

Minutes of the meeting of the HOUSING AND COMMUNITY COMMITTEE held on TUESDAY 17 JANUARY 2017 at 7:00 PM in the COUNCIL CHAMBER, Civic Offices

**Present:** Councillor C Williams (Chair)  
Councillors Burke, Ferrans, Ganatra, Geaney, P Geary (from 7:50 pm) Hosking (from 7:50 pm), Khan, D McCall, Wallis and Webb

**Officer:** E Richardson (Overview and Scrutiny Officer)

**Also Present:** M Smith (Housing Finance Manager), S Snelus (Community Participation Officer)

Representatives from local Residents' Associations and Tenant Participation Groups

**Disclosure**

**of Interests:** Councillor McCall declared a interest in Item 7a as an employee of the Milton Keynes Winter Night Shelter and in Item 7b as a Patron of the Refugees Welcome MK Group.

**HAC31 CHANGE IN MEMBERSHIP**

The Chair advised that Councillor Jenkins had stood down from the Committee and had been replaced by Councillor P Geary for the remainder of the 2016/17 committee cycle.

**HAC32 MINUTES**

RESOLVED -

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 30 November 2016 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**HAC33 RESIDENT AND TENANT PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT**

**Witnesses: S Snelus (Community Participation Officer) and representatives of local Residents' Associations and Tenant Participation Groups**

The Committee received a presentation from the Council's Community Participation Officer about the Housing Services Forum and how it operated. Its aims were to:

- Provide all Milton Keynes tenants the opportunity and choice to directly influence decisions that affected their homes and the standard of services offered by the Milton Keynes Council Housing Service;
- Increase resident involvement across Milton Keynes, specifically areas with high levels of council owned properties;
- Increase satisfaction with the Milton Keynes Council Housing Service.

The presentation also covered the work done by the Housing Services Forum and its achievements during 2016, the existing

groups which were part of the forum and how it operated, as well as the work of the Residents' Association Network, the Residents Involvement Review Group and the Tenant Scrutiny Panel.

There were 13 active, accredited Residents' Associations in Milton Keynes. Each Association had to complete an annual Healthcheck in order to receive an accreditation rating which was then used as the basis, along with the number of properties in an area, for funding. Associations now had more freedom and control over how their funding was spent and had become semi-autonomous with their own administrative structures.

The Housing Services Forum met quarterly, in public, and anyone was welcome to attend. The Tenant Scrutiny Panel was an autonomous group set up to carry out independent reviews each year on different parts of the Council's Housing Services. Following any review, the Panel produced a report of recommendations for the Service Director of Housing and Community.

The Committee welcomed the information in the presentation but felt that there was not enough promotion of what was happening in tenant/resident participation and engagement with the Council and that awareness needed to be raised. The Community Participation Officer agreed and explained that she was trying to increase awareness via social media and by publishing a regular newsletter on-line. She was also in the process of developing other on-line materials for use by associations.

Mr Warby, from the Beanhill Action Group, said that the name had been changed on the newsletter which had caused confusion and people had missed seeing it. Although the name had now been changed back again, he was still concerned that publication had changed from monthly to 2-monthly and he would like to see it revert to a monthly publication. The Community Participation Officer explained that she was relatively new to the post (October 2016) and that monthly publication of the newsletter was before her time. So far she had not received enough copy to justify a monthly publication; however she was happy to take this concern away and investigate the possibility of a monthly edition if associations sent her sufficient items to include in it.

Ms Marling, from the Lakes Residents' Association, said that she understood that printing paper posters and leaflets was expensive and the move to on-line publication of information made sense from the Council's point of view. She suggested that a system of text alerts, for which residents could sign up, about the meetings of the Housing Forum and its various sub-groups be investigated. She also raised the issue of no longer being able to claim taxi fares for attendance at council meetings as a representative of a residents' group, meaning she was unable to feedback information to communities about what was happening. The Community Participation Officer confirmed that her section still covered the cost of taxis for recognised representatives of resident / tenant groups to

attend the various meetings held under the aegis of the Community Partnership but not for other meetings.

