

Meeting Bath and North East Somerset Local Strategic Partnership Board

Date Tuesday, 8th June, 2010

Time 2.00 - 4.00 pm

Venue Conference Room, - Somer Housing Trust, The Malting

| | Subject | Presenting | Time |
|-----------|--|---------------------|-------------|
| 1. | Meeting Management | | |
| a) | Introductions and apologies for absence: | Cllr Haerberling | 5 |
| | John Bull, Anne Slade, Hilary Neal | | |
| b) | Declarations of Interest | Cllr Haerberling | |
| c) | Setting the Scene | Cllr Haerberling | 10 |
| d) | Note of the meeting of 15th December 2009 | Cllr Haerberling | 5 |
| 2. | Strategy & Policy | | |
| a) | Implications of the Current Position | David Trethewey | 60 |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Covers: (1) Analysis and discussion on the emerging agenda and changing financial situation plus, implications for organisations round the table • Background material: <u>Presentation and discussion</u> • Desired outcomes: LSP Board (1) Has a collective understanding of the challenges and implications for delivery of the Sustainable Community Strategy, (2) Agree actions for the LSP and its constituent partnerships and (3) Give a view of how to communicate this to the broader community | | |
| 3. | Performance & Risk Management | | |
| a) | Somer Community Housing Trust - Inspection Feedback | John Bader | 20 |

| | | | |
|-----------|--|--------------------|----|
| | | & Angela Gascoigne | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Covers: (1) A report on the findings of the Audit Commission Inspection on Somer Community Housing Trust • Background material: <u>Report by the Managing Director on Short Notice Inspection Report, (Appendix 1, Audit Commission Report, Appendix 2, News Release)</u> • Desired outcomes: LSP Board discuss the emerging inspection findings and the requests made to them by Somer Housing Trust | | |
| b) | LSP Dashboard | Annette Pearson | 10 |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Covers: (1) An update across the LSP on: Resources, Updates and Progress and Performance and Risk • Background material: <u>Agenda item 4 LSP Dashboard, (Appendix 1, LSP Board Dashboard, Appendix 2, Audit Commission Letter)</u> • Desired outcomes: LSP Board discuss the dashboard and the implications for each agency / organisation round the table | | |
| 4. | Governance, Other Business & LSP Board Requests | | |
| a) | The Role of the LSP Board - Moving Forward | Sarah Brown | 10 |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Covers: (1) Discussions on the draft LSP Board work plan and terms of reference: • Background material: <u>Agenda item 5 DRAFT LSP Board Work plan and DRAFT LSP Board terms of reference (Appendix 1 – LSP Board Draft Work Plan, Appendix 2 – LSP Board Draft Terms of Reference)</u> • Desired outcomes: LSP Board agree (1) the work plan and (2) terms of reference | | |
| 5. | Any Other Business | Cllr Haeberling | 5 |

Bath & North East Somerset LSP Board

15th December 2009

DRAFT Meeting Minutes

A. Actions arising from 15th December 2009 Meeting

| No | Action | Resp. | Target | Status |
|-----------|--|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| 40 | Redraft LSP Board terms of reference | DTr (SB) | March 10 | Agenda |
| 41 | Include the feedback from the LSP Board in the next draft of the Economic Strategy | JS | March 10 | Completed |

B. Actions outstanding from previous meetings

| No | Action | Resp. | Target | Status |
|-----------|---|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| 39 | A project update to be provided on options for the next stage of the Whiteway project | AT | Jan 10 | 2010 |

C. Detailed note of the meeting

Members Present

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Cllr Francine Haeberling (Chair) | Bath & North East Somerset Council |
| Cllr Paul Crossley | Bath & North East Somerset Council |
| Cllr John Bull | Bath & North East Somerset Council |
| Anne Slade | Avon & Somerset Police Authority |
| Gary Davies | Avon & Somerset Police |
| Rhona MacDonald | Bath & North East Somerset NHS |
| Ros Brooke | Bath & North East Somerset NHS Board Member |
| John Bader | Somer Community Housing Trust |
| Dave Salmon | Avon Fire & Rescue Service |
| Chris Head | Representing the Voluntary & Community Sector |
| Ian Bell | Representing the Business sector |
| Peter Duppa-Miller | Representing Local Communities |

In attendance

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| John Everitt | Bath & North East Somerset Council |
| Renee Smith Gorringe | Government Office South West (substitute for Hilary Neal) |
| Michael Tichelar | Chair of the Compact Board |
| Stan Frith | Chair of the Sustainable Growth Alliance |
| Jeremy Smalley | Divisional Director, Development & Regeneration, Development & Major Projects (for agenda item 4) |
| Simon de Beer | Policy & Environment Manager, Planning & Transport Development (for agenda item 5) |
| Jeremy Damrel | Project Manager, Development & Major Projects (for agenda item 5) |

Officers in attendance

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| David Trethewey | Divisional Director, Policy & Partnerships |
| Annette Pearson | Group Manger, Policy & Partnerships |
| Sarah Brown | Strategy & Plan Manager, Policy & Partnerships |

Apologies for absence

| | |
|-------------|------------------------------|
| Hilary Neal | Government Office South West |
|-------------|------------------------------|

1. Minutes of the previous meeting

The detailed note of the meeting held on 22nd September 2009 was agreed as a correct record.

2. Evolution of the LSP: The Role of the LSP Board

David Trethewey introduced the report and the draft terms of reference. Amendments tabled and agreed to the purpose and accountabilities sections of the draft terms of reference.

A discussion was held on the role of the Board. It was felt that its role was to influence organisations within the Partnership. Several issues remained unresolved and it was agreed that a workshop session in March would be focussed on the detailed role and work programme of the LSP Board.

Agreed that:

- An away day event will be held for the LSP Board at its March 2010 meeting, focussing on: (a) the role of the Board; (b) its relationships with the LSP Executive and the theme delivery partnerships; (c) the key issues across the public service agencies and the Board's approach to them; and (d) its work programme.

Key Actions

- Redraft LSP Board terms of reference (**Action 40**)

3. CAA: The Area Assessment

David Trethewey introduced the report which provided an update on the Audit Commission's Area Assessment findings. A discussion was held over if there were any areas identified in CAA that were common across the West of England area. As each agency works within different geographical

boundaries, it was felt that this was not an easy exercise. However, the effect of the recession on public sector spending and managing the relationship with the community in an environment of changing public services is an issue for the LSP Board to tackle.

