

Committee: COMMUNITY COMMITTEE
Date: 20 November 2008
Title: **Tenant Forum Minutes**
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Agenda Item

11

Item for
information

Summary

1. This report provides the Committee with the Minutes of the previous meetings 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 minutes of the Tenant Forum of 7 July 2008 and 1 September 2008.

Background Papers

3. None

Impact

4.

Communication/Consultation	Tenant Forum promotes consultation relating to a wide variety of issues that affect tenants 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 Uttlesford District
Workforce/Workplace	Statutory part of the housing management function

Situation

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

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 THE TENANT FORUM HELD
ON MONDAY 7TH JULY 2008 AT SAFFRON WALDEN COUNCIL OFFICES**

Present: - Joan Hoadley, Lorna Plant, John Maddams, Colin Gilbey, Daphne Cornell, Sam Sproul, David Parish, David Rhodes, Effie Rogers

Officers in attendance: - Helen Joy (Tenant Participation Officer), Liz Petrie (Housing Management Manager), Neil Weeding (Housing Officer), Daisy Martlew (Clerical Assistant)

APOLOGIES

Paul Simpson, George Chesham, John Cole

MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

Signed as correct

MATTERS ARISING

Daphne Cornell suggested that Tenant Forum meetings be held during school holidays as John Cole is unable to attend afternoon meetings during term time. Lorna Plant suggested that the Forum alternate meetings between evenings and afternoons to make it fair to all members.

Lorna Plant reported that she had found the European Procurement Workshop very interesting. All Forum members agreed. Helen Joy (Tenant Participation Officer) updated the Forum on the contracts for disabled adaptations and stair lifts. Helen will inform the Forum when contractors' interviews are arranged. David Parish was unable to attend the workshop but asked still to be included in the contractors' interviews.

Colin Gilbey attended the Area Panel Meeting on behalf of the Forum and reported to Peter Caulfield (Crime Reduction Officer) about carrying out speed checks at adequate times (between 8am and 10am and 4pm - 6pm).

Tenant Forum Minutes Report
Community Committee, Item 11

Helen Joy also reported at the JAG (Joint Agency Group) about speeding in Hatfield Heath. It was agreed that this information be passed on to Inspector Tom Boland and hopefully these issues will be dealt with. David Parish reported that the average speed recorded outside Hatfield Heath School was 47 mph. John Maddams explained that there had been speed checks at Fouracres during peak times.

Lorna Plant asked who to contact about Neighbourhood watch. Helen Joy agreed to contact Alan Johnson (Neighbourhood Watch Coordinator) for an updated list.

Sam Sproul attended a meeting with Iain Wright (Junior Housing Minister), Councillors Schneider, Chamberlain, and ..., also Roz Millership (Head of Division, Housing Services) to discuss the negative housing subsidy. He felt that it was a very useful meeting and ministers agreed that a review was needed into the way negative housing subsidy works.

David Rhodes said that the graffiti at Loompits Way was still there and that people were dumping rubbish. Neil Weeding (Housing Officer) reported he did a sweep of the area and has reported everything to environmental health. Neil will chase them up as something needs to be done.

TENANT PARTICIPATION UPDATE

Helen Joy reported that the visit to Vicarage Mead for Holloway Crescent tenants went very well. The visitors were very impressed with the building and spoke to the tenants of Vicarage Mead who gave both the positive and negative sides of living within the refurbishment. It was agreed that visits to Holloway Crescent would take place once a fortnight to keep tenants updated.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Repairs – Helen Joy reported that there are problems with the software and repair statistics are unavailable

Homelessness – from 1st April to end of June 2008

Presented 7

Accepted 4

Tenant Forum Minutes Report
Community Committee, Item 11

Rejected 1

Pending 2

Bed and Breakfast 0

16 – 17 year olds 0

David Parish asked where the 7 homelessness applications came from. Helen Joy explained that people would have to have local connections and, for example, may be fleeing domestic violence, falling out with families or ending a short term tenancy.

COMMUNITY ISSUES

Daphne Cornell was concerned about people not keeping their gardens tidy and asked if they were being reported to the Council. Neil Weeding explained that when Housing Officers do estate management visits, they will always look around the area to keep an eye on any ongoing issues and keep a check of any new problems on their patches. We also rely on tenants and other visiting officers to report any problems. Liz Petrie (Housing Management Manager) explained about the Welfare Scheme for the elderly or people on disability allowance and that for others who need support there are other agencies the Council can contact.

