

BOROUGH OF KETTERING

TENANTS' FORUM

Meeting held – 14th December 2017

Present: Councillor Mark Rowley (**Chair**)
Councillors Maggie Don, Andrew Dutton and David Howes

Tenant Representatives: Brian Kimpton (Counties)
Moiria Brown (Highfield Road)
Reg Carvell (Leaseholder – Highfield Cres.)
Josephine Copson (Alfred Street)
Jim French (Desborough)
Peter Harvey (Dahlia Road)
Martyn Lund (Highfield Road)
Peter Matsa (Burton Latimer)
Anne Swoboda (Rothwell)
Steven Soper (Sackville Street)
Victor Woodcock (Burton Latimer)
Brent Woodford (Ashley)
Lindsay Wooldridge (Sackville Street)

Also Present: John Conway (Housing)
Darren Ibell (Housing)
Leona Mantle (Housing)
Clare Davis (Housing)
Dan Hannam (Housing)
Dave Parker (Housing)
Tracey Copeland (Housing)
Beth Panter (Housing Apprentice)
Dean Mitchell (Finance)
David Pope (Democratic Services)

17.TF.59 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs June Derbyshire and Mike Tebbutt. Apologies were also received from Ken Burnage, Sandra Nash and Trevor Nash.

17.TF.60 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

17.TF.61 MINUTES

RESOLVED

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

17.TF.62 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

17.TF.24 - Keyways Housing Allocation Scheme

The meeting heard that Keyways applications from the beginning of September were currently being processed, with 374 applications awaiting action.

17.TF.52 – Reinventing Repairs

The number of void properties still stood at over 90, although it was anticipated that this figure would fall significantly after the Christmas period.

17.TF.63 MATTERS RAISED BY TENANTS' FORUM REPRESENTATIVES

None.

17.TF.64 HOMELESSNESS REDUCTION ACT

A presentation was provided which gave the forum an overview of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) that would come into force in April 2018.

The Private Sector Housing Manager attended the meeting and provided the meeting with details of the rise in homeless applications over the previous three financial years and a projected figure until the end of the current year. It was noted that the issue was a national one, with the single biggest factor for homeless applicants being the loss of private rented accommodation.

Figures were also provided for those households in temporary accommodation, with the meeting noting that the current figure stood at 118, a huge rise from Quarter 4 of 2014/15 when just 20 households were in temporary accommodation.

The meeting heard that the government was determined to tackle the issue of homelessness and wished to examine both the causes of the issue and local government responsibilities. It had been realised that early intervention was key, with an aim of preventing homelessness before it occurred.

The HRA was considered to be the biggest change to homelessness legislation in 40 years and had received Royal Assent on 27th April. The DCLG had advised that it would come into force in April 2018, although the exact date was yet to be confirmed. The consultation exercise on the Code of Guidance that local authorities would use to interpret the new legislation had just closed, with publication of the final version of the code awaited. Performance reporting would be changing and would require the submission of more detailed case level information.

The current homelessness application system was detailed to the forum who noted that the new legislation would add to the existing system rather than replace it. Changes to the system were detailed as follows:-

- Extending the current “threatened with homelessness” duty to “likely to become homeless within 56 days” (previously 28 days)
- New ‘prevention’ duty – KBC now had 56 days to prevent homelessness for any eligible household threatened with homelessness
- New ‘relief’ duty – KBC had 56 days to relieve homelessness for any eligible homeless household
- Public Sector Duty to Refer – specified public authorities (yet to be announced) to notify the housing authority if a client is homeless
- Culture change – Applicants needed to recognise that a homelessness application may not always lead to social tenancy
- KBC had a duty to provide a Personal Housing Plan for all eligible households; this would be bespoke housing advice provided in writing to enable an applicant to relieve their homelessness

The meeting heard that a project group and action plan had been created to assist in the implementation of the changes. Staff had attended training sessions on the issue with a further session scheduled for January. In addition, investigations had commenced regarding IT provision required for the new system. Staffing arrangements had been reviewed as it was anticipated that the number of customers and level of workload would increase as a result of producing personalised housing plans.

A case study of the experience of the system at Southwark was provided to the meeting who noted a large reduction in homelessness acceptance and homelessness reviews, but only a small initial reduction in the use of temporary accommodation.

Members asked questions in relation to additional government funding, the definition of “reasonable assistance”, the potential impact of Universal Credit and whether the new legislation would apply to private landlords.

17.TF.65 REINVENTING REPAIRS

The meeting received an update on the ongoing Reinventing Repairs project.

The meeting heard that a project team had been in place since September with an action plan created for the project. The first area examined was void properties and details were supplied of the work that had been undertaken in relation to those.

