

MINUTES OF TENANTS' LIAISON FORUM
10th March 2009

Present:

Mr C Randall (Chair)	Munsters Residents' Association
Mrs C Thornber	Boston Way Tenants' Association
Mrs J Feeney	Boston Way Tenants' Association
Mrs C Hardiman	Linden and Edmonton Residents' Association
Mrs J Sanderson	Linden and Edmonton Residents' Association
Miss D Wightman	Melbourne, Brisbane and Hobart Residents' Association
Mr B Rogers	Melbourne, Brisbane and Hobart Residents' Association
Mr C Walwyn	Melbourne, Brisbane and Hobart Residents' Association
Mrs A Stringer	Grange Park Residents Association
Mr J Newton	Queens Park Residents Association
Mrs C Cook	Queens Park Residents Association
Mr M Christian	Ingthorpe Tenants' and Residents' Association
Mrs E Christian	Ingthorpe Tenants' and Residents' Association
Mrs S Weston	Mereside Tenant' and Residents' Association
Mrs A Allen	Mereside Tenant' and Residents' Association

In Attendance:

Councillor Mrs Henderson	Blackpool Council
Councillor Lee	Blackpool Council
Mr P Jefferson	Blackpool Coastal Housing
Mrs D Williams	
Mr M Glennon	Blackpool Coastal Housing
Ms S Buckley	Blackpool Coastal Housing
Ms J Ellis	Blackpool Coastal Housing
Mr S Burbidge	Blackpool Coastal Housing
Ms S Tomlinson	Blackpool Coastal Housing
Mr J Kelly	Street Scene Services, Blackpool Council
Ms H Adam	Housing Client Manager, Blackpool Council
Miss G Atkinson	Legal and Democratic Services, Blackpool Council

Action

1. WELCOME

As the Chair was not in attendance it was agreed that Mr Randall, as Vice-Chairman of the Tenant Liaison Forum, be Chair for the meeting.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Mrs Horn, Mr Holland and Mrs Cornall.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING 13th January 2009

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 13th January 2009 were agreed as a correct record.

4. HIGHWAYS AND STREET SCENE SERVICES

The Forum was advised that Mr Kelly, Street Scene Inspection and Enforcement Manager, was in attendance to answer any questions or queries relating to the roles and responsibilities of the Council's Street Scene service.

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Mr Kelly advised that the service was responsible for the repair of minor highway damage, such as potholes and cracked flagstones, and that more significant repairs were undertaken by the Council's Transportation services. Ongoing inspections by the Street Scene officers identified areas of the highways that required prioritising for repair, according to the national code of practice. All customer reports of highway damage required an inspection to determine the extent of the damage. Any pavement potholes in excess of 25mm in depth would be raised as a priority. Mr Kelly advised the Forum to inform the Customer First service on (01253) 477477 should they identify any apparent damage to roads and pavements.

With regard to street lighting, the Forum was advised that a renewal of Blackpool's street lighting columns was due to be implemented with a contractor through a Private Finance Investment scheme and that Mr John Heaton, in the Council's Capital Works and Regeneration division, would be able to provide further information.

A discussion took place with regard to a number of parking problems within the town, primarily the parking of vehicles on grass verges and accessibility problems along narrow roads. Mr Kelly advised that Blackpool's parking issues related to a significant lack of space, particularly in residential areas. As Council was reluctant to remove grass verges due to expenditure and environmental impact, it was currently trialling alternative methods to deter motorists from parking on verges, such as double-kerb installations.

With regard to flagstone repairs, Mrs Kelly advised that they were not replaced with tarmacadam as this provided a long-term cost-effective alternative. Areas scheduled for repair were prioritised according to the severity of the damage and the current Council budget could only feasibly achieve major repairs to a few areas per year.

It was reported that each Ward Councillor had been delegated £10,000 each for expenditure within their ward and that this had been previously used to address various issues, such as grass verges and potholes.

In response to individual requests for information that were raised by members of the Forum, it was agreed that Mr Kelly report back at the next meeting.

James Kelly

5. HOUSING MATTERS

(a) Blackpool Coastal Housing (BCH)

Mr Jefferson advised that since June 2008, nearly 1,600 homes had been improved under the Decent Homes programme and that previous issues relating to the quality of work provided by the contractors had been successfully resolved.

With regard to the contract for ground maintenance and security of estates, Mr Jefferson advised that this was due to commence in April 2009.

A rent increase of 2.5 per cent had been implemented and the Forum was advised that this was the reported lowest in the North West area. BCH had undertaken careful consideration of affordable rent increases

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and had agreed to maintain the increase to a minimal level. The Income and Debt Prevention service would provide support to any tenants concerned with the recent increase.

(b) Sheltered Housing and Community Centres

Mrs Buckley advised there at present three of the Scheme Manager posts were vacant.

Ms Ellis had attended the previous Sheltered Housing Forum meeting to advise on the future affiliation with the Tenant Liaison Forum. The Sheltered Housing Forum was currently considering their draft Constitution and the appointment of a Chair and Vice-Chair prior to their next meeting which had been scheduled for 12th June 2008. It was agreed that a copy of the draft Constitution be circulated to the Forum for information.

Sharon
Buckley

It was anticipated that new water boilers would be installed in each community centres by April 2009. This would also include any day centres that were not necessarily within sheltered housing areas.

(c) Performance Indicators

Mr Jefferson provided the Forum with an outline of a number of Performance Indicators.

