

DERBY HOMES LIMITED

MINUTES OF THE OPERATIONAL BOARD MEETING

Held on Thursday 27 April 2017

The meeting started at 6.00 pm

Operational Board Members present:

Paul Bayliss, Jim Elks, Tony Holme, Samantha Hudson (arrived at 7.10 pm), Bob MacDonald (Chair), Dennis Rees, Jsan Shepherd and Anna Skrobisz.

Officers present:

Steve Bayliss, Murray Chapman, Julie Eyre, Chris Forrester, Sonia Hardy, Andy Higginbottom, Richard Holman, Andrew McNeil, Clare Mehrbani, Jackie Mitchell, Sophie Reynolds, Daniel Robertson.

17/26 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Andrew Berresford, Richard Bruford, Elastus Mwaba and Jackie Westwood.

17/27 Admission of late items

Operational Board Attendance

The Chair introduced a late item regarding the rule for attendance at meetings. The Governance Manager explained that currently there was no rule set for Operational Board Members. The rule for the main Board is that any Board Member who is absent for any 3 meetings in a rolling 12 month period is automatically removed from the Board.

The Operational Board was asked to consider whether they wished to adopt the same rule as the main Board or they could suggest an alternative.

The general consensus was that 3 absences out of 6 meetings a year was reasonable.

The Governance Manager offered to produce an attendance update at every meeting so that Operational Board Members would be aware of their attendance levels.

The matter will be discussed at the next Governance Committee.

Agreed

The Operational Board agreed that they wished to adopt the same rule as the main Board.

17/28 Declarations of interests

The Council Board Member was noted as declaring their interest in matters relating to Derby City Council.

The Tenant and Leasehold Board Members declared their interests as tenants and leaseholders (as defined in the Memorandum and Articles of Association) of Derby City Council.

17/29 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on the 23 February 2017 were accepted as a true and accurate record.

17/28 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

17/29 Questions from members of the public

There were no questions from the public.

17/30 Financial Inclusion & Capability Strategy

The Operational Board received a presentation and report on a new Financial Inclusion & Capability Strategy for 2017- 2020.

The Financial Inclusion and Capability Strategy set out why Derby Homes is committed to working with partners to improve residents' ability to manage their money and how Derby Homes currently supports residents and what the future priorities are for tackling financial exclusion.

The presentation was very well received by the Operational Board.

Tenants who are not fully knowledgeable of IT will be supported by Derby Homes and existing annual digital campaigns advising tenants of what is available will build on this and the Income Team will be working with Derby Advice to establish how we can move forward to help all Derby citizens.

Agreed

The Operational Board approved the Financial Inclusion & Capability Strategy 2017-2020.

17/31 Part B Supplementary Questions.

Questions relating to items on Part B of the agenda were raised prior to the meeting and are attached at Appendix 1.

17/32 Operational Board Forward Plan

The Operational Board received a copy of the forward plan of items for future meetings.

Agreed

The Operational Board noted the forward plan.

17/33 Estates Maintenance Small Scale Bids 2017-18

The Operational Board received a report requesting approval of two Estates Maintenance bids above £10,000.

1. replacement CCTV system on the Old Sinfen estate.
2. request from Derby City Council Parks to match fund a grant from Sport England for improved lighting at Alvaston Park BMX track.

A suggestion was made that the Police be asked to monitor the CCTV; this would be possible as the system is 4G enabled.

There was general support for the funding for lighting at the BMX Track but a formal request made for around 5000 vouchers for free coaching sessions for tenants.

It was felt that Derby Homes' overall financial support for this work should be publicly acknowledged.

Andrew McNeil informed that the national BMX championship will be taking place in August on the Alvaston track and that we can ask for publicity on the day. He also noted that our tenants do use the track, and we will want more to use it in the future. This bid will ensure its use is maximized moving forward.

Murray Chapman proposed that the Operational Board considers investment in CCTV in other areas on Derby Homes' estates at a future meeting.

Agreed

The Operational Board approved

1. the bid for the replacement CCTV system on the Old Sinfin estate
2. the bid from Derby City Council Parks to match fund a grant from Sport England for improved lighting at Alvaston Park BMX Track.

17/34 Welfare Adaptations Policy

The Operational Board received a report outlining amendments to the Welfare Adaptations policy.

The policy provides the means of support required to assist the most vulnerable and disabled Derby Homes' tenants to live as independently in their homes as they can. It has been updated to reflect the changing profiles of Derby Homes' tenants.

The proposed policy increased the standard maximum threshold for welfare adaptations to £10,000 whilst introducing a mechanism for the authorisation of works above this level to be approved by the Head of Housing Investment.

The current £6000 checkpoint figure was put in place a while ago in response to historical over-spends; it has never been a limit, it has always been a checkpoint. A new £10,000 checkpoint was proposed because some works, like wet rooms, ramps and stair lifts, can easily reach the £10,000.

At that point staff may need to explore with senior management if there are other more appropriate options.

