



Minutes of the meeting of the MILTON KEYNES COUNCIL HOUSING FORUM held on THURSDAY 21 SEPTEMBER 2006 at 7.30PM

Members

- Present:**
- | | | |
|---------------------|---|---|
| Eamonn Bobey(Chair) | - | Netherfield Residents Association |
| Hazel Taylor | - | Greenleys Residents Association |
| Rita Venn | - | Fenny Stratford Residents Association |
| Brian King | - | Bradwell Common Residents Association |
| Pat Warner | - | Bradwell Common Residents Association |
| Mike Healey | - | Castles Residents Association |
| Jim Blore | - | Castles Residents Association |
| Jeanette Marling | - | Lakes Residents Association |
| Lynn White | - | Lakes Residents Association |
| George Byfield | - | Conniburrow Community Association |
| Terry Field | - | Conniburrow Community Association |
| George Farran | - | Fishermead Residents Action Group |
| Andy Work | - | Fishermead Residents Action Group |
| Anthony Mercer | - | Eaglestone Residents Association |
| Fred Smith | - | Greenleys Residents Association |
| George Chennel | - | Fenny Stratford Residents Association |
| Gwen Murphy | - | Meads Close Residents Association |
| John Beale | - | Meads Close Residents Association |
| Janette Bobey | - | Netherfield Residents Association |
| Geoff Woolmore | - | Woughton Parish, Beanhill Representative |
| Margaret Burke | - | Bradville North End Residents Association |
| Judy Kennah | - | Tinkers Bridge Residents Association |

- Others:**
- | | | |
|------------------------|---|--|
| Councillor I Henderson | - | Cabinet Member with responsibility for Social Care, Housing & Health |
| Councillor D Hoyle | - | Milton Keynes Council |
| Councillor R Edwards | - | Milton Keynes Council |

- Also Present:**
- | | | |
|----------------------------|---|-----------------------|
| Councillor A Latham | - | Milton Keynes Council |
| Councillor L Campbell | - | Milton Keynes Council |
| Two members of the public. | | |

- MKC Officers:**
- | | | |
|-----------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| Pam Wharfe | - | Director of Housing |
| Jon Bilson | - | Strategy and Performance Manager |
| Anthony Hodson-Curran | - | Assistant Director of Housing |
| Caroline Chandler | - | Finance Manager (HBS) |
| Derek Beaumont | - | Partnering Manager |
| Michael Toze | - | Committee Manger |
| Clem Smith | - | Housing Research and Strategy Officer |

- Apologies:**
- | | | |
|----------------|---|--|
| Paula Bonarius | - | Bradville North End Residents' Association |
| Simon Aslett | - | Tenant Participation Manager |
| Pauline Prop | - | Tinkers Bridge Residents Association |

- | | | |
|---------------|---|---|
| Paula Mason | - | Tenant Participation Officer |
| David Siddals | - | Service Delivery Manager |
| Charles Allum | - | Great Linford Parish Council (Downs Barn) |

1.0 MINUTES

ACTION

RESOLVED -

1. That the Minutes of the meeting of the Milton Keynes Council Housing Forum, held on 15 June 2006 be approved as a correct record, subject to the following alterations:-
 - (a) Page 12 – The fourth paragraph down should read “The Chair stated that there would be a special meeting between officers and Forum Members to take the matter forward for discussion”
 - (b) It was noted that the list of representatives for the Milton Keynes Council Housing Forum was extremely inaccurate, with several mistakes in names of members and names of associations. Committee Services would liaise with Tenant Participation Services to ensure that the correct details were included on future agendas.

Michael Toze

2.0 MATTERS ARISING

ACTION

Meetings were still ongoing with regard to the future of Bramley Grange. It was currently unfit for purpose, but Housing Associations had been approached by Pam Wharfe about the possibility of refurbishment.

Pam Wharfe said that she had assumed the issue of CRB checks had been concluded at the meeting, since Tenant Representatives should not be inviting children into their centres.

Pam Wharfe

Margaret Burke said that since Tenant Representatives made home visits, she would still like the possibility of Milton Keynes Council paying for CRB checks investigated.

The Forum asked about checks on windows in Bradville as part of the Decent Homes surveys. It was explained that windows were on a different programme to the current surveys of kitchens and bathrooms. The Forum expressed concern that some Bradville residents had been waiting for replacement doors and windows since 1998. The Forum discussed the division of roles between HBS and the contractors in carrying out surveys, and noted that HBS was responsible for deciding which houses needed work. A further explanation of the Decent Homes Survey is included as Annex A to these minutes.

