

BOROUGH OF KETTERING

TENANTS' FORUM

Meeting held – 9th November 2017

Present: Councillor Mark Rowley (Chair)
Councillors June Derbyshire, Maggie Don, Andrew Dutton,
David Howes and Mike Tebbutt

Tenant Representatives: Brian Kimpton (Counties)
Reg Carvell (Leaseholder – Highfield Cres.)
Josephine Copson (Alfred Street)
Jim French (Desborough)
Peter Harvey (Dahlia Road)
Martyn Lund (Highfield Road)
Anne Swoboda (Rothwell)
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)
Hayley Knight (Housing)
Simon Haile (Housing)
Tracey Copeland (Housing)
Pearl Nathaniel (Finance)
David Pope (Democratic Services)

17.TF.46 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Moira Brown, Ken Burnage, Lorraine Morland, Sandra Nash and Trevor Nash.

17.TF.47 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

17.TF.48 HOUSING TEAM LGA WARDS SHORTLISTING

The Deputy Mayor, Cllr James Burton attended the meeting and

congratulated the Council's Housing Team for being shortlisted for an award at the Local Government Chronicle (LGC) Awards in the category of Housing Initiative. It was heard that the awards ceremony would take place in London in March 2018.

The Deputy Mayor also offered congratulation to Tenant Representative Martyn Lund for his involvement in the Benefit to Society Campaign

The Head of Housing noted that the shortlisting was as a result of the work undertaken by the Housing Team to prevent tenancy breakdown through Tenant Support Officers, LifePlan and a regime of working intensively with new tenants. It was positive to see teams across whole of service recognised for their work.

17.TF.49 MINUTES

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting held on 12th October 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

17.TF.50 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

17.TF.10 – ASB Update

A total of 60 ASB complaints had been received during the year, varying from noise, drug use and criminal behaviours to unacceptable garden condition. Legal action had been started in 16 cases, with four closure orders granted mainly for one-bed units in the Town Centre and all for drug related criminal activity.

Housing Services had a number of new enforcement powers available to tackle ASB including community protection warnings and notices. To date 29 warning letters had been issued and these had proved to be an effective tool. Of those issued, 12 had gone on to receive community protection notices with only one breach. As a result of the breach of the notice, the Council had utilised its new powers to gain warranted entry to seize noise making equipment that was the cause of the ASB issue.

17.TF.24 - Keyways housing Allocation Scheme

An update was provided in relation to the backlog of applications. It had been reported at the previous forum that there had been delays in processing applications and the team was now handling those received on 7th August. The number of outstanding emails had been reduced from over 600 to 388 with the number of applications awaiting processing down from 399 to 354. Regular progress updates would be supplied to the forum at future meetings.

17.TF.37 – Feedback on Highfield Communal Cleaning Pilot

It was reported that further feedback would be supplied to the forum at the conclusion of the pilot scheme.

17.TF.51 MATTERS RAISED BY TENANTS' FORUM REPRESENTATIVES

None.

17.TF.52 REINVENTING REPAIRS

A presentation was provided which gave the forum an update in relation to the recently launched Reinventing Repairs project.

A brief overview was provided of the scope and aims of the project as outlined to the forum at its previous meeting. The meeting heard that a progress report would be brought to each meeting of the forum going forward concentrating on a different aspect of the project each time.

Voids

The initial update was provided in relation to Voids. The meeting heard that at the beginning of October, 82 properties had been void across the Council's housing stock. That number had seen a sharp increase to a current figure of 96, although that was expected to reduce significantly over the coming months as the project progressed. The aim was to eventually have between 25 and 35 void properties at any one time.

In addition to the number of void properties, it was noted that average void times could fluctuate wildly as a property remained void until it was re-let. The current average void time was over 100 days and had never been lower than 38 days during the previous 18 months. Again, the aim was to reduce this figure to between 25 and 35 days.

To assist in improving the void position, £130k had been transferred into the void budget from other schemes with uncommitted funds. The existing major voids contract had been terminated as it was not deemed to incentivise the quick completion of voids. A total of 40 long term void properties had been identified and a contractor had been appointed to turn these around and return them to the available housing stock, with work commencing on these properties from 16th October.

With work on major voids having commenced, attention could turn to improving the standard voids process by ensuring that only works required to make properties safe, clean and easy to let were carried out. It was reported that a Voids Project Manager would be sought on a 12 month contract to undertake a review of the whole void process.

In the medium term future options for the service would be considered alongside the need for investment, customer requirements and the financial and policy environment. It was noted that the government had recently indicated that social housing rents could be increased by the rate of inflation plus 1% between 2020-2024, a contrast to the current annual 1% decrease.

In addition to the above, the focus and scope of operations would be reviewed alongside the organisational structure of the service to enable service improvement and innovation.

The forum heard that details of the Callsys IT system and its current and future uses would be brought to the next meeting.

Questions were asked in relation to long-term voids, potential turnaround times for these and the future of voids maintenance. An update provided in relation to the involvement of apprentices in the team was welcomed by the meeting.

