

DERBY HOMES LIMITED

MINUTES OF THE OPERATIONAL BOARD MEETING

HELD ON THURSDAY 10 DECEMBER 2015

The meeting started at 6:00 PM

Operational Board Members Present:

Violeta Ekaterinina, Jim Elks, Tony Holme, Dennis Rees, Jsan Shepherd, Mick Whitehead, Bob MacDonald (Chair).

Officers present:

Steve Bayliss, Matt Hands, Andrew McNeil, Clare Mehrbani, Jackie Mitchell, Jackie Westwood, Daniel Robertson, Steve Stokes.

Others Present:

Derby City Council: Stuart Kitchen and Valerie Watson

15/120 Appointment of Operational Board Chair and Vice Chair

Jim Elks and Ian Veitch seconded Dennis Rees in his nomination to appoint Bob MacDonald as the new Operational Board Chair and Jsan Shepherd as the Operational Board Vice Chair.

Agreed

The Operational Board appointed Bob MacDonald as the Operational Board Chair and Jsan Shepherd as the Operational Board Vice Chair for 2015-16.

15/121 Apologies

The Operational Board received no apologies.

15/122 Admission of late items

The Operational Board received no late items.

15/123 Declarations of interests

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

15/124 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the Operational Board meeting held on the Thursday 22 October 2015 were accepted as a true and accurate record.

15/125 Matters Arising

15/111 – At the last meeting, Tony Holme asked why main Board members have IT training funds but Operational Board members don't.

Jackie Mitchel Informed Tony Holme that this will be on the agenda at the next Governance Committee in 2016.

15/113 – The Operational Board had received a report informing of a petition that the Stockbrook local housing office received from residents complaining about the behaviour from another property.

Tony Holme informed the Operational Board that the residents are still not happy at all with the situation; Derby Homes last responded saying it was with the Police and in hand. The residents are now approaching their local Councillors due to the 'problem tenant' still causing nuisance. One elderly leaseholder has placed her property on the housing market as she does not feel safe living there anymore. Only one resident has spoken to someone in the ASB team.

Clare Mehrbani asked if the residents had gone through Derby homes Complaints procedures.

Tony Holme informed that they have not.

Clare Mehrbani asked Tony Holme for all of the tenants contact information and advised that she will arrange for them to be contacted.

15/126 Questions from members of the public

There were no questions from members of the public.

15/127 Items for Partner Organisations

Grounds Maintenance - Chris Fraser from Street Pride was unable to attend. Matt Hands provided a brief update in his absence.

Matt Hands informed that StreetPride are now past the grass cutting season and they are now maintaining the hedges and shrubs which will be finished by the end of February 2016. As they are ahead of their plans they will be able to put some of their workers on maintenance improvement.

Matt Hands informed that they have now completed their second leaf collection and they believe that the third leaf collection will not be necessary due to recent windy weather and hardly any leaves left on the trees, which means their workers who would have done the third collection, will now be able to do other maintenance work in the city.

Matt Hands informed that the first grass cutting of 2016 will be at the start of March.

15/128 Any Items from Part B to be Discussed

The Operational Board agreed to discuss item B1, B3, B5.

15/129 Performance Monitoring Q2

The Operational Board received a report which summarised Derby Homes' performance for quarter two and provided details on the outcome of the half-yearly review of the year-end performance targets.

Valerie Watson noted that the year-end performance targets have already been approved by the Council due to the scheduling of meetings (approved 09.12.2015). But assured Operational Board members that if they aren't happy with the new targets or have any comments, then this will be taken back to the Council.

Tony Holme asked if reducing certain targets would be a risk for Derby Homes.

Clare Mehrbani informed that it would not.

Jsan Shepherd asked why the proposed revised customer satisfaction target of 70% is not higher when the upper quartile is 74%.

Clare Mehrbani explained that the risk would be high for Derby Homes if we were to stretch the target and it would possibly end in the red.

The Chair asked if Derby Homes are encouraging tenants to give satisfaction feedback.

Clare Mehrbani explained that this target is measured when tenants provide feedback via numerous ways such as door step campaigns and that Derby Homes approach them for the feedback and this statistic is the proof which is encouraging.

Tony Holme asked why Derby Homes doesn't consider a more challenging target set at 80%.