Lorna Plant reported difficulty in getting through to Environmental Services and asked if something could be done. Liz Petrie explained that we could only raise our concerns.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Daphne Cornell expressed her concern about the new Choice Based Lettings Scheme. She registered her interest in the scheme, but unfortunately the computer system did not recognise her details. When trying to get through by telephone, the numbers corresponding to the local authorities on the automated answer system were mixed up. Daphne is concerned that the new system doesn't seem to be filling vacant properties any more quickly than the old system. Liz Petrie explained that with any new system there are teething problems. It was agreed that Neil Weeding would check Daphne's details and update her if there was a problem.

Members of the forum asked if we could arrange for Roz Millership (Head of Division, Housing Services) to attend our next meeting to explain how the housing

revenue account has been affected by the Council's financial situation and why budgets have been cut when rents have gone up. Helen Joy agreed to invite Roz Millership along to the next meeting.

DATES OF NEXT MEETING

Monday 1st September 2008 at 2pm, Committee Room, Saffron Walden Council Offices

Monday 3rd November 2008 at 7pm, Committee Room, Saffron Walden Council Offices

MINUTES OF THE TENANT FORUM HELD

ON MONDAY 1st SEPTEMBER 2008 AT SAFFRON WALDEN COUNCIL OFFICES

Present: - Joan Hoadley, Lorna Plant, John Maddams, Colin Gilbey, Daphne Cornell, Sam Sproul, David Parish, David Rhodes, Effie Rogers, Paul Simpson, George Chesham, John Cole

Officers in attendance: - Helen Joy (Tenant Participation Officer), Liz Petrie (Housing Management Manager), Lisa Higgon (Housing Officer), Roz Millership (Head of Division for Housing), Russell Goodey (Building Services Manager), Daisy Martlew (Clerical Assistant)

APOLOGIES

None

MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

Signed as correct

MATTERS ARISING

Lorna Plant asked if Helen Joy (Tenant Participation Officer) had acquired a list of contacts for Neighbourhood Watch. Helen replied that it is the local PCs not local people on the contact list and suggested that the Forum invite Peter Caulfield (Crime Reduction Officer) to the next meeting. The Forum agreed.

Daphne Cornell reported that the problems she had had with the Choice Based Letting Scheme system had been resolved.

SPEAKER ROZ MILLERSHIP (HEAD OF DIVISION FOR HOUSING)

Roz Millership reported that whilst there were pressures on the HRA these had not been caused by the financial position of the general fund.

Daphne Cornell asked why houses have not been painted. Roz Millership explained that should be done every 5 years, Roz agreed to check the planned programme of works for specific properties.

Effie Rogers enquired that she had received a letter in April to say her windows will be done and had heard nothing since. Roz explained letters are sent to all tenants explaining works to be done in the financial year but the window contractors will contact tenants directly when work is due to start.

Sam Sproul informed the forum that two tenants had complained about the window fitters using their electricity to recharge their equipment, which the tenants then had to pay for. Roz Millership will report this to Bill Goldbourn.

John Cole asked if there was any news on the replacement of doors in Council properties. Roz Millership explained that work on bungalows was a priority and that work on general needs properties would follow once this programme was complete

Daphne Cornell informed the Forum that she had written to Ian Wright (Junior Housing Minister) complaining about the Government taking a large portion of the money collected from Uttlesford residents' rent, and not using it for what they say it will be used for. Sam Sproul agreed and suggested writing to Ian Wright as a Forum. It was agreed that Sam Sproul would draft the letter, and that the final version would come from the Chairperson (Daphne Cornell).

HOUSING OPTIONS APPRAISAL/HOUSING CONDITION SURVEY

Roz Millership explained that a New Conditions Survey will have to be carried out so that the Council can assess what needs to be spent on the housing stock. Roz reported that this information would be fed into the options appraisal. Roz further explained that the Council will be involving the Forum in the options appraisal.

SERVICE STANDARDS

Liz Petrie (Housing Management Manager) asked the Forum for their input into Service Standards. Daphne Cornell asked about interpreter access. Liz replied that the Council has access to Language Line.

George Chesham asked when a phone call is made to Repairs to report a fault, is this recorded straight onto the computer? Liz Petrie explained that at times the Repairs Assistants can get very busy and do not always have time to record it on the computer there and then. Often they will make a note of the problem and during a quieter period enter the relevant details onto the system.

Effie Rogers asked when reporting a repair, could a reference number be provided so if any problems occur tenants can use the reference number to chase works.

SHELTERED HOUSING REVIEW

Liz Petrie announced that a review of sheltered housing accommodation will be starting towards the end of September 2008. Liz also requested that two members of the Forum one with and one without knowledge of sheltered accommodation join the review task group. John Maddams and Paul Simpson both volunteered.

TENANT PARTICIPATION UPDATE (HOLLOWAY CRESCENT, NEWSLETTER)

Helen Joy reported that the Council had consulted with tenants and the wider community in Leaden Roding regarding the proposed development plans for Holloway Crescent.