Agreed that:

The area assessment is used to improve the work of the Sustainable Community Strategy.

4. Draft Economic Strategy Developed by the Sustainable Growth Alliance

Jeremy Smalley introduced the report and provided some context about the current economic profile of the area. The strategy would help deliver the cross cutting themes of the LAA and would also be used for discussions with Government about securing investment into the area. The strategy would be owned and monitored by the Sustainable Growth Alliance.

The following points were raised for consideration in drafting the strategy:

- How to draw people upwards into the more skilled jobs rather than creating an economy where the gap between low educational attainment / unemployment and the jobs available widens
- How targeted intervention could be used to draw people into work
- More emphasis on social enterprise – particularly in the context of an aging population
- Ensure that the strategy covers all of Bath & North East Somerset and not just Bath
- Understand what is causing the delay in some sites coming forward for business use

Key Actions

- Include the feedback from the LSP Board in the next draft of the Economic Strategy (**Action 42**)

5. Infrastructure Delivery Plan

Simon de Beer and Jeremy Damrel introduced the report and explained the work under way to produce the Infrastructure Delivery Plan. The LSP Board queried how the voluntary sector was to be engaged with through the process, given the role they play in developing social capital. It was confirmed that an extensive list of stakeholders had been put together and would be involved at various points throughout the project.

The approach being taken to prepare the Infrastructure Delivery Plan in support of the Core Strategy was noted.

6. LAA Performance report April – September 2009

Annette Pearson introduced the report and highlighted the areas where performance was currently off target. Where performance is currently at red, action plans are in place to address issues. There was a discussion on overlaps between cohorts of young offenders (NI 19) and cohorts of young

people not in employment, education or training (NI 117); and there was a request for more information on the reclassification of domestic waste, which is affecting the achievement of the target for indicator NI 197.

The LAA performance update report was noted.

7. AOB

Renee Smith Gorringe informed the Board that funding had been awarded to B&NES to extend the Whiteway community engagement project concept into two other areas, London Road, Bath and Keynsham.

D. Actions completed from previous meetings

(Actions will be shown once, then removed from subsequent minutes)

| No | Action | Resp | Target | Status |
|-----------|---|-------------|---------------|---------------|
| 37 | Audit Commission to consider further how they present information relating to a specific geographical area | PS | Sept 09 | Complete |
| 38 | Feedback to the Audit Commission about the inclusion of private schools and private care homes in inspection judgements that feed into the area assessment. | PS | Oct 09 | Complete |

Somer Community Housing Short Notice Inspection

| | |
|---|--|
| What is your request of the LSP Board? | The LSP Board is asked to note the contents of the report and appendices. This report is confidential to the LSP Board. |
| What do you want from the Theme Delivery Partnerships? | Nothing at this stage. |
| Background material | Audit Commission Report |

1 Summary

- 1.1 Somer Community Housing Trust (Trust) received a short notice inspection of its gas safety and voids and lettings services from 22-24 March 2010. This report sets out the findings of the inspectors; the current position in terms of responding to the inspection; and the next steps for the Trust.

2.0 Background and context

- 2.1 On 12 March 2010 the Audit Commission informed us that they would conduct a short notice inspection of the following services from 22-24 March:
- Gas safety;
 - Voids and lettings;
 - Access and customer care, diversity and value for money in the areas being inspected.
- 2.2 The inspectors' pre-inspection work and on-site work relates to Judgement 1 – How good is the service? This focuses on how well are we doing at this point in time. The second stage of the process is the assessment for Judgement 2 – prospects for improvement? This judgement is based on an improvement plan that we will be required to develop, in consultation with residents, to achieve the outcomes outlined with their recommendations in the report.

3.0 Inspection process

- 3.1 Pre-inspection
In preparation for the site visit, the inspectors requested 5 key documents plus 5 additional documents to support information they already had about Somer, to assist them with developing their initial

impression of the Trust's performance and to help frame what they would concentrate on during the inspection.

3.2 On site

While the inspectors were on site, after presenting their initial findings they spent three days meeting with residents, staff, managers and Trustees and visiting properties and Local Service Centres. They used a range of methods to assess how we were performing, including:

- Interviews
- Focus groups
- Mystery shopping
- Telephone interviews
- Document review

3.3 On their last day, the inspectors presented their findings and gave us the opportunity to respond within five days. We gave them comments on their feedback and further detail or information where requested.

3.4 The outcome of the inspection was as follows:

Lettings and void management – weaknesses outweigh strengths
Gas safety – strengths and weaknesses in balance
Equality and diversity – weaknesses outweigh strengths
Customer care and access – weaknesses outweigh strengths
Value for money – weaknesses outweigh strengths

3.4 Draft report

The Audit Commission sent their draft interim report to us on 12 April 2010. This sets out what they found in each of the areas inspected in terms of specific strengths and weaknesses, and gives their assessment for Judgement 1 in each of the areas.

3.5 We were given five days to comment on this report and challenge any aspects we didn't agree with. The report, findings and recommendations are in line with our expectations and therefore we have no reason or desire to challenge the Audit Commission's judgements.

3.6 The inspectors have now published their interim report on their website (Annex A) and have issued a press release. The Bath Chronicle has covered the report which was balanced. Our press release is attached at Annex B. They have given us a letter which will go out to all tenants this week. A special page on our website has been established so that residents and others can monitor our progress against the plans.

4 Next Steps

4.1 In order for the inspectors to make an assessment for judgement 2, the next stage is developing an improvement plan to address the weaknesses highlighted in the initial report. This plan must be submitted to the Audit Commission by 21 June 2010. In order to achieve this

deadline, a staff project team has been established and is meeting weekly to review actions and track progress.

