMB • Overview/background to the HMB • Terms of reference for the HMB • Training programme • Personal Development Plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet the other members of the group • Understand the background and why the HMB has been set up • Begin to consider the skills set needed for the HMB role 	2.5 hours
Budgets and Housing Revenue Account <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget setting in Stevenage - an introduction • What is the Housing Revenue Account (HRA)? • Rents and service charges • Revenue and capital budgets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve understanding of budget setting and the HRA in Stevenage • Improved understanding of how budgets are set • Develop understanding of accounts and financial statements • Understand variances 	2.5 hours
Team Building Day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build relationships • Develop vision for HMB • Develop group dynamics 	Half-day
Risk Management & Business Planning Risk management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role of the HMB in the context of risk management • Relationship with SMT • Role of internal audit • Where the organisation is now and where they want to get to? • Risk management based approach to internal control • Managing risk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the application of risk management in organisations, the HMB's role and responsibility with respect to its use • Identify top 10 risks • Agree risk assessment 	2.5 hours
Business Planning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Values and vision • Objectives • Environment • Priorities • Using a business plan • Link between plan and budget • Link between plan and performance indicators 	Feed into 30 year business plan for SBC	Half-day
Governance, democracy and performance management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop knowledge of council's governance arrangements and how the HMB fits in • Learn about Balanced Scorecard • Learn about Key Performance Indicators 	2.5 hours

Topic	Outcomes	Length
Housing and Housing Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tenancy management • Lettings • Estate Management • Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) • Homeownership • Homelessness and housing advice • Tenancy support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop overview of how core housing service operates • Build understanding of bigger picture around housing 	2.5 hours
Study tour, asset management & repairs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tour of stock • Stock condition survey • What does the stock need? • Managing major works programme • Long term maintenance • Partnering • Controlling costs • Using resources effectively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build understanding of stock profile and location • Build understanding of investment challenges/priorities • Gain skills to assess asset management arrangements and question officers appropriately 	Half-day
Diversity and Equal Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislation • Examine values and attitudes • Strategy and policy • Putting it into practice in the workplace for staff and service users 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raised level of awareness, fluency and skill to generate more effective thinking, language and practices • Able to implement strategic and practical ideas to address equalities challenges faced in the workplace • Develop action plans to take leadership role 	2.5 hours



HMB Membership

Membership of the HMB comprises of:

- Four residents, including three council tenants and one resident council leaseholder
- Five councillors, including one opposition member
- Three senior housing officers.

Each councillor is selected by his/her political group and new HMB members are usually appointed to the HMB by the council in May. The three members of staff usually include the roles of Assistant Director of Housing; Head of Housing Management and Head of Asset Management. Resident members of the HMB are appointed to the Board following a recruitment and interview process.

Aims and objectives of the HMB

The main aims and objectives of the HMB were set in 2014 and agreed at the inaugural meeting of the HMB. They state that the HMB will:

- Be the principal advisory body for all council housing related matters for Stevenage Borough Council (SBC).
- Embed the principle of partnership working between customers, staff and councillors within Stevenage Borough Council.
- Make recommendations, within their remit, to the portfolio holder for housing, the council's Executive and full council where appropriate.
- Participate in the Housing Revenue Account budget setting process and make recommendations to the Portfolio Holder for housing and the Executive.
- Participate in and continually review all policies and strategies relevant to the management and delivery of council homes within the borough of Stevenage.

The HMB have been operating for 18 months and during this time both the housing team and the council as a whole have faced unprecedented challenges and change. Government policy announcements in 2015, such as the 1% rent cut for four years, have had a major impact on the HRA Business Plan and budgets. Recent changes in strategic housing staff and the recruitment of a new Chief Executive officer responsible for all council functions have led to changes in focus for both the council as a whole and in the plans for managing and developing council housing. The Future Town, Future Council focus helps strengthen the role of HMB and provides new areas of work with new council home development.

The HMB agreed this was an opportune time to reflect on the first 18 months of HMB and to plan for the future.

Under the terms of reference the HMB are also expected to:

- Promote good practice and overseeing housing service improvements
- Monitor performance on housing management activities and report to Executive
- Get involved in preparing the Housing Revenue Account budget and Business Plan
- Promote tenant and leaseholder involvement
- Monitor implementation of the Resident Involvement Strategy 2015/18
- Encourage good practice in relation to equality and diversity issues
- Advise on any other matters affecting the council's landlord duties and responsibilities.

