



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

Members

Present: Eamonn Bobey (Chair) - Netherfield Residents Association
 Charles Allum - Gt Linford Parish Council (Downs Barn)
 John Beale - Meads Close Residents Association
 Janette Bobey - Netherfield Residents Association
 Margaret Burke - Bradville North End Residents Association
 George Chennell - Fenny Stratford Residents Association Association
 Jeanette Marling - Lakes Residents Association
 Gwyn Murphy - Meads Close Residents Association
 Lynn White - Lakes Residents Association
 Geoff Woolmore - Woughton Parish Council (Beanhill)

Others: Councillor I Henderson - Milton Keynes Council
 Councillor R Exon - Milton Keynes Council
 Councillor D Hoyle - Milton Keynes Council
 Councillor A Latham - Milton Keynes Council

Officers: Simon Aslett - Tenant Participation Manager
 Anthony Hodson-Curran - Assistant Director of Housing Services
 Lee Mooney - Social Inclusion and Health Inequalities Officer
 Simon Teesdale - Environmental Health Teamleader
 Pam Wharfe - Director of Housing Services
 Kay O'Callaghan - Committee Manager

No. of Public: 2

Apologies: P Bonarius - Bradville North End Residents Association
 G Byfield - Conniburrow Community Association
 G Farran - Fishermead Residents Action Group
 B King - Bradwell Common Residents Association
 R Venn - Fenny Stratford Residents Association
 P Warner - Bradwell Common Residents Association

1.0 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENT

The Chair reported on the death of Pat Warner's (Bradwell Common Residents Association) son the previous week and suggested that the Forum make a donation to Willen Hospice from the money raised at its Christmas Party 2006.

2.0 MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Milton Keynes Council Housing Forum, held on 15 February 2007 be approved as a correct record, subject to Minute 5.0 Resolution 2 being amended to read "That a representative of the Environmental Health Service be invited to attend a future meeting of the Forum and a further discussion be held regarding Digital Audio Tapes (DATS) owned by the Council".

3.0 ACTION SHEET

That the Chair be provided with a breakdown on the repairs carried out to homes in Granby Court under the Decent Homes Standard.

Matt Bishop

4.0 MATTERS ARISING

1. Further to Minute 4.0 Jeanette Marling stated that Jan Poynter of ORC International had agreed to provide her with a breakdown of figures regarding the number of telephone calls received by the Council other than those that came through to the call centre. This information had not been received.
2. Further to Minute 5.0 Janette Bobey (Netherfield Residents Association) stated that the majority of problems in relation to noise nuisance enforcement on the Netherfield Estate were from homeowners rather than tenants.

Simon Aslett

ACTION

**Pam Wharfe /
Caroline Chandler**

3. Further to Minute 6.0 Margaret Burke, the Vice-Chair requested that she be provided with information regarding the level of: -
 - (a) reserves in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and
 - (b) the minimum amount that the Government permitted the Council to retain in the HRA as reserves.

5.0 ADVANCE NOTICE OF ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Representatives requested that the following business be considered later in the meeting:

- (a) Rent Increase (JM)
- (b) Asbestos Removal (GM)
- (c) Servicing and Installation of Gas Boilers (EB)
- (d) British Gas (MB)
- (e) Allocation of Properties at Granby Court (MB)
- (f) Sustainable Communities Public Meeting (EB)
- (g) Landline Numbers for Premium Rate Numbers (Cllr Hoyle)

6.0 THE USE OF DIGITAL AUDIO TAPE (DAT) RECORDERS BY THE ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT

The Forum received a Presentation from Simon Teesdale, Environmental Health Teamleader on the use of DAT recorders by the Environmental Health Department.

Following a discussion the Forum raised a number of issues and questions:

- (a) Charles Allum asked if odour was classed as a nuisance under the Environmental Protection Act?

Simon Teesdale responded that smoke and odour were classed as the same and both were included under the Environmental Protection Act.

(b) Janette Bobey asked the following questions: -

(i) Was it possible to report tonal noise to the Council?