- 4.2 In addition, a project board made up of four Trustees has been established. This group will monitor progress with the Trust's response to inspection and provide assurances to the Board. Given their background, skills and experience it is proposed that the following Trustees sit on the Project Board: Margaret Connor; Rob Appleyard; Janet Durk; John Kilner. All have indicated their willingness to commit to the project.
- 4.3 A 'critical friend' Ellis Blakemore from HQN has been commissioned to support the delivery of the project and a successful response. .
- 4.4 The final improvement plan will be presented to the Trust Board in June. The plan has been developed with full involvement of residents including an insert on the Audit Commissions findings and recommendations going out with Somer Times at the beginning of May 2010; focus groups being set up to review the inspectors findings and input their ideas into the planned response; review of our plans by the residents in Viewpoint; a special meeting of the Somer Residents Committee on 18 May 2010 to review the outcome of the consultation and feed into the plan themselves.
- 4.5 The final improvement plan will be submitted to the Audit Commission by 21 June 2010. They will then make their judgement from poor prospects to excellent prospects for improvement and this will be published on the website along with the judgement 1.
- 4.6 In the meantime the Trust have been working to address the weaknesses raised by the Audit Commission:
- 4.7 Voids and lettings
The Trust was about to fundamentally review its lettings service, following a major restructuring last year. We've already reduced the time homes stay empty by 12 days (20 per cent) since the inspection. The new simple, clear re-let standard developed with residents is now being used.
- 4.8 Service standards
The Trust has been consulting with residents over the last few months on what service standards they would like to see put in place. These were approved by the Board in May and will now form the basis of our 'local offer' with tenants for the new TSA standards introduced in April this year.
- 4.9 Tailoring services
At the time of the inspection, we were tendering for a 'customer profiling' survey. The consultant has been appointed and work on gathering the profiling information will start in June. This links in with

another major project to procure a new housing management system to record and access this information.

4.10 Telephone monitoring and complaints

Following a tender process, ComplaintsRgreat have been appointed to review our complaints policy and procedure and are due to report to the Board at the beginning of July on a new system. We have set up new systems for monitoring performance on answering and dealing with telephone calls and the first set of information will go to the Board in July.

4.11 Gas safety inspections

The gas safety service was already in the middle of a fundamental review at the time of the inspection, and the changes were about to be implemented. These include moving to a 10-month, rather than 11-month, cycle to be certain all services take place within the legal requirement of a year and establishing more flexible working hours and a better appointment service.

4.12 Value for money

The report recognised that we have good processes for procurement and the Board approved a new value for money strategy in February, which will lead to better monitoring and benchmarking of our performance. This is in the process of being rolled out across the Group.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

5.1 This report has set out the findings from the recent short notice inspection, the current position and next steps for the Trust. In order to achieve a successful response the Trust is taking a project approach with reports back to the Board at regular intervals.

5.2 The report's findings validate the work already in progress and the Trust is confident we can deliver the improvements required.

6.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)

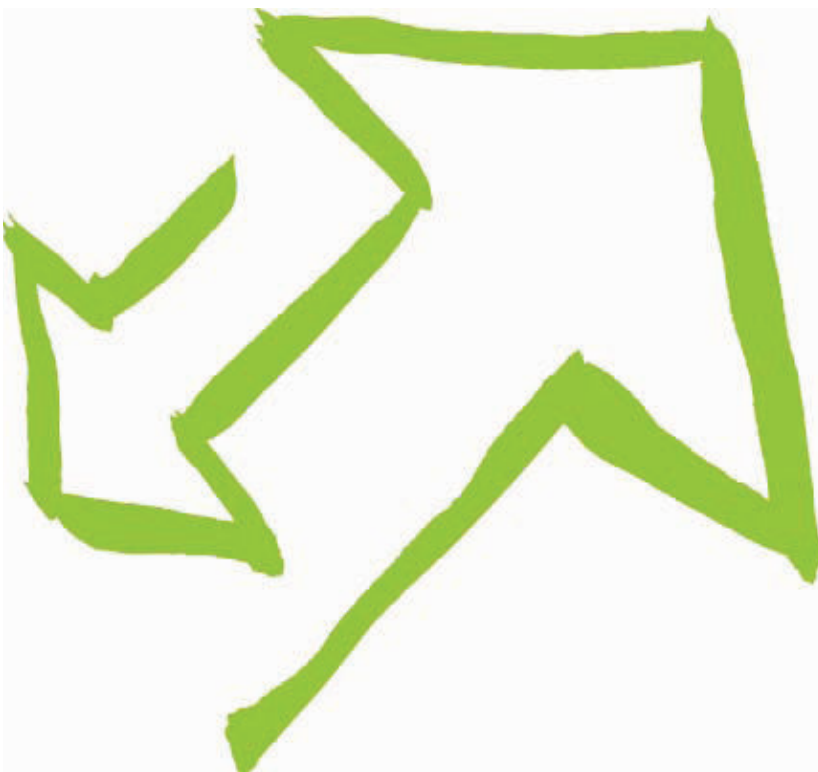
(1) That the LSP Board notes the contents of the report and appendices;

Short Notice Inspection - Interim Report

Short notice inspection of services Gas servicing and the re-letting of empty homes.

Somer Community Housing Trust

May 2010



Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Housing Association Inspections | 3 |
| Summary of our findings | 5 |
| How good is the service? | 6 |
| Recommendations | 11 |

Housing Association Inspections

The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively and delivers high quality local services for the public.

The Audit Commission inspects and monitors the performance of a number of bodies and services. These include local authority housing departments, local authorities administering Supporting People programmes, arms length management organisations and housing associations. Our key lines of enquiry (KLOEs) set out the main issues which we consider when forming our judgements on the quality of services. The KLOEs can be found on the Audit Commission's website at www.audit-commission.gov.uk/housing.

For housing associations our current inspection role and remit is set out in sections 41A and 41B of the Audit Commission Act 1998 (as amended by section 109 of the Local Government Act 2003). Provisions contained in the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 will amend our role and remit in due course, but are not yet in force. Our role is in line with the Audit Commission's strategic regulation principles. In broad terms, these principles look to minimise the burden of regulation while maximising its impact.

Short notice inspections (SNIs) have been developed to encourage improvements in the performance of housing associations (HAs) at delivering services to their customers. They focus on the outcomes for residents and work on the basis that associations will concentrate on improving services rather than preparing for an inspection, which could happen at any time.

The scope of each inspection of a housing association, undertaken by the Audit Commission has been agreed in consultation with the Tenant Services Authority. The Tenant Services Authority is the statutory body which regulates housing associations to ensure that they are well governed, well managed and financially viable as set out in its Regulatory Code.