Reports to the HMB and outcomes

The HMB receives regular reports, such as:

- Housing Delivery Plan quarterly monitoring
 - Performance reports quarterly monitoring
- Information/update reports, such as:
- » Anti-social behaviour – new powers
 - » Pin Green Redevelopment Project update
 - » Housing development updates.

Alongside this, all reviews of (or new) housing strategies and policies are discussed by the HMB before they are agreed by Executive. During Executive debate, the HMB comments are considered, and more recently the Chair of the HMB has a standing invite to Executive meetings.

This table shows the impact of HMB's work and the outcomes during 2015/16:

Item taken to the HMB	Outcome
Housing Energy and Sustainability Strategy and Plan	Went to Executive and the HMB comments were noted. Further minor amendments made and agreed by Executive.
Customer Scrutiny Panel - review of caretaking services	Staff to draft an improvement plan – this was followed by a full review of this service.
Resident Involvement Strategy 2015/18	The HMB were involved in reviewing the strategy, which was agreed by Executive.
CSP review of regular tenant satisfaction surveys	Recommendations on hold due to changes proposed at the Building Maintenance Operation (BMO).
Major refurbishment contract	The HMB agreed the principle of a one contractor approach.
Lettable standard and core void process	The HMB noted the reports.
Homelessness Strategy	The HMB agreed the draft, which was then agreed by Executive.
CSP review of aids and adaptations	Recommendations are on hold due to changes proposed at BMO.
BMO proposals for the service	The HMB supported the proposals and have a role in monitoring the action plan. This was agreed by Executive.
Review of allocations scheme	Agreed by Executive following HMB comments.
Rent and Service Charge Policy	Agreed by Executive.
Flat block contract 2017	The HMB noted the timetable.

Work Planning

At an away day in January 2015, the HMB reflected on the first six months and agreed their work plan for 2015/16. HMB members also met the Customer Scrutiny Panel and Housing Forum members and discussed joint working opportunities and communication.

It was noted that HMB receive a great deal of information and reports that sometimes the challenges felt quite overwhelming.

In the past eight months nearly half (42%) of the HMB members have changed:

- Two of the five councillor members have been replaced after elections
- Two of the three staff members have been replaced following staff changes
- One tenant stood down due to ill health and the recruitment for a new tenant member is close to finalising.

As these changes took place over a short period of time, induction briefings took place instead of the extensive training the original members received.

The HMB workshop February 2016

A HMB workshop took place in February 2016 – this was attended by all members of the HMB and the group reflected on the HMB and discussed:

- What has worked well?
- What could make the HMB even better?
- Are these aspirations achievable?

The responses to these questions form the basis for the recommendations in this report.

What worked well?

1. Support for the HMB

- The Council Leader's support for the HMB
- Developing how the HMB make recommendations and reports to Executive and staff
- The HMB's participation in setting HRA budgets and the HRA Business Plan
- The HMB's input into policy reviews
- The support the HMB gets at meetings
- The HMB training and development
- The Chair attending the January Executive to give the HMB's report personally
- Performance reports are well understood
- The healthy challenge by residents
- The leasehold voice is heard
- The joint away day with Customer Scrutiny Panel (CSP) and Housing Forum encouraged joint working
- Tenant as Chair and then Vice Chair has encouraged their participation
- The HMB members really care about housing and want to make a difference.

2. Working together

- Partnership working
- Networking before meetings
- Developing how the HMB make recommendations and reports to Executive and staff
- The HMB's participation in setting HRA budgets and the HRA Business Plan
- The HMB's input into policy reviews
- Working with Customer Scrutiny Panel at a joint away day
- Attendance is good, ensuring a quorum

What would make the HMB better?

- Developing clear terms of reference that all the HMB members sign up to
- Developing the link to clearly show the HMB as an advisory body for Executive
- Improving communication and feedback between the HMB and Executive
- Improving the link from the HMB to the Portfolio Holder
- Reinvigorating members enthusiasm and commitment to positive outcomes
- Revisiting training needs
- The HMB being more proactive and innovative in coming up with solutions
- Summer meeting walkabouts instead of a meeting
- Using case studies to make it more real
- Developing feedback mechanisms for the HMB to report to other involved groups
- Holding the HMB pre-meetings to discuss some reports
- Improving the link and communication with CSP
- Develop effective communication with housing customers

Recommendations for the future

1. Review the HMB terms of reference

The HMB's current terms of reference were developed during the set-up of the group and a cursory look at the document during the February HMB meeting highlighted that a review is needed. It is good practice for groups to review their terms of reference and their performance periodically. This ensures they are operating at maximum effectiveness and that objectives remain relevant and achievable.