Concern was expressed at the lack of paper communications and an increasing reliance on social media to get messages across to the public; many council tenants were elderly and were not necessarily computer-literate. The Community Participation Officers explained that the Council no longer had the resources to send out personal letters or invitations to events. Residents' Associations were based in their local communities and there was an expectation that they cascaded down any information locally. They were also in a position to feed information back up the line to the Council. She agreed that the information on resident participation on the Council's website could be better and she had plans to improve and update this once she had received training as a web author.

It was suggested that as elected representatives of their local areas, councillors also had a role to play in providing a communications bridge between the Council and residents' groups and back again.

Representatives also raised the matter of the Building Services Tenant Group being disbanded when YourMK had been formed. Although they had been told it would be replaced with a similar group, so far nothing had been put in place. This group had been a useful forum for tenants to discuss repairs and maintenance works and carrying out this work in a timely manner with the Council's contractor. The issue of repairs was very important to residents and they would like to see continued resident involvement in how this was done.

Mr Wilde, from the Fullers Slade Residents' Association, explained that they were a relatively new group, only being formed in November 2015. However, he thought that they had had a good year and the work had been interesting. The group was very active and had led a successful campaign to reduce anti-social behaviour in Fullers Slade. He also thought that the Association had been successfully integrated into the Council's resident participation network and he thanked the Council for investing time in developing the Association. He added that plans for regeneration of the area were of concern but that the way forward was to remain in discussions with all parties, and not to listen to rumours and misinformation which could be wrong.

Mr Orr, from the Tinkers' Bridge Association, agreed that being involved with a residents' group was a very rewarding activity and he had been struck by the amount of help that was available from the Council, particularly when applying for grants. The Tinkers Bridge Association staged a range of events for local residents throughout the year and had also established a junior Residents' Association to provide sporting and social activities for young people. The work of the Association had helped to improve the estate and it was now integrating activities with the Council. They had recently worked

with the Council on fly-tipping issues, holding a litter-pick around the estate, filling 50 sacks with rubbish.

Representatives were concerned however, that some estates appeared to have been allowed to run down over a number of years and that planned maintenance had stopped until the proposed regeneration programme started. They were concerned that the money from rents was not being re-invested in the estates where it was raised. They also felt that they were not benefitting from government schemes for home improvements in the same way that private residents could. The point was made that managing council housing as an asset in a proper manner actually saved money further down the line.

Representatives of the residents' groups present and members of the Committee raised concerns about the Council's regeneration programme which would be delivered by the partner organisation formed with Mears plc, YourMK. Seven estates had been identified as being in the first tranche of the regeneration programme, but beyond this there was very little information, giving rise to a range of rumours which were causing distress and concern amongst tenants. Some of the representatives from the residents' associations said that they had already tried to seek clarification from YourMK on which estates were designated for regeneration first, but had not received any definite information.

The Committee had been given to understand that no plans in respect of any of the estates had yet been made, as these would depend on the stock condition surveys being carried out for each area, which were not yet complete. A business case and timetable would be produced for each estate and residents would have to be consulted on the proposals as agreed in section 14.1 of the Council Plan. Where a Neighbourhood Plan for an area had already been agreed, this would also have to be taken into consideration when regeneration schemes were being developed.

RESOLVED -

1. That the Council's Community Participation Officer be thanked for her presentation and contribution to the Committee's discussions.
2. That the representatives from the Residents' Associations and Tenant Participation Groups be thanked for their attendance, for sharing their views and positive comments with the Committee and contributing to the discussion.
3. That the Committee is concerned to learn that, given the importance of a proper repairs and maintenance programme for Council owned property and the effect poor maintenance can have on the lives of tenants, the Building Services Tenant Group no longer exists and that a promised replacement group has not yet been established, thus diminishing opportunities for tenants to express their views about housing repairs. The Committee,

therefore, recommends that YourMK be requested to establish such a group.