The Association

- 1 Somer Community Housing Trust (SCHT) is a charitable registered stock transfer association formed in 1999. SCHT is a member of the Somer Housing Group Ltd (SHG), a non asset holding parent company, registered in 2002. SHG provides central services to the group structure comprising of SCHT, Redland Housing Association, Shape Housing Association and Lantern Homes Ltd.
- 2 SCHT owns and manages about 9,000 homes, including 1,700 sheltered housing properties, and manages a further 850 leased dwellings. SCHT operates principally in Bath and North East Somerset (BANES), owning 86 per cent of the social housing stock in that area. SCHT has its own repairs team, which carries out works to homes within the group using neighbourhood based multi-skilled trade staff.

- 3 SCHAT employs 252 staff, and is managed by a Managing Director, who is also a member of the group's Executive Team, which reports to the Chief Executive of the group. SCHAT has a board of nine members, including four tenant trustees. Three of the SCHAT board members sit on the group's board.
- 4 SCHAT was inspected by the Audit Commission in 2004¹ and assessed as providing a good service that has excellent prospects for improvement.

The scope of the inspection

- 5 The scope of this inspection focused on the following areas, which have been identified in consultation with the Tenant Services Authority (TSA).
 - Gas servicing; and
 - The re-letting of empty homes.
- 6 The inspection also included an assessment of how Somer Community Housing Trust is addressing three cross-cutting themes: access and customer care, diversity and value for money within the services included in the inspection's scope.
- 7 We would like to thank the staff of Somer Community Housing Trust who made us welcome and met our requests efficiently and courteously.

Dates of inspection: 22 - 24 March 2010

¹ This was a full service inspection.

Summary of our findings

- 8 We have assessed the strengths and weaknesses of the service areas included in the scope of the inspection. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

Table 1 **Assessment**

| How good is the service? | Assessment |
|---|---|
| • Access and customer care ¹ | Weaknesses outweigh strengths |
| • Diversity | Weaknesses outweigh strengths |
| • Value for money | Weaknesses outweigh strengths |
| • Gas servicing | Strengths and weaknesses are in balance |
| • Re-letting of empty homes | Weaknesses outweigh strengths |

-
- 9 We have asked Somer Community Housing Trust to consult with its tenants on the findings of this report and on the preparation of an action plan to implement our recommendations. We will publish Somer Community Housing Trust's response together with our assessment of the Association's prospects for improvement within three months.

¹ Access and customer care, diversity and value for money are assessed in relation to the service areas inspected only.

How good is the service?

Access and customer care in the service areas inspected

10 We found weaknesses outweigh strengths in this area.

11 There are a number of weaknesses.

- There are no service standards currently in place. This means that tenants do not know what level of service to expect, or what level of service is being delivered.
- The website is not routinely updated. Information on service standards, equalities schemes and Choice Based Lettings has not been sufficiently updated. This means tenants are not always kept up to date on available services.
- Telephone performance is not consistently monitored across all of the services and the level of abandoned calls for gas repairs/servicing has increased significantly. This means that tenants may not be receiving an effective service when contacting the trust by telephone, despite it being the main contact method used by tenants.
- The overall handling of complaints is not well managed. Performance on how quickly complaints are processed is not known, satisfaction levels are not monitored and the trust is not consistently learning from complaints.

12 There are a number of strengths.

- The offices¹ that we visited are customer focused and welcoming, and front line staff are helpful and competent.
- Information available for tenants is generally clear and informative, and the website is easy to find, navigate and well set out, which helps tenants access services and resolve their queries.
- There are high levels of tenant satisfaction with the opportunities to participate and of the trust taking tenants' views into account. Tenants influence decision making of the trust through a number of avenues, including the Somer Residents' Committee, Area Panels and specific service groups.
- Individual complaints are responded to in a sensitive and comprehensive manner, and compensation is offered (where appropriate). This provides complainants with some assurance that the trust is acknowledging service failures.

¹ The offices visited during the inspection were The Maltings, and the local service centres at Meade House and Rosewell Court, Bath.

Diversity in the service areas inspected

13 We found weaknesses outweigh strengths in this area.

14 There are a number of weaknesses.

- Equalities and diversity is not sufficiently embedded within the trust. There are no clear equalities objectives, Equality Impact Assessments have not been carried out for the services inspected, and satisfaction levels are not routinely monitored across the six nationally recognised diversity strands. This prevents the trust from being sure that services are meeting the needs of its tenants, and being provided in a fair and equitable manner.
- The trust has information about the profile of only about 50 per cent of its tenants. This information has not been strategically used to tailor services and consequently, services may not be meeting the needs of tenants, and in particular those that require additional assistance.
- The board and staff of the trust are not fully representative of the customers that it serves.
- The approach to domestic violence and harassment is not well publicised on the website and performance reports do not capture if reports are being handled effectively.

15 There are a number of strengths.

- The level of lettings to Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) households has increased from 4.9 per cent (2008/09) to 7.6 per cent (April to December 2009/10).
- Where known the individual needs of vulnerable tenants are highlighted through the IT systems. This enables officers and gas engineers to tailor their approach to contacting and visiting individual tenants to better meet their needs.
- Specific resources have been used to target the needs of some groups, including: the promotion of dementia awareness; tackling isolation and promoting healthier life styles for older tenants; working with BME older tenants to improve access to sheltered accommodation; and a dedicated officer to assist vulnerable tenants with rehousing from the Pre-cast Reinforced Concrete (PRC) stock.

Value for money in the service areas inspected¹

16 We found weaknesses outweigh strengths in this area.

17 There are a number of weaknesses.

- A systematic approach to value for money is not yet in place. Value for money does not yet feature as a key corporate objective and it has only recently been considered in the trust's planning process. Benchmarking data is not routinely used to evaluate cost and quality and the trust has not completed some of the actions set out in its strategic plan for improving the value for money of its services.
- The trust has not fully explored the value for money of the inspected services, and early indications show some stock is high cost, specifically the trust's Georgian period properties.
- The trust is losing income due to the lengthy periods it takes to re-let homes.
- Only 75 per cent of the trust's tenants felt that their homes represented value for money.

