

Residents Present:

Freda Smith

John Harwood

Freda Smith

Frank McKenna (Chair)

Phyllis Whiteside

Edna Counce

Don Smith

Christine Anderson, Pat Henshaw, Beryl Cotton, John Bradley, Sandra Tonks

HOUSING FORUM

May 22nd 2007

Large Boardroom

Sumner House

Supported by:- Bernie Keenan, Amanda Pyper, Franco Barnowski, Sarah Barnes and Steve O'Hagan

Apologies: Mrs Rafferty & Alex Green

Item	Action
<p>1. North West Tenants & Residents Assembly</p>	<p>Frank invited guests representing the North West Tenants & Residents Assembly (NWTRA) - Bernard Caine (Chair of NWTRA) and Frank Evans to speak about the history and purpose of the NWTRA.</p> <p>Bernard explained that the assembly had evolved out of a Greater Manchester assembly and had been successful in securing funds and support.</p> <p>The Housing Corporation had provided £28,000 funding in the past and at the Annual General Meeting of the assembly in February it was announced the developer Bramhalls had agreed annual sponsorship of £10,000.</p> <p>The assembly meets monthly, covers Lancashire and Merseyside but not Cheshire.</p> <p>Bernard explained that a re-launch of the "Lancashire Voices" sub-regional assembly was being planned and asked Frank to explain a little about this.</p> <p>Frank explained that he came from Bacup and how a re-launch of Lancashire Voices was being considered during September.</p>

In response to an enquiry from Frank McKenna the other Frank explained that Lancashire Voices involves residents setting the agenda with such topics discussed as:-

- Anti-Social Behaviour
- Affordability
- Rural Homelessness

The meetings give tenants an opportunity to share information and compare landlords. Frank also gave as examples of the assembly's activities working with the Northern Consortium on voids policy development and generally on developing the Respect agenda.

Bernard went on to add that there were occasions when relevant bodies such as the Housing Corporation and the Regional Assembly sought views from NWTRA on a range of relevant matters.

Bernie Keenan asked about the membership levels and fees and was advised by Bernard that there is no charge and that the membership currently stands at tenants from about 120 Landlord organisations.

Freda enquired whether Frank was a housing association (HA) or Local Authority (LA) tenant in Bacup. Frank explained that the housing stock had transferred from LA to HA - Green Vale Homes - within the last few years.

In conclusion Frank thanked the visitors for coming along.

It was agreed an appropriate way forward was for NPHA tenants to accept an invitation to the next sub-regional conference that NWTRA would organise in Preston in September, consider the next newsletter publicising the conference and take a view on whether to actively engage with NWTRA.

Frank and Bernard said their goodbyes and Steve showed them out.

2	<p>Welfare Rights Strategy</p>	<p>Franco outlined the main themes in review and the revised approach in the strategy as outlined at page 15 of the documents that had been handed out.</p> <p>Franco explained that he was particularly interested to hear views on the proposal to enter into discussions with the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) about NPHA possibly funding a specialist debt adviser post.</p> <p>Bernie commended the excellent job that Franco had been doing in taking a strategic, intelligent and impact based approach to his efforts to maximise the income of NPHA tenants.</p> <p>There was discussion about the proposal to work with the banks on basic accounts for those who do not have them. Frank observed that he understood that a basic product of this nature provided by the Post Office was being discontinued.</p> <p>Franco explained that he is working closely with the Policy Manager - Amanda Pyper - addressing the government financial inclusion campaign "Let's Talk Money" and that he & Amanda were due to meet the relevant member of staff from the government regional office.</p> <p>Franco also confirmed that this aspect of the proposed revision to the strategy was partly in recognition of post office closures.</p> <p>The strategy and the revisions were fully endorsed and Franco was thanked for attending and explaining the key themes.</p>	
3	<p>Minutes of 22.05.07 & Matters Arising</p>	<p>Christine asked about reference to stringent checks on potential tenants raised under the Choice Based Lettings discussion last time. It was explained that the approach to determining whether prior conduct should mean that offers of property are withdrawn would be just as robust - if not more so - as currently.</p>	