Clare Mehrbani noted that for a long time this figure has been poor, so moving forward the risk to red would be high if the target was stretched. She also advised that increasing the target to highly could demotivate staff who are now seeing an increase in tenant satisfaction.

Tony Holme asked if Derby Homes was looking into improving the 30% that is dissatisfied.

Clare Mehrbani said that Derby Homes constantly looks into that 30% to see where improvement can be made and believes that it will get stronger with time.

Dennis Rees questioned the figures for number of tenants seen by money advice for rent arrears.

Jackie Westwood advised that this had been a new service for Derby Homes and she had set a challenging target but now with an income restructure she is feeling positive with it.

Jsan Shepherd asked Jackie Westwood to explain the decreasing eviction figures when rent arrears are on an increase.

Jackie Westwood noted that Derby Homes provides tenants with support early on which avoids evictions in the long run.

Agreed

The Operational Board noted the quarter two 2015/16 performance results and agreed the revised year-end targets for 2015 /16.

15/130 Estates Pride Large Scale Bid – Osmaston Park BMX Track

The Operational Board received a report outlining a request from the Council to match fund planned improvements to the BMX track on Osmaston Park using available Estates Pride funding.

Stuart Kitchen attended and gave an overview and current state of the track. He informed that the funds will have to be spent either way by the end of March 2016 and if the Council have to remove the track the cost will be £2,500.

Mick Whitehead advised of the amount of funds used at the Osmaston Park entrance and said that he believes there is a need for this work to be done to bring people in and improve the area and park. The Impact on young people will be very high and in addition their fitness levels and social skills would increase.

Stuart Kitchen left the meeting so that the Operational Board members could discuss. The Chair informed Stuart Kitchen that he will be informed of the decision as soon as possible.

The Chair asked Matt Hands for his recommendations.

Matt Hands noted he had outlined the pros and cons within the report. He highlighted that in comparison, the £10,000 we would spend against the £1.1M that needs to be spent before March 2016, is very small. Providing the BMX track would provide a great family setting for the public. If we don't do it, the track will close.

Tony Holme said that he believes we should be putting extra funding in to do the skate park too and asked Matt Hands what the maintenance costs for the track will be.

Matt Hands informed that those costs will fall to the Council, and should be minimal for the next decade.

Dennis Rees said that he believes it will be a valuable resource for our tenants.

Andrew McNeil suggested that the Operational Board can suggest a dual recommendation to approve funding for the BMX track and an amount for work to the skate park.

Mick Whitehead highlighted the new homes being built will be full of families and they will benefit from the park.

Jim Elks agreed with Mick Whitehead and said as it is a family park it is needed for the area. The Cotton Lane BMX track is over a mile away which is a barrier for some Osmaston residents who live nearer the park.

Agreed

The Operational Board agreed to provide £15K Estates Pride Large Scale funding towards the regeneration of the Osmaston Park BMX track and a further contribution of £15K towards the cost of other additional work required.

15/131 Sinfin Local Office Reception Services & Surgeries

The Operational Board received a report which reviewed the opening times of the Sinfin Local Housing Office and the number of satellite surgeries provided by the Sinfin Local Housing Office.

Agreed

The Operational Board agreed to recommend the following to the Council:

1. The reduction of opening hours at Sinfin Local Housing Office on a permanent basis.
2. The reduction of satellite surgeries by Sinfin Local Housing Office.

15/132 Governance Update

The Operational Board received an update on governance matters arising following the 26 November meeting of the Derby Homes Board.

Jackie Mitchell advised of a vacancy for an Operational Board Member to join the Audit Committee.

Dennis Rees volunteered to join the Audit Committee.

Agreed

The Operational Board:

1. Noted the changes to membership of the Operational Board.
2. Noted the process for the recruitment of a Tenant Operational Board Member.
3. Nominated Dennis Rees to the Audit Committee.
4. Noted the dates of future meeting of the Operational Board.

15/133 Service Delivery Update

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

Tony Holme asked the following questions before the meeting and the answers we provided by the relevant Heads of Service prior to the meeting.

Housing Management - What software project strands are being looked at?

Project strands currently include Housing Options and Management (HOAMS), Software for Single Homeless Peoples services (RARS), Housing on line (Customer self-service) and Temporary accommodation management. Timescale – RARS and HOAMS Oct 16 – Temp longer.

Bronze accreditation - What benefits accrue from seeking this type of award and what further challenges need to be addressed?