When the tenant no longer lives in the property the adaptation can remain in the property although some installations, such as stair lifts, can be removed.

Agreed

The Operational Board approved the revised Welfare Adaptations Policy.

17/35 Local Housing Office Surgeries

The Operational Board received a report proposing that all remaining local office surgeries are closed from 1 July 2017, as they are not a cost effective way to deliver front line customer contact and evidence shows that they are hardly used. Closing surgeries will allow time for a localised push on other service access methods, working with customers as they visit the surgeries in the affected areas between April and June.

The Sussex Circus and Allenton offices are being reviewed as part of a service access review and a report on this review will be brought to the Operational Board later in the year.

The Customer Service Strategy, agreed by the Operational Board, aims to encourage access to services online and moving the emphasis away from phone calls. It is anticipated a new triage of options will cut call times via the Customer Service Team.

The Operational Board asked for call statistics to be provided in order to see if the transformation to online service access is being achieved. An analysis of calls was also requested on the number of calls versus resources and abandoned/repeat calls.

A report will be brought to a future meeting but there will be difficulty obtaining some of the statistics from the system due to ongoing software issues.

Agreed

The Operational Board agreed to close all remaining local office surgeries with effect from week commencing Monday 3 July 2017.

17/36 Heads of Service Update

The Operational Board received a joint report from Heads of Service providing a general overview and update on current issues.

Agreed

The Operational Board noted the report.

17/37 Rent Arrears and Welfare Reform Update

The Operational Board received a report detailing;

- February position on rent arrears.
- Detail of Discretionary Housing Payments.
- Welfare Reforms and how we are mitigating the impacts.

Agreed

The Operational Board noted the report.

17/38 Board Training Programme 2017-18

The Operational Board received a report setting out the Board training programme for 2017-18.

Agreed

The Operational Board noted the report and the programme outlined in appendix 1.

17/39 Tenants Incentive Scheme

The Operational Board received a report providing details of a new tenant's incentive scheme which has been proposed by the Council and approved by Cabinet on 16 March 2017.

Agreed

The Operational Board noted the new policy.

17/40 Draft Minutes of Derby Homes Board meeting held on Thursday 30 March 2017

The Operational Board received the draft minutes of Derby Homes Board meeting on Thursday 30 March 2017.

Agreed

The Operational Board noted draft minutes of Derby Homes Board meeting on Thursday 30 March 2017.

The meeting ended at 7.57 pm.

Date of next meeting:

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 29 June 2017 at 6.00 pm in the Large Training Room at London Road.

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CHAIR

Signed as true and accurate record of the meeting held on Thursday 27 April 2017.

**Operational Board 27 April 2017
Part B Queries**

Item B1 Heads of Service Update

Head of Housing Management - Homeless Reduction Bill

Could we have a bit more information on what is proposed to tackle this issue in the Bill.

The Bill is seeking to amend Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996. Its measures include:

- *An extension of the period during which an authority should treat someone as threatened with homelessness from 28 to 56 days.*
- *Clarification of the action an authority should take when someone applies for assistance having been served with a valid section 21 notice of intention to seek possession from an assured shorthold tenancy.*
- *A new duty to prevent homelessness for all eligible applicants threatened with homelessness.*
- *A new duty to relieve homelessness for all eligible homeless applicants.*
- *A new duty on public services to notify a local authority if they come into contact with someone they think may be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.*

The main thrust of the Bill is to refocus English local authorities on efforts to prevent homelessness.

Head of Repairs

Voids Repairs - is "relate time" a typo or a technical term?

Apologies, this was a typo and should read 'relet time'.

Head of Housing Investment

I note 2000 new doors are to be fitted to improve security. Having just had my shed door in our block forced and my bike stolen I would like to know if there are any plans to include doors to flat communal areas and sheds?

The replacement door programme is predominantly for individual entrance doors. We also pick up other doors such as outhouses/stores where they are timber or are in need of repair and these are replaced. There are blocks where the replacement programme was a different specification and it did not include store doors. We will be happy to respond to this issue and replace these where necessary. The communal main entrances are a door entry system and replacement is done under separate contracts when required.

Item B2 Rent Arrears and Welfare Reform Update

With most tenants on the Benefit Cap falling into arrears what are typical arrears levels, I note discretionary housing payments are around £1000 per claim.

As at 1 March 2017, 130 families in Derby were affected by the Benefit Cap. The loss of income for the benefit cap cases ranges from £0.80 to £160 per week. The total amount per week of potential lost income is approx. £8k and on average each family has lost £62 per week. This represents a significant loss in household income for the individuals concerned, but also accounts for a potential annual equivalent loss of benefit income of approximately £416k. 115 (88%) of the 130 households are currently in arrears with their rent at approximately £54k.

The arrears banding £500- £999.99 has the highest numbers of cases but this is a snapshot as at week 1.

Our Income Advisors are working with tenants who are responding to offers of support and helping them with money advice/budgeting and making applications for DHP's.

