

BOROUGH OF KETTERING

TENANTS' FORUM

Meeting held – 9th March 2017

Present: Councillors Maggie Don, David Howes and Clark Mitchell

Tenant Representatives:

Brian Kimpton	(Counties) (Chair)
Martyn Lund	(Highfield Road)
Jim French	(Desborough)
Peter Harvey	(Dahlia Road)
Josephine Copson	(Alfred Street)
Sandra Nash	(Counties)
Trevor Nash	(Counties)
Brent Woodford	(Ashley)
Lorraine Morland	(Ashley)
Moira Brown	(Highfield Road)
Reg Carvell	(Leaseholder)
Roland Shipham	(Highfields)
Sue Shipham	(Highfields)
Peter Matsa	(Geddington)
Victor Woodcock	(Burton Latimer)

Also Present:

John Conway	(Housing)
Leona Mantle	(Housing)
Darren Ibell	(Housing)
Simon Haile	(Environmental Care)
Pearl Nathaniel	(Finance)
Mark Dickenson	(Finance)
Callum Galluzzo	(Democratic Services)

16.TF.84 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs James Burton and Mike Tebbutt. Apologies were also received from Ken Burnage.

16.TF.85 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

16.TF.86 MINUTES

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting held on 9th February 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

16.TF.87 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

16.TF.24 – Sterile Block Policy

Phases One and Two of the Sterile Block Policy had now completed, with Phase Three underway and Phase Four completing the project during the summer. The implementation of Phase Two had seen some resistance from a few tenants and leaseholders. Good feedback had been received from the Fire Service in relation to the policy.

It was noted that Neighbourhood Managers would continue to check all blocks where implementation had been completed to ensure that residents were adhering to the policy

16.TF.88 MATTERS RAISED BY TENANTS' FORUM REPRESENTATIVES

The following issue was raised by a representative:-

- Fitting of fire doors and repairs of locks on Highfield Road. An update would be brought to the next meeting of the forum

16.TF.89 HOUSING WHITE PAPER: FIXING OUR BROKEN HOUSING MARKET

John Conway provided the meeting with an overview of the Housing White Paper published by the government in February outlining what it might mean for KBC as a council and what outcomes could arise that may affect tenants.

The meeting noted that previous government housing policy had focussed on promotion of home ownership, although the white paper recognised that housing policy going forward needed to speak for everyone across all sectors of the housing market. The government had also recognised that the main issue affecting the housing market was one of housing supply.

Since 1970, an average of 160,000 houses had been built per annum. However, there was a need for between 225,000-275,000 to be built annually in order to keep pace with demand, although this was not currently the case, with more than a third of houses granted planning permission between 2010/11 and 2015/16 yet to be built. In addition, the existing housebuilding market was shown to be dysfunctional, with the ten largest housebuilders constructing over 60% of private homes. Productivity in

relation to construction had only increased by 11% in the last 25 years and 40% of councils did not have a current plan to meet projected growth.

It was noted that as home ownership was increasingly unaffordable for many, so was the private rented market. This, combined with a growing population, demographic changes and Welfare Reform, had led to a soaring demand for social housing.

The government white paper had four main aspects to it:-

Ensuring a working planning system, with the right homes in the right places

The government wanted to ensure that up to date, ambitious local plans were able to meet projected growth. There was a need to make the planning process more transparent and straightforward, with a standard approach to assessing housing needs across the country. In addition, greater transparency was required in regard to land ownership and interests. Where land was identified for housing, there should be a variety of approaches for developing new homes, making use of brownfield and surplus public sector land, regeneration of existing estates and creation of new rural communities, whilst maintaining the Green Belt. Higher densities in urban areas could also assist matters.

When land was allocated for housing, homes to be built quickly

Councils would be able to agree a five-year land supply on an annual basis and resources would be provided to invest in additional planners by increasing planning fees by 20%. A Housing Infrastructure Fund of £2.3b would be provided to target areas with the greatest housing need to improve delivery of infrastructure and connections to utilities. Unnecessary delays in the planning system would be reviewed, with a shortening of timescales for implementation of planning consents from 3 years to 2 years being considered. Other considerations include more active use of Compulsory Purchase Orders on stalled sites, greater investment in construction training and apprenticeships and the introduction of a housing delivery test to assess whether councils were building sufficient quantities of new homes.

Diversifying the Housing Market

The meeting noted the importance of diversifying the housing market to better achieve the quantity, quality and choice of housing demanded by the population. There was a need to help small building companies to become more significant players in the housing market and also to support the expansion of self-built properties. The white paper also sought to encourage institutional investors such as pension funds to build properties for rent. Housing Associations were expected to explore every opportunity to build new homes and to find efficiencies that would release additional resources to pay for construction.

The government was backing councils to build, and would address issues holding such building back. The government was also open to bespoke deals for council which had ambitions to build, including arrangements in

regard to capital receipts. Beyond 2020, the rent policy would enable social landlords to borrow against future income streams.

Helping People Now

Although there was a focus on the long term strategy for increasing the overall housing supply, there remained a need to help struggling households now. The white paper promised increased funding and flexibility for the Affordable Housing Programme and help for people wishing to own their own home. In addition, there would be a new definition for affordable homes and a minimum of 10% of any new builds would have to be affordable. A consultation was being undertaken in consideration of banning letting agent fees for tenants and there would be promotion of family friendly tenancies for new build properties. In addition, it was planned to tackle unfair practice and abuse of leaseholds.

