

Tenants' and Leaseholders' Panel Meeting
24th September 2008

Present: Nick Westlake (NW)
 Chick Lavender (CL)
 Barbara McMinnies (BM)
 Henry Bone (HBo)
 Derek Sullivan (DS)
 Sheila Lambourne (SL)
 Michael Marsh (MM)
 Margaret Firth (MF)
 Muriel Rawsthorne (MR)
 Tim Rawsthorne (TR)
 Herbie Barlow (HBa)
 Ron Godfrey (RGo)
 Bill Potts (BP)
 Maurice Grant (MG)
 Phil Jones (PJ)
 George McMinnies (GM)

Officers: Linda Wells (LW) – Housing and Community Services Director
 Joanna Flaxman (JF) – Resident Involvement Officer
 Emma Martin (EM) – Resident Involvement Assistant

Observers: Simon Lloyd (SLI)
 Marjo Anderson (MA)
 Muriel Rawsthorne (MR)
 Sue Cleaver (SC)
 Ruth Edminson (RE) – Interim Resident Involvement Officer
 Justine Thompson (JT) – Head of Policy and Community Engagement

		ACTION
1.	<p><u>Welcomes, Apologies and Correspondence</u></p> <p>Apologies were received from:</p> <p>Mark Hickson Robert Gristwood Bob Begbie Marcella Begbie Trevor Pearson Cllr Shelagh Pile David Weston</p> <p>There was no correspondence received since the last meeting.</p>	
2.	<p><u>Agreement of Minutes</u></p> <p>HBo disagreed with the minutes from the last meeting. The meeting had been closed by NW and then TR had nominated MR as co-opted representative for Wildridings. EM was not able to minute this, due to the meeting already being closed and some representatives who had already left. NW agreed that the minutes should not be signed; EM will make the amendments</p>	

	<p>and pass back to NW to sign.</p> <p>NW said in future, as soon as the minutes are typed, a copy should be sent out to everyone, so any mistakes or corrections can be made before the next meeting. Everyone agreed.</p>	BM
<p>3.</p>	<p><u>Matters Arising</u></p> <p>On page 5, MF said she is now the Residents Voice for the MGM flats in Home Farm.</p> <p>On page 6, MM said the grey bins have been removed because they were being misused. Also the contractors had put their prices up.</p> <p>Page 7, CL said he had not yet received information from the last Harmans Water Walkabout. JF apologised and asked if there were any issues in particular, that needed urgent attention. CL said the electrical cupboard still needs to be covered up. JF said that she has been advised that is the responsibility of the council; she has reported it and will chase them again.</p> <p>HBa clarified his point on the Dacorum visit that Bracknell Forest Homes could only demonstrate one side of the story i.e. the transfer option.</p>	
<p>4.</p>	<p><u>Bracknell Forest Homes Update</u></p> <p><u>Major works</u></p> <p>LW said that the 3 contractors for the major works are all on site. Mears started on the 8th September in Priestwood 2. Mitie started on the 15th September in Priestwood 1 and Wates also started at the beginning of September working on void properties. LW said Karen Novell had mentioned that the Anglian window programme was running ahead of schedule.</p> <p><u>Recruitment</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tenant benefits advisor, Pal Sandhu has recruited an assistant, Harpal, and she will be starting in October. • Ruth Edminson will be covering JF whilst she is on maternity leave. RE currently works with the sheltered schemes and also has experience in voids. • Martin Thomas is the new Head of Technical Services, but no start date has been set as yet. • Mags Mercer is starting on the 29th September as the NEAT manager. LW asked the Panel if they would like Mags Mercer to attend a future meeting to talk about her role. The Panel agreed that, that would be a good idea. <p><u>Resident Inspection</u></p> <p>Bracknell Forest Homes has had a key week with the Resident</p>	

Inspectors visiting on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. On Monday they spent some time with Caroline Titley and Mike Jones. They visited the depot and listened in on some of the calls to see how they were dealt with. The inspectors had interviews with NW and BM. They also shadowed some of the tradesmen to hear what customers thought of the service. In the afternoon the inspectors phoned customers who do not usually get involved to hear their thoughts on Bracknell Forest Homes. The afternoon was finished off with a coffee afternoon at Dennis Pilcher House. On Wednesday the morning was started with a visit to Broadway House, some of the inspectors visited some void properties. For lunch, they spent some time at Easthampstead Baptist Church with “uninvolved” customers to hear their opinions. LW said that the general feedback has been positive on their experience with us but their recommendations are awaited. On Friday the inspectors will be back to write up their report. LW said once the report has been made, it will be shown to the Board and to the Panel. Bracknell Forest Homes has gained a lot out of this experience and will use the findings to improve services.

