

**MINUTES OF TENANTS' LIAISON FORUM**  
**11<sup>th</sup> January 2011**

**Present:**

Mr M Christian	Ingthorpe Tenants' and Residents' Association (Chairman)
Mrs C Thornber	Bostonway 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
Mrs I Bishop	Disability Forum
Mr B Rogers	Melbourne, Brisbane and Hobart Tenants Association
Mrs M Horn	Grange Park Residents Association
Mrs J Stirling	Blackpool Coastal Housing Board

**In Attendance:**

Councillor Mrs Henderson	Blackpool Council
Councillor Lee	Blackpool Council
Mr P Jefferson	Blackpool Coastal Housing
Mr M Glennon	Blackpool Coastal Housing
Mrs S Grundy	Blackpool Coastal Housing
Mrs M Cornall	Blackpool Coastal Housing
Mrs T Ansell	Blackpool Coastal Housing
Miss J Ellis	Blackpool Coastal Housing
Mrs D Williams	Blackpool Coastal Housing
Ms H Master	Social Housing and Development Worker, Housing Client Team
Miss G Atkinson	Senior Democratic Services Adviser, Democratic Services
Mr N Colquhoun	Blackpool Third Sector Strategic Partnership

**Action**

**1. WELCOME**

The Chairman welcomed members of the Forum to the meeting.

**2. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were submitted on behalf of Ms H. France and Mrs D. Wightman.

**3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS HELD ON 9<sup>th</sup> November 2010**

The minutes of the meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2010 were agreed as a correct record.

**4. BLACKPOOL THIRD SECTOR STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP (BTSSP)**

Mr Colquhoun, Blackpool Third Sector Strategic Partnership Manager, provided the Forum with an overview of the organisation. BTSSP had been designed to support Third Sector organisations and volunteers (e.g. community groups, Tenants and Residents Associations) to enable them to deliver services more effectively and improve partnership working with the public and private sectors.

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It was reported that the Coalition Government's 'Big Society' agenda included a focus on individuals to lead and champion local communities. Areas of approximately 400 households would be led by a 'Neighbourhood Organiser' who would engage with local communities and develop a Neighbourhood Plan, which would include key issues and areas for development specific to the local neighbourhood.

A pilot scheme would be held in three Blackpool wards to ascertain the effectiveness of the Neighbourhood Organiser initiative. The scheme would commence in January 2011 for a period of three months and was open to all individuals. Appointed Neighbourhood Organisers would receive training, support and guidance through the BTSSP by volunteers who would be recruited as mentors. The pilot scheme had been funded through a number of sources. Further funding would be applied for, should the BTSSP wish to roll-out the scheme across the borough.

A discussion took place with regard to 'hard to reach' groups, particularly young people under the age of 25 years and individuals aged between 25 and 40 years. The Forum considered that positive relationships needed to be built with those groups, particularly with regard to young people, before their active engagement with the community could be achieved. Mr Colquhoun acknowledged the challenge in engaging those groups in community activities. It was hoped that the promotion of the Neighbourhood Organiser scheme would encourage community champions from the hard to reach groups.

The Forum was advised that the role of a Neighbourhood Organiser would become increasingly important in light of the significant spending cuts and the move to increased public consultation regarding the prioritisation of services.

In response to concerns raised by the Forum, Mr Colquhoun advised that the scheme would not supersede any positive community work that had already been achieved. The scheme offered either existing community champions, or individuals who wanted to become involved in community work, the opportunity to access support and training to assist with their role. Mr Colquhoun acknowledged the extensive training and support services that were provided by BCH for tenants; however, he advised that not all community champions were BCH tenants and therefore it was important for those individuals to also have access to similar support services.

A discussion took place with regard to the difficulty in engaging individuals with community-focused projects. The Forum considered that the lack of incentive was a key issue and that certain groups had different priorities to others. Each group needed the appropriate support and incentives to encourage them to participate.

The Forum requested that further information on the Neighbourhood Organiser scheme be circulated.

