

BOROUGH OF KETTERING

TENANTS' FORUM

Meeting held – 14th November 2013

Present: Councillors Bellamy, Bunday, Don, Henson,
Manns and Derbyshire

Tenant Representatives: Colin Medlycott (Avondale) - Chair
Martyn Lund (Highfield Road)
Lynne Lund (Highfield Road)
Brent Woodford (Rural)
Brian Kimpton (Counties)
Susan Milne (Naseby Road)
Mark Ingram (Town Centre)
Mick Springthorpe (Town Centre)
Leonore Springthorpe (Town Centre)
Hayley Fountain (Broughton)

Also Present: John Conway (Head of Housing)
Leona Mantle (Housing)
Anne Coulson (Housing)
Pearl Nathaniel (Finance)

Rachel Paling (Committee Administrator)

13.TF.42 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Michael Brown, Linda Nash, Trevor and Sandra Nash, Josephine Copson and Jim French.

13.TF.43 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

13.TF.44 MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 10th October 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

13.TF.45 MATTERS ARISING

13.TF.35 HRA Capital Programme

An update of the HRA Capital Projects was circulated to the forum members which provided details of where the projects would take place and the costs involved.

13.TF.46 MATTERS RAISED BY TENANTS' FORUM REPRESENTATIVES

None

13.TF.47 ARCH TENANTS CONFERENCE

Lynne Lund and Leona Mantle gave a joint presentation on the Association of Retained Council Housing (ARCH) Tenants' Conference, which was held in Great Yarmouth on 19th September 2013.

It was noted that ARCH was an association of councils in England who have retained ownership and management of their council homes. Their aim was to make sure that a positive future for council housing was secured. The conference allowed tenants to discuss key issues. ARCH Tenants Group currently had 21 members and Martyn Lund was one of them.

There were two main topics covered at the Conference:-

- HRA Self-financing
- Welfare Reform

Lynne Lund went on to report how she had asked Croydon Borough Council about their Complaints Panel and had gained ideas on how to incentivise to encourage people to become involved.

In Jim French's absence, Leona Mantle reported that Jim had chosen to focus on the importance of tenants, service delivery and the Tenants' Scrutiny Panel. He discovered that at Warwick District Council, their panel scrutinised all repairs performance against targets and then the repairs manager was responsible for answering to the panel.

Lynne Lund then went on to give information from Bishops Stortford Council relating to voids scrutiny and how by asking more probing questions and inspecting properties, service improvements were achieved, as well as better communication between the panel and

officers. She also told the forum about Great Yarmouth who had started a Young Persons Group, which consisted of various young people who had come together to help vulnerable young people. They were doing projects to encourage them to join in and give them a purpose.

Martyn Lund reported that he had had a meeting with the Tenants' Group since the conference and that they had suggested an idea that the representatives of ARCH could visit councils and introduce themselves to ask what they required and then could go to the government and lobby for them on behalf of tenants.

It was noted that Jim French had also learned about a 'news' magazine from Great Yarmouth and was really impressed with it. A meeting of the Connect group decided to show Mark Redding who helped produce Connect and he was now making some changes.

Cllr Maggie Don thanked the tenants for giving up their time to attend the conference and finding out the valuable information.

13.TF.48 TENANTS' FORUM CONSTITUTION UPDATE

A paper was circulated giving updated details for possible changes to the Constitution to be considered.

It was noted that as the forum was a Council Committee the Chair would always be a Borough councillor.

It was requested that any comments be forwarded to John Conway.

A revised Constitution for the Tenants' Forum would be brought back to a meeting after December to be approved.

Cllr Bellamy welcomed members to see the process of the changes being approved by attending the meetings of the Executive and Council.

13.TF.49 WELFARE REFORM - UPDATE

John Conway gave a presentation entitled 'Welfare Reform Update: Rent Arrears'.

It was noted that the rent arrears for 2012/13 were down to £133,605, another reduction on previous years.