18 There are a number of strengths.

- The trust has recently introduced a clear strategic action plan for delivering value for money.
- The trust has low overheads as a percentage of 'adjusted turnover'² and office costs and IT costs per direct employee are also low, when compared to similar organisations.
- The trust benefits from being a member of various procurement partnerships, and the cost of purchasing new kitchens, gas boilers, energy supplies, IT and office equipment have reduced as a result.
- The application of Systems Thinking³ has reduced the cost of the repairs service by £149,000, and the cost of the gas service has been reduced by £50,000 due to the reduction in the use of external contractors.

¹ In assessing value for money we are looking at two questions: 'How do costs compare?' and 'How is value for money managed?'

² For comparison purposes 'Adjusted turnover' takes into account some aspects of organisational structures, for example if an organisation has a DLO (Direct Labour Organisation).

³ Systems Thinking applies a three stage cycle to processes, in an attempt to reduce duplication and delays and deliver improved outcomes for customers.

How good is the service?

Gas servicing

19 We found strengths and weaknesses are in balance in this area.

20 There are a number of strengths.

- The majority of the trust's homes have had an annual gas safety check. At the end of February 2010 eight properties were overdue an annual inspection by up to one month.
- Some aspects of the service are customer focused including: a range of appointment slots are offered to residents; and telephone calls or texts are used to remind residents of appointments.
- The importance of gas servicing is well publicised to residents through posters in the local service centres, leaflets, newsletters and the website, although the latter is not so clearly signposted.
- The trust has taken some steps to ensure its leaseholders homes have had an annual gas safety inspection, and has confirmed that 50 per cent have.

21 There are a number of weaknesses.

- Due to the trust's 11 month programmed approach to gas servicing, the late initiation of contact with tenant's means that a proportion of annual gas safety inspections are not completed within the legal requirement of one year.¹
- External auditing of the quality of gas safety inspections is not meeting recommended good practice levels, and audits have identified weaknesses in the labelling, documentation and the recording of gas safety inspections. The trust could therefore be in breach of gas safety regulations.
- Ongoing satisfaction testing of the service is not in place, and this prevents the trust from ensuring that it is improving the service to meet the needs of its residents.

¹ Across the period April 2009 and February 2010 106 gas safety inspections were reported to be overdue up to one month, and four up to two months.

The re-letting of empty homes

22 We found weaknesses outweigh strengths in this area.

23 There are a number of weaknesses.

- Properties take a long time to be re-let, taking an average of 49 days between April and December 2010. This means that applicants are waiting longer for housing and the trust is losing income while the properties are empty.
- The re-let standard is basic and is not provided to new tenants, or sufficiently user friendly. This means that new tenants are unclear about the standard of property they can expect to receive.
- There are no incentives currently in place to ensure that vacating residents provide 28 days notice or leave the property in a satisfactory condition.
- The trust has not tested the level of satisfaction of those tenants that have moved through the PRC decanting programme. This means that the trust is not identifying potential weaknesses or strengths in its own processes to assist future improvements.

24 There are a number of strengths.

- The trust is working with local authority partners to address strategic housing priorities, and tenants have some choice over their rehousing through Choice Based Lettings.
- There are high tenant satisfaction levels with the lettings process and the condition of new homes¹.
- A dedicated officer has effectively supported the decanting of 193 households from the trust's Pre-cast Reinforced Concrete (PRC) stock since 2007. Particular assistance has been provided to the more vulnerable tenants, and therefore reduced the stress and anxiety generally associated with moving home.

¹ Based on SCHAT's routine satisfaction testing of new tenants.

Recommendations

25 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, organisations need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. Our recommendations identify the expected benefits for both local people and the organisation. In addition, we identify the approximate costs¹ and indicate the priority we place on each recommendation and key dates for delivering these where they are considered appropriate. In this context, the inspection team recommends that the organisation shares the findings of this report with tenants and board members; and takes action to address all weaknesses identified in the report. Associations forming part of a group structure should share the lessons and findings of the report amongst the wider group. The inspection team makes the following recommendations.

Recommendation

R1 Improve outcomes for tenants in the services inspected by:

- completing the development of comprehensive measurable services standards with residents for the services inspected, and monitor and publicise performance against the standards;
- ensuring that the website is routinely updated with information that is relevant to tenants;
- improving the monitoring of telephone answering, and the performance of telephone answering for gas repairs and servicing;
- improving the overall management and performance of complaints handling and monitoring; and
- reviewing the re-let standard with tenants and providing it to all customers that are viewing a property.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- tenants will be clearer on what they can expect from the service and when they are not receiving the level promised;
- up to date and clear customer information in electronic formats;
- better access to the gas repairs and servicing team by telephone;
- better evidence that complaints from tenants are being handled effectively; and
- improved service delivery.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by August 2010.

¹ Low cost is defined as less than 1 per cent of the annual service cost, medium cost is between 1 and 5 per cent and high cost is over 5 per cent.

Recommendation

- R2** Strengthen the approach to equality and diversity in the services inspected by:
- strengthening the corporate commitment and profile to improve the trust's approach to equalities and diversity;
 - developing a comprehensive understanding of the tenant profile;
 - using the profiling information obtained to ensure that services are accessible, appropriate and meeting need;
 - monitoring and reporting against the six diversity strands and address the findings, including tenant satisfaction monitoring;
 - setting targets against key service areas and board and staff membership to reflect the tenant profile;
 - putting in place a timetabled programme of robust Equality Impact Assessments and acting on their findings; and
 - improving the approach taken to domestic violence and harassment by: providing clearer service information and standards; monitoring service delivery; and reporting against outcome focused targets.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- services that reflect the needs of customers and are accessible to all tenants; and
- services which do not inadvertently discriminate and which can demonstrate they are equitable.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by August 2010.

Recommendation

- R3** Improve the approach to value for money in the services inspected by:
- improving the corporate commitment and profile to deliver services that are value for money;
 - routinely benchmarking service costs with high performers, and addressing findings; and
 - improving empty property re-let performance.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- a better understanding of how service costs compare to other organisations providing similar services;
- homes that are let quickly to those in housing need; and
- more efficient services for tenants.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by July 2010.

Recommendations

Recommendation

R4 Improve outcomes in the delivery of gas servicing by:

- improving performance on gas service completions, including the level of annual gas services that are completed within the legal 12 month requirement;
- improving the quantity of external quality inspections of gas services to meet good practice guidelines;
- ensuring completed gas safety inspections meet gas safety regulations; and
- routinely testing tenant satisfaction with gas servicing.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- safer homes for tenants; and
- improved service delivery.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by July 2010.

