

## **BOROUGH OF KETTERING**

### **TENANTS' FORUM**

#### **Meeting held – 12<sup>th</sup> October 2017**

**Present:** Councillor Mark Rowley (Chair)

Councillors June Derbyshire, Andrew Dutton, David Howes, Anne Lee and Mike Tebbutt

**Tenant Representatives:**

Brian Kimpton	(Counties)
Moira Brown	(Highfield Road)
Ken Burnage	(Thorpe Malsor)
Reg Carvell	(Leaseholder – Highfield Cres.)
Josephine Copson	(Alfred Street)
Jim French	(Desborough)
Peter Harvey	(Dahlia Road)
Martyn Lund	(Highfield Road)
Katherine Matthews	(Highfield Road)
Peter Matsa	(Burton Latimer)
Glenis Saddington	(Highfield Road)
Steven Soper	(Sackville Street)
Victor Woodcock	(Burton Latimer)
Brent Woodford	(Ashley)
Lindsay Wooldridge	(Sackville Street)

**Also Present:**

John Conway	(Housing)
Darren Ibell	(Housing)
Leona Mantle	(Housing)
Maria Keane	(Housing)
Simon Haile	(Housing)
Tracey Copeland	(Housing)
Dean Mitchell	(Finance)
Pearl Nathaniel	(Finance)
David Pope	(Democratic Services)

#### **17.TF.31 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Maggie Don. It was noted that Councillor Lee was acting as substitute. Apologies were also received from Sandra and Trevor Nash and Lorraine Morland.

**17.TF.32 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

**17.TF.33 MINUTES**

**RESOLVED**

that the minutes of the meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> September 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**17.TF.34 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

17.TF.10 – ASB Update

It was heard that a report regarding ASB would be brought to the November meeting of the forum.

17.TF.24 – Keyways Housing Allocations Scheme

The meeting noted that the Executive Committee had approved the new scheme at its last meeting and it had since gone live. It was heard that delays were being experienced in processing Keyways applications due to a combination of staff absence and unprecedented demand. Temporary staff experienced in handling such applications had been brought in to assist with the backlog, with applications received in July currently being assessed.

17.TF.25 – HRA Capital Programme

The previous meeting of the forum had heard that the Homes for the Future contractor had gone into liquidation and work on the scheme had ceased. A replacement contractor had been identified to continue the works and it was anticipated that the two families currently in decamp accommodation would be back in their homes before Christmas.

**17.TF.35 MATTERS RAISED BY TENANTS' FORUM REPRESENTATIVES**

Three issues were raised regarding an intercom at a block of flats on the Highfield Estate. It was noted that these would be investigated.

**17.TF.36 PERIODIC TENANCY VISITS UPDATE**

A presentation was given that provided the forum with an update on the Periodic Tenancy Visits that had commenced in April.

The meeting heard that reasons for undertaking visits included:-

- Long term tenants not being visited except on request or by necessity
- Concerns regarding management of long term tenancies
- Concerns from the Void Properties Team in relation to the state of certain properties
- Long term tenants possibly being unaware of housing services available to them

It was noted that there were a total of 514 visits to be undertaken before the end of March 2018, 162 had been booked as at 10<sup>th</sup> October, with 143 visits undertaken successfully. Work was underway to rebook visits for those that had been unsuccessful. In addition, there were 74 visits scheduled for the remainder of October.

All tenants visited had been written to prior to the visit explaining the reasons behind it. Despite these letters, some tenants were still concerned over the purpose of the visit and the majority had a relative or friend present during the visit. The average length of a visit was one hour and a number of actions had been identified as a result, including:-

- Need for tenancy support
- Referral to Occupational Therapy for adaptations
- Tenants interested in moving to smaller accommodation
- Poor garden conditions
- Properties identified that were well maintained
- Necessary repairs
- Rent queries
- Follow up visits
- Photos taken

Of the visits completed, 95% of tenants were tenancy compliant, with the remaining 5% needing to make small alterations to the condition of property of garden to become compliant. A total of 76 referrals had been made off the back of the visit, with the most frequent being repairs, aid and adaptations, Right to Buy enquiries and Home Move enquiries.

Three case studies were presented to the meeting which outlined the variety of housing situations and outcomes arising as a result of the visits.

The meeting noted that the process involved in periodic tenancy visits was labour intensive. It was further noted that in order for all visits to be completed by the end of March 2018, an average of 59 visits would need to be undertaken each month. Capacity to undertake the visits and the additional work generated as a result was a major issue for the Housing Team, with staffing levels being examined to identify whether there was scope for increasing capacity.

Forum members commented that the visits were essential work and were very positive, although questions were asked about the capacity of the Housing Team to undertake work arising from the visits.

### **17.TF.37 FEEDBACK ON HIGHFIELD COMMUNAL CLEANING PILOT**

A report was presented to the meeting which provided an update on the Highfield Estate Cleaning Pilot which commenced in April 2017 and the feedback obtained from the recent satisfaction survey sent to all tenants and leaseholders.

It was heard that the pilot scheme to carry out a monthly clean of all communal areas across 23 blocks had originally been proposed in April 2016 and approved by the Tenants' Forum prior to a procurement process being undertaken with involvement from tenant and leaseholder representatives as well as the Finance and Legal Teams. A local firm had been procured to carry out the service that was monitored and assessed through the Neighbourhood Manager, customer satisfaction surveys, monthly contract management meetings and tenant inspectors. The meeting heard that the cost of the service was £3.10 a week per household and was met through service charges to tenants.

