

## **BOROUGH OF KETTERING**

### **TENANTS' FORUM**

**Meeting held – 11<sup>th</sup> January 2018**

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

**Tenant Representatives:** Brian Kimpton (Counties)  
Moiria Brown (Highfield Road)  
Reg Carvell (Leaseholder – Highfield Cres.)  
Josephine Copson (Alfred Street)  
Peter Harvey (Dahlia Road)  
Aggie Koziura (Laburnum Crescent)  
Martyn Lund (Highfield Road)  
Peter Matsa (Burton Latimer)  
Anne Swoboda (Rothwell)  
Steven Soper (Sackville Street)  
Lindsay Wooldridge (Sackville Street)

**Also Present:** John Conway (Housing)  
Darren Ibell (Housing)  
Tracey Copeland (Housing)  
Simon Haile (Housing)  
Glyn Dowdell (Housing)  
Dean Mitchell (Finance)  
David Pope (Democratic Services)

#### **17.TF.73 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs June Derbyshire, David Howes and Mike Tebbutt. Apologies were also received from Leona Mantle, Ken Burnage, Jim French, Sandra Nash and Trevor Nash.

#### **17.TF.74 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

#### **17.TF.75 MINUTES**

##### **RESOLVED**

that the minutes of the meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

## **17.TF.76 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

### **17.TF.64 – Homelessness Reduction Act**

The meeting heard that the act was due to come into effect on 3<sup>rd</sup> April. The final version of the Code of Practice had yet to be submitted to local authorities although this was expected during February.

## **17.TF.77 MATTERS RAISED BY TENANTS' FORUM REPRESENTATIVES**

An issue was raised regarding utility meter cupboard doors on the Highfield Estate. It was heard that this would be investigated by officers

Aggie Koziura, representing Laburnum Crescent, was welcomed to the meeting.

## **17.TF.78 REINVENTING REPAIRS**

The meeting received a further update on the ongoing Reinventing Repairs project.

It was heard that work would start on system updates for the Callsys IT system the following week. Senior Surveyor Sarah Huseyin had been seconded to the project for a period of six months. It was noted that the project would be an extensive piece of work and would also link in with the recommendations made by the Tenant Overview and Scrutiny Panel following its previous review.

Work would also continue on voids. It was noted that work on 40 “toxic” void properties had seen approximately half of those returned to the council’s housing stock. It was anticipated that the remainder would be completed by the middle of February, with management of the voids process being more efficient going forward.

The Head of Housing and Environmental Care Operations Manager would be reviewing the staffing structure of the depot team with a view to providing career paths and retaining quality staff. There would also be a link with apprenticeships.

It was heard that the Council had a legal duty to make homes as safe as possible as well as managing the safety and welfare of its staff. A report would be produced in the spring detailing its obligations, undertakings and any gaps in compliance.

The meeting heard that work would also be undertaken in relation to procurement and stores and the preparation of an Asset Management Strategy.

## 17.TF.79 HOUSING MARKETS UPDATE

The forum was provided with an update in relation to the housing market, including recent developments regarding the government standpoint on housing and the council's budgetary considerations.

It was heard that the new housing supply required nationally was not being met by the current level of building as had been the case historically since the 1960's, the last point in time that councils had been building significant quantities of new dwellings. In 2016/17 a total of 141,000 new homes had been built nationally which was approximately half the required level. Of that total, only 1.5% had been built by councils.

It was acknowledged that there was an ongoing housing crisis locally and nationally and a number of the causal effects were outlined to the meeting.

An overview was provided of recent government legislation relating to housing as follows:-

- Housing and Planning Act 2016 – This piece of legislation had aimed to encourage home ownership as well as allowing Right to Buy for Housing Association tenants, forcing council's to sell higher value void properties, offer mandatory fixed term tenancies and introduced the concept of "Pay to Stay" for higher earning tenants
- Fixing Our Broken Housing Market White Paper – Upon the appointment of Gavin Barwell MP as Housing Minister, it was recognised that the existing housing strategy was insufficient, focussing as it did on home ownership. The white paper was frank about the scale of the problem faced and stated that there was a need to build the right homes in the right locations at a faster rate and to diversify the housing market. A range of measures was introduced that could help address issues that were holding councils back from building
- Conservative Party Conference 2017 – The Prime Minister had spoken of a new generation of council houses to fix the broken housing market. The housing strategy was no longer solely based on home ownership, but recognised that councils had a major role to play in fixing the housing market.

It was heard that from 2020, social housing rents would be set using the Consumer Price Index +1% rather than the current 1% annual reduction. There would be no LHA cap for supported housing, with an extra £2 billion of funding towards new affordable and social housing.