The Audit Commission

The Audit Commission is an independent watchdog, driving economy, efficiency and effectiveness in local public services to deliver better outcomes for everyone.

Our work across local government, health, housing, community safety and fire and rescue services means that we have a unique perspective. We promote value for money for taxpayers, auditing the £200 billion spent by 11,000 local public bodies.

As a force for improvement, we work in partnership to assess local public services and make practical recommendations for promoting a better quality of life for local people.

Copies of this report

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NEWS RELEASE

PR131

24th May 2010

Draft

For immediate release

Embargo: 27th May 2010

Somer Community Housing Trust responds positively to Audit Commission short notice inspection

Somer Community Housing Trust says it is confident that all of the weaknesses identified in an Audit Commission inspection report published today will be dealt with before the end of August.

The Audit Commission carried out a short-notice inspection in March 2010 of three of the Trust's services – lettings, empty homes and gas safety – on behalf of social housing's regulator, the Tenant Services Authority (TSA). It made a number of recommendations to improve the services, which must be variously completed by the end of July or August. Since then, the Trust has been consulting with residents on an action plan detailing how it will meet those recommendations, which must be returned to the Audit Commission by 21st June. The commission will then judge what it thinks the Trust's prospects for improvement are, and publish its final report.

Angela Gascoigne, Managing Director of Somer Community Housing Trust, said:

'The idea behind short notice inspections is that they focus on your weaker services, partly based on the information we give ourselves to the TSA. So the Audit Commission's findings were no surprise, and we were already making good progress on dealing with those weaknesses.'

'The inspectors' findings necessarily represent a snapshot in time of our organisation. We welcome their findings, as they validate what we were already doing or planning, to improve these services. We will also continue to work with residents to make improvements that go beyond the Audit Commission's priorities where we can.'

The inspectors praised Somer Community Housing Trust for a number of strengths, including: high levels of tenant satisfaction with their opportunities

to participate and influence decision-making, that complaints are responded to sensitively and comprehensively, and specific initiatives to work with older tenants, black and minority ethnic tenants, and those affected by the major pre-cast reinforced concrete (PRC) redevelopment and refurbishment project.

These are the Trust's responses to some of the weaknesses raised by the Audit Commission:

Empty properties take a long time to re-let, the re-let standard is basic, and tenants are not given information on what standard to expect

- The Trust was just about to review its lettings service, following a restructure to put more resources into the service late last year.
- The time that homes stay empty has already been reduced by 12 days (20 per cent) since the inspection.
- To achieve the best value for money, the Trust includes empty homes in existing programmes to update kitchens, bathrooms and heating systems, such as the major project in Snow Hill, Bath. This can add delays, but provides a higher-quality home for the new tenant.
- The Trust is developing a simpler and clearer re-let standard with residents and comparing what we do with other social landlords.

There are no service standards currently in place

- The Trust has been consulting with residents over the last few months on what service standards they would like to see put in place. These were scheduled to be considered by the Board in May and agreed. They will be published in July and will form the basis of our 'local offer' with tenants for the new TSA standards introduced in April this year.

Telephone performance and complaints handling is not consistently monitored

- Better monitoring of performance on answering and dealing with telephone calls is underway and performance is also checked through an established group of resident 'mystery shoppers'.
- The complaints policy and procedure is being reviewed with the assistance of ComplaintsRgreat, following a tender process to appoint a specialist in this area.

Information collected about tenants has not been used to tailor and direct services

- A 'customer profiling' project to collect more accurate data about tenants was already underway, and C&R Associates has been appointed to carry out the survey, following a tender process.
- Another ongoing, major project is to procure a new housing management system, to record and access this information.

External auditing of gas safety inspections shows they are not meeting good practice levels

- The gas safety service was already in the middle of a fundamental review at the time of the inspection, and the changes were about to be implemented.

- Gas servicing is being changed from an 11-month to a 10-month cycle to prevent any services from slipping past the legal requirement of a year.
- The existing audit arrangements have been reviewed and stepped up, and EnergyServ UK has been appointed as external auditor.

The Trust has not made sure that the inspected services are giving residents value for money

- While the report recognises that the Trust has good processes for procurement, it will continue to make progress in this area, particularly given the current economic climate, where efficiency is ever more important.
- A new strategy on value for money had already been developed and was approved by the Board in February. It is now being rolled out across the organisation, and there will be better monitoring of our performance, including more benchmarking of our services against other social landlords.

ENDS

Notes to editors

The **Audit Commission** is an independent watchdog, working with local authorities, arm's length management organisations (ALMOs) and housing associations to improve their services through its audit, inspection and research functions. The Audit Commission's report on Somer Community Housing Trust can be found here:

<http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/Pages/bodypage.aspx?AIBId=1027&bodyname=Somer%20Community%20Housing%20Trust>

The **Tenant Services Authority** (TSA) is the new, independent regulator for affordable housing in England. It works with landlords and tenants to improve the standard of service for tenants and residents. It has taken a radically different approach to regulating a sector that provides homes for more than eight million people in over four million homes and has set out six clear standards focused on outcomes. www.tenantservicesauthority.org.

Somer Community Housing Trust is a social landlord providing 9,700 affordable rented homes. Based in Bath, it owns homes across Bath, Somerset, Wiltshire, and the Bristol area. The charity has an active social housing development programme and an investment programme in excess of £10million a year. The Trust is a member of Somer Housing Group. www.somer.org.uk.

Issued by

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Local Strategic Partnership Dashboard Report

| | |
|---|--|
| Request of LSP Board | <p>The LSP Board is asked to comment on the following aspects of the draft Dashboard:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The contents • The format |
| Steer <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | |
| Endorsement <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Action <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Engagement <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Other <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Background Material | <p>Appendix 1- Local Strategic Partnership Board Dashboard</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Audit Commission Letter to Local Authorities on Comprehensive Area Assessment</p> |

Background

The rationale for the LSP Board using a dashboard comes from the need to take a view of activity across the whole of the LSP. It is suggested that the LSP Board Dashboard will provide a way of reporting issues such as performance, risk and funding activity in one standing agenda item, to be presented at each meeting.