3.0 NOTICE OF ANY OTHER BUSINESS

ACTION

- Young people
- Advertising
- Junior Jamboree
- Walkabouts
- Granby Scheme

- Housing Allocations
- Waiting List
- Housing Ownership Presentation
- Decent Homes Surveys

4.0 DRAFT YOUNG PEOPLE HOUSING STRATEGY

ACTION

The Chair noted that the Black and Minority Ethnic Housing Strategy would not be discussed now, but would be raised at a future meeting of the Forum.

The Housing Research and Strategy Officer, Clem Smith, gave a presentation on the Draft Young People Housing Strategy. She noted that there was a shortfall of about 4,195 houses every year, and that only 39% of people aged sixteen to twenty-four could afford market housing. 48% of homeless people were aged 16-24. She also noted that the number of young people leaving the Milton Keynes South Midlands area was greater than that coming in.

Questions were asked about the distribution of the questionnaire, as many members of the Forum knew young people who had not received a copy.

The Forum raised the issue of the building of the university, and the effect this would have on the housing situation. Consideration of this issue would be added into the Young People's Housing Strategy.

**Clem
Smith**

The Forum noted the problem of key workers from London benefiting from schemes in Milton Keynes and driving up prices. However little could be done to tackle this as the key worker scheme was a national policy.

The Forum asked about the Council's policy on housing for second-generation Milton Keynes residents.

Cllr I Henderson answered that the Council had never had such a policy. The Development Corporation had made such a promise, but the current shortage of socially rented homes meant that priority had to be given to those in greatest need. Ultimately this came down to Government policy.

The Forum noted that the Draft Young Person Housing Strategy had identified a need for more socially rented housing and this would be acted upon, but it was a long term process.

The Forum asked about the issue of antisocial behaviour in young tenants. It was noted that Government policy meant that homeless sixteen and seventeen year olds had to be given priority. However, work was being done to try and prevent family breakdown through mediation, and also to help young people develop life skills in hostels. There was currently a programme in schools warning of the unpleasant facts of being homeless.

When bad behaviour did occur, those in the introductory period of their first council tenancy could be evicted more rapidly if there were problems. The Council was also now acting much more forcefully

against problem tenants, with ASBOs and injunctions being issued. However ASBOs were used only when appropriate, as simply issuing an ASBO often did not do much to change the underlying behaviour.

The Forum expressed concern about the problem of young people making themselves intentionally homeless in order to get greater priority on the housing list. It was noted that family mediation was required in cases of youth homelessness and this often rooted out cases where inaccurate information had been given to housing services.

The Chair noted that it was important that the Forum made it clear that many young people were responsible tenants and did not cause problems

Cllr Edwards commented that the priority should be building more socially rented housing rather than worrying about allocation criteria.

The Forum asked if disused sheltered housing could be converted into hostels to support young people. It was noted that in some cases this was done but sheltered housing blocks were often too big. It would be inappropriate to house thirty young people with complex needs in one hostel.

The Forum noted that a particular hostel was no longer taking as much action to help integrate its tenants into the local community. Pam Wharfe would contact the manager of that hostel and pass on the suggestion.

**Pam
Wharfe**

The Forum noted that the Titan scheme in Towcester was successful in intervening before youths were excluded from schools.

A question asked about the proportion of affordable housing in new developments. It was noted that the Young People's Housing Strategy had recognised the need for more socially rented housing, especially as shared ownership was becoming more expensive.

The Forum suggested a register of young people-friendly landlords. It was agreed that this was a good idea and would be looked into, possibly along with a "matching" service for young people looking for housemates.

**Pam
Wharfe**

Some members of the Forum felt the new letting scheme in Granby Court, which insisted on tenants being over twenty-one and employed, was discriminatory. Pam Wharfe answered that the council did have discretion to do this in cases where there was a good reason. In this and some other cases it had been felt that it was appropriate to give conditions on lettings in order to provide the right balance in a development. Pam Wharfe would produce a report on Granby Court and on Tenford Street, where a similar programme had been implemented previously.

**Pam
Wharfe**

Cllr Hoyle suggested that Cllr I Henderson could ask Cabinet about the issue of housing second-generation Milton Keynes residents. He also pointed out that Central Milton Keynes residential developments had had problems in the past, and suggested a concierge might help reduce problems. He commented that in some cases developers built

affordable housing so that more parking spaces could be allocated to market housing. Cllr I Henderson suggested that Cllr Hoyle bring these issues to Policy Development Committee.

Pam Wharfe noted that several of the city centre proposals did include provision for supporting residents – the YMCA had made such a proposal. She considered it unlikely that developers would be granted planning permission without giving tenants adequate parking spaces.

The Chair asked that Clem Smith send a copy of the draft Young Person Housing Strategy out to Forum members.

**Clem
Smith**

5.0 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT

ACTION

Caroline Chandler presented the Budget Monitoring Report. It was noted that there was no breakdown on the cost of voids. The predicted subsidy had been inaccurate, and the reasons for this would be looked into.