4. That the Community Participation Officer be requested to investigate the agreed frequency of publication of the Residents' Associations newsletter and that consideration be given to reinstating monthly publication as had been previously promised.
5. That Residents' Associations/Tenant Participation Groups be encouraged to submit items of news, details of events etc on a regular basis to the Community Participation Officer to ensure that there is a sufficient supply of copy in order to produce a monthly newsletter.
6. That the Community Partnership Officer continues her work to establish Resident/Tenant participation and interaction with the Council as a significant presence on social media, particularly Facebook.
7. That the Committee, through the Overview and Scrutiny Officer, be added to the distribution list for the Community Partnership Newsletter and receive notifications of postings on the Facebook page.
8. That the Committee deplored the perceived lack of clarity around YourMK activities in relation to the RegenerationMK Programme and requests that YourMK makes available details of its assessment process and the proposals for each estate.
9. That the Committee, on behalf of the Residents' Associations/Tenant Participation Groups in Milton Keynes, be given a cast-iron guarantee that, regardless of any Neighbourhood Plan which may be in place, residents living on each estate scheduled for regeneration have the opportunity to accept or decline the regeneration proposals by means of a local referendum as set out in clause 14.1 of the Council Plan (agreed by Council on 13/07/16).
10. That the details of the previous arrangements for assistance with transport costs to enable elected representatives of Residents' Associations/ Tenant Participation Groups to attend relevant meetings of the Council (other than Community Partnership meetings for which other arrangements apply) on behalf of their group, be investigated.
11. That once the details of Resolution 10 above have been ascertained, the Committee recommends to Council that this arrangement be re-instated in order to maintain the existing good relationship between the Council and accredited Residents' Associations/Tenant Participation Groups and to encourage public attendance at meetings of the Council.

**HAC34 DRAFT 2017/18 BUDGET PROPOSALS: HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT AND HOUSING AND COMMUNITY GENERAL FUND**

The Chair advised that this item had been dropped, as Council had already approved the 2017/18 Budget for the Housing Revenue Account and the Housing and Community General Fund at its meeting on 11 January 2017.

**HAC35 UPDATE ON THE MILTON KEYNES HOMELESSNESS PARTNERSHIP AND WORK WITH SYRIAN REFUGEES**

The Milton Keynes Homelessness Partnership had met on 13 January and the Chair and one of the Vice-Chairs (Councillor Wallis) had attended as observers.

The Partnership had received a submission from the group hoping to convert a double-decker bus into a year-round temporary shelter and support hub for rough sleepers, based on the model recently established on the Isle of Wight. The Partnership had agreed to help them to develop the project and get leverage for funding. Councillor D McCall suggested that the project team be invited to a future meeting of the Committee so that the Committee could be reassured that they had a full understanding of the logistics involved and what might be the pitfalls.

The Partnership was also in the process of developing a Communications Strategy; work had only just started and more information would be available as the strategy progressed.

The Committee noted that the Refugees Welcome MK organisation produced a regular newsletter, circulated by e-mail. The Overview and Scrutiny Officer would arrange for this to be circulated to the Committee as and when she received it.

RESOLVED -

1. That the Vice-Chair of the Milton Keynes Homelessness Partnership be thanked for her written update on the work of the Partnership.
2. That the Committee agrees to the Partnership's request to scrutinise the plans to convert a double-decker bus into temporary accommodation for rough sleepers, based on the successful model already established in the Isle of Wight (the 'Bus Shelter' Project).

**HAC35 2016/17 WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee received and noted the amended Work Programme for 2016/17.

RESOLVED –

That members of the Committee review the current Work Programme and send any comments, positive or negative, to the Committee's Planning Group for consideration at its next meeting

(date to be confirmed), together with any suggestions for the 2017/18 Work Programme.

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 8.59 PM

DRAFT