The main benefit of completing the individual challenges within the 10 gold standard challenges is one of service improvement. By completing each challenge, the questions that are asked require an explanation of how Housing Options is meeting the requirements which also need evidence. An example of this would be within the corporate commitment where we are asked whether we are briefing other teams such as social care within Housing Options. This was clearly something that we have been able to demonstrate but it has also highlighted that we need to do more. As a result of this the Housing Options team have been attending team meetings across the Council and updating them on the bond bank and how this might benefit certain groups. There are not any financial benefits from achieving accreditation but there are practice and service improvements that will result from this.

The 10 challenges are:

1. Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services – achieved
2. Actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs
3. Offer a Housing Options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients
4. Adopt a *No Second Night Out* model or an effective local alternative
5. Have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support
6. Develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both clients and landlords
7. Actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme
8. Have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually so that it is

- responsive to emerging needs
9. Not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation
 10. Not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks

Recruitment - Not mentioned but Derby Homes are seeking a new Leasehold Manager - any update?

Interviews for the Leasehold Manager post are being held this Monday 14/12/15.

Gas Servicing etc. - I understand that Leaseholders are not required to have these inspections but had enquired about likely costs if provided by DH. Does DH have any responsibility over Leaseholders who sublet?

Leaseholders are not required to have gas inspections carried out unless they sublet the property. In this case they become the landlord and therefore have to carry one out on behalf of their tenant. Derby Homes have no responsibility over Leaseholders who sublet. We are looking to offer leaseholders the option of DH carrying out gas servicing for leaseholders. The costs are expected to be £51.52 to service one gas appliances and £71.25 to service two appliances. We are looking to give the option of installing other appliances such as gas cookers potentially to leaseholders or tenants.

Dennis Rees asked if we can tell the leaseholders this information. Andrew McNeil advised we will need to check the legality of that.

Void Repairs - Any staffing implications if work load down by a third approx? Although void numbers are down average void costs are up. We are carrying out additional works this year which seems to have pushed up voids costs which includes replacement of gas fires with electric fire suites, extra works carried out on properties managed by YMCA and a general push to ensure properties meet the lettable standard.

We would look to reduce sub-contractor usage initially or the use of agency staff. We have had one staff member leave, one moved to another team and a third staff member on long term sick. To date we have not replaced them or used sub-contractor or agency staff.

This reduction in the number of jobs will be reviewed and if this results in a continuing or long term reduction we will ensure the void team is not over staffed and efficiencies will be made.

New lifts - Leaseholders at Eaton Court have complained about constant breakdowns and delay in getting a replacement. Can we have an update on progress or lack of it? Are leaseholders being charged for each repair?

There is no delay; it simply takes a really long time to get a passenger lift replaced. There's no way around that and no one is to blame.

We only have a handful of passenger lifts in Derby and don't think we've ever had to replace one (certainly not in the 10 years I've been here). So replacement is an exceptional event and while we can and do have contracts in place for things we need regularly, a lift replacement is a true one-off. It's a sizeable procurement, governed by public procurement legislation, and that isn't quick. Leaseholder consultation adds substantial delay at the start and completion of the procurement, but again that's a statutory requirement. Then the lift has to be custom built, so there's a long lead in time - estimated to be 10 weeks from order, but could be longer. All together this makes the process very long.

No one can predict how long a lift will last. It could be 15 or 50 years. Replacement can only be considered when it starts to fail more often and is no longer considered economically maintainable. That doesn't become immediately apparent on any one breakdown; it takes a period of time and failures to establish that replacement is needed. When replacement is needed, all anyone can do is commence the processes, let everyone know and manage the situation as well as possible in the circumstances. I feel that we've all done that. Leaseholders are liable for their share of any maintenance costs. It's not their fault the lift is failing but it isn't anyone's fault. It is, though, the clear responsibility of each flat owner to pay their share of any costs. But in this case Derby Homes has agreed not to re-charge further lift repair costs, but only as a goodwill gesture.

Developments - August - Where have these buildings been demolished?
This was the demolition of the Ashlea building on Coronation Avenue.

Future Developments - Any update on the eyesore that is Duckworth Square?
We are awaiting the Council's appraisal on the options for the site – for leisure/entertainment offer or for housing.

Dennis Rees asked if gas servicing is being provided by a new company. He thought this was being done inhouse but his gas service was provided by Vinshires.