Developing a clear shared vision with the current HMB membership would help improve both the HMB member's commitment and confirm to Executive what the HMB's role is. This will help strengthen HMB's focus and explain to the outside world what the HMB does and why. The Leader, Executive and housing portfolio holder should be involved in this review to ensure everyone understands:

- Who the Housing Management Board are
- What they do, what they stand for and why do they do it
- Who they report to and how the feedback mechanisms work.



2. The HMB to work together to develop an agreed work plan for 2016/17

The HMB worked together to develop their first work plan and this helped the group develop into a team and grow into a trusting and co-operative group. This meant the original group members were more likely to take risks, ask questions, and share ideas.

This level of co-operation is essential to group effectiveness and is frequently associated with enhancing a group's sense of purpose and improving their performance. The HMB could link their priorities to the corporate 'Future Town, Future Council' priorities and in particular priority nine; 'excellent council homes for life'.

3. Strengthen links and communication between the HMB, the Executive and the Executive Member for Housing

Recent work to improve the link to Executive has resulted in a much clearer process in relation to how and when housing service reports and documents are discussed and agreed.

Executive and the HMB meeting dates have been set up for 2016/17 and the timing of this will allow time for the HMB to receive reports in the first instance and forward their comments to Executive. The outcomes are recorded in the Executive 'notice of decisions', which goes online.

The relationship and formal communication between the HMB with Executive and the Executive Member for Housing need more clarity and should be jointly agreed.

It would improve relationship and understanding if Executive reported directly to HMB on their decisions – particularly those areas/policies where the HMB have been involved and commented. The Chair of HMB attending Executive to provide the HMB report would solve this problem, as feedback to the HMB on the Executive decision would be immediate.

Alternatively this link could be via committee's staff, regular reports from Executive or by a report from the Executive Member for Housing.

4. Strengthen communication and links between the HMB and Customer Scrutiny Panel

Both HMB and CSP have asked for more communication and stronger links between the two groups. The HMB could discuss and agree to monitor the action plans following CSP reviews (these are based on CSP's recommendations) Alongside this the HMB and CSP could work on at least one joint project a year.

5. Develop a fit for purpose induction process for all new HMB members

The team dynamic has been mentioned in this report and a fuller induction for new members and a firmer 'buddy up' agreement would help new team members to grasp the role and the focus of the HMB from the outset. This induction should be for all new HMB members.

A training needs analysis should take place annually which should focus on the softer team and communication skills, as well as the more practical performance and business planning skills. This would help the group to work together effectively as a team.

6. Develop a training/briefing programme

Consider linking HMB into the modern member's councillor sessions? This would ensure that the tenants, leaseholder and staff are trained to the same level as the councillors. This could further strengthen the links and communication between the HMB and Executive.

A session on HMB and CSP could be held for all councillors. A 'meet the HMB and CSP' session would give councillors a flavour of the impact that this level of involvement has on housing services.

An annual joint work planning event between the HMB, CSP and Executive should be considered to allow for joint work planning and training needs analysis.

7. Develop effective ways to communicate the HMB outcomes

HMB is listed on the council website under council meetings. But the minutes and photos are held in the housing section on the website, under the resident involvement. It is recommended that a link between these minutes and photos be published.

Alongside the HMB minutes on the website, it is recommended that a notice of decisions is uploaded after HMB and Executive meetings. This would clearly show the link to how councillors and key staff are working co-operatively with tenants and leaseholders. A record of the debate and agreements made on each housing policy, strategy and service report should be included.

The tenant and leaseholder role in these decisions should be communicated widely. This could be publicised in the tenant annual report, but an interim report (such as this HMB annual report) could be produced and advertised online, in the CSC and at involved resident group meetings and events.



For further information on the HMB and its activities please contact them by email on **housingmanagementboard@stevenage.gov.uk** or via the resident involvement team on 01438 242183 or **residentinvolvement@stevenage.gov.uk**

Housing Management Board members at 10 April 2016

Carol Latif – councillor member and Chair

Cathy Govey - tenant member and Vice Chair

Phil Bibby – councillor member

Jaine Cresser – staff member

Michelle Gardner – councillor member

Liz Harrington – councillor member

Sarah Mead – councillor member

Peter Nourse – staff member

Jon Thurlow – leaseholder member

Neil Wilson Prior – staff member

Vacancy - tenant member