

MINUTES OF TENANTS' LIAISON FORUM
9th March 2010

Present:

Mr J Newton (Chairman)	Queens Park Residents Association
Mrs C Thornber	Boston Way Tenants Association
Mrs M Everett	Boston Way Tenants Association
Mrs C Hardiman	Edmonton, Linden and Washington Residents Association
Mrs J Sanderson	Edmonton and Linden Tenants and Residents Association
Mr B Rogers	Melbourne, Brisbane and Hobart Residents' Association
Miss G King	Queens Park Residents Association
Mr M Christian	Ingthorpe Tenants and Residents Association
Mrs E Christian	Ingthorpe Tenants and Residents Association
Mr A Pilborough	Munster Avenue Residents Association
Mrs C Pilborough	Munster Avenue Residents Association
Mr R Masson	All Hallows Residents Association
Mrs D Wightman	Melbourne, Brisbane and Hobart Tenants Association
Mrs L Chapman	Melbourne, Brisbane and Hobart Tenants Association
Mrs M Horn	Grange Park Residents Association
Mrs S Underwood	Grange Park Residents Association

In Attendance:

Councillor Mrs Henderson	Blackpool Council
Mrs S Tomlinson	Blackpool Coastal Housing
Mrs M Cornall	Blackpool Coastal Housing
Ms J Ellis	Blackpool Coastal Housing
Ms S Grundy	Blackpool Coastal Housing
Mr M Glennon	Blackpool Coastal Housing
Mr I Grimshaw	Blackpool Coastal Housing
Ms P Whitworth	Assessment, Prevention and Support, Blackpool Council
Mr N Mackey	Principal Legal Solicitor
Miss G Atkinson	Democratic Services, Blackpool Council

Observing:

Mrs A Allen	Mereside Tenants and Residents Association
Mrs V Critchley	Mereside Tenants and Residents Association

1. WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed those in attendance.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were submitted on behalf of Councillor Lee, Mr C Holland, Mrs B Ratcliffe, Mrs D Williams, Ms H Master and Mrs S Buckley.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS HELD ON 12th January 2010

The minutes of the meeting held on 12th January 2010 were agreed as a correct record.

Action

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4. RELATIONSHIP WITH BLACKPOOL COASTAL HOUSING

The Chairman advised the Forum that the item had been added to the Agenda to provide members with the opportunity to have a private discussion. He felt that a number of members may not feel able to speak openly and honestly about particular issues in the presence of BCH officers.

The Forum did not feel that this was necessary and agreed to continue the meeting as standard.

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 the second ALMO inspection of BCH would be undertaken in early 2011. To prepare for the inspection, the Audit Commission had been asked to undertake a review of a number of key service areas in March 2010. It was reported that BCH would need to achieve a two-star rating to continue receiving funding through the Decent Homes programme.

Mr Jefferson advised the Forum that seven members of staff had recently undertaken a visit to the Borough of Poole Council for learning and development purposes. It was reported that the Poole Housing Partnership had been awarded a three-star status as an ALMO and therefore BCH had regarded the visit as a valuable opportunity to gain knowledge and share best practice experiences, for the following reasons:

- Poole had a similar economy and experienced similar issues to Blackpool;
- Poole was of a very similar size organisation to BCH;
- Local 3 star ALMOs had been visited on various occasions; however, Poole was in a different part of the country and as such may have considered new initiatives that had not yet been identified by North West organisations;
- The staff attending had each considered different service areas; and
- Information from the visit would form part of future TLF Workshop meetings.

The visit had been arranged to achieve optimum value for money and had cost £990 in total.

To conclude, Mrs Cornall advised that the BCH Board was due to agree to the commissioning of the governance review for the new customer involvement structure at their next meeting.

(b) Sheltered Housing

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

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- The vacant Assistant Scheme Manager post had now been advertised and would be temporarily covered by other Sheltered Housing employees during the weekend;
- A number of Scheme Managers had been rotated due to sickness absences and it was anticipated that this would be resolved in the near future; and
- A consultation exercise to consider the replacement of furniture at Cherry Tree Community Centre had commenced.

In addition, Mrs Cornall advised that funding submission to Comic Relief for the purchase of IT equipment had not been successful; however, the Sheltered Housing team hoped to submit to alternative funding sources in the near future

A review of Sheltered Housing, which was being led by the Adult Social Care and Housing directorate, had commenced and would include consultation with the Sheltered Housing Forum.

The Satisfaction Survey, which had been circulated to all Sheltered Housing tenants on 1st January 2010, had received a very positive response rate and the results would be presented to the next TLF meeting and published in the Sheltered Housing newsletter.

Maggie
Cornall

(c) Performance Indicators

A copy of the Balanced Scorecard to end of Quarter 3, 2009/10, was circulated at the meeting. Mr Jefferson provided the Forum with an update on a number of Key Performance Indicators 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', Mr Jefferson advised that the Gas Servicing team had been unable to gain entry to nine properties. Two of those had had injunctions granted in order to gain entry and the remaining seven were currently being processed. In response to a concern raised by the Forum, Mrs Cornall advised that weekend and out of hours visits could be arranged for tenants and that more support would be provided to the Gas Servicing team to resolve the issue.

The Forum was advised that BUS02 and 05, 'The percentage of routine repairs completed on time', had recently dropped to 97.2 per cent as a consequence of the adverse weather conditions, which had prevented a number of external repairs being undertaken.

