



Minutes of the meeting of the MILTON KEYNES COUNCIL HOUSING FORUM held on THURSDAY 15 FEBRUARY 2007 at 7.30PM

Members

Present: Eamonn Bobey (Chair) - Netherfield Residents Association
 Charles Allum - Great Linford Parish Council (Downs Barn)
 John Beale - Meads Close Residents Association
 Janette Bobey - Netherfield Residents Association
 Margaret Burke - Bradville North End Residents Association
 G Chennell - Fenny Stratford Residents Association
 Mike Healey - Castles Residents Association
 Jeanette Marling - Lakes Residents Association
 Tony Mercer - Eaglestone Residents Association
 Gwyn Murphy - Meads Close Residents Association
 Hazel Taylor - Greenleys Residents Association
 Rita Venn - Fenny Stratford Residents Association
 Lynn White - Lakes Residents Association
 Geoff Woolmore - Woughton Parish Council (Beanhill)

Others: Councillor Exon - Milton Keynes Council

MKC Officers: Pam Wharfe - Director of Housing Services.
 Simon Aslett - Tenant Participation Manager
 Matt Bishop - Asset and Performance Manager
 Linda Ellen - Tenancy Services Manager
 John Moffoot - Head of Democratic Services

Also Present: Jan Poynter - ORC International

Apologies: Jim Blore - Castles Residents Association
 Paula Bonarius - Bradville North End Residents Association
 George Byfield - Conniburrow Community Association
 Brian King - Bradwell Common Residents Association
 Councillor I Henderson - Milton Keynes Council
 Pauline Prop - Tinkers Bridge Residents Association
 Fred Smith - Greenleys Residents Association
 Pat Warner - Bradwell Common Residents Association
 A Work - Fishermead Residents Action Group

1.0 MINUTES ACTION

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Milton Keynes Council Housing Forum, held on 18 January 2007 be approved.

2.0 MATTERS ARISING ACTION

In relation to Minute 6.0, the Chair noted that it had been reported that the level of profit which MITIE made was set regardless of how many jobs they did and that the overspend on the Contract did not provide the company with additional profits. On that basis, the average cost per repair was approximately £117 and he asked if that was just to cover the costs of parts and labour. Matt Bishop replied that the number of 4,000 jobs was an estimate and an increase in demand and not cost per works order. Since the introduction of the MITIE contract, the cost of an average works order had decreased.

In relation to Minute 7.0 the Chair asked if there was an average cost per void property. Mike Bishop replied that the average was in the order of £2,400 to bring properties back up to a minimum lettable standard.

In relation to Minute 9.0 the Chair noted that it had been reported that launching an investigation in relation to the delayed consultation on the window replacement programme would be a waste of time and money. The Director of Housing Services pointed out that there was no additional cost involved at the present time. If additional cost had been incurred, then an investigation would have been worth doing.

3.0 NOTICE OF ANY OTHER BUSINESS ACTION

Newspaper Article regarding Fencing and Decent Homes (E Bobey)

4.0 TENANT AND LEASEHOLDER SATISFACTION SURVEY 2006 ACTION

The Forum received a presentation from Jan Poynter of ORC International on the Tenant and Leaseholders Satisfaction Survey 2006.

1,490 tenants' questionnaires and 643 homeowners' questionnaires had been returned representing an overall response rate of 32%. 63% of respondents to the homeowners survey were shared owners and 35% were leaseholders.

A net figure of 67% of tenant respondents and 50% of homeowners were found to be satisfied with the overall service provided by the Council. Older respondents were more likely to

record higher levels of satisfaction when compared with those in younger age groups, and shared owners were found to be far more satisfied than leaseholders.

74% of tenants were satisfied with their accommodation and 62% of respondents believed that the condition of their homes was good. 69% of tenants and 75% of homeowners recorded that they were satisfied with the neighbourhood in which they lived.

A majority of both tenants (62%) and homeowners (54%) considered that it was easy to get hold of the right member of staff when contacting the Council. 72% of tenants and 57% of homeowners believed that staff were helpful while 66% of tenants and 59% of homeowners indicated that staff had been able to deal with their problems.