Simon Teesdale replied that a test would have to be carried out from adjoining properties to determine whether there were grounds for issuing a statutory nuisance notice.

(ii) Would it be possible for a breakdown of the figures for seizures of equipment and callouts for tenants and homeowners and also the figures for callouts for noise?

Simon Teesdale stated that the Council did not have a break down figures for tenanted premises, non tenanted properties and others for callout. He would provide the number of callouts for officers on standby over the last twelve months and also the number of seizures of equipment.

Simon Teesdale

(iii) How closely did Housing Officers and Environmental Health Officers work with local Thames Valley Police Officers in an area?

Simon Teesdale responded that Housing Officers would have been dealing with an issue for a while prior to passing it to Environmental Health.

(iv) Was there an issue with Thames Valley Police withholding information from Environmental Health? On Friday and Saturday nights Thames Valley Police were not available as the Police tended to concentrate on the Theatre District of Milton Keynes?

The Chair commented that the telephone number published was for Thames Valley Police and not the Council which meant that if the Police did not report the matter to Environmental Health then the issue would not be resolved.

Councillor I Henderson stated that the telephone number 01908 691691 should be used which put the caller through to the alarm centre. The caller would be diverted to the appropriate duty officer. The caller could not speak to the duty officer directly.

Janette Bobey responded that she had phoned the number previously and was told to report to the local housing office the following morning. She stated that a better working relationship between the Environmental Health Service and the Housing Service was needed.

- (v) How many members of staff were in the Environmental Health Team?

Simon Teesdale replied that there were thirteen Officers in the team and currently seventeen Officers on the standby rota.

- (c) The Vice-Chair asked the following questions: -

- (i) Would the Environmental Health Team normally visit the person making the complaint as well as visiting the people causing the noise?

Simon Teesdale responded that normally the person making the complaint would not be identified and the Environmental Health Service with Thames Valley Police would visit the people together.

- (ii) The Vice-Chair stated that homeowners were better off than tenants regarding DAT equipment and suggested that tenants should be given the first opportunity to use the Digital Audio Tapes (DATS) equipment purchased by the Housing Service rather than homeowners as the equipment had been paid for from the housing budget.

Simon Teesdale replied that the Environmental Health Service would consider any suggestions, however he did not see why tenants should have priority.

The Director of Housing Services stated that the Council had a contract with tenants and could take action against them, however it was not possible to prosecute homeowners for noise nuisance but mediation would be recommended. The mediation service received a small grant from the Council each year.

- (d) The Chair asked the following questions: -

- (i) What was the timescale for dealing with complaints?

Simon Teesdale said that the shortest timescale was one month.

- (ii) The Chair stated that there was a need for a proactive out of hours service and the possibility of using Police Community Support Officers should be investigated?

Councillor I Henderson stated that it was Thames Valley Police that determined the usage of the Police Community Support Officers.

- (e) Jeanette Marling asked the following questions: -

- (i) How many Environmental Health Officers were on call at any one time?

Simon Teesdale responded that one officer was on call at any one time except if a fatality occurred in the city and other officers could be called on if required.

- (ii) What was the position regarding Environmental Health Officers attending an area which could not be accessed by road?

Simon Teesdale responded a risk assessment of the area would be carried out on the day by the Environmental Health Officer.

Geoff Woolmore asked what hours would be considered unsocial for undertaking Do It Yourself (DIY) at weekends?

Simon Teesdale responded that to start work prior to 7.30 am and to continue working after 10.30 pm would be considered unsocial.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted.

7.0 NEIGHBOURHOOD AGREEMENTS

The Forum received a report from the Social Inclusion and Health Inequalities Officer on the Council's trial introduction of "Neighbourhood Agreements" for Beanhill (2007) and Tinkers Bridge (2008).

A Neighbourhood Agreement was one where the Council and its partner agencies, in this case Thames Valley Police, the Milton Keynes Primary Care Trust and possibly Woughton Parish Council agree to provide the best possible services to an estate using existing resources and taking into account local priorities.

