

Committee: COMMUNITY COMMITTEE

Agenda Item

Date: March 15 2007

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Title: TENANT FORUM MINUTES

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Item for information

Summary

1. This report provides the Committee with the draft Minutes of the previous meeting of the Tenant Forum, which covers the district. There are no specific financial or risk assessments relating to this report.

Recommendations

2. That the Committee note the draft minutes of the Tenant Forum of 29 January 2007.

Background Papers

3. None.

Impact

- 4.

Communication/Consultation	Tenant Forum promotes consultation relating to a wide variety of issues that affect tenant and the wider community.
Community Safety	N/A
Equalities	Tenant Participation must be applied without discrimination of any kind.
Finance	The Tenant Forum is operated via existing Tenant Participation budget.
Human Rights	NONE
Legal implications	Fulfils the Council's statutory duty.
Sustainability	N/A
Ward-specific impacts	Covers the whole district.
Workforce/Workplace	Statutory part of housing function

Situation

5. This report has been presented to members following the request made by the former Health and Housing Committee in March 2005.

It should be noted that the minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2007 are in draft only and are subject to approval of the Tenant Forum at it's next meeting in March 2007.

Risk Analysis

- 6.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
Tenant Forum does not have a sufficiently high profile in helping shape/plan future improvements to the services provided to tenants.	Low	High	Ensure Tenant Participation is promoted by the Housing Service, to ensure full take up of all positions on the Forum.

Minutes of a Meeting of the Tenant Forum held on Monday 29th January 2007 at Saffron Walden Council Offices

Present: Jill Bolvig-Hansen (Chairman), George Chesham, Daphne Cornell, John Maddams, Paul Simpson, Dick Brown, Sam Sproul, Joan Hoadley, Colin Gilbey.

Officers in attendance: Helen Joy, Rebecca Procter (Tenant Participation Officers); Liz Petrie (Housing Management Manager); Diane Burridge (Operations Director); Jonathan Smith (Organisational Re-engineering Manager); Alasdair Bovaird (Chief Executive).

1. APOLOGIES

John Maddams, Barbara Armstrong.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

These were signed as a correct record.

3. MATTERS ARISING

Co-option of New Tenant Representatives

It was agreed to co-opt Sam Sproul and Barbara Armstrong onto the Tenant Forum.

Introduction of Operations Director

Jill Bolvig-Hansen welcomed Diane Burridge to the meeting in her new capacity as Operations Director, responsible for Housing Management, following the re-structuring of services within the District Council. Diane introduced herself, and briefly summarised her experience with the Council, which included supervising the repairs and maintenance function. Diane assured Tenants that she has a great deal of interest in all the areas associated with the Housing Service.

Regarding the current staffing changes, Diane advised that appointments are due to be finalised in the next few weeks, with a target date of 1st April 2007. During this process customers should find no change in terms of the service they receive. The aim of the changes is to make the best use of computerised processes to free up officers' time in the most efficient way. Elizabeth Petrie confirmed that in the case of Housing Officers, they had found that over time they were more office-bound. The intention is to free up more of their time to allow them to carry out more work with tenants in their homes. Daphne Cornell noted that tenants are generally very contented at present. She wished to emphasise that the Tenant Representatives simply wished to be kept informed and felt that recently they had been told less and less. Diane Burridge reassured Tenants that officers were here today to keep them informed.

Re-structuring of the Housing Service

Jill Bolvig-Hansen thanked Diane Burridge, then welcomed Alasdair Bovaird, whom she had invited to attend a meeting with Tenant Representatives in view of the recent changes, to answer their questions.

Alasdair Bovaird expressed the hope that tenants (other than Tenant Representatives) would not have noticed a difference in the overall service they receive from Housing, as he would expect due to the professionalism of the staff. There are changes throughout the services provided by the District Council, caused not only by the re-structuring but also by the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review imposed three yearly by Government. The Council also faces the prospect of changes to administration due to local and general elections. The Council is therefore in a state of flux. The Council also faces a likely reduction of 3% p.a. of funds available to local government, and for UDC this means we are looking to save £1.5m p.a. on running costs. Consequently, the Council has been examining the way in which services are delivered, with a view to saving money on background costs, rather than "frontline" costs. This is why the Council has planned to implement a Customer Services Centre, which is nearly operational. The intention is that enquiries should as far as possible be dealt with in one telephone call, by a person rather than an automated machine.

Alasdair noted that whilst the changes have taken place very rapidly, the intention was to avoid the negative impact which would arise from a long period of uncertainty.

Regarding the Housing Service, the Council performs two roles, stock management and repairs. It is important to ensure that the District has a good housing supply of different ranges. Accordingly, the Council has taken the view that Housing Strategy becomes more closely associated with Planning. Housing Management will therefore be headed by Diane Burridge as Director of Operations, whereas Housing Strategy will be headed by John Mitchell, Director of Development. A new Head of Housing Management is to be identified as soon as possible.

Regarding the future of the housing stock, the re-structuring process will not alter the position following the recent Stock Options Appraisal.