Neil  
Colquhoun /  
Mike Glennon

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**5. LOCAL OFFERS**

Mrs Cornall referred to the document that had been distributed prior to the meeting which included information on the proposed Tenant Service Authority's 'Local Offers' for BCH tenants. The Local Offers defined a minimum set of standards that tenants should expect from BCH. The document had been created using the feedback from a range of consultation activities that had been undertaken with tenants. It was proposed that the Local Offers would be formally adopted in April 2011 following approval from the BCH Board. The Forum was asked to submit comments on the proposed Local Offers by 21<sup>st</sup> January 2011.

TLF members

Mrs Cornall advised that the Forum would continue to monitor BCH until the new Customer Involvement and Scrutiny structure was fully embedded. This would include the consideration of significant service failures. An outline of the interim arrangements, as detailed in the Local Offers document, was provided to members.

The item continued with an overview of each of the seven Local Offers that had been designed for Blackpool tenants, together with an Action Plan to clarify how each Local Offer would be achieved. It was reported that the Service Improvement Panels (SIPs) would be responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Action Plan. Each of the Local Offers would evolve and be refreshed on an annual basis to ensure that they were still appropriate for BCH tenants.

**6. GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION**

Mrs Cornall referred to the 'Local Decision: A Fairer Future for Social Housing' consultation document that had been issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2010. A BCH report which had been submitted to the Board provided an overview of the eight key areas of proposed changes. These included:

- Tenure
- Rents
- Allocations
- Homelessness
- Overcrowding
- Empty Homes
- Mobility
- Housing Revenue Account reform

An outline of each of the areas was provided to the Forum and members were asked to submit any comments on the proposed changes to BCH by 17<sup>th</sup> January 2011.

TLF members

A discussion took place with regard to the standard of private rented accommodation in Blackpool and the Forum considered that a high proportion was of a poor quality. Members were advised that the Council's Strategic Housing section was working on a number of projects that aimed to tackle private landlords and improve the quality of private rented accommodation.

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**7. BLACKPOOL COASTAL HOUSING (BCH)**

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

Mr Jefferson advised that with regard to the availability of funding through the Decent Homes programme, the Government had initially indicated that BCH had not been selected. However, as a result of lobbying from BCH, with the support of the Council and key partners, BCH had been listed and was therefore able to bid for funding. The level of money available was less than in previous years and it was anticipated that confirmation would be received in February 2011.

The grounds maintenance contract with Fountains Plc (the new trading name of Connaught Environmental Plc) would be terminated on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011 due to issues with poor performance. Companies had been invited to tender for the new contract and tenants would be involved in the selection process.

The inspection by the Audit Commission, which had been scheduled for February 2011, had been cancelled in light of the associated costs which had been estimated at £40,000. The inspection was a qualifying criteria for Decent Homes funding; therefore, the inspection was no longer necessary.

The Forum was informed that the last phase of decanting tenants from a number of Grange Park properties was ongoing. The development work had been delayed due to a main supplier going into administration.

With regard to Sheltered Housing, Mr Jefferson advised that the Council's Supporting People Grant would be reduced by 50 per cent in the next financial year. In light of this, there would be a reduction in the Scheme Manager service. Sheltered Housing tenants would be advised of the proposed changes and it was anticipated that service provision would be targeted for the most vulnerable individuals. The Council was also undertaking a review of community centres which included the possibility of introducing a charging scheme for use by external organisations.

**8. TENANT PROJECT FUND**

Mr Glennon reported that the first round of applications had been submitted by the deadline date of 30<sup>th</sup> September 2010. A total of 21 applications had been submitted, totalling £120,000 in potential projects. Of those schemes, six had been approved by the Tenant Project Fund Panel which equated to a value of £32,000. The schemes included:

- The purchase of cold alarms for the elderly.
- A self-defence course for teenagers at Revoe.
- The development of a new park at Dinmore Avenue.
- The development of an allotment at Lostock Gardens.
- The purchase of video surveillance equipment.
- The operation of a Youth Club on Friday evenings at All Hallows.

A number of the projects were part-funded through the Tenant Project Fund and would be supported by other external partners.

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The Forum was advised that the assessment process undertaken by the Panel had been very effective and each application had been considered thoroughly. It was anticipated that the funds for the approved projects would be released within the next two weeks.

The closing date for the next round of applications was 31<sup>st</sup> January 2011, followed by a final application deadline on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011. Following that date, a full review of the Tenant Project Fund would be undertaken.