Key Issues

The LSP Board Dashboard has been drafted to create a high level summary of the overall picture of activity across the Local Strategic Partnership. The LSP Board Dashboard at **Appendix 1** is structured under three headings of 'Resources', 'Updates and Progress' and 'Performance and Risk'.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Dashboard is presented as a standing item on the forward plan at every Board meeting.

Discussion Points:

LSP Board is asked to comment on:

- a) The content
- b) The format

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The Role of the LSP Board – Moving Forward

| | |
|---|---|
| What is your request of the LSP Board? | <p>The LSP Board is asked to</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Discuss and agree the draft work plan 2. Discuss and agree the draft LSP Board Terms of Reference 3. To share this information with the organisations and networks you represent |
| What do you want from the Theme Delivery Partnerships? | To communicate the role of the LSP Board to their members. |
| Background material | Appendix 1 – LSP Board Draft Work Plan Appendix 2 – LSP Board Draft Terms of Reference |

Background

In March, the LSP Board held a workshop to discuss their role. As a result of that workshop, a number of suggestions were made as to how the Board could work differently together.

To help with this, the work plan of the LSP Board has been reshaped. Each agenda will focus on:

- Strategy and Policy
- Performance and Risk Management
- Governance, Other Business and LSP Board Requests

The draft work plan is attached as Appendix 1 for discussion and agreement.

The draft LSP Board terms of reference, updated to reflect discussions at both the December meeting and the March workshop, are attached at Appendix 2 for discussion and agreement.

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LSP Board Draft Work Plan – For Discussion

| Meeting | Category | Item | Purpose | Lead |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|--|---|
| 21 st September 2010 | Strategy & Policy | Implications of the new direction from Government | Discussion on the implications of the first 50 days, the budget and emerging comprehensive spending review and what it means for each agency round the table | Council |
| | | LSP Annual Forum | Discussion on progress in addressing the drivers for change in preparation for the LSP Annual Forum | Council |
| | Governance, Other Business & LSP Board Requests | Theme Partnership Update (1) Health & Wellbeing | Discussion and scrutiny of Theme Delivery Partnership by the LSP Board | Theme Sponsor / Chair of Theme Delivery Partnership |
| | | Theme Partnership Update (2) Children & Young People | Discussion and scrutiny of Theme Delivery Partnership by the LSP Board | Theme Sponsor / Chair of Theme Delivery Partnership |
| | Performance & Risk Management | LSP Dashboard | Update on progress across the LSP including performance, risk, achievements and resources | Council |
| | | LAA 2010/11 Year End Performance Report | Performance report reflecting on the year ending 2009/10 | Council |
| 14 th December 2010 | Strategy & Policy | Refreshing the Sustainable Community Strategy | Discussion on the output from the Annual Forum on the key issues facing the area and the impact this has on the current strategy | Council |

| Meeting | Category | Item | Purpose | Lead |
|----------------------|---|---|---|---|
| | | LSP Community Engagement Strategy | Discussion on the emerging LSP Community Engagement Strategy | Council |
| | Governance, Other Business & LSP Board Requests | Theme Partnership Update (3) Economic Development & Enterprise TBC | Discussion and scrutiny of Theme Delivery Partnership by the LSP Board | Theme Sponsor / Chair of Theme Delivery Partnership |
| | | Theme Partnership Update (4) Environmental Sustainability & Climate Change | Discussion and scrutiny of Theme Delivery Partnership by the LSP Board | Theme Sponsor / Chair of Theme Delivery Partnership |
| | Performance & Risk Management | LSP Dashboard | Update on progress across the LSP including performance, risk, achievements and resources | Council |
| | | | | |
| TBC March 2011 | Strategy & Policy | | | |
| | Governance, Other Business & LSP Board Requests | Theme Partnership Update (5) Safer Communities TBC | Discussion and scrutiny of Theme Delivery Partnership by the LSP Board | Theme Sponsor / Chair of Theme Delivery Partnership |
| | | Theme Partnership Update (6) Stronger Communities TBC | Discussion and scrutiny of Theme Delivery Partnership by the LSP Board | Theme Sponsor / Chair of Theme Delivery |

| Meeting | Category | Item | Purpose | Lead |
|---------------|---|------------------------------|---|---|
| | | | | Partnership |
| | Performance & Risk Management | LSP Dashboard | Update on progress across the LSP including performance, risk, achievements and resources | Council |
| | | | | |
| TBC June 2011 | Strategy & Policy | | | |
| | Governance, Other Business & LSP Board Requests | Theme Partnership Update (1) | Discussion and scrutiny of Theme Delivery Partnership by the LSP Board | Theme Sponsor / Chair of Theme Delivery Partnership |
| | | Theme Partnership Update (2) | Discussion and scrutiny of Theme Delivery Partnership by the LSP Board | Theme Sponsor / Chair of Theme Delivery Partnership |
| | Performance & Risk Management | LSP Dashboard | Update on progress across the LSP including performance, risk, achievements and resources | Council |
| | | | | |
| TBC Sept 2011 | Strategy & Policy | | | |
| | Governance, Other Business & LSP Board Requests | Theme Partnership Update (3) | Discussion and scrutiny of Theme Delivery Partnership by the LSP Board | Theme Sponsor / Chair of Theme Delivery Partnership |
| | | Theme Partnership Update (4) | Discussion and scrutiny of Theme Delivery Partnership by the LSP Board | Theme Sponsor / |

| Meeting | Category | Item | Purpose | Lead |
|--------------|---|------------------------------|---|---|
| | | | | Chair of Theme Delivery Partnership |
| | Performance & Risk Management | LSP Dashboard | Update on progress across the LSP including performance, risk, achievements and resources | Council |
| | | | | |
| TBC Dec 2011 | Strategy & Policy | | | |
| | Governance, Other Business & LSP Board Requests | Theme Partnership Update (5) | Discussion and scrutiny of Theme Delivery Partnership by the LSP Board | Theme Sponsor / Chair of Theme Delivery Partnership |
| | | Theme Partnership Update (6) | Discussion and scrutiny of Theme Delivery Partnership by the LSP Board | Theme Sponsor / Chair of Theme Delivery Partnership |
| | Performance & Risk Management | LSP Dashboard | Update on progress across the LSP including performance, risk, achievements and resources | Council |

LSP Board members are invited to add items to the work plan at any time.