Item B4 Tenant Incentive Scheme

- 1. While I support this item I wonder what the plans are to address and help existing tenants who for various reason are reluctant or unable to access digital services. Many older generation tenants like to be able to talk to someone and one neighbour complained to me that it seems impossible to contact the Enquiry Centre (or whatever it is called these days) having given up after several attempts and getting no reply after 15 minutes on the phone.**
- 2. How do you go on if you have not got internet access?**

We will provide support to tenants who have no access to the internet. We believe this number to be quite low now. There is public access in libraries and many of our common rooms. Also many people will access through family and friends. Through our teams we will use mobile devices to assist tenants. On line services are now very common and we aim to support our tenants with access to not just our but all services.

Can you report emergency repairs online?

At the present time we will still promote reporting emergency repairs through the telephone system – and out of hours service. This is not to say this won't change in the future as technology develops.

What if you are on Housing Benefit?

Tenants who receive benefit will be treated the same as self- funders.

How do you claim the money if it is on your rent account is it automatically refunded to tenants?

Tenants will be encouraged to keep the payment on their rent account to offset against required payments. Where required we will refund to bank accounts. This information will be made available to tenants.

How many Tenants are a week in front with their rent?

Currently, 2325 tenants have one week's credit on their account and 129 tenants have £10 or less to make their current rent credit up to one week's rent. 4774 tenants have some credit on their account.

Will the £100.00 just go to making up the weeks rent?

A good proportion of tenants have some form of credit on their rent account so will benefit from all or part of the £100 subject to meeting the criteria.

It is a condition of tenancy to be 1 week's rent in advance so the payment will enable those tenants who are not currently in advance to be so.

Leaseholder Repair Charges

One issue I would like to raise on behalf of Leaseholders either here or as any other business is how we should be charged for repeated repairs where the initial repair fails to rectify the problem. The Leasehold Manager can only pick up what is entered on the "system" and it is then up to the Leaseholder to query the issue, often at least 18 months later when the actual charges land on our doorsteps. There is also an associated issue of the repair description and trying to relate that to the work carried out. This has been prompted by a good case study of blocked drains in Field Avenue but affects all Leaseholders.

Question 1: how we should be charged for repeated repairs where the initial repair fails to rectify the problem.

When our operatives visit a repair they will make an assessment of the work to that needs to be carried on their expert opinion. On some occasions it may be necessary to carry out further works to "fix" an issue. This may be because they did an interim fix before the parts/ materials could be ordered.

The perceived "failure" may not also be same issue that was initially reported and fixed. There is also the potential issue that it may not be obvious what is causing the problem.

For example a roof leak may track along a roof beam and leak through a ceiling in a completely different area of the roof.

Charges are levied for all works undertaken on the assumption they are required, reasonable and have been carried out by a competent employee using their trade, skill and expertise.

However if we do make a mistake and a number of repairs are carried out on a single job we are prepared to discuss a leaseholders concerns and make adjustments to charges when appropriate.

We try to ensure that our service charges are accurate and reasonable, however if you feel that we should not charge for a repair, then you should contact the Leasehold Manager. We will check the charges and if we have made a mistake, we will correct it. If the charge is correct we will explain why.

Where we do not reach an agreement a determination can be made by the Tribunal on matters such as the liability to pay service charges (including improvements), and the reasonableness of those charges.

Question 2: The Leasehold Manager can only pick up what is entered on the "system" and it is then up to the Leaseholder to query the issue, often at least 18 months later when the actual charges land on our doorsteps.

All charges are made in accordance with the lease.

Service Charges

Before the 1 April each financial year Derby Homes will send you an Estimated Service Charge Statement for the forthcoming service charge period of the 1 April to the 31 March. Your statement will provide details of the communal services that Derby Homes carry out at your block. Your statement will also inform you of the estimated annual cost to you as a leaseholder.

The services that apply to your property will vary according to where you live and the type of property you own.

Actual Service Charge Adjustments

The service charge period is from the 1 April to the 31 March each year. At the end of the service charge period Derby Homes has 6 months to prepare your Actual Service Charge statement. Before the 1 October each year we will write to inform you of the Actual costs incurred for providing these services for the last service charge period.

The difference between the estimated and actual service charge costs will be added to your service charge account as either a credit or debit adjustment.

Question 3: There is also an associated issue of the repair description and trying to relate that to the work carried out.

There are a number of variables that come into play here.

The initial report by the tenant/leaseholder may state the incorrect fault.

The recorder of the repair will record the works against the definition given by reporter of the repair.

We use Schedule of Rates (SOR's). On the whole they cover a majority of works undertaken across the industry. They contain both composite and elemental descriptions of works however not every individual task and element of work is recorded as this would have a disproportionate effect. Our operative will redefine the works to the actual job that has been undertaken.

The vast majority of repairs raised come through the Customer Service Centre. We totally understand that the information provided by our tenants and leaseholders is from a non-technical person who may or may not give us accurate information.

There is also the issue that the Customer Service Centre staff may misunderstand what they are being told and record inaccurate information.

We continually work with our staff on our skills to find out and record as accurate information as possible.