

**MINUTES OF TENANTS' LIAISON FORUM**  
**13<sup>th</sup> July 2010**

**Present:**

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| Mrs C Thornber   | Boston Way Tenants' Association                       |
| Ms B Halpin      | Boston Way Tenants' Association                       |
| Mr B Rogers      | Melbourne, Brisbane and Hobart Residents' Association |
| Mr M Christian   | Ingthorpe Tenants' and Residents' Association         |
| Mr R Masson      | All Hallows Tenants' and Residents' Association       |
| Mr A Pilborough  | Munster Avenue Tenants' and Residents' Association    |
| Mrs C Pilborough | Munster Avenue Tenants' and Residents' Association    |
| Mr J Scholey     | Sheltered Housing Forum                               |
| Mr K Myers       | Sheltered Housing Forum                               |
| Mrs E Christian  | Disability Forum                                      |

**In Attendance:**

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| Councillor Lee  | Blackpool Council  |
| Mr P Jefferson  | Blackpool Coastal Housing                                  |
| Mrs M Cornall   | Blackpool Coastal Housing                                  |
| Mr M Glennon    | Blackpool Coastal Housing                                  |
| Mrs S Grundy    | Blackpool Coastal Housing                                  |
| Ms D Nicholson  | Blackpool Coastal Housing                                  |
| Ms H Master     | Social Housing and Development Worker, Housing Client Team |
| Mr D Stockwell  | Debt Advice Development Worker, Advice Link                |
| Miss G Atkinson | Senior Democratic Services Adviser, Democratic Services    |

**Action**

**1. WELCOME**

The Chairman welcomed members of the Forum to the meeting.

**2. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were submitted on behalf of Councillor Mrs Henderson, Mrs I. Bishop, Ms J. Ellis, Mr C. Holland, Mrs H. Adam and Mrs M. Horn.

**3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS HELD ON 11<sup>th</sup> May 2010**

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Mrs Cornall advised that a letter had been sent to Queen's Park Residents Association on behalf of TLF to invite them to continue their involvement with the Forum on condition that this was in accordance with the TLF Constitution. A further meeting with QPRA had been undertaken to discuss its involvement. She added that the matter would be discussed at the QPRA Committee meeting at the end of July 2010 where it was anticipated a decision would be taken with regard to future affiliation with TLF.

Members were advised that tenants within the Queen's Park boundary could still continue to be involved with Blackpool Coastal Housing through alternative methods that did not necessarily require attendance at TLF meetings.

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It was reported that work was currently being undertaken to obtain invoices for the grant that had been submitted to QPRA for 2009/10.

Mike Glennon

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Mr Glennon reported that a bird table had been purchased in remembrance of Mrs Carol Hardiman who had recently passed away. A plaque would accompany the table in Lowmoor Gardens and a small ceremony would be organised in the near future.

The minutes of the meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2010 were agreed as a correct record.

**4. ADVICE LINK**

Mr Stockwell provided the Forum with an overview of the Debt Advice service that was provided by Advice Link, which was an independent organisation that provided direct services to Blackpool Council and Blackpool Coastal Housing.

The Forum was advised that due to the detrimental impact of debt on an individual's mental health and well-being, it was a challenge to engage with those who were experiencing debt issues. In light of this, the Debt Advice team offered a free, impartial and confidential service that was tailored to individual needs. The team worked in partnership with BCH to assist tenants that had been referred due to rent or tenancy-related issues that may be as a consequence of debt. Mr Stockwell stressed that the team did not deal with rent arrears.

The Debt Advice team aimed to hold a one-to-one meeting with each individual within two weeks following the referral to assess their financial situation, in terms of debt, welfare benefits, income maximisation and budgeting. The team was also able to challenge any debts that might have been imposed unfairly or illegitimately.

The Forum was provided with an outline of the key outcomes that had been achieved by the Debt Advice team since it was launched in early 2007.

In response to a query raised, Mr Stockwell advised that the team did not duplicate existing services provided by the Council or BCH. It provided a tailored and specialised service which both organisations paid directly for. It was added that BCH was currently undertaking a value for money assessment of the contract with Advice Link.

**5. HOUSING MATTERS**

**(a) Blackpool Coastal Housing (BCH)**

A brief summary of the activities undertaken within Blackpool Coastal Housing was provided to the Forum.