		<p>Freda and Bernie reported on discussions at Board about the proposal to introduce a Penwortham Estate Caretaker.</p> <p>In essence the Board was not convinced of the merit of a full-time service for the area specified in the report partly because of mixed feedback from public consultation.</p> <p>Bernie advised that the Board anticipated a more "logical" proposal coming to them at a later date and that this may entail, for example, a part-time service to parts of Penwortham through a member of staff shared with another area.</p>	
4	<p>NPHA Performance Report</p>	<p>Sarah explained that it was intended to bring a performance report on key areas to each forum meeting and that she was interested to hear what views people had on the content and layout of the report provided for discussion.</p> <p>This partly arose from the improvement action plan as a result of the audit commission inspection report earlier in the year that had suggested customers should be given opportunity to comment on performance figures.</p> <p>Bernie commended Sarah for the work she was doing on policy analysis that had transformed the way this work was presented and done at NPHA. He also suggested that there was perhaps a little too much information in the proposed reports.</p> <p>Frank suggested that the format may benefit in some instances from a "Target Vs Actual" format and Bernie queried the value of some of the data presented.</p> <p>In suggesting it was an occasion when less could be more in terms of explaining service issues Bernie suggested the rent collection data was very much skewed by Housing Benefit payment and therefore not very helpful in measuring the performance of NPHA without a bit of narrative.</p>	

		<p>Following Freda' remark that the state of some void properties she had seen led her to think that staff having to work in them deserved a medal Bernie commended the work done on void inspection by customers.</p> <p>He speculated that a presentation to the Audit Committee may be appropriate and appreciated as part of the Board's interest in liasing more closely with active customers. The Forum welcomed this and further feedback from Bernie was requested in due course.</p> <p>Sarah thanked people for their comments, advised that any more thought were welcome by phone or email and advised that she would bring a report with a revised format to the next forum meeting.</p>	<p>BK</p> <p>SB</p>
<p>5</p>	<p>Annual Impact Assessment</p>	<p>Steve talked the meeting through the draft NPHA Board report reviewing the Community Cohesion Strategy and the Community Involvement Compact that was included on pages 6 through to 14 of the papers for the forum meeting.</p> <p>The report contained a copy of quarterly Summary Impact assessments taken from the tal2progress tenant website and some ideas for closer liaison with Board Members as discussed under item 4 above.</p> <p>The meeting welcomed the ideas for closer working and Freda was able to report on the positive discussion about the idea at audit Committee.</p> <p>Edna observed that Steve had neglected to mention the Polish cultural exchange event and this led to further endorsement of looking at ways to work closely with the Board and appropriate committees.</p> <p>Steve advised that he would report the views given when presenting the report to the Board, in particular the view that the Compact and Strategy remain "fit for purpose" for now</p>	<p>BK</p> <p>SOH</p>

6	Managing Director's Report	<p>Bernie went through a version of the report he would be taking to NPHA Board explaining that some confidential and/or sensitive matters would on occasion be omitted from the version presented at forum.</p> <p>This related - for example - to the action plan for Board's information that was not reproduced at 8.6 and to section 8.4.</p> <p>He explained that he intended bringing a report to forum meetings as a matter of routine and welcomed giving a customer forum the opportunity to influence thinking on some key issues.</p> <p>There was discussion of a number of the items in the report and Bernie agreed to take account of the views expressed when presenting to the Board</p>	BK
7	Reward & Recognition for good customer conduct	<p>Amanda explained that she was attending the meeting to take some initial views prior to drafting a report for the Board on the idea of both rewarding the good conduct of tenants and recognising the value of contributions made by people, like those present, who actively engaged with NPHA to review and improve services.</p> <p>Amanda explained that customer reward schemes were becoming more common with landlord organisations and that there was an extent to which some existing initiatives - the Progress Discount Card and the gardening competition, for instance - could be re-launched as part of a more comprehensive scheme.</p> <p>In summary the issues recorded to take account of were:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a general in principle approval for both elements (rewarding good tenants and recognising involvement) • unanimous agreement on the following as criteria ; clear rent account; been in the tenancy at least 6 months, (absolutely didn't want immediate membership given to 	

all new tenants) no complaints of ASB/nuisance (in its widest sense and to include unkempt gardens), no damage to property.