The Neighbourhood Manager responsible for the Highfield Estate was in regular contact with the contractor who supplied before and after photos and completed update logs on the work undertaken. A newsletter had also been sent to residents to provide updates on the project.

The recent customer satisfaction survey indicated that overall 75% of residents were happy with the service provided and 76% were satisfied with the contract so far. Although the survey showed high levels of satisfaction there was a section of respondents that considered that they already cleaned the communal areas to a good standard and therefore there was no need for outside contractors.

It was reported that the monthly contract management meetings were attended by the contractor, housing officers, tenant inspectors and tenant and leaseholder representatives. Feedback was supplied from all parties and the contractor responded to feedback received.

A report was provided from one of the tenant inspectors who spoke positively of the pilot scheme and noted positive feedback received from residents.

Forum members asked questions in relation to the end date of the trial period, future satisfaction surveys and specific residents wishing to clean their own blocks.

### **17.TF.38 REINVENTING REPAIRS**

Forum members received a report that provided an overview of the newly introduced Reinventing Repairs project.

At the previous meeting of the Tenants Forum, representatives were advised that responsibility for repairs and capital projects to the Council's housing stock had been transferred from Environmental Care to the Housing Service. As a result, the service now had sole responsibility for all aspects of the HRA Capital Programme, planned maintenance, responsive repairs and works to void properties.

The Reinventing Repairs project had launched on 29<sup>th</sup> September with Housing and Environmental Care staff briefed on organisational changes both by letter and face-to-face. A steering group comprised of officers from Housing, Finance and HR met weekly to plan actions going forward and to review completed undertakings. An action plan for service improvements for the subsequent 12 months was being prepared and the forum would receive a presentation on its contents once complete. Views on the contents of the plan would be sought from the Tenant Overview and Scrutiny Panel (TOSP), also taking into account the previous work of the panel in relation to repairs reporting processes.

Key priorities for the next 6 months were identified as follows:-

- **Voids** – The number of void properties stood at 83 at end of September with an average void time of 130 days. Focus would be made on reducing both of those figures. Capital resources of £130k had been transferred to the Major Voids budget. Contractors had been appointed to work on 40 long term void properties with work starting on 16<sup>th</sup> October. In addition a temporary Voids Project Manager would be recruited.
- **Callsys repairs scheduling system** – The existing system was not currently used to its full potential, and more could be done to offer appointments, better supervise staff and get obtain more useful statistics
- **Out of Hours service**
- **Workforce management and support**
- **Appointments for repairs**
- **Disabled adaptations** – a review of systems would be undertaken to ensure all requests were processed properly
- **Performance monitoring** – This required review to make it fit for purpose
- **Statutory compliance** – The Council had a legal duty to make homes as safe as possible as well as managing the safety and welfare of its staff. A report would be produced on its obligations, undertakings and any gaps in compliance
- **Asset management** – It was vital to ensure that investment was being directed to the correct areas.

Members asked questions in relation to the additional £130k of funding for the major voids budget and the timescales involved for returning the long term void properties to the housing stock.

### **17.TF.39 FAIR PRESS FOR TENANTS PUBLICATION RELEASE**

Martyn Lund presented a report in relation to a new guide prepared by social housing tenants across the country to examine the way tenants were represented in the press and to encourage the media to report on social housing fairly.

It was reported that the ARCH tenants group was promoting the guide which would be distributed to local authorities across the country to share and promote. The guide contained a short history of social housing and provided useful facts in relation to the demographics of social tenants that highlighted low unemployment rates and noted that tenants came from all sections of society.

It was heard that social housing tenants were frequently portrayed under a number of negative stereotypes by the media and there was a need for tenants to be fairly represented and to demonstrate that social housing was not a step backwards. It was noted that the guide sought to see positive stories regarding social housing and for the media to be respectful, use photographs and statistics accurately and honestly and not to ignore the truth in place of sensationalist stories.

The forum heard that a large press release would herald the publication of the guide and communication was already underway with local and national press, with an interview arranged for Martyn with BBC Radio Northampton.

Forum members asked questions in relation to advertising the guide and it was noted that details would be shared on the Council website and social media sites, with a summary of the guide published in the next edition of Connect.

### **17.TF.40 HRA CAPITAL PROGRAMME**

It was reported that works on Hampden Crescent had commenced six weeks previously and a small number of minor issues had been identified, as was to be expected when carrying out major work on a building of that age. The first contract meeting had been held with the contractors to discuss works to date and this had been positive. Brian Kimpton was thanked for his involvement in the Hampden Crescent project, with the meeting noting that there was real value in having tenant involvement with large scale projects in the Borough.

It was heard that the Window Renewal contract had caused significant issues. The contractor responsible for the project was aiming to exit from the contract and negotiations were ongoing.

It was noted by the forum that failing to provide access for a gas safety check was a breach of tenancy conditions.

**17.TF.41 CONNECT**

The meeting heard that the next edition would contain articles on the following subjects:-

- Budgeting, Universal Credit update and paying rent
- Tenant Involvement
- Health and Housing project
- Reinventing Repairs

**17.TF.42 TENANT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL**

It was reported that the panel had concluded their investigative work as part of their current report and would be collating the information gathered with a view to submitting a report to the forum as soon as possible.

**17.TF.43 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

A request was made for an update on homelessness and the use of temporary accommodation to be provided to a future meeting.

**17.TF.44 PRIZE DRAW**

The winner of the prize draw was Brent Woodford.

**17.TF.45 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the date for the next meeting of the forum would be 9<sup>th</sup> November 2017

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

Signed .....

Chair

DJP