BUS11, 'The percentage of empty homes-other', was anticipated to increase in light of the number of properties that would be retained as vacant under the Council's housing redevelopment programme.

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 was at unsatisfactory level. BCH provided intensive support to tenants to try to avoid evictions in all cases; however, it was important that BCH did

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have a robust approach for those individuals that continued to refuse to pay. The recovery of tenant arrears, linked to FIN14, 'Former tenant arrears', was currently under review to value cost effectiveness and it was reported that the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Housing had written off around £80k for 2009/10. Arrears would only be written off for former tenants who had vacated Blackpool, although the arrears would be reissued should the individual return to the town and become a Council tenant again. BCH provided assistance to all tenants with arrears, such as repayment schemes and early intervention support.

It was noted that CUS02, 'Customer satisfaction with repairs service', had recently experienced a 0.5 per cent reduction in rates of satisfaction rates, which would be addressed with the contractors.

The figures relating 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', did not appear to follow any particular pattern and it was anticipated that the number of refusals would continue. 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.

6. TENANT PROJECT FUND

Mrs Cornall reported that the BCH Board had approved the establishment of the Tenant Projects Fund in September 2010. The Board was due to consider the appointment of an independent third party body to undertake the management of the Fund and BCH officers would be obtaining quotes from organisations with appropriate expertise. It was hoped that work with a selected organisation would commence in the new financial year.

7. CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT

Mrs Cornall advised that the proposal to introduce more robust review and scrutiny of BCH services had been recently considered and agreed by the BCH Board. The next stage would be to formalise eight new Service Improvement Panels, which would link into an overarching body. This would replace the existing Tenant Liaison Forum and form part of the new Tenant Led Scrutiny structure. A review of BCH governance arrangements would ensure that the new structure could become successfully embedded within the organisation's structure and it was anticipated that the review would be completed by autumn 2010.

In response to a query raised, the Forum was advised that the Tenants and Residents Associations that were affiliated to the Tenant Liaison Forum would still continue to receive funding from BCH.

Mr Glennon advised that any Council tenant would be welcome to become involved in the new structure and that membership was not necessarily linked to an affiliation to a TARA or the TLF. He explained that this enabled tenants, who were interested in a particular service area, to be involved in the relevant Service Improvement Panel. Information and details on how to join the Panels would be published in the next edition of Viewpoint.

In response to a concern raised regarding the disbanding of TLF, Mrs Cornall advised that the new overarching body would be responsible for

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scrutiny, analysing issues and submitting recommendations to the BCH Board. It would have a formalised link to each of the Service Improvement Panels, as well as to the LGBT and Disability Forums.

The Forum was advised that new structure would allow for a review of membership criteria and that the possibility to establish an informal community-focused group could be considered. The Forum agreed to consider this at a future TLF Workshop meeting.

8. TENANT COMPACT AND INVOLVEMENT STRUCTURE REVIEW

It was agreed that this had been discussed in Item 7, 'Customer Involvement'.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

In response to a concern raised regarding a lack of attendance by Lancashire Constabulary at the meetings of the All Hallows Residents Association, it was agreed that BCH contact Richard Scholes to assist with the issue.

Maggie
Cornall

A discussion took place regarding Mereside Tenants and Residents Association. The Forum had agreed at the AGM meeting in July 2009 that the TARA could no longer be affiliated to TLF because it did not achieve the criteria, as stipulated in the 'Criteria for Tenants and Residents Associations' of the TLF Constitution. However, a number of members now felt that they should still be involved with the Forum.

The Forum was advised that the authorisation of Mereside TARA's affiliation would require a change to the current Constitution, which could only be considered at the next AGM or at an Extraordinary General Meeting. This would then need to be presented as a recommendation to the Cabinet Member for approval.

It was agreed that Legal Services consider possible alternative options and report back to the next meeting; however, it was noted that the TLF in its current form was due to be disbanded and therefore the membership disputes regarding TLF would cease to be an issue. It was suggested that Mereside TARA submit requests to attend the TLF meetings as observers while options were being considered.

Neil Mackey

With regard to Public Liability Insurance, members were advised that the Council would cover TARAs for general low-risk activities undertaken within the community centres. However, groups would need to obtain separate insurance for other activities, or those that were undertaken outside of the community centres. It was reported that a document was currently being produced to provide groups with guidance on insurance requirements.

Mrs Horn wished to submit her appreciation to Connaughts for its quick resolution of a number of issues on Grange Park. A positive working relationship had been formed with the contractors and Mrs Horn commended them on their recent work.

In response to a query raised, Mr Jefferson advised that ongoing investment and maintenance would ensure that refurbished properties would retain Decent Homes standards. In addition, a guidance booklet

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would also be provided to tenants to advise them how to effectively care for new kitchen and bathrooms installations.

For information purposes, a report was circulated by the Chairman which outlined responses to a number of actions that had been raised at previous TLF meetings, together with a costing exercise that outlined the cost of holding TLF meetings.

It was reported that a TARA had recently been established for Cherry Tree Gardens and a copy of their Constitution was circulated to the Forum. As the TARA achieved the criteria, the Forum agreed that this group be affiliated to the TLF and be invited to attend future meetings.

Georgina
Atkinson

10. DATE AND VENUE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the date of the next meeting had been scheduled for Tuesday 11th May 2010, commencing at 10.00 a.m. at the City Learning Centre.

Georgina
Atkinson

The meeting ended at 11.25 a.m.

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