Helen reported that tenants of Holloway Crescent were very pleased with the plans and residents of the Close still have some reservations. Helen is consulting with residents within the Close and the Crescent on a weekly basis.

Tenant Forum Minutes Report
Community Committee, Item 11

Roz Millership expressed her appreciation for the way officers behaved at the consultation due to the high volume of local opposition. No one lost their temper, but remained calm and responded to questions confidently and coherently.

Helen Joy asked the Forum for any suggestions on what to include in the newsletter. Lorna Plant suggested a few paragraphs explaining the difference between Home Option, the Housing Register and the Mutual Exchange Scheme, as there seemed to be some confusion amongst residents.

Lorna also asked why private home owners in Radwinter do not receive the newsletter. Helen Joy explained that only Council tenants receive it, although if there are spare copies available they may request one. Helen added that the newsletter is also available online.

Lorna Plant asked for an update on the Essex County Council pilot scheme to measure CO2 emissions caused by turning off the streetlights. Lorna expressed concern that residents had put their own lights up so would the CO2 emissions not increase. Helen Joy agreed to speak to Jake Roos (Energy Efficiency Surveyor)

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Repairs satisfaction survey

April

Yes – 224

In part – 49

No – 3

99% Satisfaction

May

Yes – 221

In part – 50

No – 1

99% Satisfaction

June

Yes- 193

Tenant Forum Minutes Report
Community Committee, Item 11

In part – 51

No – 0

100% Satisfaction

July

Yes – 143

In part – 27

No – 1

99% Satisfaction

Homelessness

April – July 2008

Presented – 14

Rejected – 4

Accepted – 7

Pending – 2

Withdrawn -1

LOCAL ISSUES

John Cole asked if there was any law regarding the number of vehicles allowed outside your house. Roz Millership said she did not know of any law; however she will ask a Housing Officer to find out if the vehicles are taxed when they are next in the area.

Sam Sproul expressed his concern over the proposal for waste collection vehicles not reversing into cal-de-sacs to collect waste; many people will struggle to wheel their bins to the top of the road, especially the elderly or infirm. Helen Joy reported that Environmental Services say if people have problems then they should contact the Council for an assisted collection. The Forum considers the proposal to be indiscriminate, and asks the Council to reverse its decision. Helen suggested that Ron Pridham (Head of Street Services) be invited to the next meeting.

Tenant Forum Minutes Report
Community Committee, Item 11

Lorna Plant reported a broken front door glass pane and asked whether the Council intended to repair it. Liz Petrie explained that broken glass is the tenant's responsibility.

Joan Hoadley asked if the Council supply smoke alarms to Council properties. Russell Goodey said that the Council can supply a smoke detector free of charge to the elderly.

Effie Rogers reported that an occupied flat in Barkers Mead had been advertised as vacant in the home options booklet. Lisa Higgon explained that if tenants give four weeks notice to end their tenancy, the Council will advertise the property in the next booklet printed. Lisa added that people should not be visiting any property until they have been offered it.

Colin Gilbey informed the Forum that a number of disabled people have been complaining about the state of pavements in the district. Officers confirmed that it is the Highways Agency's responsibility.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Russell Goodey (Building Services Manager) reported that the procurement process for the letting of contracts is well underway.

Russell told the Forum about an all day event due to be held on 16th September from 10am, to meet all the short listed contractors for the Disabled Adaptations Contract. Russell invited members of the Forum to attend; David Parish, Effie Rogers, Colin Gilbey and David Rhodes volunteered to come along.

Liz Petrie reported that the Government requires a customer satisfaction survey to be carried out in October. Questionnaires will be sent to all tenants, except those in sheltered housing. Liz explained that approximately 600 questionnaires need to be returned. Roz Millership explained that the survey is a Government survey, although UDC has to supervise it, and that the survey is being carried out by BMG on behalf of some Councils in Essex.

The Forum were concerned about the number that need to be returned, especially due to the nature of the questions, and feel that many people will not fill them in for this reason. Vouchers offered as an incentive were discussed; however Roz Millership explained that it would be difficult to offer an incentive when the survey is confidential.

Tenant Forum Minutes Report
Community Committee, Item 11

John Cole asked if some questions were left unanswered whether the survey form would still count towards the 600 target. Roz Millership confirmed that it would count.

Daphne Cornell informed the Forum that her and Colin Gilbey had been invited to and will be attending the London Commuter Belt East/M11 Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2008 on the 10th September, 10am -12pm.

Liz Petrie reported that the Council will be carrying out a survey at the end of September 2008 involving everyone on the housing register to ask if they understand or need help understanding the Choice Based Letting Scheme.

DATES OF NEXT MEETING

Monday 3rd November 2008 at 7pm, Committee Room, Saffron Walden Council Offices