Peter
Jefferson

With regard to the delays in repairs being completed, this was attributed to BCH's expectation of quality of standards and in ensuring that vacant joiner posts were filled by staff with the appropriate skills, attitude and approach.

A recent increase in the number of empty homes had resulted from a higher number of deaths of elderly tenants than usual, primarily due to the severe winter weather conditions. BCH would be working closely with NHS Blackpool to address the issue. In addition, a number of homes had been vacated within the Queen's Park estate and it was presumed that this was in response to a number of security issues, which would be resolved through consultation with the Queen's Park Residents' Association.

In response to questioning from the Forum, Mr Jefferson advised that while the empty homes would be made available to those on the Council housing waiting list in the first instance, it would still be difficult to house those requiring larger properties due to an ongoing lack of availability. The waiting list had recently increased following rising home repossessions, yet in many of those cases, the residents required family-sized properties. The Housing Advise service would continue to proactively support homeowners in maintaining their mortgage payments.

With regard to the number of rent arrears, the Forum was advised that the introduction of the new Vanguard system had impacted the current level, together with the economic recession which had resulted in rising unemployment levels.

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6. CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT

Mr Glennon advised the Forum that the tenant questionnaires for the response to the Tenant Services Authority's 'national conversation' needed to be submitted by 16th March 2009 and it was anticipated that the results would be published in summer.

Ms Adam, Housing Client Manager, was introduced to the meeting. It was reported that Ms Adam, together with the Customer Involvement team, would be working on the review of the Tenant Compact document which provided a tri-party agreement between BCH, the Council and tenants. Due to the extent of work required, it was agreed that the Forum establish a small sub-group to undertake the work and that the membership included a representative from each of the Tenants' and Residents' Associations (TARAs). It was anticipated that the sub-group would meet on a monthly basis, with progress updates to be presented at the Forum meetings.

Mike
Glennon

An 18-month work plan for the Tenant Compact review had been developed, with the aim to complete the work by March 2009 to allow the document to be in use for a period of six months, prior to the next Audit Commission inspection.

With regard to the Customer Priority Fund, Mr Glennon advised that BCH would be consulting with Cross Key Homes to ascertain best practice ideas and guidance. The organisation had recently been awarded for their governance arrangements and had appointed a panel of tenants and officers to consider requests for funding. It was therefore felt that it would be beneficial to attend a panel meeting to gain information on their procedures.

It was reported that BCH would appoint a Tenant Committee to consider funding requests and a copy of the draft Constitution for the group was circulated at the meeting. A discussion took place with regard to membership of the Tenant Committee and it was agreed that Tenant Board Members were not permitted to sit on the Committee due to potential conflict of interest. A revised copy of the Constitution would be circulated to all members and further information relating to applying to sit on the Committee would be provided at the next Tenant Liaison Workshop meeting.

Mike
Glennon

The Tenant Conference had been scheduled for 27th August 2009 at the Winter Gardens. The programme for the event included information on the Decent Homes improvement works and 20-minute information sessions on BCH standards, services and priorities. It was hoped that the event would be more interactive by encouraging greater tenant participation and feedback.

With regard to the Equality and Diversity training event, Mr Glennon advised that all members had passed the course and invited those that had been unable to attend to make alternative arrangements through BCH.

A mapping exercise had recently been undertaken to ascertain how BCH communicated with tenants. A total of 35 different methods had been identified which would be co-ordinated through the Customer Involvement database to provide up-to-date information relating to tenant

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activity.

A discussion took place with regard to Mereside Tenant's and Residents Association and it was reported that BCH would be working with the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) to provide mediation support to resolve the issue. The TARA had suggested that should the boundaries remain the same, that the funding allocated to the Association be calculated on a pro-rata basis that reflected the number of Council housing tenants located within the boundary area.

The Forum was advised that there was a minimum requirement of 51 per cent of residents, within the TARA area, to be Council housing tenants. This was to safeguard the representation of Council tenants in consultation and decision-making exercises with BCH. Those tenants paid BCH and the Council for a housing service and therefore it was essential that their views were correctly represented. The Tenant Liaison Forum provided a method by which consultation and decision-making on BCH funding and services could be achieved and therefore it would be inappropriate for private-sector residents and homeowners to have increased involvement in this.

It was agreed that further consideration be undertaken following the mediation exercise with TPAS and that the results be brought to the next meeting for consideration.

Mike
Glennon

7. TENANT TRAINING

The Forum was advised that from April 2009, each TARA would be eligible to apply for funding for member training.

Furthermore, a number of short training programmes had been designed to assist tenants in their homes, such as DIY, gardening and budgeting.

8. TENANT COMPACT REVIEW

The Forum agreed that this had already been considered earlier in the meeting.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Forum was advised that following the meeting today, Mr Randall would be resigning as Vice-Chairman of the Tenant Liaison Forum and representative of Munster Avenue TARA. Mr Jefferson presented Mr Randall with a token of appreciation for the support and commitment he had provided to both BCH and the Forum over the past five years.

The Forum agreed to appoint a Vice-Chair at the next meeting for that meeting only and that nominations for Chair and Vice-Chair be taken at the Annual General Meeting in July 2009.

10. DATE AND VENUE OF THE NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the date of the next meeting had been scheduled for Tuesday 12th May 2009, commencing at 10.00 a.m. in the City Learning Centre.

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The meeting ended at 12.00 p.m.

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
Georgina Atkinson, Senior Democratic Services Adviser
Tel: (01253) 477164, e-mail: georgina.atkinson@blackpool.gov.uk