ACTION

The final draft of the report on Neighbourhood Agreements would be produced in April 2007 and noise nuisance would be included.

The Vice-Chair stated that it was another meeting that representatives would have to attend and suggested that the Neighbourhood Agreement meeting should be combined with the Neighbourhood Action Groups (NAGS) meetings.

The Vice-Chair asked if the Council was expecting every resident to sign the contract and if they refused to do so would they be entitled to the same services as those that had signed the contract.

The Social Inclusion and Health Inequalities Officer responded that the Council would still provide the same service for all residents but those that had not signed the agreement would be reminded of their obligations.

The Chair queried the priorities for action (Paragraph 4.4 of the report refers) identified by residents and asked if only six residents attended the meeting would the Council agree to the priorities identified at the meeting even though it may not be the priorities of the majority of the residents.

The Chair stated that on the Beanhill Estate only 5% of the residents responded.

The Social Inclusion and Health Inequalities Officer advised that the issues were not thought of in percentage terms.

Councillor Hoyle asked how the additional resources were being funded.

The Social Inclusion and Health Inequalities Officer responded that some funding was being provided by the Milton Keynes Primary Care Trust and Thames Valley Police. The Council was working with these agencies and looking to the long term vision for the future.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted.

8.0 THE MANAGEMENT OF GARAGES IN MILTON KEYNES

The Forum received a report from the Assistant Director of Housing on the management of garages in Milton Keynes.

Janette Bobey asked if the Council had considered demolishing the garages on the Netherfield Estate and the hard standing area used for bins/rubbish. She also asked if the Council was seeking ideas regarding the garages.

The Assistant Director of Housing responded that the Council was seeking local solutions to local issues.

Jeanette Marling asked if the Council was looking at each street individually and would the garages be sold as single units or in bulk.

Jeanette Marling sought clarification regarding the garages on the Lakes Estate and asked that if garages were to be demolished would she be informed in order to answer residents queries.

The Assistant Director of Housing stated that a solution for garage sites were investigated on a site by site basis. It may not always be possible for the Tenant Representative to be informed prior to the demolition of the garage as it depended on how acute the risk was at the time.

The Director of Housing Services mentioned that unless the demolition of the garage was very urgent the Council would normally contact the local Tenants and Residents Association but advised that this might not always be possible.

The Vice-Chair reported that on the Bradville Estate blocks of garages had to be demolished as the doors had been removed, and which resulted in the garages being subject to vandalism.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted.

9.0 ROLE OF THE HOUSING FORUM

The Chair stated that it was very important that the Housing Forum dealt with all issues in relation to the housing service.

The Vice Chair stated that the Housing Forum had been criticised previously that it should not be discussing some issues regarding the housing service for example the General Rate Fund.

Councillor I Henderson responded that the General Rate Fund did not form part of the remit of the Housing Forum. The Housing Forum should be discussing a range of issues including improving the housing service.

Janette Bobey stated that the Forum should be discussing any issues that affected tenants and that many tenant representatives felt the Housing Forum was discriminating against them by not permitting some issues to be discussed at meetings.

The Director of Housing Services stated that Officers found it helpful if tenants prioritised their important issues. The Council was currently reviewing the allocations policy in Granby Court and tenants as stakeholders would be consulted.

Pam Wharfe

RESOLVED –

That the role of the Housing Forum be discussed at a future meeting.

10.0 A NEW WAY OF DEALING WITH NOISE NUISANCE

The Forum received a report from the Tenancy Services Manager in relation to the report on “A New Way of Dealing with Noise Nuisance” which had been submitted to the previous meeting of the Forum.

RESOLVED –

1. That the report be noted.
2. That representatives e-mail the Tenant Participation Manager with any questions that they may have regarding the report.

