

Minutes of the Tenants' Open Forum Meeting held on 22 August 2023, in Fountains Room, Harrogate Civic Centre

Attendance:

Steve Wilson – Neighbourhood Services Manager

Lucy Tyne - Tenant Involvement Officer

Carl Doolan – Head of Housing and Landlord Services

Paul Boreham – Housing Safety Manager

Cllr Monika Slater

Tenant Forum members:

Lesley Peplow; Barbara Rickards; Pauline Lockley; Denise Ann Daniels; Jenny Walton; Therese Hobbs Briggs; Teresa Fox; David Cole; Thelma McCrimmon; Alan Sunley; Michael Ellenor; Gary Bridge

Action

1. Welcome and apologies:

1.1 Steve welcomed all to the meeting.

1.2 Apologies for absence had been received from Richard Hinson, David Thomas and James Jenner and Arnot Wood.

2. Matters of meeting held on 23 February, 2023

2.1 The minutes of the previous meeting had been circulated and were approved as a correct record.

2.2 A number of issues were raised:

2.2.1 Lesley asked if the window keys had been given out at Carlton Lodge – Steve hadn't heard otherwise so as far as he is aware they have been. Lucy said she will double check.

2.2.2 Lesley also asked if the garden at Russell Dixon square was finished. Steve confirmed it was but Terry added that it's looking unsymmetrical, Steve commented that in the autumn, after the bad weather, it will be tidied up.

2.2.3 Pauline asked if the kitchen and window contracts were now in place. Paul confirmed that they both were.

3. Estates update – *Steve Wilson, Neighbourhood Services Manager*

3.1 Steve began by giving an update on staffing within the team, they are still carrying some vacancies but various job roles have been assessed and are ready to be recruited to. At the moment the team are working with their colleagues across Selby and Richmond to find the best ways of working.

3.2 Barbara raised her concern about staffing levels in the in house maintenance team. Paul commented that this situation has improved greatly, the latest job role the team put out received a large number of applications. Interviews will be held very soon and the team will be growing. Paul also added that the council have built a relationship with Harrogate College, this will encourage apprenticeships and bring more talent to the team.

3.3 Jenny asked if we still have a contract with Sure. Paul and Steve confirmed that we do, they are our gas contractor.

3.4 Steve moved on discuss the allocations policy review, he stated that the council will be consulting with applicants in September. The work means we will have 1 allocations policy across the council.

3.5 Lesley and Barbara raised concern about the council vans still not having council branding. Barbara commented that the branding reassures people that the vehicle attending your property is from the council. Paul said the team are currently investigating different types of wraps for the vans and progress should be made shortly.

3.6 Cllr Monika Slater spoke to the group and introduced herself as a new councillor, who was elected in May. She reiterated the point that if any tenants have concerns to please contact councillors and they will respond and act upon them.

4. Property Services update – Paul Boreham

4.1 Paul began with adding onto what Cllr Monika Slater said in that the property team have made very good relationships with councillors and are working with them a lot.

4.2 Paul explained a new inspection system - HHSRS that is being introduced. The team have attended training and now have 7 practitioners qualified to carry out these inspections. These aim to make our properties safer places to live.

4.3 Paul discussed the work that is ongoing around increasing engagement on disrepair claims. The team are also working hard to dispel and tackle fraudulent disrepair claims.

4.4 Paul explained that Paul Cole has finalised the window and kitchen contractors and work should begin soon. He has also taken over the decarbonisation project.

4.5 Steve asked Paul to give an update on the works going on in sheltered schemes. Paul explained that works at Blossomgate Court have begun. The works around the fire system are still with procurement at the moment.

5. Discussion with Carl Doolan – Head of Housing and Landlord Services

5.1 Carl introduced himself to the group, he was appointed at beginning of August. He explained that not all heads of services have been recruited yet but everyone should be in post hopefully very soon. He has been observing each area and is working towards better ways of working whilst learning along the way. He explained that he needs to look at the team as a whole, at the moment each area offers slightly different things. The idea is to take things that work well from each area.

5.2 Carl discussed the allocations policy review. All other areas except Harrogate used choice based lettings and as we are legally obligated to operate with 1 policy it made sense to transfer Harrogate over to CBL. He explained that from the 4th September the council will be consulting applicants to see what they think of the policy. The first face to face meeting will be on the 4th October. In his experience he has found that most applicants view CBL in a positive light.

5.3 Lesley asked Carl to explain CBL. Carl explained that it's not much different to the points based system Harrogate currently use. It's a bidding system - when a property becomes void it's advertised on a system, you can then express interest by 'bidding'. The advert closes and whoever finishes at top of the shortlist will usually be allocated the property. It's a more customer led system.

5.4 Barbara expressed her concern that there'll be hard to let areas and who will decide who is allocated properties in these areas. Carl explained that in this case, the council can 'direct let' properties to those with the highest housing need.

5.5 Gary suggested that the CBL system should have a 'homeswapper' element. Carl liked this idea but explained we would need to get commitments from others for this and there would be cost implications.

5.6 The group then went on to discuss tenant involvement. It was noted that change needs to be had but we need to ensure what we are doing is meeting the requirements of the regulator.

5.6.1 Barbara commented that we still do not have a tenant newsletter, Lucy explained that until we have a plan in place for what involvement will look like going forward we cannot start work on a newsletter.

5.6.2 Lesley expressed her concern for losing members of the editorial panel whilst it is out of action. Steve commented that when we do start activities with Richmond and Selby they will be bringing valuable tenants into the groups.

5.7 Barbara raised the conversation of stock transfer of housing stock. Carl stated that he is not aware of any plans of this. Steve and Cllr Monika Slater echoed this and added the view of Cllr Simon Myers very much championing council housing stock.

6. Questions in advance and discussion

6.1 A number of questions had been received in advance and Lucy and Steve ran through these.

6.2 Some questions were received regarding the Wedderburn estate.
- When are the windows due to be replaced? They are due to be done in the next programme of works in 23/24, residents will soon be contacted for a survey.
- Overgrown trees and weeds – I have raised this with the housing officer in the area. They were not aware of any problem trees but I will update them with more detail.

6.3 A tenant raised a question about the installation of carbon monoxide alarms. Michael Woodhouse confirmed that tenants were told that if they did not have a carbon monoxide alarm in their property, one would be fitted either by the gas servicing team and repairs contractor, Sure. Michael has asked me to contact his team with tenants who have not yet had a carbon monoxide alarm fitted.

7. Any other business

7.1 Denise raised a question about fire doors on her estate– Paul knew of this and suggested speaking to David Elleker. Lucy confirmed she will do this.

7.2 Denise discussed her views on the current need for more social housing and expressed her belief that the council should build large estates for applicants rather than allocating a small number of affordable housing properties on a large development.

8. Date and venue for next meeting

8.1 The date of the next Open Forum meeting will be confirmed in due course.

The meeting closed at 4pm.