60% of tenants were satisfied with the repairs service provided by the Council, but amongst homeowners, only 31% were satisfied with the repairs service, 45% were satisfied with the cleaning service and 44% were satisfied with the landscaping service.

75% of tenants and 66% of homeowners considered the Council to be good at keeping tenants informed and more than two-fifths of both tenants and homeowners believed that the Council took their views into account a little in making decisions. 50% of tenants and 33% of homeowners were satisfied with the opportunities for participation in management and decision making.

A net figure of 64% rated their rent as good value for money. Repairs and maintenance was regarded as being the most important service provided by the Council and was the service ranked first in those requiring some or much improvement.

Jan Poynter responded to questions from the Forum in relation to disability and illness levels amongst tenants, and contacts other than for the repairs service, which had to be by telephone. Members of the Forum also asked questions about when the survey had been done, and acknowledged that it represented a snapshot of the levels of satisfaction in August/September 2006. Margaret Burke asked who set the standard for levels of improvement, and Jan Poynter responded that this measured people's own experience and perception.

It was acknowledged that a higher degree of older tenants had responded, and that they were the ones who were most likely to know who to turn to for service and advice. Jan Poynter pointed out that a face to face survey would be better at targeting particular age groups rather than the postal survey which was carried out.

RESOLVED –

1. That the report be noted.
2. That further information be provided to the Forum in relation to the proportions of tenants who were disabled or suffering long term illness in comparison with national figures; the number and types of repairs carried out for shared owners; and details of methods and levels of satisfaction associated with contact other than for repairs.

P Wharfe

5.0 MANAGING NOISE NUISANCE IN COUNCIL PROPERTIES ACTION

The Forum received a report from Linda Ellen on the introduction of measures to manage noise nuisance in Council properties. A report on a pilot scheme with Thames Valley Police in relation to anti-social behaviour would be submitted to the next meeting.

Linda Ellen reported that she was looking at the use of the Geographical Information System to identify hot spots for noise nuisance. When a complaint was received, interviews were carried out with all parties and tenants were encouraged to talk to their neighbours straight away. DAT noise measurement equipment had been acquired, but it was too early to report on the success or otherwise of the initiative.

The initiative was part of a general move to reduce neighbour nuisance, which would involve an updating of the Tenancy Agreement and the Lettings Policy, publicity, improved security to doors and windows, protection of witnesses and the identification of vulnerable tenants.

Janette Bobey welcomed the report, and noted that the DAT machines could be used by homeowners in relation to complaints against tenants, but could not be used by tenants complaining about homeowners. She would prefer that the machines could only be used for tenants complaining about tenants, and that other complaints should be referred to Environmental Health. The majority of problems in the Netherfield Estate were from homeowners rather than from tenants.

She also commented that it would be wrong if tenants felt that they could get their fences, doors and windows repaired as a result of complaining about their neighbours' anti-social behaviour. Linda Ellen replied that there was no suggestion that doors, windows and fences would be replaced just for that reason, but there was a general need to design out crime. In relation to the DAT machines, Linda Ellen commented that the majority of complaints would be between tenants. Any complaint against a homeowner would need to be actioned through the Environmental Protection Act by Environmental Health. The Housing Department was unable to take action against homeowners. In relation to complaints by homeowners against

tenants, however, the Housing Department had a responsibility for tenants' behaviour. However, she would talk to Environmental Health to see if evidence could be gathered using the Housing Department's machines for use under the Environmental Protection Act.

Geoff Woolmore asked how long it should take between a complaint and a prosecution. Linda Ellen reported that it depended upon the availability of evidence, the level of nuisance, the availability of witnesses, the availability of Court dates and the views of a Judge. It could be a lengthy process. Mr Woolmore referred to a complaint which had taken 3 years to progress, and Linda agreed to talk to him outside of the meeting.

Hazel Taylor asked how long the DAT machines would remain in properties. Linda Ellen replied that each case would be dealt with individually. Normally the machines would be used for about a week, but this depended upon type of noise and when it generally happened.