The meeting was given an update on Right to Buy for Housing Association tenants which was currently undergoing a pilot scheme. Sales of higher value void council houses would not be introduced during the current financial year. The Homelessness Reduction Act would come into effect from 3<sup>rd</sup> April with an emphasis on keeping people in their homes and would

provide a challenge to the Housing Team.

The Social Housing Green Paper was seen as a pivotal moment for social housing. It was important that social housing was seen as part of solution and not as the cause of societal problems. The meeting heard that in the last two years, there had been a shift from a bleak outlook for social housing towards a progressive governmental view. It was understood that there remained a long way to go, but depending on the new Housing Minister, an era of investment in social housing could be on the horizon.

#### Council Budget

A brief overview was provided of the Council's budget consultation process, with the meeting noting that the formal process would commence at the Executive Committee on 17<sup>th</sup> January. The next meeting of the forum would consider the draft budget proposals and recommend rent levels to the Executive who would consider all the comments received as part of the process and formally set rent levels for 2018/19 at its meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> February.

Details were provided of the HRA, General Fund and Capital Fund accounts and draft Capital Programme proposals. It was heard that should a 1% rent decrease be approved, this would see the average weekly rent set at £79.43, with an average decrease of 81p a week across the council's housing stock.

Members asked questions in relation to the potential impact on Kettering of the national housing picture and whether future new-build social housing accommodation would take into account single households.

### **17.TF.80 FALLS PILLOW DEMONSTRATION**

A demonstration of a falls pillow was provided by the Sheltered Housing team, with assistance from Councillor Maggie Don.

It was heard the just over 400 properties formed part of KBC's sheltered housing schemes, with scheme managers having responsibility onsite for approximately 70 properties each. The meeting was advised that there were between 30 and 55 call outs from residents on a monthly basis for a variety of reasons. However, falls were an issue for residents and there had recently been an increase in call outs made for that reason.

The meeting noted that the falls pillow scheme had been in operation in association with East Midlands Ambulance Service since June 2017, with KBC staff receiving relevant training. The pillow itself was used to help residents who had fallen return safely to a sitting position while medical aid was sought. To date 16 persons had been assisted using the pillow and very positive feedback had been received from those who had been helped and their families.

It was noted that given the current strains on the ambulance and medical service, response times for ambulance attendance could be lengthy and use of the pillow had a positive impact not only on those who had fallen but also served to reduce the pressures on the ambulance service.

Currently there was only one falls pillow available across the sheltered housing schemes, although there was a capital bid in place to procure additional pillows to allow for one at each scheme going forward, plus one for each scheme manager to be stored in their vehicles.

Questions were asked in relation to the risks of moving patients who had fallen. It was heard that this was something that had been built into the risk assessment process, with a requirement to obtain documentation to support the decision to move someone who had fallen should the need arise.

#### **17.TF.81 HRA CAPITAL PROGRAMME**

The meeting noted that work had recommenced on the various capital projects following the Christmas period. It was further noted that the financial summary provided to the meeting showed few alterations from that submitted at the December meeting as a result of the shutdown.

The forum was advised that an agreement had been reached in regard to the window replacement project on the Highfield Estate. The window units had been purchased at a heavily discounted rate and it was anticipated that a new fitting contract would be approved by the end of January.

The roofing renewal contract was at the start of its four-year programme, with 200 roofs being replaced on properties across the Borough over that period.

The Hampden Crescent project was progressing well and was noted as being only a week behind schedule with lost time accrued in the initial stages of the project as the result of a variety of unforeseen issues having been recovered by the contractor. Works including the installation of External Wall Insulation and the heating system as well as internal plastering works would be undertaken in the following weeks. Funding had been secured to pay for works on Block B, with formal contractor procurement the next step.

Questions and issues were raised in relation to damage to a block of flats on Sackville Street and roof renewals on Dahlia Road not forming part of the initial four-year programme of works.

**17.TF.83 CONNECT**

The meeting heard that the editorial panel was considering the spring edition of the magazine, with articles promoting the annual garden competition, Easter activities around the Borough, free parking during the Easter period and voter registration. Details would also be provided of the annual rent review process.

A request was made to feature an article asking tenants what they would like to see in future editions of Connect.

**17.TF.84 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 performance indicators would be submitted to future meetings for consideration. Work was also ongoing alongside the Head of Housing in regard to the Repairs Reporting Review.

**17.TF.85 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Figures for the number of households in temporary accommodation were requested. It was heard that there were currently 118 households resident in temporary accommodation.

A further request was made for the number of people accommodated under the Severe Weather Emergency Protocols which had come into force for a short period at the end of 2017. It was agreed that this number would be communicated to Cllr Don as requested.

**17.TF.86 PRIZE DRAW**

The winner of the prize draw was Steven Soper.

**17.TF.87 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the date for the next meeting of the forum would be 8<sup>th</sup> February 2018.

*(The meeting started at 6.30pm and ended at 8.03pm)*

Signed .....

Chair

DJP