



Minutes of the meeting of the MILTON KEYNES COUNCIL HOUSING FORUM held on THURSDAY 17 November 2006 at 7.30PM

Members

Present:	Eamonn Bobey(Chair)	-	Netherfield Residents Association
	Rita Venn	-	Fenny Stratford Residents Association
	Mike Healey	-	Castles Residents Association
	Jeanette Marling	-	Lakes Residents Association
	George Byfield	-	Conniburrow Community Association
	George Farran	-	Fishermead Residents Action Group
	Janette Bobey	-	Netherfield Residents Association
	Margaret Burke	-	Bradville North End Residents Association
	Nellie Farran	-	Lords Close Residents Association
	Charles Allum	-	Great Linford Parish Council (Downs Barn)
	Hazel Taylor	-	Greenleys Residents Association
	Lynn White	-	Lakes Residents Association
	Geoff Woolmore	-	Woughton Parish Council (Beanhill)
	Fred Smith	-	Greenleys Residents' Association
	Terry Field	-	Conniburrow Community Association
	Gwen Murphy	-	Meads Close Residents Association
	George Chennell	-	Fenny Stratford Residents Association

Others: Councillor D Hoyle - Milton Keynes Council

Also Present: Councillor A Latham - Milton Keynes Council

MKC Officers:	Pam Wharfe	-	Director of Housing Services.
	Simon Aslett	-	Tenant Participation Manager
	Caroline Chandler	-	Finance Manager
	Michael Toze	-	Committee Manger
	Paula Mason	-	Tenant Participation Officer
	Anthony Hodson-Curran	-	Assistant Director of Housing
	Derek Beaumont	-	Partnering Manager
	Jan Bate	-	Sheltered Housing Manager

Apologies:	Paula Bonarius	-	Bradville North End Residents' Association
	Brian King	-	Bradwell Common Residents Association
	Andy Work	-	Fishermead Residents Action Group
	Councillor R Edwards	-	Milton Keynes Council
	Pat Warner	-	Bradwell Common Residents Association
	John Beale	-	Meads Close Residents Association

1.0 MINUTES

ACTION

RESOLVED -

- (a) That the Minutes of the meeting of the Milton Keynes Council Housing Forum, held on 21 September 2006 be approved as a correct record.

2.0 MATTERS ARISING

ACTION

The Tenant Participation Manager tabled documents relating to action points from the minutes of the last meeting. It was noted that from now on feedback on action points would be a separate agenda item.

In relation to minute 4.0 a), Forum members noted that they were still receiving reports of people being told they had to accept housing association or private rented properties. They requested a report on this, preferably from someone independent.

In relation to minute 4.0 j) Forum members noted that they believed the fee to private landlords was £50-75, not £25.

In relation to minute 5.0, E Bobey observed that he had received a response to some of his questions, but not to all. P Wharfe answered that she had not yet started to look at changes to the Granby Court allocation policy, but she would do so. It was only a trial scheme.

P Wharfe

In relation to minute 10.0 the Forum noted that minutes of the Building Services Tenants Action Group should not come to the Housing Forum before the Action Group approved them.

In relation to minute 10.0 J Marling noted that she wanted feedback on the voids workshop as well as the capability charts. P Wharfe would provide this at the next Forum meeting.

P Wharfe

In relation to minute 11.0 M Burke reported that there were only four residents remaining at Briar Lodge, and they were happy with their forthcoming move to the Willen retirement village. J Marling noted that Bramley Grange already had good links with the Lakes Residents Association and the Residents Association would go on visiting.

3.0 NOTICE OF ANY OTHER BUSINESS

ACTION

- Problems with MITIE (G Farran)
- Emailed invitation to Christmas party (M Burke)
- Data Protection (M Healey)
- Visits to MITIE (C Allum)

4.0 POLICY FOR PROVIDING EMERGENCY HEATING TO TENANTS

ACTION

The Partnering Manager presented a report on the issues around providing emergency heating for tenants. The key issues that had been raised were the issue of heating several rooms in the house with emergency heating, the issue of supplying hot water and the problems additional expenses caused for those on low incomes. He noted that temporary heating could not provide the same level of heating as central heating, and that running multiple emergency heaters would

overload most household fuseboxes. Prevention of breakdown was the best option, but was not always possible. Health and safety issues made provision of hot water impractical. Discretionary payments for those affected by emergency heating costs were an option and would be looked into. However, it should be remembered that this would reduce overall funding for other items.

Housing Forum representatives noted that they felt the comparison between private homes and social housing on the cost of emergency heating was unfair, as Council tenants were not responsible for their boiler systems. They asked how long tenants might be without heating.

The Partnering Manager answered that it was impossible to give a definitive answer, as timescale depended on the repairs needed. A complete replacement of a system would probably take some days.

