

Item 1 – Notes from 03.07.07

Residents Present:

John Harwood
Frank McKenna (Chair)
Phyllis Whiteside
Don Smith
Patricia Henshaw
Sandra Wade
Amanda Thom,
Mike Hall & Jacqueline Lord



Supported by: Gary Melia, Sian Coulton, Sarah Barnes, Paul Smith & Steve O'Hagan

Apologies: Freda Smith, Edna Counce, Sandra Tonks, John Bradley, Tony Webster, Louise Newell, Mrs Rafferty, Beryl Cotton, Jackie Hall, Mavis Bennett, Colin White, Joyce Gildert, Wendy Taylor, Kelly Bennett & Jean O'Neill

Item **Action**

<p>1.</p>	<p>Witness Support Policy</p> <p>Frank invited Gary to present this item prior to minutes and matters arising so that he could get away in good time.</p> <p>Gary explained the background to the policy including the Respect Standard, the relevant Audit Commission Key Line of Enquiry, our Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Strategy and emerging Good Practice in this area of our work.</p> <p>He expanded by adding that providing good customer service means, encouraging complaints, protecting victims and witnesses, working in partnership, keeping victims and witnesses up to date and sign posting support groups like victim support</p> <p>Court attendance on our behalf would make transport or reimbursement of reasonable expenses a "must" under the policy and "Target hardening" eg panic alarms, CCTV, fireproof letterboxes, security lights, dead locks and/or spy holes would be provided in appropriate cases.</p> <p>Gary explained that we would consider moving witnesses if there were a threat of serious violence and with Police support.</p> <p>Mike asked about appropriate action being taken</p>	

against perpetrators and was advised by Gary that the policy should be read in conjunction with our ASB Strategy that sets out the overall and robust approach that NPHA takes to using all the powers at our disposal to deal with ASB issues.

Patricia asked about who pays the cost of taking any legal action including solicitors fees and was advised it was tenants via rents.

Don wondered about joint working with the police in appropriate circumstances and was advised by Gary that co-operation and notification arrangements were really sound.

Mike encouraged the positive attitude to this issue being exhibited in the meeting saying that though it was frustrating that it took 2 years to deal with a local problem his Residents Association had recently been awarded a £1,000 respect prize in recognition of it's efforts.

Frank asked if the perceived increase in ASB issues was due to an increase in reporting and Gary agreed this was a partial explanation adding that every effort was being made to maximise the ease of reporting including updating of software to make online reporting easy.

Gary also suggested that developments like publicising success and support for witnesses made people less afraid than formerly to report problems and thanked Frank for making a very good point.

In response to Patricia Gary explained that victims and witnesses would only be moved as a last resort and if they wanted it. In the vast majority of instances complainants just want the unacceptable behaviour they are experiencing to stop.

Don wondered about appropriate measures to help some younger and less mature tenants to make a success of their tenancy. Gary referred to three

		<p>measures being taken:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Tenancy Enforcement Team is visiting schools to talk to 15-16 year olds on the Respect Standard as part of the Citizenship syllabus • The Floating Support service deals with a variety of clients - including some younger people - the aim being to make it more likely they will be successful in maintaining their tenancy • We are working in partnership with a local voluntary sector body that gives housing advice and guidance to young people - the Key Project - that provides accredited training on running a tenancy successfully. <p>Gary agreed to note all the views offered when presenting the policy to the Board.</p> <p>Frank thanked Gary for attending and checked that everybody was in support of the policy before Gary left the meeting.</p>	<p>GM</p>
<p>2</p>	<p>NPHA Performance Report</p>	<p>The Performance Analyst, Sarah Barnes, talked people through a report based on figures for the month of May that she explained had been redrafted following helpful comment at the May 22nd Forum meeting.</p> <p>Sarah reminded those present that this was part of an effort to publicise how NPHA is performing against service standards and that any further comment on the format and content was welcome.</p> <p>From the chair Frank suggested the improvements on the earlier draft were welcome and valuable in terms of peoples' understanding the figures. All indicated their agreement as he referred particularly to target as well as actual figure being shown and to the smiley/frowny graphics.</p> <p>The undertaking to provide more explanatory narrative in subsequent reports to Forum was also welcomed.</p> <p>Phyllis suggested that Sarah had agreed at an earlier meeting to follow-up concerns from a</p>	

