

**Minutes from the Rents Improvement Panel Meeting held on
Thursday 18th November, 10am at Aysgarth Community Centre**

Attendees

Elaine Christian (EC)
Maurice Christian (MC)
Sheila Friar (SF)
Colin Porter (CP)
David Shakespeare (DS)
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
Dean Stockwell (DSt) – Advice Link

Apologies

Alun Jones (AJ)
Gwen King (GK)
Irene Bishop (IB)

1. Welcome and Introduction

AW welcomed attendees to the meeting and thanked all for attending and for their involvement. He explained that DSt was in attendance to join in with discussions and answer relevant queries.

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:

- **Customer First** – AW apologised for not having met with Customer First regarding the issues raised at a previous meeting. He stated that a meeting was due to take place this afternoon which a staff member was due to attend – AW is to organise a meeting specifically to discuss the various issues.
- **Payzone** – AW explained that the Council are moving away from Payzone and are currently arranging a new contract with AllPay which have paypoint outlets in a number of different locations. Once the contract has been finalised this will be advertised on the website and in relevant publications etc.
- **Rents Statement** – DS and SF requested that they be sent a copy of the new rents statement which was discussed at the last meeting.

3. Key Performance Indicators

Target = £350,000
Arrears figure, 2nd quarter (July - Sept) = £368,800

AW explained that there had been some issues with retrieving information out of the system but a graph would be produced in the future to demonstrate the performance results.

The performance information was discussed and an update was provided on what can be reported on as follows:

- Amount of current arrears
- Amount of rent collected in relation to the amount outstanding
- Number of tenants evicted as a result of rent arrears

The following information can be reported on in the future:

- 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

A discussion took place into Advice Link and the service they offer. One attendee enquired whether the number/percentage of tenants who had received assistance from Advice Link and were paying off their arrears as a result could be reported on – AW is to look into this.

4. Service Standards

It was stated that this information had already been provided along with the performance indicators and the minutes of the last meeting. AW explained that the service standards could be developed and reviewed regularly by this group and would link to the local offers for the rents service once these have been implemented.

5. Customer Satisfaction

- **Rents Survey** – AW explained that the survey, drafted with the assistance of this Panel, had been sent to all tenants in arrears in August. Approximately 300 surveys were returned which represents a response rate of around 20%. The final report is yet to be received; once it is all relevant information will be sent to Panel members. From the initial findings it has been noted that around 80% of people are satisfied with the service; an action plan is to be developed on the improvements needed to raise this satisfaction level. AW stated that a special meeting may be arranged with the Panel to discuss this in more detail.
- **Mystery Shopping** – AW stated that the Rents Team and other departments had been 'mystery shopped' with questions relating to the Rents service. The majority of feedback received was positive with minor improvement actions. As a result of the scheme, the Rents section on the BCH website is to be regularly updated. A short article will feature in the winter edition of Viewpoint to illustrate the changes made as a result of this activity.
- **Local Offers** – The Tenant Conference held on 1st September focussed specifically on the services we provide in order to help identify future priorities and begin to develop new 'local offers'. These local offers will represent a shared vision for developing and improving a variety of services across BCH and will allow BCH to target funds to the services that tenants feel are most important. The Rents Team are currently completing phone surveys relating to service priorities and this, along with the survey results mentioned above and the information gathered at the Tenant Conference, will assist in developing local offers. This Panel will assist in drafting these offers and it was stated that a special meeting may be held to discuss this further.

6. Service Improvements

- **Value for money review of Debt Advice Service** – AW explained that this is ongoing and is to demonstrate cost awareness and to ensure that value for money is being provided. Benchmarking has been completed and the information on the effect that this service has had is currently being evaluated.
- **Former Tenant Arrears Review** – AW advised that the workflow has been agreed with Client (the link between the Council and BCH) and is to be sent to Panel members once finalised.
- **Buddy Service** – AW stated that they are waiting for the new system to be fully operational and all training completed before arranging for EC to spend time with the Team and pilot the Buddy Service.
- **Newsletter** – It was agreed that an evaluation form should be included with the newsletter in the near future to ensure that people find the information provided relevant, useful and easy to read/understand. It was agreed that the following should be included in the next edition:
 - An anonymous case study/question and answers on Advice Link to promote the service
 - Table featuring benefit news and changes
 - Positive outcomes from this Improvement Panel
 - Evaluation form
 - What's new section (standard item)

- Contact and text instead numbers
- **Housing Benefit** – AW explained that there would be some changes to Housing Benefit but exact details had not yet been finalised. DSt clarified that there may not be significant changes until 2013/2014. It was agreed that this should be included in the newsletter to explain the changes due to take place in the near future.

7. Benchmarking

AW explained that benchmarking is still being completed on inspection results from 3 star ALMO's prior to the inspection in February 2011. Good practice from these organisations is being incorporated into the Team Plan and this will be an ongoing process. AW stated that a document was published by the Rent Income Excellence Network which demonstrates excellent service and performance.

8. Any Other Business

- The letters being reviewed by Advice Link will be sent to members for their comments along with these minutes.
- Up-to-date performance information will be sent out along with the minutes.
- The proof (before design) of the revised Rents Booklet will be sent out with the minutes.
- AW explained that there are currently 3 different coloured payment cards for rent, garages, court costs and recharges. However, this is currently being reviewed under value for money and efficiency savings – attendees suggested that one card should be used for all. AW is to speak with Gail Moyle, BCH Business Services Manager.

9. Date and Time of Next Meeting

February 2011, exact date and venue to be confirmed