Mrs Cornall reported that a pre-inspection review by the Audit Commission in March 2010 had been a success and had identified a number of areas for service improvement. These had been incorporated into an action plan and predominately focused on access to services. Mr Jefferson added that the review had also highlighted a need for more

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individual services for individual tenant needs; however, he advised that BCH employees regularly went the extra mile in terms of service provision. He advised that employees needed to be more aware of when they had gone beyond their standard duties to assist tenants and encouraged the Forum to submit examples of good practice so that these could be presented to the Audit Commission.

Additional updates regarding BCH included:

- The Anti-Social Behaviour service had been recently accredited following a voluntary inspection and was one of the first ASB services to be awarded nationally.
- BCH had been short listed for a Traveller's Site Community Centre award for its recent work in engaging with travellers in the Mereside area.
- A BCH employee had recently won the Apprentice of the Year award.
- BCH rent arrears had significantly reduced as a result of the early intervention strategy.
- The organisation's new office within the Town Centre would be called 'Coastal House'.
- The first installation phase of a new Housing Management IT system was due for completion by October 2010 and would address the development points that were previously raised by the Audit Commission.

The item continued with an overview of the End of Year Quarter 4 2009/10 performance information appertaining to the following areas:

- Business Process
- Financial
- Customer
- Homestop and Emergency Housing
- Organisational Development

With regard to BUS01, 'The number of properties without a current Landlord's Certificate', Mrs Cornall advised that the Gas Servicing team had been unable to gain entry to 23 properties. These would be subject to the necessary legal processes.

The Forum was advised that BUS02 and 05, 'The percentage of routine repairs completed on time', had recently dropped to 97.68 per cent as a consequence of the adverse weather conditions earlier this year, which had prevented a number of external repairs being undertaken.

BUS06, 'The percentage of appointments made and kept', and BUS12, 'The percentage of repairs completed "right first time"', would be reported at the end of the next quarter.

Mrs Cornall advised that BUS10, 'The percentage of empty homes available for letting or awaiting minor repairs', included the number of vacant hostel units, which BCH needed to retain on behalf of the Council for homelessness purposes. It was felt that the target may have been set over ambitiously and therefore would require a review in light of the circumstances.

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BUS11, 'The percentage of empty homes-other', had increased in light of the number of properties that were being retained as vacant under the Council's housing redevelopment programme. Potential usage of the previous Warden Units was currently being review by the Council.

With regard to FIN10 and 11, 'The number/percentage of residents evicted as a result of rent arrears', the Forum was advised that the figure had increased due to increased activity within the Rents Team.

It was noted that CUS02, 'Customer satisfaction with repairs service', had recently experienced a 0.2 per cent reduction in rates of satisfaction rates, yet was still 1.0 per cent better than the year end figure for 2008/09. The Audit Commission had commended BCH for the customer satisfaction levels.

With regard to HEH01, 'The percentage of properties let that were accepted on the first offer' and HEH02, 'The average number of offers taken to let each property', Mrs Cornall advised that the Council's Housing Allocations Policy enabled tenants to bid for more than one property in any one cycle and therefore refusals of property were inevitable. In light of this, the target would be reviewed in due course to assess its value in terms of demonstrating service provision.

To conclude, it was reported that HEH03, 'The average relate time in calendar days excluding properties undergoing major repairs' had not achieved its target, yet was still 1.3 days better than 2008/09. Mrs Cornall explained that the town's insufficient availability of family accommodation created unstable tenancies, which was a contributory factor to the recent levels of performance.

#### **(b) Sheltered Housing and Community Centres**

The Forum was advised that Ms Nicholson had been appointed as the new Sheltered Housing Manger to replace Mrs Buckley during her maternity leave.

A brief summary of the activities undertaken within Sheltered Housing was provided to the Forum, which included:

- The Deputy Scheme Manager position would be re-advertised;
- The Princes Trust had undertaken improvement works at Horsebridge community centre; and
- Tarnside Community Centre had also recently been improved with an allotment and flowerbeds.

#### **6. TENANT PROJECT FUND**

Mrs Cornall advised that £100k had been ring-fenced for 2010/11 for the Tenant Project Fund. This money was available for tenants and community groups to submit funding applications for projects that would enhance the community. Following a tender process, the Community Foundation for Lancashire had been appointed as the independent third party body who would manage and administer the Fund. The Forum was advised that the organisation had extensive experience and expertise in the management of community-related funds.

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A launch date for the Fund had been scheduled for Friday 16<sup>th</sup> July 2010. A training session had also been organised to enable members to effectively review funding applications against the relevant criteria. All applications would need to demonstrate feasibility, value for money and intended benefits to the local community. Mr Glennon advised that the first round of applications would need to be submitted by the deadline date of 30<sup>th</sup> September 2010, in order to be considered in mid-October 2010.