17.TF.52 UPDATE ON TENANT INVOLVEMENT

The meeting received a presentation from KBC's Tenant Engagement Officer (TEO), Tracey Copeland which provided an update on her work in the role and more broadly the engagement between the council and its tenants.

The meeting was provided with an overview of tenant engagement activities undertaken since Tracey had accepted the role of TEO in May, including:-

- **Tenants' Forum Housing Tour**; planning for the 2018 tour would commence shortly after Christmas
- **Highfield Estate Cleaning Project**; Tenant Inspectors had been appointed to check work undertaken and tenant representatives attended monthly meetings with the contractor. A newsletter and survey had further engaged residents, with a second survey and newsletter to be sent
- **Estate improvements at Barnes Close**, with coffee mornings held to engage tenants and seek their views on improvements
- **Garden Competition**; the annual competition for tenants and leaseholders had taken place in June with a good number of new and returning entrants. A presentation evening hosted by the Mayor had taken place in October
- **The Environmental Improvement Panel** involved tenants in allocating funds for community improvement works. The panel examined bids and selected those offering the best value and potential impact. Consultation exercises were undertaken with affected tenants with a review meeting once works were completed
- **Holyoake Court**; a "meet and greet" event had been held to establish ideas for improvements to external parts of the estate. The

event brought to light ASB affecting the quality of life for tenants. Investigations had resulted in a property closure order being obtained. Further work would include a newsletter to all tenants and another “meet and greet” event, with the Social Inclusion Team and PCSOs in attendance, before a consultation event in Spring 2018.

- **Connect;** editions were published quarterly and tenant involvement on the editorial panel was welcomed. Future editions would carry a dedicated article on tenant involvement
- **Community Events;** these events were important in terms raising awareness of the council’s housing service and the involvement tenants could have. The team had attended Kettering Carnival in August providing the public with information and goody bags.
- **Hampden Crescent;** a “meet and greet” event had provided the local community with the opportunity to view refurbishment plans. A tenant representative had been involved in meetings with the appointed contractor
- **New Buildings Clean-up Day;** this event provided a good example of what could happen when the council worked with residents. Nine terraced properties had taken part in an event to return to usage an area of outside space previously lost through ASB activities. The majority of tenants had taken part and the event had attracted good press coverage.

It was heard that tenant involvement was changing and becoming more prominent, with tenants increasingly wanting their voices to be heard. Networking at external events, such as those held by the Association of Retained Council Housing (ARCH) was vital, and officers would also be attending a meeting with the government Housing Minister in Nottingham.

Future plans for engagement included:-

- A review of volunteering policies and procedures as well as updating the tenant involvement sections of the main council website.
- The development of an action plan and strategy informed by the TOSP Repairs Reporting review and its recommendations
- Formation of a business case to utilise new technology and social media to better engage with tenants.
- Welfare Reform/Universal Credit (UC) roadshow events would be held in partnership with other agencies to help prepare claimants for the UC rollout.
- TOSP would review the Terms of Reference, Code of Conduct and recruitment of new tenant representatives.

In response to a question from the forum, it was noted that although it was difficult to quantify to what degree tenant engagement improved community cohesion, it remained of great importance and assisted in informing funding applications and reducing ASB.

17.TF.53 HRA CAPITAL PROGRAMME

The monthly HRA Capital Programme was presented to the meeting, which noted the aim to complete a number of planned programmes prior to Christmas.

It was reported that the Homes for the Future scheme had recommenced in Desborough, with the two families currently residing in decamp properties able to return to their refurbished homes before Christmas.

The meeting heard that the new roofing contract had been procured over a four year period and improved stock data had been key in enabling this longer term procurement, allowing access to quality contractors and better rates. Approval of the new contract would be sought from the Executive Committee at its November meeting.

Works at Hampden Crescent were progressing well and were now only a week behind schedule. The Council's Senior Management Team had visited the site to view progress.

The forum heard that there had been strong progress in regard to apprentices. It was suggested that an apprentice attend a future meeting of the forum to provide a progress update and to detail the work they had undertaken.

It was noted that a monthly compliance report would be submitted to future forums, with the initial report currently being compiled. It was important that the forum heard what works were being carried out in areas such as fire safety and gas checks. It was heard that there would be TOSP involvement in determining the content of future reports.

Decent Homes standards in relation to fire safety were discussed. It was noted that there were two work-streams in relation to fire safety, the fire door replacement contract and work around fire risk assessments which may lead to remedial work being required, such as installation of adequate smoke detection devices.

17.TF.54 CONNECT

The meeting heard that the latest edition of Connect was currently in draft form and included an article in relation to tenant involvement, with this becoming a regular feature. In addition, there would be features on Homes for the Future and the Borough's best gardens following the awards ceremony that had taken place in October.

17.TF.55 TENANT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

It was reported that the panel's current review was very nearly complete, with a number of recommendations, suggestions and considerations to be included in a report that would be tabled to the forum at a forthcoming meeting.

17.TF.56 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None.

17.TF.57 PRIZE DRAW

The winner of the prize draw was Victor Woodcock.

17.TF.58 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the date for the next meeting of the forum would be 14th December 2017

(The meeting started at 6.30pm and ended at 7.39pm)

Signed

Chair

DJP