		<p>number of people that repairs follow-up survey arrangements appeared haphazard as some had work done but no follow-up survey.</p> <p>Paul Smith confirmed that he had followed this up at the time and that staff absence meant there had been an interruption to the process.</p> <p>Steve confirmed that it was actually Amanda Pyper who had given the undertaking that Phyllis referred to and suggested Paul would ensure there was now a system in place to deal with particular members of staff being absent.</p> <p>Sarah left after being thanked for attending and indicating her gratitude that the identity confusion had been cleared up.</p>	PS
3	<p>Lettable Standards Review</p>	<p>Paul Smith tabled a summary of void works during 2006/07 indicating there had been 446 properties worked on at a cost of £465,752 giving an average cost of over £1,000. 110 toilet seats had been replaced, 69 toilets had been refixed or replaced and 423 skips filled.</p> <p>34 colour photographs of voids in a poor state were also tabled.</p> <p>He outlined the drivers for change in terms of the forthcoming review of the lettable standard as:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistency in application of the standard identified in the audit commission inspection • A new health & safety rating system being introduced that included tenanted properties and put the onus on the property owner <p>In answer to a query from Frank Paul confirmed that the void cost figures tabled did not include rent loss.</p> <p>There was a lively discussion contributed to by Mike, Phyllis, Don, Pat, Frank and Sandra about the various implications of offering to leave</p>	

		<p>carpets and other items for incoming tenants so long as they signed to accept responsibility for the upkeep of the items thereafter.</p> <p>It was agreed that this indicated that looking at the standard and flexibility related to individual customers preferences was timely.</p> <p>Paul suggested that whilst he had not produced a timetabled programme for meetings and concluding the review project he aimed to reach his conclusions to coincide with the beginning of the budgets discussions for next year i.e. by October of this year.</p> <p>There was also some speculation about how to engage as many people as possible in this review with a suggestion that the Talk magazine and talk2progress website could prove fruitful for recruitment given the obviously high level of interest.</p> <p>Paul agreed to fix the first meeting within 3-4 weeks hopefully but certainly before the end of August.</p> <p>Paul was thanked for attending before he left the meeting.</p>	PS
4	Managing Directors Annual Report	<p>Steve explained that NPHA's managing Director - Bernie Keenan - was unable to make it to the meeting but had confirmed he wanted to attend quite routinely in future. In his absence he had submitted for the Forum's attention a look back over the past year that had initially been prepared for staff.</p> <p>Steve gave a brief overview of the contents including: the reference to over 500 hours of staff time spent on community involvement; the positive feedback from people whose life had been improved through effective addressing of ASB issues; the additional customer facing jobs created and filled, and, the importance of the Customer Focus project.</p>	

		Frank commended the brightness and clarity of the format and invited people to read at their leisure and raise any questions in due course.	
5	Notes of meeting on May 22nd and Matters Arising	<p>It was agreed that all matters of significance from the notes of the meeting on May 22nd had been dealt with and that the notes were an accurate record of the meeting.</p> <p>Further feedback from the North West Tenants & Residents Assembly was awaited.</p>	
6	Seminars & Events Update	<p>Steve drew peoples' attention to the copy invite included in the meeting papers to the customer & staff seminar scheduled for the following day (Wednesday July 4th) on the Community Cohesion Strategy & Compact.</p> <p>A copy of the latest draft of the consultative events calendar had also been included in the papers. The forthcoming editorial panel on July 10th & Grounds Maintenance panel on July 11th were referred to.</p> <p>Steve went on to explain that partly due to the addition of Sian to the team we will now be aiming to send as many reports as possible out to people about a week before the meeting along with an agenda and notes of the last meeting.</p> <p>If items are to be dealt with through a verbal report we will give the name and contact details of the person who will be leading the discussion at the meeting.</p> <p>Steve also explained that a full years programme of events would be scheduled and publicised via talk2progress as soon as the Board meetings for the next annual cycle (October-September) have been agreed.</p>	SOH
7	Date, Time & Venue for next meeting	Tuesday July 31st @ 6pm Boardroom, Sumner House	

Item 2 – Reward and Recognition Policy

To **The Housing Forum**
From **Amanda Pyper, Consultant Policy Manager**
Re **Briefing Note | the Tenant Reward and Recognition Scheme**
Date **18th July 2007**

What is the background to this briefing paper?