Forum representatives suggested that additional expenses for hard-to-heat homes be taken into account when calculating payments for emergency heating. They also suggested that the way in which help was offered should be considered, as some people would not know to apply for help. It was also pointed out that some people would need immediate help to pay electricity meters, while others would need help when quarterly bills came in. There might also be borderline cases of people not on benefits who could not afford the additional expenditure of emergency heating.

Cllr I Henderson noted that it would be preferable if the system were as simple as possible.

Forum representatives asked to have an input when these proposals were considered in more depth, possibly through a working group.

Forum representatives noted that paragraph 7.2 was incorrectly worded. The Partnering Manager apologised for any lack of clarity

It was suggested that heating contractors should pay for the additional heating costs, as this would ensure they got their heaters back and save them money. It was also suggested that heating contractors should pay anyway if they failed to fix properties in adequate time. The Partnering Manager noted that it was difficult to set a deadline for repairs – if an entire system needed replacing it would be unreasonable to expect a contractor to fix it in 24 hours. It was unfortunate that heating systems got to the state of failure but this was a result of historic under-investment in heating systems within Milton Keynes, and it was not the fault of current contractors.

Forum representatives noted that since there was no programme of regularly maintaining heaters, most heaters would only get fixed when they had actually broken down. The Partnering Manager replied that this was not the case. Gas installations were serviced annually and if faults were noted then repairs were scheduled.

Forum representatives noted that they were aware of tenants without heating for weeks or months. It was also suggested that help with emergency heating costs should not be discretionary, and everyone who needed it should receive it. The Partnering Manager answered that he would investigate any cases of excessive delays in heating repairs

**D
Beaumont**

reported to him.

RESOLVED –

That the Partnering Manager and Director of Housing Services consider how best to proceed with the issues and proposals raised in this report, including the possibility of including tenant representation via a working group.

**P Wharfe/D
Beaumont**

5.0 CHANGE IN THE DATE OF THE MKC FORUM AGM

ACTION

The Chair noted that the current practice of holding the Housing Forum Annual General Meeting in July meant that there was a 3 month gap between the Housing Forum meetings in June and September. It was also difficult for a new executive to settle in over that gap. It was therefore proposed that the AGM be held in June, with an ordinary Housing Forum meeting held in July.

RESOLVED –

That this be put forward as a change to the Constitution at a future meeting of the Housing Forum.

6.0 CHANGE IN THE OPENING HOURS OF THE TENANTS RESOURCE CENTRE

ACTION

The Chair noted that there was a desire to open the Tenants' Resource Centre for longer. However, this was dependent on volunteers, and also discovering if there was a demand. Volunteers could be any tenant.

Forum members noted that this had been tried before and there had been a shortage of volunteers. The Forum Executive then ended up filling in. Advertising different hours might confuse people, and it would be off-putting if tenants turned up and found no-one at the resource centre. It would be difficult to judge if volunteers would be reliable.

RESOLVED –

That the Executive seek more volunteers for the Resource Centre. If volunteer numbers increased significantly, then opening hours could perhaps be extended.

7.0 ELECTION OF COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER TO THE EXECUTIVE 2006/7

ACTION

No nominations were received. The Forum noted that the job description looked off-putting but in fact responsibilities were shared among the Executive.

RESOLVED –

1. That S Aslett circulate the job description to tenant groups.
2. That the election be brought back to the next meeting of the Housing Forum.

S Aslett

8.0 UPDATE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SHELTERED HOUSING STRATEGY

ACTION

Cllr I Henderson presented a report on the implementation of the Sheltered Housing Strategy. It had been noted in 2004 that there was a need for a more strategic look at sheltered housing, as many schemes were out of date and hard to let, and people's expectations of housing

in old age had changed. The Housing Revenues account did not have money to renovate many of the older schemes and in some cases they were completely unsuitable due to poor layout.

It had been agreed as part of the strategy that Briar Lodge and Bramley Grange would close, as they were in poor condition and hard to let. The strategy had been widely consulted. However, the decision to close Briar Lodge and Bramley Grange not been initially publicised to ensure that residents were informed sensitively and appropriately. Cllr Janet Irons had submitted a letter to this meeting supporting the closure of Briar Lodge. It was also notable that residents were largely happy to be moving elsewhere. There were only four residents still in Briar Lodge, and they would be moving to Willen Retirement Village. The decommissioning of Bramley Grange was also well under way.

Forum members noted that a good warden was often a key factor in the quality of a sheltered housing scheme. Concern was expressed that mobile wardens undermined this. Cllr I Henderson noted that while good wardens were very important to sheltered housing schemes, mobile wardens allowed the flexibility to support individuals in their own homes.