The meeting heard that additional action would be taken in regard to long term empty homes and barriers would be removed prevent older people from moving to more appropriate accommodation. A green paper on funding for supported housing would be published later in the year.

The forum heard that the white paper offered a number of positives, including recognition of the scale and root causes of the problems facing the housing market in the UK. There was also recognition that everyone had a role to play in fixing the market. Bespoke housing deals for councils and reduced emphasis on starter homes were also positive steps forward.

It was noted that there were still areas of concern for KBC in relation to disposal of high value assets, Right to Buy, capital receipts and the enforced 1% rent reduction. In addition, there were still obstacles to councils wishing to build their own properties and the new definition of affordable housing could make it more difficult to provide affordable rented housing on Section 106 sites. Further action also needed to be undertaken to improve conditions in the private rented sector.

The forum asked questions in relation to building on flood plains and Green Belt land. It was noted that there was nothing in the White Paper regarding rent control for the private sector. Questions were also asked regarding the development programme with Housing Associations, building on unviable garage sites and bringing long term empty properties back into use.

16.TF.90 PERIODIC TENANCY VISITS

Leona Mantle provided the forum with an update on the planned periodic tenancy visits for all KBC tenants.

The meeting heard that KBC invested a significant amount of time with its new tenants to ensure they were aware of the support and services

available to them. Comprehensive tenancy reviews were undertaken, with five visits conducted in the first year of tenancy.

It was now considered that existing tenants could benefit from the same sharing of information. Contact with existing tenants was currently largely by request or reactive. The results of the customer satisfaction survey undertaken in 2016 indicated that communication with existing tenants required improvement.

Tenancy visits would enable the council to undertake the following:-

- Raise awareness of the support services offered to all tenants (e.g. Tenancy Support, LifePlan, Financial Advice, Health and Wellbeing etc).
- Carry out tenancy checks plus property and garden inspections
- Checking tenants ID and occupancy of properties

Tenants would also have the opportunity to discuss any issues with their home, neighbourhood or tenancy when the Neighbourhood Manager visited.

A focus group had been held with eight tenants in attendance to discuss the tenancy visits and allowed for tenants to provide their views. Key points raised were:-

- Tenancy visits were seen in a positive light, it indicated KBC cared about its tenants
- There was a need to check properties to ensure they remained in a good state
- Visits provided a useful method of offering additional support to tenants if required
- It was positive to hear about improvements to the local area from Neighbourhood Managers as well as having the chance to have a say
- The group was pleased long-standing tenants would be visited first
- There was a preference for a formal letter and an information leaflet to be sent to tenants to introduce the idea of a visit.

An article regarding the visits would be placed into the next edition of Connect, with visit invitation letters and an information leaflet issued to the most long-standing tenants providing at least a week's notice of a visit. A Guide to Services for Tenants was in the preparatory stage and the scheme would be reviewed after a period of three months.

Forum members welcomed the scheme and asked questions in relation to costings, inclusion of contact details for ward councillors and tenant representatives on notification leaflets, inspections of gardens and the length of notice provided prior to visits.

16.TF.91 HRA CAPITAL PROGRAMME

Darren Ibell attended the meeting and presented the monthly HRA Capital Programme report.

The forum was advised that the April meeting would feature a presentation in relation to major voids. In addition, the capital programme for 2017/18 was based on stock condition information. The council had now surveyed well over 60% of its housing stock, and it was noted that there was a lot of work to undertake in order to bring some of the properties back to a level that the Housing Team deemed acceptable.

It was requested that 2017/18 capital programme details supplied to the next meeting contain rough timescales and locations for works.

16.TF.92 CONNECT

The forum heard that the latest edition was currently with the printers and was due for delivery the following week.

16.TF.93 TENANT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Martyn Lund provided the forum with a questionnaire to complete to assist with the ongoing Resident Involvement and Communication Review. All forum members completed and returned the form.

16.TF.94 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The following issues were reported:

- Roughton Close required street-cleaning and additional lighting
- A fence had blown to the rear of Dahlia Road, blocking an alleyway
- Stamford Road had an ongoing issue with rats

The meeting heard that the communal block cleaning pilot scheme would commence at the start of April following the award of the cleaning contract.

It was reported that the Neighbourhood Manager for Patch 4, Shelley Hallen, had resigned from her post. Her job share partner remained in post, but an advertisement had been placed for a full time replacement. In addition there was currently a vacancy for a Tenant Engagement Officer (TEO), which was a critical role. It was anticipated that the recruitment and selection process should be completed by the end of March. Councillor Don moved a vote of thanks for the work of both Shelley and previous TEO,

Linda.

John Conway asked the forum whether moving the annual Housing Tour to May from July would be acceptable. The forum assented to the change.

It was heard that the first five council houses built in a generation should be handed over to the council in early April, with tenants occupying them by the end of the same month. An opportunity to view the properties would be made available and communicated to members of the forum.

16.TF.95 PRIZE DRAW

The winner of the prize draw was Trevor Nash.

16.TF.96 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the date for the next meeting of the forum would be 13th April 2017.

(The meeting started at 6.30pm and ended at 8.10pm)

Signed

Chair

DJP