Bath & North East Somerset Local Strategic Partnership Board

Terms of Reference – June 2010

1. Name

The Bath & North East Somerset Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) Board.

2. Purpose

The LSP Board is the coming together of key influencers across all sectors to produce and enable delivery of the Sustainable Community Strategy for Bath & North East Somerset.

3. Accountabilities

The LSP is a non statutory partnership. It is a voluntary partnership arrangement. The LSP Board has oversight for:

a) Strategic Vision & Direction

- Setting a long-term vision for the area through the development of the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) for Bath & North East Somerset (B&NES)
- Harnessing support for building capacity in the community to help deliver priorities
- Identifying local priorities and outcomes; undertaking reviews of the SCS and reviewing performance as appropriate
- Reviewing the progress of Theme Delivery Partnerships on the delivery of the LSP's priorities

b) Representation and Involvement

- Developing & implementing engagement mechanisms for all three sectors (public, private and civil society / charity or social enterprise)
- Ensuring partnership adds value to delivery of strategies and plans
- Being the Crime Disorder Reduction Partnership for Bath and North East Somerset *
- Acting as the guarantor of the Local Compact**

** Previously the LSP has acted as the statutory Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP).*

*** see Annex 2 for detail on the Local Compact*

4. Membership Arrangements

The LSP Board shall consist of the following:

a) Core Members

- Chair: Leader of the Council
- Chief Executive of Bath & North East Somerset Council

- 2 (Two) Group Leaders
- Police Authority
- Chief Superintendent Police
- NHS Bath & North East Somerset Board Non Executive member
- Chief Executive Bath & North East Somerset NHS
- Avon Fire & Rescue
- Somer Community Housing Trust
- Sector Specific Representation x3 (Three), ie one from each of the following sectors:
 - Civil Society / Charity or Social Enterprise
 - Communities sector
 - Business sector

b) Observers

Attending the meeting, but not able to vote or be part of any decision making, shall be:

- Government Office South West (GOSW)
- Compact Board chair (see Annex 2 for detail on the role of the Compact Board)

c) Advisors

Attending the meeting in a support and advisory capacity shall be:

- Divisional Director, Policy & Partnerships
- Strategy & Plan Manager, Policy & Partnerships

Representation on the LSP Board shall be kept under review.

d) Deputies

Each member of the LSP Board shall nominate a standing deputy who may attend any meeting on his/her behalf

Deputies shall have the same voting rights as the primary members of the Board.

e) Quorum

The LSP Board will be declared quorate when (a) one third or 4 (four) of its core members are in attendance as long as those members cover a minimum of three (3) organisations or sectors.

5. Reporting & Operating Arrangements

a) Chairing

The LSP Board shall be chaired by the Leader of the Council. The Board shall elect a Vice Chair by simple majority.

b) Meetings

Meetings of the LSP Board shall take place on a quarterly basis. Meetings of the LSP Board will not be held in public but meeting agendas and papers will be made publicly available.

Administrative support shall be provided by Bath & North East Somerset Council.

c) Agenda Management

Agendas shall be developed

- By consideration of the LSP Board work programme
- By discussion amongst the members of the LSP Board
- By requests from individual members of the LSP Board
- Following direction from the LSP Board
- Following recommendation by the LSP Executive

d) Links with the Theme Delivery Partnerships

The work programme of the LSP Board shall include reviewing the progress of Theme Delivery Partnerships, to be undertaken by each Partnership Chair and / or Theme Sponsor attending a meeting of the Board at least once during each financial year. See Annex 1 for detail of membership.

e) Links with Overview & Scrutiny Panels

The role of the Council Overview & Scrutiny Panels in relation to the work of the LSP and LSP member organisations needs to be further articulated. Work is underway with Council Scrutiny officers to develop this and clarify the relationship between the Panels and the LSP.

f) Resourcing Arrangements

As the accountable body, the Council will act as the secretariate to the LSP Board.

Annex 1

| Theme | Theme Sponsor | Theme Delivery Partnership Arrangements |
|---|---|--|
| Children & Young People | Ashley Ayre Strategic Director, Children's Services Bath & North East Somerset Council | Partnership: Children's Trust Chair: Ashley Ayre, Strategic Director, Children's Services, Bath & North East Somerset Council |
| Economic Development & Enterprise | John Betty Strategic Director, Development & Major Projects Bath & North East Somerset Council | Partnership: Sustainable Growth Alliance Chair: Stan Frith, Independent Business Representative |
| Environmental Sustainability & Climate Change | Andrew Pate Strategic Director, Resources & Support Services Bath & North East Somerset Council | Partnership: Environmental Sustainability & Climate Change Partnership Chair: Charles Gerrish, Cabinet Member for Customer Services |
| Health & Wellbeing | Janet Rowse Acting Chief Executive, NHS B&NES | Partnership: Health & Wellbeing Partnership Board Chair: Malcolm Hanney, Chair of the Primary Care Trust and Deputy Leader of Council |
| Safer Communities | Chief Supt Gary Davies Avon & Somerset Police | Partnership: Responsible Authorities Group Chair: Chief Supt Gary Davies, Avon & Somerset Police |
| Stronger Communities | Glenn Chipp Strategic Director, Customer Services Bath & North East Somerset Council | Partnership: Stronger Communities Partnership Chair: Tony Crouch, Independent Community Representative |

Annex 2 - The Role of the Compact Board

The Compact is an agreement between the voluntary and community sector and statutory organisations such as the Police, the Council and the Local Health Authority, that governs the way they work together to improve services within the community. The B&NES Compact aims to improve mutual understanding and encourage a more effective working relationship between the partners. The Codes of Good Practice give more detailed guidance on how this agreement operates in four areas: equalities, funding, involvement and volunteering.

The local Compact Board is a cross sector board which meets regularly to review progress and to implement action aimed at bringing the awareness and understanding of Compact to the forefront of public planning and policy. The Board is chaired by an independent chair, Michael Tichelar.

The Role of Government Office South West (GOSW)

Government Office has a particular role in putting government policy into practice at a local level. GOSW has identified officers who work with the Local Authority and partner organisations, specifically focussing on the Bath & North East Somerset area. They are invited to join the LSP Board in an advisory capacity. GOSW is represented at the LSP Board by their locality lead for Bath & North East Somerset, Hilary Neal.

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