Steve Stokes informed that whilst there is sickness within the gas team they are using an external company.

Dennis Rees asked why gas servicing cannot have an AM or PM specific appointment.

Steve Bayliss informed it is due to staffing and IT limitations.

Jim Elks noted that his recent experience with Alphatrack who test Derby Homes' smoke detectors.

Steve Stokes noted that Derby Homes are looking to provide this service inhouse in the New Year

Agreed

The Operational Board noted the report.

15/134 Rent Arrears and Welfare Reform Update

The Operational Board received a report giving details on;

- October 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 and agreed to continue receiving further update reports.

15/135 Pets Policy Update

The Operational Board received a report updating the implementation of Derby Homes' Pest Policy.

Tony Holme asked the following question before the meeting and the answer was provided prior to the meeting.

What training does staff receive to assist with making any assessment and how consistent is approach across city?

We have tried to be as detailed and prescriptive as possible in the procedure but as with any procedure there will always be some scope for local variation in interpretation. We have not provided direct training on this. However we do have a Housing Management trainer who was involved in developing and writing the procedure. When we introduced the procedure, the trainer attended team meetings to explain it and answer questions and in addition it is normal practice for staff to seek guidance from her if they are not sure about how to interpret the procedure as well of course talking to their Senior Housing Officer. The involvement of the trainer City wide does help to ensure that interpretation is consistent.

Dennis Rees informed that DACP had received complaints from the decorating team regarding tenants with lots of pets and feels the amount of pets must be maintained. Surely the Housing officers should know about this?

Clare Mehrbani advised if there was anything highlighted to the local housing office they would visit the tenants and enforce responsible pet ownership and permits.

Steve Bayliss noted if an operative visits a property which breaches tenancy agreements then they would report it back to housing office teams.

The Chair voiced his concerns around if a pet dies the and the tenant wanted another pet, they wouldn't have to request another permit, which is stated within the report.

Clare Mehrbani advised that that is coming out of the policy and tenants will have to require a new permit if one of their pets died.

Agreed

The Operational Board noted the report and the updated procedure.

15/136 Equalities & Allocations

The Operational Board received a report providing analysis of a snapshot of the Housing Register on 15 October 2015 and the data on Bids (expressions) and Lettings on Derby Homes properties in quarters 1 and 2 (1 April to 30 September 2015).

Agreed

The Operational Board noted the report.

15/137 Homelessness Quarter 2

The Operational Board received a report giving detail on:

- Homelessness Preventions.
- Homelessness Approaches.
- Homelessness Acceptances.

Tony Holme asked the following question before the meeting and the answer was provided prior to the meeting.

The greatest cause is associated with loss of privately rented accommodation - do we understand the reason for this and are we able to prevent it by working with other housing providers?

The loss of Assured Shorthold tenancies is the main reason for accepting a main housing duty under homelessness legislation. We do not know for sure the reasons for the increase although we do ask why notice has been issued during our investigations. We have been advised by landlords that they want the properties for their own use or that of family members; they wish to increase the rent levels above the local housing allowance rate making it unaffordable for the majority of our clients; they need to carry out extensive repairs; they wish to sell the property especially for those who perhaps rented out their properties when the market prices were lower but can now make enough profit without needing to take on the business of being a landlord.

For any household approaching us as homeless we make investigations to ascertain the reasons for the notice and will try to negotiate to maintain the tenancy. Where notice has been issued because of underlying rent payment issues perhaps because a tenant has failed to make a correct housing benefit claim. We have staff who are particularly knowledgeable in housing benefit matters and a good relationship with staff in the revenues team. However, benefit regulations have changed with shorter periods to complete backdated claims, the benefit cap affecting clients and the introduction of Universal Credit that is to be introduced in Derby in January 2016. We liaise closely with colleagues in Housing Standards regarding repair issues and overcrowding and work with any support agencies both voluntary and statutory to avoid people becoming homeless.

Agreed

The Operational Board noted the report and agreed to continue receiving further quarterly update reports.

15/138 Draft Minutes of Derby Homes Board Meeting held on 24 September 2015.

The Operational Board received the draft Minutes of Derby Homes Board meeting on 22 October 2015.

Agreed

The Operational Board noted the draft minutes.

Date of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 25 February 2016 at 6pm

The meeting ended at 7:40 PM.

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CHAIR

Signed as true and accurate record of the meeting held on 22 October 2015.