

**Minutes from the Rents Improvement Panel Meeting held on
Monday 28th February, 10am at Kilmory Community Centre**

Attendees

Elaine Christian (EC)
Maurice Christian (MC)
Sheila Friar (SF)
Alun Jones (AJ)
Colin Porter (CP)
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

Irene Bishop (IB)
David Shakespeare (DS)

1. Welcome and Introduction

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

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 stated that a meeting had taken place with Customer First where the issues raised at a previous Panel meeting were discussed. Another meeting is planned to take place mid-March and AW advised that he would put forward the concerns of Panel members regarding the lack of staff available to assist with the payment machines. Attendees also raised an issue with the rent payment cards as the rent account number is unclear; it doesn't state which the account number is and this can cause confusion as there are two numbers displayed. AW stated that the rent payment cards are currently being reviewed and this would be passed on.
- **Review of Debt Advice Service** – AW handed out the notes from the special meeting held to discuss the results of the Advice Link review. AW advised that the contract with Advice link had been terminated and a Rent Intervention Officer post is being created to provide a specific rent-related support role to customers.
- **Any Other Business** – Due to the termination of the contract, the Advice link letters no longer need to be reviewed by the Rents Panel.

3. Performance

Target = £350,000
Arrears figure, 3rd quarter (Oct – Dec) = £419,610

The quarter 3 performance report was handed out and headline figures were briefly discussed. It was stated that members of the Rents Team are working weekends to get up to date; due to the implementation of new computer systems for both BCH and Housing Benefit, there has been delays and teething problems which has negatively affected the service. AW stated that a summarised version of the report is to be brought to future meetings. AW requested that members contact him with any queries.

AW handed out the local offers document for the Rents Service. It was stated that all local offers would be published within the 'BCH Customer Charter Booklet' which will be delivered to tenants around 18th March along with Viewpoint.

4. Service Standards

It was stated that this information was not available and would be provided as soon as possible. This will link with the local offers once implemented from April and so it was agreed that this standard agenda item be renamed 'Local Offers'.

5. Customer Satisfaction

- **Rents Survey Action Plan** – the summary report detailing the findings of the rents survey was handed out to members. It was suggested and agreed that a separate meeting should be held to discuss the action plan which has been produced following the results.
- **Equality Impact Assessment** – AW explained that the purpose of this assessment is to ensure that the service is accessible to everyone and does not discriminate. It was agreed that the outcomes from this should be reviewed at a special meeting once the assessment has been completed. The results should identify trends and therefore assist in tailoring services to suit certain situations/individuals.

6. Service Improvements

- **Letters/How to Pay/Rent Calendars** – AW thanked members for their comments on the documents recently sent for review and all agreed the documents were easy to read and understand.
- **Former Tenant Arrears Policy** – AW stated that this policy is due to go to the Board meeting on 1st March for approval.
- **Financial Inclusion Policy** – This policy is also due to go to the Board on 1st March for approval.
- **Newsletter** – The content of the newsletter was agreed as follows:
 - An update on the termination of the Advice Link contract
 - Did you know/what's new – standard item
 - Frequently asked questions
 - Relevant news items

The newsletter is to be drafted and sent to the Panel before publication. A photograph is to be taken of the Rents Improvement Panel at the next meeting for inclusion in a future edition of the newsletter.

7. Benchmarking

Performance Management – AW stated that this would be taking place on a team basis to determine which actions completed achieve the best results. For example, more customers may make a payment after they have received a visit than if they had had a phone call from an Officer. This will assist in ensuring effective services are in place.

8. Any Other Business

It was noted that Housing Benefit are not informing tenants when an overpayment is made which can cause rent arrears. AW advised that he would look into this but ensured attendees that the Rents Team contact customers within 10 days of them falling into arrears and so this is raised at an early stage.

9. Date and Time of Next Meeting

Tuesday 17th May, 10am at Horsebridge Community Centre, Horsebridge Road.