

BOROUGH OF KETTERING

TENANTS' FORUM

Meeting held – 6th February 2014

Present: Councillors Steve Bellamy (Chair), Lloyd Bunday
Maggie Don, Ellie Manns

Tenant Representatives: Martyn Lund (Highfield Road)
Brian Kimpton (Counties)
Mick Springthorpe (Town Centre)
Jim French (Desborough)
Sandra Nash (Counties)
Trevor Nash (Counties)
Josephine Copson (Alfred Street)
Hayley Fountain (Broughton)
Gloria Tubb (Grange)
Mark Ingram (Sackville Street)
Brent Woodford (Ashley)

Also Present: John Conway (Head of Housing)
Leona Mantle (Housing)
Linda Nash (Housing)
Mark Dickenson (Acting Head of Finance)
Pearl Nathaniel (Finance)
David Pope (Committee Administrator)

13.TF.83 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Jenny Henson and Michael Brown. It was noted that Councillor Bunday was acting as substitute for Councillor Michael Brown.

Apologies were also received from Susan Milne and Leonore Springthorpe

13.TF.84 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

13.TF.85 FORUM RESIGNATIONS

John Conway advised the forum that since the last meeting, two resignations had been received from members of the forum. John thanked both the former deputy chair, Colin Medlycott and Lynn Lund, who had played a pivotal role in the Tenants' Forum enabling difficult issues to be dealt with in a responsible and mature way.

During their tenures the forum had moved from being a body where information was disseminated to tenants, to one where issues were debated in depth and resulted in changes to policies and procedures.

John stated that he would be writing to both Colin and Lynn to thank them for their past involvement with the forum and wishing them well for the future. This sentiment was echoed by all elected members present.

13.TF.86 APPOINTMENT OF DEPUTY CHAIR

The forum noted that as a result of the resignation of Colin Medlycott a vote was required to appoint his replacement as deputy chair.

Two nominations were received:-

1. Brian Kimpton was proposed by Brent Woodford and seconded by Gloria Tubb
2. Brent Woodford was proposed by Brian Kimpton, however he stated he would be unable to accept the role.

A vote was taken by members of the forum and accordingly, it was

RESOLVED that Brian Kimpton be appointed Deputy Chair of the Tenants' Forum for the remainder of the municipal year 2013/14.

13.TF.87 MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 9th January 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

13.TF.88 MATTERS ARISING

13.TF.75

It was noted that Jenna Bartley would be attending the forum in March to provide a presentation on Health and Wellbeing.

13.TF.89 MATTERS RAISED BY TENANTS' FORUM REPRESENTATIVES

None

13.TF. 90 RENT REVIEW 2014/15

Officers gave a joint presentation detailing the Rent Review for 2014/15.

It was noted that the Council's budget of £68.8m for 2014/15 was out in draft form and had gone to consultation. It was made up of:-

- General Fund Account £47.8m
- Housing Revenue Account £15.5m
- Capital Programme £5.5m

Officers outlined the six main risks requiring mitigation that the council had to consider when setting the rent increase. These included:-

- Welfare Reform
- Voids
- Supporting People; including Silver Service
- Right to Buy
- Rents Policy
- Changes to the local housing market

John then outlined alterations to the Rent Convergence Policy, noting that the previous formula used to calculate rent increases would change from 2015/16, moving from Retail Price Index (+ 0.5% + £2) per week to Consumer Price Index (+1%). This policy alteration could result in lower annual rent increases in future, and the HRA Business Plan could suffer a loss in income over around £10m over thirty years.

Challenges and plans for 2014/15 were outlined to the forum who noted that KBC had a duty to ensure council housing was fit for purpose, easy to let and meet local housing need. Council

properties should be seen as a resource that people were glad to move into. Given the impacts of Welfare Reform, it was vital to assist tenants in sustaining their tenancies. To that end an additional Tenancy Support Worker and two rents officers would be employed to support tenants and help them with their finances. A greater focus on introductory tenancies was noted, with a more proactive approach to marketing and letting of void properties also planned.

The forum was provided with figures for rent increases across Northamptonshire, and past increases for KBC from 2008/09 to date. It was noted that the proposed increase would enable KBC to invest in the priorities identified by forum members, with the expectation that rent increases in future could be considerably lower due to the revised formula for calculating annual rent increases.

Officers then proposed the recommendation for the Rent Review 2014/15 as follows:-

- Average rent increase - **5.1%**
- Average weekly rent per property - **£79.73**
- Average weekly increase - **£3.87**

(The officers and councillors left the Chamber at 7.15pm to allow tenants time to discuss the increase and vote. They were recalled to the Chamber at 7.30pm)

RESOLVED that the members of the Tenants' Forum did not support the proposed rent increase of 5.1%. It believed that services promised as part of the rent increase in 2013/14 had not been delivered and standards had dropped overall, with void properties given as a particular example.

Members of the forum were advised that their views would be reported to the next meeting of the Executive Committee on 12 February. If Executive were minded to implement a lower increase than the proposed 5.1%, savings would need to be identified to ensure the HRA plan remained viable and a balanced budget could be set for 2014/15.

Officers specified that for each 1% decrease from the proposed increase (i.e. 5.1%) there would be an adverse impact on resources of £1.7m over 10 years, or £6.9m over 30 years. Tenants were asked whether they required an additional period of private discussion in order to provide an alternative increase figure, but

decided not to exercise that opportunity.

Tenants enquired whether the rental increase could be spread across the next three years, but were reminded that this would not be feasible as the Consumer Price Index would not be known until next year and rents could only be set for one year at a time.

The forum was further advised that whilst their comments were taken on board, officers had a duty to put a professional opinion forward to the Executive. That advice would be a 5.1% increase in lieu of likely lower rental increases from 2015/16 onwards.

13.TF.91 CAPITAL PROGRAMME UPDATE

John Conway advised the meeting that a draft capital programme update would be presented at the next forum in March. It was noted that the programme size may be affected in light of the rent increase decision by tenants.

13.TF.92 TENANTS' FORUM CONSTITUTION

John Conway supplied the meeting with the final draft of the Tenants' Forum Constitution. It was noted that feedback provided at the previous forum in January had been incorporated into the revised constitution following consultation with the Head of Legal and Democratic Services. It was proposed to have the revised constitution in place by the start of the new civic year in May 2014.

13.TF.93 CONNECT

Gloria Tubb reported that the Connect Review Panel had nearly completed its review. A number of improvements had been made with the convening of new editorial and reading panels. KBC now had an in-house designer which had made a big difference to the quality and structure of the magazine.

13.TF.94 TENANT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Martyn Lund reported that the panel would bring further details of the Connect review to the next meeting of the forum. The review on introductory tenancies was going well with a great deal of information obtained. Once this information had been distilled, it

would be brought to the forum for members to provide their opinions. The panel was continuing to monitor voids, repairs and performance indicators.

13.TF.95 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

It was noted that due to the resignation of the deputy chair, a new representative was required to be appointed as a member of the East Kettering Liaison Forum.

Gloria Tubb accepted the invitation to join the East Kettering Liaison Forum.

13.TF.96 PRIZE DRAW

The winner of the prize draw was Sandra Nash.

13.TF.97 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the date for the next meeting of the forum was Thursday 13th March 2014.

(The meeting started at 6.30 pm and ended at 7.46pm)

Signed
Chair

djp