**All
Representatives**

11.0 REPORTS FROM ASSOCIATION

- (a) Margaret Burke reported that Bradville North End Residents' Association had submitted a letter of objection regarding a planning application for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HIMOs) on its estate and the Development Control Committee had refused the application. She advised the Forum that if only one letter of objection was received regarding a planning application it had to be considered by Development Control Committee.
- (b) George Chennell thanked Charles Allum and the Fenny Stratford Tenants and Residents Association for attending a meeting with the new Warden for Durrans House.

12.0 HOUSING FORUM EXECUTIVE/ TENANT PARTICIPATION LIAISON MEETINGS

The Forum received the Minutes of the meetings of the Housing Forum Executive/Tenant Participation Liaison held on 22 January and 5 February 2007.

13.0 HOUSING FORUM EXECUTIVE MEETINGS

The Forum received the Minutes of the meetings of the Housing Forum Executive held on 4 December 2006, 15 and 29 January 2007.

14.0 HOUSING FORUM GRANT PANEL MINUTES

The Forum received the Minutes of the meeting of the Housing Forum Grant Panel held on 10 January 2007.

15.0 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- (a) Rent Increase

J Marling, Lakes Residents Association reported that letters had been sent by the Council regarding the rent increase and stated that next year there appeared to be 53 weeks for people who paid by direct debit.

The Director of Housing Services said she would investigate the matter.

**Pam Wharfe/John
Bate**

ACTION

- (b) G Murphy, Meads Close Residents' Association stated that contractors had removed asbestos from her property without wearing any protective clothing. She sought clarification regarding the £300 charge for the removal of asbestos if a tenant was not at home when the contractor arrived to carry out the work to the property.

The Director of Housing Services asked for the address of the property where work had been undertaken by contractors without wearing any protective clothing and agreed to investigate the matter. She would investigate the £300 charge regarding asbestos removal for tenants who were not at home when contractors arrived to carry out the work.

Pam Wharfe

- (c) Servicing and Installation of Gas Boilers

The Chair asked how frequently were gas boilers in Council properties to be serviced and sought clarification regarding the procedure for the servicing of gas boilers and what was included in the service.

The Chair asked if the Council installed Potterton Supreme Combi Boilers to replace broken boilers in Council properties. He stated that when he phoned the Council previously and asked if this was the case he was advised to phone Weldon Contractors Ltd and check with them.

The Director of Housing Services agreed to investigate the frequency and procedure for the servicing and installation of gas boilers in Council properties.

Matt Bishop

The Director of Housing Services asked that in future would representatives submit a list of items they wish to raise under Any Other Business prior to the meeting. This would help Officers and herself to provide answers at the meeting.

**All
Representatives**

- (d) British Gas

The Vice-Chair reported that tenants receiving pension credit, benefits or any disability allowance could qualify for £90 per annum from British Gas. The telephone number for enquiries was 0845 601 2006.

- (e) Allocation of properties at Granby Court

The Vice-Chair sought clarification regarding the allocation of properties at Granby Court. She asked if the Council was using a policy that a tenant must be over 21 years old and unemployed.

ACTION

The Director of Housing Services responded that the Council's Policy regarding allocations at Granby Court was being looked at and the Council was trying to allocate some properties to people who were in employment.

The Director of Housing Services stated that people in housing needs required a better balanced community and Granby Court was not always suitable for their needs.

Janette Bobey, Netherfield Residents Association asked which other agencies were involved in the review of the allocations policy for Granby Court.

The Director of Housing Services responded that Thames Valley Police were also involved.

(f) **Sustainable Communities Public Meeting**

The Chair reported that there would be a meeting on Thursday 22 March 2007 at 7.00 pm-7.30 pm at the Lakes Estate Community Centre in Bletchley and all residents representing the Fenny Stratford Residents Association and the Lakes Residents Association were invited to attend.

(g) **Landline Numbers for Premium Rate Numbers**

Councillor Hoyle stated that the "website SAYNOTO0870" was useful if people had a free-at-point-of-use landline. The premium rate numbers included 0845 and 0870.

11.0 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting of the Milton Keynes Council Housing Forum would be held on 19 April 2007 in the Council Chamber, Civic Offices at 7.30 PM.

All

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 10.35 PM