Forum members noted that Durrans house was currently in a poor state of cleanliness, and dropped kerbs and double glazing had not been introduced. They were concerned that sheltered housing schemes were being neglected and that the other six sheltered housing schemes identified as difficult to let might also be at risk. They noted that many older people preferred to remain within their own community.

Cllr I Henderson noted that demand for the Willen Retirement Village had been extremely high, showing that for many people remaining in a particular community was not the key priority. It was important to offer people a choice. Problems with Durrans House would be investigated. It was important to review how the sheltered housing strategy had worked so far, and then move forward. While the Housing Forum would be kept involved in any decisions about sheltered housing schemes, the sensitive notification of residents would take priority. This had been organised very well in the case of Briar Lodge and Bramley Grange.

P Wharfe

The Sheltered Housing Manager noted that those moving from Briar Lodge and Bramley Grange were filling voids in other schemes. 24 tenants from the two schemes had already been re-housed, 33 in total would be moved by the end of November and twelve more would move early next year. She noted that the warden property at Subgrove House was not being sold, it was being let to a warden living elsewhere.

Forum members noted that the closure of a sheltered housing scheme affected the whole community. Many residents of estates looked upon local sheltered housing schemes as somewhere they would eventually want to live.

P Wharfe noted that housing provision in areas losing sheltered housing schemes would be considered. In some cases there might be provision of other forms of housing for the elderly. Local residents would be involved in the consultation process regarding Bramley Grange very soon.

Concern was expressed that people had still moved into Bramley Grange after it was known it would close, giving them the stress of two moves. Had any of the former residents of Briar Lodge and Bramley Grange moved to other schemes at risk of closure, as this would force them to move repeatedly?

The Sheltered Housing Manager noted that there were two residents who had moved into Bramley Grange after closure was known. In one case the move happened between the decision to close and residents being informed of the closure. In the other case a tenant had needed an urgent move from an unsuitable property. He had been informed that Bramley Grange was about to close and had decided to go ahead with the move anyway. The situation with regard to other schemes was still being assessed. No closures were currently planned.

RESOLVED –
That the report be noted

9.0 REPORTS FROM ASSOCIATIONS ACTION

R Venn reported that the Fenny Stratford Residents Association had been regenerated, with a Steering Group formed from former members. The AGM would be held on 6 December

M Burke noted that Bradville North End Residents Association had not received funding from the Parish Council as it had hoped, so had been unable to produce leaflets. However, it had joined the demonstration outside the front of the Civic Offices about Milton Keynes Partnership.

L White asked whether information on joining Residents Associations was available via the Tenant Participation website. P Mason agreed to look into this **P Mason**

10.0 OFFICERS REPORTS ACTION

J Marling noted that the door in the Resource Centre kitchen could not be moved because it was a fire door.

RESOLVED –

That the Forum receive the minutes from the Officers' meetings of the MKC Housing Forum held on 2 October 2006.

11.0 MINUTES FROM THE BUILDING SERVICES TENANTS ACTION GROUP

J Marling noted that these had not yet been agreed by the Building Services Tenants Group.

12.0 ANY OTHER BUSINESS ACTION

MITIE

G Farran noted that appointments were being changed without notifying tenants. He asked tenant representatives to ask residents about this issue, and the quality of work carried out. C Allum noted that he had a meeting with MITIE the next day and would pass on details of any

specific concerns

C Allum noted that he and Cllr Henderson had visited MITIE's offices and received an explanation of how MITIE's repairs system worked. He felt that the MITIE system was generally good, and that visiting them had been a worthwhile exercise, as it helped build up a relationship.

Several Forum Members noted that they still had concerns about MITIE's performance. C Allum noted that there would be good and bad staff in any organisation. He suggested that Executive Members also take up MITIE's offer and visit them. The Partnering Manager noted that MITIE contractors also regularly attended the Housing Forum surgeries and would respond to any issues raised there.

**Housing
Forum
Executive**

DATA PROTECTION

M Healey noted that his personal details had been distributed without his permission. He suggested that everyone's personal details be distributed. Other tenant representatives also raised concerns about details or photos being used without permission.

Some tenant representatives felt that limited use of details and/or photographs was expected when volunteering as a tenant representative, though out of courtesy they should be asked first.

The Committee Manager noted that personal contact details would not normally be given out in public agenda. However, in September an address had been included in a report, which had not been noticed and so was printed by mistake.

The Director of Housing suggested there should be a form asking tenant representatives if they minded contact their details being made public.

P Mason

EMAILED INVITATION TO CHRISTMAS PARTY

Several members of the Forum expressed concern about an email sent from the Resource Centre. The Deputy Resource Centre Manager apologised and noted that in future emails would be discussed by the whole Executive before they were sent out.

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 10:52 PM