In response to a question from Tony Mercer, Linda Ellen commented that the tenants who were the subject of the complaint had to be informed that the machines were being used.

In response to a question from Charles Allum, Linda Ellen reported that leaflets were being made available in Housing Offices which would contain advice on how to approach neighbours and then how to complain about them if necessary.

In relation to a question from Margaret Burke, Linda Ellen replied it was too early to say whether or not the machines would be used for noise in gardens during the summer.

There was further discussion relating to the use of machinery to measure noise nuisance from tenants, and the lack of a service from the Environmental Health Department. The Director of Housing Services pointed out that this was not a matter of tenants against homeowners but it was a Housing Management issue. Complaints about tenants needed to be investigated and it was the responsibility of the Housing Department to do that. Janette Bobey commented that a noise nuisance problem with homeowners would take months to investigate through the Environmental Health Department and tenants were being asked to pay twice for the service through their rent and their Council Tax.

RESOLVED –

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the Environmental Health Department be invited to attend a future meeting of the Forum to outline their role in tackling noise nuisance. **S Aslett**

6.0 DECENT HOMES UPDATE

ACTION

Matt Bishop reported that he would be able to give a fuller progress update on the Decent Homes standard at the April meeting following the year end. However, he had received some questions from Members in advance of the meeting to which he would respond.

Work on Decent Homes standards in sheltered housing would be carried out alongside the rest of the stock in the area. However, Buckland Lodge would be the subject of a separate programme which would be carried out towards the end of the 2008/09. Kitchens in communal areas were not the subject of Decent Homes standard, and any work done in kitchens would be as a result of a Health and Safety repair.

The next question related to Kingsfold, Bradville, and Matt Bishop reported that UPVC windows, external decoration and repairs to the timberwork would be carried out alongside the Decent Homes work in 2007/08.

Matt Bishop reported that the overspend on voids and repairs now amounted to £600,000 and was likely to remain at that level until the end of March. He had carried out an analysis of the value of work done since the MITIE Contract and was satisfied that the increase in cost was as a result of increased demand. The actual spend on voids had increased by 20%, but the average cost of work carried out had reduced by 11.5%. To get the work back into balance against the expenditure, would involve a reduction of the amount of work being done, and this in turn, would affect customer satisfaction. He reminded the Forum that the survey report earlier in the meeting suggested that the repairs service was already regarded as the highest priority service in relation to customer satisfaction.

Members of the Forum commented upon the return of customer satisfaction cards, the replacement of fences, the standards which tenants expected of repaired stock, the possibilities of getting prospective tenants to visit properties in advance to comment upon the standard of decoration and their personal preferences, and the tendency to replace rather than repair low cost equipment.

A discussion ensued relating to the Council's policy in relation to the replacement of fences. Janette Bobey stated that tenants had never been told that the Council was no longer responsible for the replacement of fences. The Tenancy Agreement had not been amended to reflect this change in policy. The Director of Housing reported that the matter had been discussed the previous month at the Forum, and it had now been decided that a summary of the policies needed to be prepared. In March 2005, a newsletter had been sent out in relation to the ballot on

ownership which made it clear that fences and boundaries would only be repaired if there was a health and safety issue. In the recent publicity, the Partnering Manager had simply been repeating Council policy. The newsletter which had gone out at that time had contained the logos of both the Council and the Tenants Forum.

Members of the Forum complained that any changes in the policy arising from the Housing ballot should have been notified to the Forum and not have been the subject of publicity in the newspapers. They felt that decisions were not being taken consistently by surveyors and that if tenants felt that they could get their fencing carried out by alleging anti-social behaviour by their neighbours then they would do so. The compromise position should be that the gable ends and back fences should be the responsibility of the Council and tenants could do the rest of the fencing work if they wished. The Director of Housing Services welcomed the suggested compromise but stressed that any review would have to be carried out in the context of existing resources. The recent storms had brought the matter to a head but the position had needed to be clarified for the benefit of both staff and tenants. She appreciated that tenants had demonstrated their pride in the service provided by the Council through the ballot, but it was now important that tenants and the Council worked together to deliver what could be delivered with the resources available.