You may remember that at the last meeting on 22nd May we had a debate about the introduction of a reward scheme for tenants. The aim of a reward scheme is twofold:

- √ Firstly; to say thank you for being good customer and neighbour and for acting in the spirit of the tenancy agreement.
- √ Secondly; to act as an encouragement for those on the margins of their tenancy to mend their ways.

At the meeting we said we would carry out a survey of all tenants to get their views. To achieve this we included a survey in the latest Talk magazine.

This briefing note is to tell member of the Forum what other tenants said about the idea and to explain what happens next.

What were the results of the Survey?

We had a very good response with 110 survey forms being returned and discussions taking place at sheltered schemes too. The results told us that the majority of customers like the idea of being rewarded for being a good tenant and neighbour. The answers people gave are summarised below:

1. What should we reward tenants for?

The top 5 answers were:

- 75% said having a clear rent account
- 73% said leaving properties clear and clean at termination
- 63% said being a good neighbour
- 58% said having no complaints against them
- 58% said keeping the outside of properties clean and well kept

Only 12% supported the rewarding of people who have been complained about in the past but had no complaints for 12 months or more. There was very strong feeling against this idea.

Around a third of tenants say we should reward young people who are working with our specialist support team and doing well. There was also support for rewarding tenants who complete surveys.

2. What sort of rewards should tenants receive?

The top 3 answers were:

- 72% said entry into regular prize draws
- A chance to win a big prize
- A discount card scheme

Only 15% supported having improvement works completed before other tenants. There was very strong feeling against this idea.

Were there any views against the idea?

There were strong views expressed by around a fifth of the people that took part in our consultation exercises. The view that they held was that people should not be rewarded for doing what they are supposed to do anyway. Having made their point most people said that although they wished it wasn't necessary they could understand why we wanted to try this new idea of rewarding good tenants.

What will happen next?

A recommendation will be made to Board to adopt a reward scheme in 2008.

Membership Criteria

We propose the following criteria for membership;

- Members must have been a tenant for at least 12 months
- Members must have clear rent accounts or been keeping to a repayment plan for at least 12 weeks.
- Members won't have had any proven complaints made against them
- Members will have allowed access for repairs and gas servicing
- Members will have maintained their property and kept their gardens or external areas in good condition

Rewards

We propose to offer the following rewards;

- Countdown Discount Card for national and local shops to replace the existing Progress Plus card
- Quarterly prize draws be introduced
- An Annual BIG prize be introduced (makeover/weekend break)
- Quarterly prize draw for those taking part in involvement events be introduced in addition to the current package of incentives offered
- Introduce "Nominate a Neighbour" for an award in year 2

Recommendation

For members of the Housing Forum to support this idea and the proposals that are going forward to Board.

Item 5 - Rent Arrears Strategy

The Rent Arrears Strategy is linked to five of New Progress' business plan objectives:

- Strategic Aim 1 – Equality and Diversity
- Strategic Aim 3 – Improve financial viability
- Strategic Aim 4 – Contribute to sustainable communities
- Strategic Aim 5 – Customer Focus and Customer Involvement
- Strategic Aim 9 – Effective asset management

and has links to other issues including:

- *Prevention – provision of a fast and effective rent arrears service based on arrears prevention, timely detection and recovery.*
- *Sustainability – to reduce overall debt so as to contribute to sustainable communities.*
- *Enforcement – Consistent approach to enforcing collection of arrears.*
- *Support – Support of tenants/prospective tenants who need help, being proactive in identifying barriers to rent payment and provision of opportunities for our tenant/prospective tenants to maximise their income.*
- *Partnerships – To work in partnership with other statutory and voluntary agencies.*

It promotes Partnership Working, in meeting the following Aims and objectives:

- Prevention of rent arrears
- Income maximisation
- Sustainability
- Identifying vulnerability
- Accessibility

The action plan contains specific actions to achieve the above aims and objectives.