It was noted that after Christmas, in addition to continuing the work on voids, responsive repairs would also be reviewed. A member of staff within the Depot Team would be working for six months alongside an IT consultant to ensure the council's repairs IT system, Callsys was being used to its full capabilities. The system would be upgraded for the current software releases and a review would be undertaken as to how Callsys interacted with other council IT systems.

Also to be considered were staffing structures and management arrangements. Currently there were only a small number of management positions covering a large number of tradespeople and this required review to enable coherent career structures for all employees. It was important to retain quality staff within the service and apprentice schemes would also be examined to provide the next generation of tradespeople. In addition there would be a review of job descriptions, person specifications and pay benchmarking would be undertaken to ensure the council remained competitive as an employer.

The forum asked questions in relation to staff involvement in the changes and the diagnostic tree that formed part of the repair logging system.

17.TF.66 HAMPDEN CRESCENT

A presentation on the Hampden Crescent project was provided to the forum by the chief project officer, Dave Parker. Also in attendance was housing apprentice Beth Panter and Sandra and Paul from Lovell the main contractor.

An overview was provided of the feasibility process that had commenced in January 2015, with GSS Architects appointed to provide guidance. The intention had been to transform the building into good standard, lettable properties, with the number of units rising from 11 to 18, with disabled facilities in the ground floor flats and renewable energy source, new windows and External Wall Insulation (EWI).

Following a procurement process, Berry's Architects had been appointed to produce a full tender document for contractors to bid on. A working specification had been created and planning requirements assessed to allow for planning approval to be obtained. The architects were also responsible for carrying out the required surveys as well as producing detailed site plans and had been involved in interviews with prospective contractors.

The meeting heard that three bids had been submitted for the contract for

the main part of the works, with Lovell the contractor appointed. Four tenders had been received for the heating contract.

A video was shown to the meeting which detailed internal and external works being undertaken on the building. The forum requested an updated video be submitted when the project was closer to completion.

Paul and Sandra from Lovell attended the meeting and reported that works had commenced on 1st August and were now 17 weeks into the programme which was on schedule to finish as planned. A crane was due to be brought in on 18th December to enable stairs to be lifted into place, with scaffolding erected early in the New Year to allow for the EWI to be applied.

The meeting heard that Lovell as a contractor liked to leave a legacy in the community as part of any project the company undertook. As a result, connections had been made with Grange Primary School where painting and ground works had been undertaken. Local children had also been encouraged to paint decorative pebbles that would be installed as a permanent feature at the site. In addition, Lovell promoted the construction industry to young people as part of their community work.

Lovell utilised an auditable system which provided details of the return for each pound invested by the company in the local community and this was monitored on a monthly basis. This also included the use of local labour and work with KBC apprentices, with an aim to offer on-site work placements.

Members of the forum welcomed the presentation and appreciated the video footage of the ongoing works.

Questions were asked regarding the design of the ground floor flats with disabled adaptations and whether there was provision for the use and storage of mobility scooters in these properties.

17.TF.67 HRA CAPITAL PROGRAMME

The monthly HRA Capital Programme was presented to the meeting, with member noting that most schemes would be drawing to a close over the Christmas period.

Thanks and congratulations were offered to in regard to the work of apprentices who formed part of KBC's housing service.

17.TF.68 TENANTS FORUM CHRISTMAS QUIZ

A festive quiz took place with questions relating to housing activities reported during the previous year. The winner, decided by tie-breaker question, was Brian Kimpton.

17.TF.68 CONNECT

The meeting heard that the latest edition of Connect had been published and delivered with article suggestions for the Spring edition welcomed.

A request was made to include an article on Kettering Futures Partnership in regard to its work and the ways it could be used by tenants to gain assistance.

17.TF.69 TENANT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

It was reported that the panel's current review was now complete with the final report to be submitted to the forum in early 2018. It was also heard that there would be an increase in overview reporting, with performance indicators submitted to future meetings for consideration.

17.TF.70 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The meeting was informed of the pilot project that had seen joint work between KBC's Housing Options team, Kettering General Hospital and the Mental Health Trust. It was heard that partner organisations had been pleased by the positive outcomes of the project to date and had allocated funding for a further six month extension.

The meeting was presented with the concept of air cushions used to help sheltered housing residents who had fallen return safely to a sitting position while medical aid was sought. It was heard that these cushions saved time and money for emergency and housing services as well as help to maintain dignity for residents affected.

Christmas and New Year wishes were extended to all forum members on behalf of KBC Housing Officers.

17.TF.71 PRIZE DRAW

The winner of the prize draw was Moira Brown.

17.TF.72 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the date for the next meeting of the forum would be 11th January 2018.

(The meeting started at 6.30pm and ended at 7.39pm)

Signed

Chair

DJP