- some varying views on whether those who are in arrears but keeping to a payment plan should be included - on the whole people recognised it was an incentive to those who were had arrears to pay it off.
- some feeling of stigmatisation as a result of having a card to produce in shops where those around you would see you were a tenant (like having a voucher for school dinners)
- one strongly expressed view that it might be divisive and result in some being seen as 2nd class tenants - equally strongly argued was the opposing view, from those who felt it might encourage people to be better tenants and the whole idea was to make them feel uncomfortable.
- a suggestion that vouchers from the shops may be more anonymous than a card, however on checking no scheme offers this at present, they are all card based. We can use the voucher idea for prize draws though.
- an in principle approval for staff to benefit from the countdown card as well
- a concern that "cash or in kind" recognition for involvement may affect benefits
- a strongly expressed view that the gardening competition should not be included as a benefit and restricted to members only - want to keep it open to all, no barriers.

We still need to discuss various types of rewards and whether membership should be automatic or applied for.

		<p>It was agreed that Steve would forward survey forms to members so they could give their personal views and at a future meeting a more formal presentation of the tenants feedback from TALK subsequent proposals would follow.</p>	<p>SOH AP</p>
<p>8</p>	<p>Customer Void Inspections - Lettable Standard Review</p>	<p>Paul Smith - the repairs Operations Manager was not able to make it to the meeting and Steve had not been able to pick up his note to the forum which is therefore reproduced in full below:-</p> <p>Void Tenant Inspections</p> <p>I have been asked to feedback on the effectiveness and content of the inspections carried out by our tenant inspectors.</p> <p>The inspections are very useful and informative and give the voids team feedback on the standard that the voids presented. All of the points noted by the representatives are acted upon either through direct action by resolving the issue before letting (i.e. cleanliness) or through being discussed at the Voids CIT (Continuous Improvement Team). There has been some useful suggestions and with some positive and negative feedback.</p> <p>My only issue with the inspections is the length of time taken to get the feedback. I would like to suggest that for the next void inspection that my Voids Team Leader Terry Toft is present. This will enable a more interactive feedback to take place at the void with the void inspectors.</p> <p>Voids Lettable Standard</p> <p>The voids lettable standard is currently under review. The Audit Commission Inspection highlighted that parts of the standard are too strict and other parts are too lenient. This is being reviewed over the next 6 months and feedback from the tenant inspectors will be sort during this time. I will be organising a separate meeting where all relevant parties will be invited to discuss the standard and produce a new standard if necessary.</p> <p>Steve advised that he had discussed the issue with the Head of Housing Operations - Gary Melia - prior to the meeting.</p> <p>Gary's advice concurred with Paul's suggesting that a Board report was the likely upshot of a review project since changes to the Lettable Standard would likely have substantial financial implications.</p> <p>Gary had also agreed there should be substantial</p>	

		<p>customer input and suggested others who should be involved such as Adrian Smith - Head of Property Maintenance - and the housing Management Team.</p> <p>It was agreed that Steve should invite Paul to attend the next meeting to present a timetabled project plan.</p>	SOH
9	Seminars Update	<p>Steve went through the presentations from the 3 customer/staff seminars held since March 1st that were reproduced within pages 16-43 of the meeting papers.</p> <p>This included a letter to the Housing Corporation with comments on the "Delivering Change Through Involvement" Consultation Paper.</p> <p>Steve also encouraged people to attend a seminar on reviewing the Grounds Maintenance Contract to be held the following day (May 23rd)</p>	
10	Date & Time of Next Meeting	July 3rd at 6pm	