**9. TARA SUPPORT GRANTS**

A discussion had taken place at the last Forum meeting with regard to the £500 support grant that BCH awarded to the Tenants and Residents Associations (TARAs). Mr Glennon advised that a benchmarking exercise with other North West social landlords had indicated that BCH granted the highest level. Due to a significant lack of take-up of the grant, the Forum was asked to consider whether it was necessary to retain the grant money at the current level. The Forum agreed that the TARA Support Grant be reduced to £250 per annum and that any underspend be returned to the Customer Involvement budget for use on other projects.

**10. CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT**

A brief summary of the activities undertaken within the Customer Involvement division was provided to the Forum. Mr Glennon reported that the Annual Involvement Awards ceremony had been scheduled for 10<sup>th</sup> February 2011 as an afternoon tea and dance at the Empress Ballroom. It was anticipated that around 200 tenants would be invited to the ceremony, in addition to 30 VIP guests. Invitations would be circulated within the next two weeks. The ceremony and awards would be sponsored by a number of organisations; therefore the costs to BCH were minimal.

Mr Glennon advised that the previous Customer Involvement Manager, Tony Fitzgerald, had sadly passed away. The Tenant Involvement Award would therefore be renamed the Tony Fitzgerald Award in commemoration.

It was reported that the Friends of Horsebridge Group had established itself as a TARA and a copy of the Constitution was circulated at the meeting. It was agreed that the TARA be affiliated to the Tenant Liaison Forum.

It was reported that All Hallows had not attended four consecutive meetings of the Forum, despite attempts from BCH to encourage participation. In accordance with the Constitution, it was agreed that the All Hallows TARA be no longer affiliated to the Tenant Liaison Forum. The group would still be able to access support and advice from BCH.

**11. PROPOSED NEW CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT AND SCRUTINY ARRANGEMENTS**

The Forum was reminded of the document that had been circulated prior to the meeting which outlined the proposed new Customer Involvement and Scrutiny arrangements for BCH. It was proposed that a Blackpool

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Tenants and Leaseholders Assembly (BTLA) would sit above a number of Service Improvement Panels (SIPs). The new structure would effectively replace the inspection regime that was undertaken by the Audit Commission. The Assembly would be responsible for the investigation and scrutiny of service failures. The Forum was advised that it was essential that robust scrutiny of services was fully embedded within the organisation. The Assembly would not replace the responsibilities of the BCH Board, but would replace the role of the Tenant Liaison Forum once fully established. Following that, the Forum would still exist but would have no Constitutional links to the Council and would focus only on sharing and considering good practice.

Mr Glennon presented members with five flow-charts that demonstrated the scrutiny systems that had been designed to identify and resolve service failure issues. Flowchart 5 'SIP Alarm' provided an interim arrangement for the Tenant Liaison Forum to raise scrutiny issues, prior to the implementation of the new structure. The BCH complaints procedure would still be available for tenants with individual complaints.

Mrs Cornall advised that a Code of Conduct and Terms of Reference for each of the SIPs and the Assembly would need to be established, which would be completed through a number of workshop meetings. In terms of membership to the Assembly, the Forum was advised that a Person Specification would be developed to assist with the recruitment process.

With regard to the next step, the proposed arrangements were due to receive full approval by the BCH Board, prior to being submitted to the Council for consideration. The Council would be asked to amend the Constitutional arrangements with BCH to enable the new structure to be implemented. The Forum agreed to the proposed arrangements.

**12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Mrs Stirling, BCH Board, thanked the Chairman for granting permission to attend the meeting. She considered that the discussions at the meeting had been interesting and thanked BCH for its success in effectively involving and engaging tenants.

Mrs Horn of Grange Park expressed her appreciation to First Class Windows and Bathrooms for the refurbishment work that had been undertaken on the estate. An update on a number of recent achievements and forthcoming events was outlined to the Forum.

In response to a query raised regarding mobility scooter sheds, the Forum was advised that individuals would need to submit their request to the relevant Estate Office.

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

It was noted that the date of the next meeting had been scheduled for Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> March 2011, commencing at 10.00 a.m. in the Boardroom, Coastal House.

Georgina  
Atkinson

The meeting ended at 12.45 p.m.

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