In response to a query raised, the Forum was advised that all the relevant application paperwork had been approved by the Reading Panel and that support was available for individuals when completing the application form. Mr Glennon added that the Community Foundation for Lancashire would also be able to advise applicants of other available grants for specific community-focused projects that might not necessary be just the Tenant Project Fund.

### 7. CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT

Mr Glennon presented the Forum with an overview of the key outcomes relating to the recently developed Customer Involvement database. For 2009/10, these included:

- 200 tenants had been 'actively involved', i.e. had attended a meeting within the last six months.
- A total of 105 new tenants had been recruited to customer involvement activities.
- Over 1,800 recorded units (incidents) of tenant feedback or activity, totalling on average six units per tenant.
- An average of one service improvement achieved per one involvement activity.

The Forum was advised that targets had also been determined for the involvement of key equality groups. Each of those had been achieved, except for the age range of 25 to 40 years. In light of this, work would be undertaken to examine reasons for low involvement and ascertain possible methods that would improvement engagement with that age range. Mr Glennon reported that customer involvement activity could now be regularly presented to the Forum.

With regard to the BCH Academy, Mr Glennon advised that the first group had graduated at the end of May 2010. A celebration event at the City Learning Centre had been organised and graduates had been presented with their qualification certificate from the Head of Education for the Chartered Institute of Housing. Tenants who were interested in the course were invited to enrol for the next session, which would commence in September 2010. In addition, an Academy 2 was now available to graduates of the Academy 1 course. This would focus on skills development to prepare tenants for an active scrutiny role.

It was reported that the Tenant Conference had been scheduled for 1<sup>st</sup> September 2010 and would be held at the Winter Gardens. Details of the Conference had been included in the Rent Statement which tenants would receive in due course. Mr Glennon advised that the event would focus on the Tenant Service Authority's national standards and the 'local offer' for Blackpool tenants, to inform them about the minimum standards of service that they should expect from BCH.

Mike Glennon

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The Forum was advised that as part of the recent review of the Tenant Involvement Structure, a 'Get Involved' Panel had been established, which would focus on customer complaints, access to services and customer care. Mr Glennon advised that the Panel was also responsible for considering a range of methods that would improve tenant involvement and participation. He encouraged members to attend the next meeting, which had been scheduled for 18<sup>th</sup> August 2010.

An Annual Report Focus Group meeting had been scheduled for 14<sup>th</sup> July 2010. The Annual Report aimed to present an overview of BCH performance and future proposals to tenants. Members were encouraged to attend the meeting to ensure that the report was user-friendly and relevant to tenants.

In light of the success of the Academy programme, BCH was currently developing a tenant training programme which would provide an extensive range of short-courses, such as budgeting, healthy living, yoga and flower arranging. The courses would be free of charge for Council tenants and leaseholders only. A draft programme was currently being developed and would be circulated to the Forum in due course. The possibility of providing stationary packs, such as a diary and files, to assist tenants with attending training courses was also being considered.

Mike Glennon

**8. TENANT COMPACT AND INVOLVEMENT STRUCTURE REVIEW**

Mrs Cornall reported that each of the Service Improvement Panels (SIPs) had now been established with Terms of Reference and had commenced their first cycle of meetings. It was anticipated that an Assembly would sit above each of the SIPs and undertake direct scrutiny of BCH. This proposal would be considered at the next BCH Board meeting for approval, and subsequently discussed with the Council. A further progress update would be provided at the next Forum meeting.

Maggie  
Cornall

**9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

A member raised a number of complaints regarding the accommodation at Munster Avenue, relating to repairs and maintenance. He was concerned that the complaints, which had been submitted to the Repairs Team at an earlier date, were not been addressed in a timely manner. Mr Jefferson acknowledged the complaints and agreed to investigate the matter further. In terms of the issues raised regarding highways, he agreed that he would contact the Highways department.

Peter  
Jefferson

Mr Glennon advised the Forum that Mrs Jenny Sanderson had been admitted to the Trinity Hospice due to cancer. BCH had visited Mrs Sanderson who had welcomed other members of the Forum to visit.

**10. DATE AND VENUE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the date of the next meeting had been scheduled for Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> September 2010, commencing at 10.00 a.m. in Committee Room A.

Georgina  
Atkinson

The meeting ended at 12.15 p.m.

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:  
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