Last year these actions included:

- Held targeted rent arrears campaigns to emphasise the message that 'failure to pay your rent will put your home at risk'.
- Held surgeries at the Bridge and The Foundations for clients and training given for officers.
- Responded to pre tenancy requests for information, and referrals from other staff, as well as providing staff with a benefit calculator to assess new tenants liability for rent
- Payment of one weeks rent and service charge in advance based on initial assessment of housing benefit entitlement.
- New tenant visits within 6 weeks of tenancy commencement
- Respond to referrals to and from other agencies within 5 working days.

The Housing Management section was successful in meeting the current rent arrears target set of 3.5%, showing a reduction from the previous year of 0.67%. Targeted work on interventions did have an impact.

As a result the additions/alterations to the strategy are recommended:

1. Target set for current arrears of 3.5% and former tenant arrears of 4.4%.
2. Review tenancy offer process to ensure prospective tenant's income and expenditure is assessed to ensure future tenant is fully aware of the cost involved in running their own home and can afford to do so.
3. Provision of benefit advice leaflet in sign up pack.

4. Continue to require payment of one-week rent and service charge in advance based on initial assessment of housing benefit entitlement.
5. Continue with new tenant visits within 6 weeks of tenancy commencement
6. Continue with targeted benefit and rent arrears campaigns to achieve the target set.
7. Investigate the possibility of introduction of Tenant Reward Scheme
8. Review cost of arrears collection service.
9. Review former tenant arrears procedure and processes
10. Review marketing of rent arrears collection – radio promotion
11. Develop/review tools, training and process for debt recovery.
12. Work closely with Court User Group to campaign for speedy listings of cases.

The Forums views are requested on the additions/alterations to the Rent Arrears Strategy.

Item 6 – Local Lettings Policy

The Local Lettings Policies are linked to five of New Progress' business plan objectives:

- Strategic Aim 1 – Equality and Diversity
- Strategic Aim 4 – Contribute to sustainable communities
- Strategic Aim 5 – Customer Focus and Customer Involvement
- Strategic Aim 9 – Effective asset management

and have links to other issues including:

- *Prevention – provision of a fast and effective tenancy enforcement service based on prevention, timely detection and remedying of breaches of tenancy conditions.*
- *Sustainability – Balance of communities on the estates in which we operate to contribute to sustainable communities.*
- *Support – Support of existing tenants who need help to remain in their homes.*
- *Partnerships – To work in partnership with other statutory and voluntary agencies.*

It promotes Partnership Working, in meeting the following Aims and objectives:

- Prevention of anti social behaviour
- Sustainability
- Identifying vulnerability
- Accessibility

The policies contain specific criteria to achieve the above aims and objectives.

Last year the criteria included:

- Bannister Drive, Leyland. Allocation of flats around and above shops to applicants over 30 years to create a more diverse age range of tenants in the area. To give priority to those applicants who are in employment without children to assist in the prevention of juvenile nuisance.
- New Build – The Oaks, Buckshaw Village. Allocation of flats and houses on to applicants over the age of 25 years who provides satisfactory reference and are in employment in an effort to sustain a new community.
- Kingsfold West – Penwortham. Allocation of flats and houses to applicants without children, who are in employment to assist in the prevention of anti social behaviour.
- Town Gate Flats – Allocation of flats to applicants over 30 years and to give priority to those applicants without children to assist in the prevention of anti social behaviour.

The following amendments to the local letting policies recommended:

1. Extend the existing Bannister Drive local letting policy to include the wider area of the Broadfield estate. The Broadfield estate has now moved from green to red on the current asset management matrix and it does appear that anti social behaviour is increasing and this is having an impact on tenancy turnover that is confirmed by the local police. Rent arrears are high on the estate and are ranked at 11th place on the asset management matrix.
2. Continue with the Kingsfold West Penwortham local letting policy. The Kingsfold West area has now moved from green to amber on the current asset management matrix and it does appear that anti social behaviour is increasing and this is confirmed by the local police; this is having an impact on tenancy turnover. Rent arrears are high on the estate and are ranked at 13th place on the asset management matrix.

3. To remove the local letting policy on the Towngate flats after problems previously encountered have been reduced and a more stable community is being seen.
4. To remove the local letting policy on the New Build sites at Buckshaw Village and The Oaks after problems previously encountered have been reduced and a more stable community is being seen.

The Forum's views are requested on the additions/alterations to the Local Lettings Policies