Alasdair stated that Uttlesford is a very good place to live and work, and that the Council intends to keep it that way. This will be done by ensuring that housing meets people's reasonable aspirations, by putting forward development plans for new housing, liaising with Essex County Council and considering further options for accomplishing this aim. Whilst there will inevitably be major changes, none will involve UDC in not being a stock owning landlord.

Jill Bolvig-Hansen thanked Alasdair and invited questions from Tenant Representatives.

In relation to the Customer Service Centre, Colin Gilbey wished to raise the issue of difficulties faced by elderly tenants when telephoning the Council. Receptionists do not always speak clearly enough, or may be too quick, which can make elderly tenants feel rushed or confused. Jill Bolvig-Hansen noted that the use of jargon by Council staff may also be confusing for the ordinary person.

Jill Bolvig-Hansen suggested that the next Tenant Newsletter include an article by Alasdair Bovaird explaining the reasoning behind the Customer Service Centre. The Tenant Participation Officers will liaise with Alasdair on this.

Sam Sproul reported a failure on the part of the Repairs service to return telephone calls.

George Chesham noted that on a recent occasion, the same contractor who had just completed some work on his property returned the following week, the system having indicated that the work was still outstanding.

Dick Brown reported an ongoing problem with guttering at his property. He had informed Repairs three times.

Alasdair Bovaird assured Tenants that their complaints would be followed up.

Jill Bolvig-Hansen requested that a workshop between Tenants and contractors should be arranged, as Tenants had found the last workshop very helpful.

4. BUSINESS PROCESS RE-ENGINEERING

Jonathan Smith, Organisational Re-engineering Team Manager, introduced himself and explained that the Team is currently identifying everything that is done by the Housing Service. The intention is to establish areas whether the work may be done more economically. A report will be issued at the end of February, which will enable the proper allocation of work to the Customer Service Centre.

5. CHARTERED INSTITUTE OF HOUSING – CONFERENCE 2007

Helen Joy confirmed that the dates for the Harrogate conference are Tuesday 19th June to Thursday 21st June, i.e. only three days this year. She has booked accommodation for two nights. Tenants agreed that Jill Bolvig-Hansen would go as their delegate.

6. TENANT PARTICIPATION

Vicarage Mead – a completion date is likely to be set for the end of March. Jill Bolvig-Hansen asked for the TPOs to arrange a visit to the site.

Church Gardens – funding is now available for the project to re-configure the car park in order to increase capacity. Consultation of residents is taking place in order to comply with planning requirements.

Broomfields – a scheme to improve the parking area has received approval from residents who were consulted.

Upper Mill Field – residents' views have been taken into account in relation to plans for improved parking, and a further survey is about to take place.

Parking across the district is causing problems of damage to grass verges, and Rebecca Procter has arranged a meeting between Legal, Environmental and Housing officers in order to ensure consistency and cost-effectiveness when responding to reports.

Stoneyfield Drive – the young people are finalising the details of their preferred equipment, which will be documented as part of the evidence of consultation required by any application for funding.

Wagon Mead – although the contractors had been there today, Paul Simpson reported that the stones near the drains had only been raked away, whereas they should be removed. Paul advised that the level should be dropped two bricks below the damp proof course. The ridge tile had still to be replaced.

Community policing – it was agreed that the police mobile telephone numbers should again be included in the Tenants’ Newsletter, this time in large print and in a “cut out and keep” format. It was agreed that the sheltered sites should be encouraged to display this notice.

7. PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

Housing Repairs customer satisfaction surveys:

	September	October	November
Satisfied	94% 225	99% 279	97% 343
In part	32	37	61
Not satisfied	17	2	13

Homelessness

For the third quarter ending December 2006
56 people presented as homeless
39 accepted
15 were rejected
2 were in Bed & Breakfast, one of which was a 17 year old.

8. LOCAL ISSUES

Bio-bags – Diane Burrige explained that paper and cardboard are better for the composting process, and that if one receives free papers then this costs nothing. The price of a roll of 50 has gone down to £4.99. UDC checks the suitability of the bags offered by the supermarkets such as Tesco (currently 40 for less than £4). The quality of recycling in the District is very good, and therefore the difficulty some people experience in reading the “triangle” symbol on plastics does not seem to be a serious issue at the moment. The advice is – if it is a bottle, put it in.

The District is being surveyed for suitable glass recycling sites.

Dick Brown wished to query the state of the car park area near his home, as the garages had been demolished. Liz Petrie advised that the plans for this site will be checked with Suzanna Clarke. Dick also wished to ask when lofts were to be insulated; the TPOs will speak to Andrew Hurrell about this.

9. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Monday 12th March 2007 at 2.00 pm in the Chairman’s Office
Monday 14TH May 2007 at 7.00 pm in the Committee Room
Monday 9th July 2007 at 7.00 pm in the Committee Room
Monday 1st October 2007 at 2.00 pm in the Committee Room
Friday 7th December 2007 Christmas lunch