

Minutes of Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board

**2 August 2022 at 5.45pm
In Committee Room 1 - Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Present: Councillors Fenton (Chair), Akhtar (Vice Chair), Ashman, Bhullar, Fisher, Jalil, Kaur, Lewis, Shaeen and Webb.
Phillippe Brown (Co- opted Member and Chair Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group)

Also present: Shefa Nessa (Vice Chair – Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group)
Gillian Douglas (Director – Housing), Nigel Collumbell (Service Manager – Housing), Marianne Munro (Community Partnerships Officer).

09/22 Apologies for Absence

No apologies were received.

10/22 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 31 March 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.

11/22 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

12/22 Urgent Additional Items of Business

There were no urgent additional items of business to consider.

Annual Report for Housing Tenants 2021- 22

The Board received the **Annual Report for Housing Tenants 2021- 22.**

The purpose of the report was to feed back to tenants on the performance and management of the housing service. The report also incorporated detail on departmental expenditure, building safety and tenant engagement. Priorities for the year ahead were also set out, which enabled tenants to hold the service to account over the next 12 months.

The Council had not produced such a report in recent years, however, it was considered best practice so would be produced annually in future. Whilst some benchmarking with other local authorities had taken place, the final report produced was unique to Sandwell.

The report had been produced by a small editorial panel made up of council officers and one tenant representative. The Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group and Sandwell Community Information and Participation Service had been consulted on the draft.

The Board was advised that the report had been compiled and published rapidly, to ensure that the data was not outdated at the time of publication. As such information from the annual statement of accounts had not been captured but would be published alongside the report as soon as it was available.

From the comments and questions by members of the Board, the following responses were made, and issues highlighted:-

- By 2030 all homes would have to be Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rated A, B or C. 50% of properties did not currently meet this standard, however, this was based on assumptions based on housing types so stock a condition survey was being undertaken.
- Achieving zero carbon was unaffordable currently, but the Council had received (matched) funding for the retro-fitting of 129 properties in 2021/22 from the

Combined Authority's Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund.

- Market difficulties in terms of rapidly increasing costs, supply chain difficulties and a shortage of suitably qualified staff was also a factor.
- The Council was unable to build new homes fast enough to replenish the stock lost via the Right to Buy scheme.
- Difficult decisions would be required in the future to manage the rising cost of living, as well as the cost of upgrading properties. Effective communication with tenants was crucial, along with educating them to manage their homes differently.
- Around 8,000 requests a month were received for repairs, which were prioritised according to need. There continued to be a backlog as a consequence of the pandemic, however, telephone waiting times had reduced significantly. Monthly performance data was presented to the Cabinet Member.
- Market factors and rapidly increasing costs presented challenges when procuring contractors.
- 16 apprentices had been taken on to help with workforce challenges.
- A 30 year business plan for housing was in development to try and address some of the challenges outlined.
- Underspend from 2021/22 would be re-invested in the service as this was money that had not been spent due to the pandemic and lockdown measures.
- The vast majority of anti-social behaviour complaints were resolved with low level action; however it was acknowledged that communication in this area needed to improve.
- It was rare for the Council to evict a tenant, and the focus was on addressing behaviours to sustain tenancies.

14/22

Tenant Engagement and Participation Update

Further to Minute No. 6/21 (of the meeting held on 25 November 2021), the Board received a progress update on the efforts to support tenant scrutiny.

Expressions of interest had been received from around 200 tenants, which had led to 56 applications. The Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group consisted of eight tenants and two leaseholders, however, there would be various opportunities for those remaining tenants that had expressed an interest to be involved in engagement in both the short and long term. The Chair of the Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group was a co-opted member of the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board and the Chair of the Board attended the Group's meetings, to provide a two way link between the two bodies.

Since the Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group had been established, its members had received induction training, agreed governance structures, terms of reference, standing orders, code of conduct and appointed its Chair and two Vice Chairs.

The Board noted the activity of the Group to date, and the activities that had led to the development of its work programme for 2022/23. The Group would be undertaking reviews on the following key areas, and reporting back to the Board with any recommendations arising:-

- Housing Hub/ Contact Centre
- Home Checks
- Building Safety
- Responsive repairs and customer satisfaction

Through the Care Leavers Forum a project had been developed with a voluntary sector partner, Krunch, to work with care leavers around stigma and attitudes. Whilst some care leavers had expressed an interest, further work was being undertaken to ensure that their needs would be met in terms of the level of commitment. The Group was building a relationship with the Care Leavers Forum.

Members congratulated officers and the Chair of the Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group for their efforts and commitment. Members of the Scrutiny Board would be invited to attend a future meeting of the Group.

15/22

Cabinet Forward Plan

The Board received the Cabinet Forward Plan.

Resolved that the following items be added to the Board's work programme 2022/23:-

- The Appropriation of Various Disused Former Garages in the Borough (private item).
- Provision of new council homes at Garratts Lane, Cradley Heath.

16/22

Work Programme 2022-23

The Board noted its work programme for 2022/23, which had been developed following a work programming event for all scrutiny boards on 13 June 2022.

Additional meetings would be held as required to ensure that the work programme was completed.

Resolved that (in addition to the items referred to at Minute No 15/22 (above) the following items be added to the Board's 2022/23 work programme:-

- Co-ordination of the third sector to support residents with the cost of living crisis.
- Enforcement activity relating to anti-social behaviour.

Meeting ended at 7.26pm

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk