



Minutes of the meeting of the BRADVILLE/GREENLEYS AREA HOUSING BOARD held on THURSDAY 7 OCTOBER 1999 at 7.30pm

Present: Councillors Kilkenny, Monk and Saunders (substitute for Councillor Day)

Tenant

Representatives: S Kennedy (Stantonbury Residents' Association)
M Simm (Fullers Slade Residents' Association)
F Smith (Greenleys Residents' Association)

Officers: S Aslett (District Housing Manager), M Harvey (Development and Maintenance Manager), S Hoppie (Senior Surveyor), C Jones (Tenants Participation Officer), B Rimmer (Benefits Manager) and W Marsden (Senior Committee Manager)

Apologies: Councillor Day, P Davies (Fullers Slade Residents Association) and H Taylor (Greenleys Residents' Association)

Also Present: C Allum (Central Area Housing Board), J Blake (Central Area Housing Board), B Moore (Netherfield/Newport Pagnell Area Housing Board), J Marling (Bletchley Area Housing Board) and A Richardson (Netherfield/Newport Pagnell Area Housing Board), I Flatt (Mears Building Services Ltd), R Reed (Mears Building Services Ltd), S Inman (Mears Building Services Ltd) and D Donovan (Wheldon Contracts)

11.0 CHAIR

Councillor Kilkenny chaired the meeting due to the unavailability of the Chair, Hazel Taylor.

12.0 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

RESOLVED -

That the appointment of Vice-Chair be dealt with at the next meeting of the Area Housing Board.

13.0

MINUTES

RESOLVED -

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Area Housing Board held on 24 June 1999 be approved as a correct record.

14.0

HEATING CONTRACTOR

The Committee met with a representative from Wheldons, the Heating and Maintenance Repairs Contractor for the Bradville/Greenleys area. The contractor, when asked whether there were any outstanding cases, replied saying he could not give figures at this time. The contractor confirmed that he was trying to do everything regarding entry to a property.

A Richardson asked whether there was a shortage of CORGI registered gas engineers and if the contractor could cope for the coming winter; the contractor replied that he had sufficient CORGI registered gas engineers and could cope for the winter.

Councillor Monk asked whether there were any examples of the heating contractor calling at a property and a tenant subsequently saying that the contractor had not called. The heating contractor replied saying that there was always a possibility that the tenant may have been upstairs at the property carrying out some works and he had not heard the contractor arriving and a card had subsequently appeared on the mat.

Wheldons were thanked for their attendance.

15.0

RESPONSIVE REPAIRS TERM CONTRACT

The Board met with the Responsive Repairs Term Contractor (Mears) for the Bradville/Greenleys area.

Mears representatives felt that their performance had improved over the last quarter. Alan Richardson asked whether Mears could produce hard copies of their figures to compare against the figures the tenants' representatives had received from Milton Keynes Council; and stated that the average void period of 10 weeks was not acceptable. Mears representatives said their performance reports were produced every month and were given to Housing Officers. When asked by Alan Richardson whether they agreed with Priority 1, 2 and 3 figures for repairs produced in the District Housing Manager's report; Mears representatives said they totally refuted the figures listed and certainly did not agree with anything that had been produced. Alan Richardson asked that figures produced by Mears, in future, should be posted to the tenants' representatives.

The contractor stated that ongoing discussions were taking place with Housing Officers. S Hoppie stated that the figures in the District Housing Manager's report which were asterixed were statistics which only showed completed orders and the computer figures would be based on these. The Housing Improvement

Team on Repairs and Voids was looking at all aspects of repairs and voids and he felt that information presented to the Area Housing Board was correct.

Councillor Kilkenny stated it was vital that the Area Housing Board needed to know where the problem lay, and why there was such a disparity between contractors and Milton Keynes Council figures. I Flatt stated that over the last three years the contractor had been turning around 115 voids a month and that 95% of the voids were back early.

Councillor Kilkenny requested that a report be presented to the Housing Committee on how to improve the computerised system that would show the correct figures for repairs.

I Flatt suggested as an improvement the Housing Improvement Team should raise the limit on Variation Orders from £20 to £50. S Hoppie said this was part of the contract at the moment, that if the value of additional work was over £20 then a variation approval was required. I Flatt said that he would accept the raising of the limit from £20 to £50 as an amendment to the contract.

16.0 DISTRICT HOUSING MANAGER'S REPORT - INCLUDING MINOR ESTATE IMPROVEMENT GRANTS

The District Housing Manager circulated two reports, one for the Bradville area and one for the Greenleys area.

Brenda Rimmer, the Benefits Manager, said she would be attending the Area Housing Boards on a regular basis to deal with the benefits item, and that the Benefits Service had moved into a backlog situation due to a number of factors:

1. The implementation of new document imaging technology which had been severely hampered by prolonged IT problems.
2. The introduction of the verification framework with increased demand for the verification of primary documentation and mandatory identity checks.
3. The staffing structure that had been in place. Brenda said that by the week ending 11 July when the Benefits Service was re-centralised a backlog had increased to over 10,000 cases. At the end of last week this backlog had been reduced to some 4100 cases.
4. New claims had a statutory turnaround deadline 14 days, each assessor had a minimum target of 15 claims per day and would therefore be expected to have an outstanding workload of about 75 claims (ie 15x5 working days) to enable this target to be achieved. The new document imaging system would eventually enable casework to be dealt with a lot quicker, enabling 20 to 25 cases to be handled each day, allowing some standard work to be done automatically, for example reminders, taking routine work away from benefit assessors.

Milton Keynes is taking part in the Single Gateway (One) Project. The Single Gateway is taking a lead towards a single point of entry where claimants could make one claim for a number of welfare benefits, and one point of contact for

enquiries and changes of circumstances. Claims for people of working age will be taken by telephone through the Call Centre located at Lloyds Court, and those claimants would be required to attend a work focused interview at a gateway access point located at Saxon Court, CMK Job Centre and Bletchley Job Centre.

The Single Gateway is a single element of the Government's welfare reform and is intended to provide a more coherent service to clients accessing the benefits system. The aim of the Single Gateway was to provide a more professional, personalised and flexible Benefits Service to all clients of working age seeking benefit, thereby providing a better service to clients.

A Single Gateway was designed to enable claimants to access all benefits from a number of Single Gateway points, which could be provided by a combination of Benefits Agency, Employment Services, Local Authority Benefit Departments and private and voluntary sector, all having the capability of taking the claims providing advice and passing claims on to the appropriate department.

Participation in the Single Gateway and the subsequent close working partnerships between Milton Keynes Council, the Benefit Agency and Employment Services would not only provide a gateway into work and benefits, but would also provide access points to other Council services, such as housing, social care and education and introduce links with voluntary sector training schemes.

Brenda Rimmer stated that from April 2000 onwards this scheme becomes compulsory. Councillor Kilkenny said that many private tenants were on benefit and there could be a question regarding data protection. Councillor Monk questioned whether employing temporary staff could not have been carried out and Brenda Rimmer said that MKC was recruiting up to complement and that a dedicated team had been set up to deal with the backlog of cases. However over time there would be staff reductions through document imaging.

Alan Richardson stated that he was concerned at outstanding claims of some 3,200 per week and asked Brenda Rimmer how MKC attempted to recover overpayments. Brenda Rimmer replied that in accordance with regulations, any overpayment caused by local authority error could only be recovered if the claimant could reasonably be expected to know that an overpayment of benefit had occurred

The District Housing Manager to:

1. Write to Fred Smith regarding the resurfacing issue of car park areas at Greenleys Croft.
2. Inform Councillor Monk at the next meeting of the Area Housing Board as to the precise position regarding remaining monies for Minor Estate Improvement Grants.

17.0

TENANTS COMPACT WORKSHOP

Clare Jones, the Tenants Participation Officer, introduced this item and stated that the Tenants' Participation Compact had been taken through the last round of Area Housing meetings in June and July 1999. Following the last meeting of the Bradville/Greenleys Area Housing Board on 24 June 1999, the Housing Committee on 29 June 1999 considered the relaxation of the current constitution of Area Housing Boards and Borough Wide Housing Board, in order that the Council would be able to meet the requirements under the Tenant Compact arrangements. The Housing Committee resolved that the Scheme of Operation for the Area Housing Boards be amended to remove the requirement for Members to be representatives of Residents' Associations.

A copy of the Tenants Participation Compact update is attached as an **Annex** to the Minutes. Clare drew attention to a survey to all tenants with a water letter in July 1999, when 947 replies were received, and also to a special meeting that had taken place with the Strategic Director Neighbourhood Services and senior officers on 4 October to discuss working together and how to improve current working practices, including resources. An evening seminar on the Tenants' Compact is being planned for 3 November 1999 with senior officers and tenants representatives, to discuss the Compact in more detail and to ensure that an agreement is reached on the benefits and outcomes of the Compact. The Board noted that a benchmarking day would take place on 18 October 1999.

Attention was drawn to the September 1999 edition of Better Living in Milton Keynes, which had a number of inserts covering:

- (a) the response to the latest tenant survey which asked how people wish to be consulted;
- (b) a Benchmarking section stating that MKC was working to improve the services provided and part of this was to compare MKC to other Councils. If another Council has a different method of operation MKC could learn from to improve our services; this process is called benchmarking;
- (c) the tenants' Resource Centre in Bletchley which would operate for a trial period of 12 months; and
- (d) general information.

18.0 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Mark Simm stated that trees were covering the street lighting in Fullers Slade and Councillor Saunders promised to see Councillor Pendry regarding this. Mark Simms to feed in the relevant information.

19.0 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The date and time of the next Area Housing Board was confirmed as 9 December 1999 at 7.30 pm.