Matt Bishop reported that the Decent Homes budget was the only money available for improvement works. The estates to be completed first in the next financial year would be the improvements to Granby Court and those properties where access had been difficult, these being the deferred properties from the 2006/7 programme due to the reduction in the budget. Historically, due to the fact that the Apollo contract commenced part way through the financial year, the lead in time for works and communication with tenants following the completion of surveys was very short. Over the last 18 months however Building Services have addressed this whereby 90% of the surveys had already been carried out for 2007/08, and this would assist in the delivery of the programme and communication with tenants earlier. The section was now able to look beyond 2010/11 when it was likely that improvements would concentrate on bathrooms, because the majority of tenants were opting to have their kitchens replaced as part of the Decent Homes Standard. It was also likely that more money would be available to spend on roof repairs. The work currently being carried out to bring homes to a Decent Homes Standard would reduce the demands on the repairs funds after 2010 however the other work that is not being addressed due to the Decent Homes requirements will continue to affect the services ability to complete preventative maintenance works.

A further discussion took place on the cost of fencing, and the Council's responsibility in relation to private fences erected by tenants. It was suggested that the money that had been spent on the Vanguard intervention could have been used for repair work or bringing some homes up to the Decent Homes Standard. There was also a discussion about the level of reserves required to be held in the Housing Revenue Account and whether more money could have been invested in achieving decent homes.

The Director of Housing Services pointed out that the Council had a duty to retain a reserve in the Account at a prudent level. She reminded the Forum that the Section 151 Officer had had to issue Notices about the level of reserves in the past and there was no intention to allow that to happen again.

RESOLVED –

1. That the report on the progress on achieving Decent Homes Standards be noted.
2. That a report on the possibilities of clarifying the Council's approach to fencing works be submitted to a future meeting. **S Aslett**

7.0 REPORTS FROM RESIDENTS ASSOCIATIONS ACTION

Tony Mercer expressed thanks on behalf of the Eaglestone tenants for the works which had been done on the Estate.

Eamonn Bobey reported that he had been re-elected as Chair of the Netherfield Residents Association and Janette Bobey had been re-elected as Secretary.

8.0 OFFICERS REPORTS ACTION

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes from the Officers' Meetings of the Housing Forum held on 11 December 2006 and 8 January 2007 be received.

9.0 NOTES FROM OTHER MEETINGS ACTION

RESOLVED –

That the notes of the Meetings of the Housing Forum Grant Panel held on 16 October 2006 and the Sheltered Tenant Forum held on 29 November 2006 be received.

10.0 ANY OTHER BUSINESS ACTION

It was agreed that, in the light of previous discussions, the item of any other business notified previously be deleted.

11.0 CONSTITUTION – DATE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING ACTION

It was agreed to bring forward the date of the Annual General Meeting of the Forum to June, with the actual date being dependent upon the availability of the Council Chamber. **S Aslett**

12.0 GRANBY COURT DROP IN SESSION ACTION

The Chair reported that he and the Vice-Chair had visited Granby Court to promote tenant participation and resident involvement with a view to setting up a Residents' Association or an action group. It had been brought to their attention that some leaseholders were concerned about the charges they were expected to pay relating to services that they received or services that were not satisfactory. There was particular concern about charges relating to communal repairs which had been caused by acts of vandalism.

The residents had spoken of issues surrounding noise, possible drug dealing, over-occupancy in some of the flats and not feeling supported. There was also concern of the dangers of speaking out about the problems because of the fear of repercussions. The residents did not know whether the security cameras were regularly monitored. It had also been evident that there was a feeling that Granby Court was regarded as temporary housing, so there was no long term commitment to the community.

The Chair felt that the meeting had given the residents some hope of improvement, and he had passed the comments to Simon Aslett for consideration. **S Aslett**

13. THE ROLE OF THE HOUSING FORUM ACTION

RESOLVED –

That this matter be considered at the next meeting, if possible. **S Aslett**

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 10.30 PM