The Bedroom Rate Restriction was introduced in April 2013 which

had the following implications for tenants:-

- **14%** deduction from Housing Benefit where a tenant was under-occupying by one bedroom
- **25%** deduction from Housing Benefit where a tenant was under-occupying by more than one bedroom

Since April 2013, the following statistics had been collated nationally:-

- Nationally, 10% of council tenants were affected by the bedroom rate restriction when it was introduced in April (Kettering 9.78%)
- The number of council tenants in arrears rose by 21% between March and June 2013 (Kettering +15%)
- The level of rent arrears increased by 16% between March and June 2013 (Kettering +19%)

John Conway reported that the rent arrears for Kettering Borough Council as of 14/11/13 was £299,483 which was £62,682 above the target. An in-depth analysis of cases with over £500 of arrears showed there were 34 cases at £1000+ totalling £46,874.35, and of these, 28 cases had an existing court or possession order against them.

It was reported that 305 council tenants (8.34%) were affected by the bedroom rate restriction of which 114 had arrears which appeared to be as a direct result of the restriction.

It was noted that Kettering Borough Council had a robust system for monitoring and taking action with regards to rent arrears including information packs, open days and one-to-one interviews.

With the impact of winter and Christmas approaching it was felt by the members that it would be interesting to see what the position was in respect of arrears in January/ February 2014 and then again in April 2014 when there would be a full year's worth of figures and information available.

John Conway confirmed there had been an increase in the bad debt provision within the budget to accommodate the anticipated increase in rent arrears.

The forum members gave praise to the work of the Tenancy Support Worker and felt that further investment in this area could only be of benefit.

Ideas were suggested of advertising in Connect to encourage tenants to contact Kettering Borough Council early on if struggling.

(Cllr Bunday left the meeting at 7.30pm)

13.TF.50 PROMOTING WIDER TENANT INVOLVEMENT

A discussion was held between members of the forum in relation to how Kettering Borough Council could get tenants to become more involved.

The members were asked to consider:-

- How can we reach more people?
- What keeps everyone involved?
- What puts people off?

The forum provided the following feedback after discussion:-

How can we reach more people?

- Advertising- Using the library, Connect or personal invitations, Mind, Doctors Surgeries, Foodbank, Keystone and William Knibb Centre.
- Members and tenants helping to encourage
- Social Media
- Social events
- Use a young person to attract more young people
- Go into schools and conduct school leaver talks

It was felt important to keep events informal and not too formal.

What keeps everyone involved?

- Wanting to make a difference
- Interest in the local community
- Giving something back

What puts people off?

- Overwhelmed by the information
- Formality

Cllr Bellamy reported that a large screen was due to go onto the Market Place and this may be a good tool to us to advertise.

13.TF.51 CONNECT

Ideas were welcomed on a new title for the magazine which would make it clearer on who it was for and what it contained. All suggestions were to be sent to Martyn Lund.

AGREED that Leona Mantle would forward the suggestions received to members.

13.TF.52 TENANT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

The review of Introductory Tenancies was still ongoing. Tenants and staff had been interviewed and provided some helpful ideas. The review would be brought to the forum very soon.

With regards to the Welfare Reform, the panel reported that the Tenancy Support Worker was spoken very highly of for helping tenants.

The panel were still looking to recruit new members.

13.TF.53 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

It was reported that the gardening competition presentation would now take place on 2nd December 2013 at 6pm at Kettering Borough Council offices. Invitations had recently been issued.

Colin Medlycott advised the forum that he would not be standing for election of Deputy Chair in May 2014, and thanked the members for their support over many years. It was noted that he would remain involved in the Tenants' Overview and Scrutiny panel.

13.TF.54 PRIZE DRAW

The winner of the prize draw was Lynne Lund.

13.TF.55 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on Thursday 12th December 2013 at the Council Offices.

(The meeting started at 6.30 pm and ended at 8.10pm)

Signed

Chair

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