The Forum asked why, if there was an under-spend on Community Alarms, residents were not getting help with the costs of installing alarms.

It was explained that the under-spend was in capital expenditure, not revenue expenditure. However, government funding ought to be available for some individuals to have alarm systems. There were various options of where the £250,000 capital saving could be spent instead.

The Forum noted the issue of the Council's responsibilities as a landlord for the switchover from analogue to digital. This issue would be brought back when more information was available.

**Pam
Wharfe**

6.0 PERFORMANCE REPORT

ACTION

Jon Bilson presented this report, and noted that page 27 had a mistake, since under Item 6 the performance for average time of repairs was high, not low. He also pointed out that while overall levels of complaints were similar, the areas of concern had changed. There were now fewer complaints on repairs, but more problems with tenant services in MK East.

The Forum expressed concern that void turnaround times had increased between April and June this year.

The Forum asked about the cost of closing the West Bletchley office then re-opening it. Jon Bilson answered that reopening the office made financial sense and would not cost anything further. However, it was unlikely that there would be a widespread scheme of re-opening offices.

Members of the Forum asked about the definition of a complaint, and whether repeat complaints on the same issue, or enquiries about late contractors would be logged as complaints.

Jon Bilson answered that it depended, but those issues would probably be treated as a problem to be resolved immediately rather than a

complaint to be passed on to a third party for resolution. Issues such as late contractors were always recorded to ensure there was not an overall problem. However, he would look into the issue of whether receptionists should ask callers reporting problems if they wished to make a complaint.

Jon Bilson

It was pointed out that although about 96% of rents were collected, 4% of a rent income of £42 million (as given in the Budget Monitoring Report) would be a significant sum. Jon Bilson noted that the Budget Monitoring Report rent collection statistics did include some other figures, including arrears collection. He noted that support provided to help tenants with debt and benefits advice helped ensure tenants could pay their arrears.

Forum members noted that the target of an average of 30 days void turn-around seemed unachievable. It was agreed that this could well be so but it was hoped that by March the void turn-around at that time would be 30 days.

The Forum pointed out that a forum on voids had been tried before, dropped, and was now returning. Pam Wharfe said they had not got it right last time and hoped to improve upon it by bringing in more agencies and surveyors.

The Forum asked why the repairs target for this year was lower than last year's actual figure. It was answered that the target had been set as a service level agreement with HBS some time before, but was being reviewed.

The Forum asked about the mutual exchanges mailshot. It was noted that this had been sent to those on the mutual exchanges list to confirm they were still interested in a mutual exchange. The Council now offered an improved matching service, and did more rigorous checks on the condition of exchanged homes.

7.0 ELECTION OF TENANTS RESOURCE CENTRE MANAGER ACTION

The Chair announced that he had received a resignation letter from Pauline Prop as Finance Officer.

Pauline Prop was nominated for the position of Tenants Resource Centre Manager by Brian King and seconded by Margaret Burke. She was elected to the position.

The positions of Finance Officer and Deputy Tenants Resource Centre Manager would be elected at the next meeting.

8.0 NOMINATIONS TO THE MKC GRANTS PANEL ACTION

Concerns were raised about the times of meetings of this panel. It was agreed that those who were interested would hold a meeting and try to find a suitable meeting time.

Andy Work, Margaret Burke, Janette Bobey, Tony Mercer, Hazel Taylor, Jeanette Marling and Geoff Woolmore all expressed interest in attending.

9.0 REPORTS FROM ASSOCIATIONS

ACTION

BRADWELL COMMON RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION –
Brian King announced that he and Pat Warner had been re-elected to the Bradwell Common Residents Association.

BEANHILL ACTION GROUP –
Geoff Woolmore announced that the Beanhill Residents' Association no longer existed and a new Beanhill Action Group had been formed, which would be registering with Simon Aslett and Paula Mason soon.

10.0 OFFICERS REPORTS

ACTION

Forum members expressed concern that a name and address had been listed in a publicly accessible document.

The Forum noted that the Junior Jamboree had not been held, as it had been felt to be inappropriate in the Resource Centre.

The Forum asked why the Walkabout mentioned on page 43 was returning to only six estates. It was answered that it the six areas were intended as a pilot only, and the matter was still under discussion. The Lakes, Bradwell and Beanhill would probably be the first three.

The Forum asked that in future, details of conferences should be circulated to all tenant associations.

A member of the Forum asked for clarification on several points in the minutes. It was noted that in future minutes ought to be made clearer for those not present at the Executive meeting.

**Paula
Mason**

11.0 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

ACTION

This agenda item was not discussed due to lack of time. Members with A.O.B items were requested to submit them to the Forum Executive or bring them to the next meeting.

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 11.15 PM