

**Minutes from the Rents Improvement Panel Meeting held on  
Friday 27<sup>th</sup> August, 10am at Ibbison Community Centre**

**Attendees**

Elaine Christian (EC)  
Maurice Christian (MC)  
Colin Porter (CP)  
Irene Bishop (IB)  
Mark Tugwood (MT)  
Andrew Walker (AW) – Area Manager for Queens Park Estate Office and the Rents Team  
Jenni Ellis (JE) – Customer Involvement and Projects Officer

**Apologies**

Sheila Friar (SF)  
Alun Jones (AJ)  
Patricia Robinson (PR)  
Gwen King (GK)

**1. Welcome and Introduction**

AW welcomed attendees to the meeting and thanked all for attending.

**2. Minutes of the last meeting/matters arising**

The minutes of the last meeting were read through and agreed as a true record. The following points were updated and additional items were raised:

- **Customer First** – AW explained that he was yet to meet with Customer First regarding the issues raised at a previous meeting but this was a priority and would take place before the next meeting. Some members expressed concerns that the staff member who assisted tenants with machine payments was finishing in September and would not be replaced – AW is to take this forward to the meeting but advised that members could also complain on an individual basis.
- **Payzone details** – AW stated that he had informed Payzone that some of the outlet details were incorrect.
- **Text messaging** – AW stated that the new text message number was now advertised in Viewpoint and on arrears letters etc.

**3. Key Performance Indicators**

Arrears year end figure: £334 000  
Target: £350 000  
1<sup>st</sup> quarter: £360 960

It was agreed that a graph to illustrate the results will be produced for future meetings and an explanation provided on the increase in arrears as necessary.

A discussion took place into the performance indicators and those found to be of interest to members. AW stated that benchmarking was currently taking place with other organisations to find what they report on – the findings are to be discussed at the next meeting. However, it was agreed that members are interested in the following performance information:

- Amount of current arrears
- Amount of rent collected in relation to the amount outstanding
- Amount of garage rent collected in relation to the amount outstanding
- Number of tenants paying arrears and sticking to payment arrangements
- Number of contacts made to tenants – this could be broken down further into the amount of money collected as a result of contact made
- Number of tenants evicted as a result of rent arrears

Performance indicators are to be sent out along with these minutes.

#### 4. Service Standards

The information on the service standards (agreed at a previous meeting) is not yet complete and so will be posted to members along with these minutes. It was agreed that the service standards should be regularly reviewed to ensure that these are challenging, measurable and realistic – benchmarking is also being completed with other organisations.

#### 5. Customer Satisfaction

- **Rents Survey** – The draft of the rents survey was handed out to members and discussed. AW explained that the survey would be carried out by the independent research company BMG, on behalf of BCH and the results are expected around the end of November. All attendees agreed that the draft survey included relevant questions and was easy to read and understand – AW asked for anyone to contact him with comments/suggestions for improvement.
- **Audit Form Redesign** – AW explained that the tenancy audit forms have been combined into one document which now includes several questions on rents. The new form was handed out to attendees and briefly discussed.
- **Survey monkey results** – AW stated that the results from satisfaction questionnaires/tenancy audit forms were input and collated on software called ‘survey monkey’ which provides an analysis of the results. It was agreed that relevant results should be brought to future meetings
- **Mystery Shopping** – AW explained this to members and advised that the scheme was currently ongoing. A series of appropriate questions had been set and different services ‘shopped’, such as the Rents Team, Customer First or any other BCH department. Once the results have been collated, these will be brought to the next Panel meeting.
- **Tenant Conference/Local Offers** – Members were reminded that the conference is due to take place on Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> September from 12.30pm until 7pm. It was explained that the conference is BCH focused as, due to the framework developed by social housing regulator the Tenant Services Authority, local standards or ‘offers’ have to be set with tenants by the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011. Therefore much consultation will take place at the conference to gain tenants views, identify priorities for the forthcoming year and assist in developing these ‘offers’. JE explained that each conference attendee will receive a season ticket and will have to complete a consultation at each stall in order to be entered into the prize draw. AW handed out the draft questionnaire which will be completed with each conference attendee. Suggestions for improvement were discussed and AW is to amend the questionnaire before the conference.

#### 6. Service Improvements

- **Value for money review of Debt Advice Service** – AW explained that this had commenced and is to demonstrate cost awareness and to ensure that value for money is being provided. The debt advice service is currently outsourced to an independent company, Advice Link, and benchmarking is taking place with agencies and organisations to review what they offer and how much they charge to ensure we receive value for money.
- **Former Tenant Arrears Review** – AW advised that the review is ongoing and once finalised and agreed will be brought to this Panel
- **Strategy – context information** – AW explained that the rent recovery strategy is being reviewed and will include an overview of Blackpool, with reference to the deprivation levels and also a comparison with towns of a similar population and proportion.
- **Buddy Service** – All agreed the draft documents relating to the buddy service were appropriate. AW is to arrange the pilot programme with Elaine Christian who has volunteered to be a buddy.
- **Newsletter** – The last edition of the newsletter was discussed briefly and positive feedback was received from attendees. It was agreed that the following should be included in the next edition:
  - The Conference and results from the consultation along with a picture
  - Promotion of the Incentive Scheme
  - Evictions and the background to these
  - Did you know/frequently asked questions
  - What's new section should remain as a standard item

A draft is to be sent to members once produced before publication.

- **Rents Statement** – An example of the new rent statement was handed out to attendees and discussed. Positive feedback was received with attendees agreeing that the statement was much easier to understand and laid out better. The 5 lines of 'free text' are beneficial to remind tenants of upcoming events or Advice Link/Credit Union etc. AW explained that these could be personalised and relate specifically to individuals.

## **7. Benchmarking**

AW explained that benchmarking is being completed on inspection results from 3 star ALMO's prior to the inspection in February 2011. We need to ensure that we document and evidence everything in order to demonstrate to the inspection team the entire service provided.

## **8. Any Other Business**

After a query raised by an attendee, AW explained that the Rents Team would not be moving to the new office, Coastal House, and would remain at Queens Park Estate Office. AW stated that his secondment was due to finish at the end of March 2011 and would return to his original position at Homestop after that time.

AW advised attendees that Advice Link were reviewing the letters they currently use to engage with tenants and attendees agreed that they would be happy to assist in this review. The letters are to be sent to members for their comments.

## **9. Date and Time of Next Meeting**

Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> November, 10am at Aysgarth Community Centre