Rent Payment

At present, BFH are looking at other ways customers can pay their rent, due to the closure of the Council Cash Office on the 31st December. Alternative methods such as paying at the post office and at Barclays, paying online, by cheque, direct debit and credit card are also possible. Bracknell Forest Homes will advise all customers that the cash office will be closing and that they will be setting up Paypoints in local garages and supermarkets. There will also be mail shots to advise them of the changes. The Council is also willing to give out information too at the cash office.

Rent Arrears

Arrears figures are on the rise from 3.37% to 3.59%, possibly due to seasonal changes, customers paying off holidays, buying school equipment, etc. People losing their jobs and the general cost of living are on the rise, which would have an effect on arrears. West Kent Housing Association has recently visited Berkshire Court to give a presentation about their experience with arrears, money advice and benefits. One example given was telephoning people during the evening when most people are at home, instead of out at work. Also sending customers mail shots about money advice and benefits they could be entitled to. LW said Bracknell Forest Homes has a firm but fair approach to rent collection.

DS asked if it is a wise decision to allow people to pay by credit card, would it not encourage further debt? LW said Bracknell Forest Homes would not advertise or encourage credit card payments, but the option is there if customers wish to use it.

CL asked what affect does housing benefit have on rent, because Housing benefit is paid 4 weeks in arrears, which can

	<p>make tenants rent accounts look as though they are in arrears. LW said a protocol is being put together to speed the assessment of claims, which can therefore send claims quicker and electronically, which means account reconciliations can be done quicker to make it up to date.</p> <p>NW asked if the housing benefit paid 4 weeks in arrears has anything to do with the increase in rent arrears figures. LW said that this has been taken into account, and arrears are still higher than this time last year.</p> <p>PJ asked if Bracknell Forest Homes has considered working with a charitable association, such as CAP to help people budget and deal with money issues. Rent is a number one priority and closely working with them could benefit everyone. LW said we do work closely with the Citizens Advice Bureau, but people find it very difficult to get an appointment. LW took details of CAP from PJ.</p> <p><u>Tenancy agreements</u></p> <p>MF asked about how many tenancy agreements had been sent back. LW said 65% had been returned. Housing officers are still chasing them and making evening visits. MF asked what kind of position does this leave the tenant in, if they do not sign their agreement. LW said they leave themselves in a weaker position; they will only have preserved rights, not statutory. A reminder is being sent out to return them as soon as possible.</p> <p><u>Tenant Census</u></p> <p>65% of tenant censuses have also been returned. Information is going to be input into the housing management system. Due to 35% of the censuses not yet being returned, Bracknell Forest Homes cannot make any final conclusions about the profile of the tenants. MF said that the repairs and maintenance satisfaction questionnaire also asks for similar personal details. LW said a new IT system will be introduced so that the repairs and maintenance team can view census information, just to check that they are not giving certain categories of people different treatment, etc.</p>	
5.	<p><u>Shareholding Membership Policy</u></p> <p>HBo questioned page 2 saying that members of staff could not become a shareholder. LW said unfortunately this is explicit in the rules of BFH and a legal condition of the policy; it would be a conflict of interest. HBa expressed how he didn't think it was a conflict of interest.</p> <p>MF asked what an independent shareholder was. LW explained it was an independent person on the board appointed to bring certain skills.</p>	

	<p>TR said he felt the document was too vague; it does not go into any detail about the voting procedure and needs to be made more explicit. NW said the voting system needs to be made as simple as possible.</p> <p>CL said why should customers have to apply in writing to become a member, also why should they have to explain their reasons for wanting to become a member. LW will follow this up.</p> <p>HBo asked why should your membership be terminated if you fail to attend 2 AGM's. What if you have perfectly legitimate reasons for missing those dates? LW will look into this.</p> <p>NW said independent board members positions must be advertised, so that when the AGM is held, everyone has a choice of who they can vote for. LW to check.</p> <p>NW asked if tenants turned councilors or tenants turned independents can apply for membership. LW was unsure and would check this.</p> <p>It was discussed how long the membership lasts. LW said that membership lasts until you die, end your tenancy with Bracknell Forest Homes, you resign from the membership or it is terminated.</p> <p>Robert Gristwood sent a letter asking when the membership would be implemented. LW will reply to this.</p> <p>NW asked how you pay the £1 fee. LW said any form of payment is accepted. Cash, cheque or card. NW also asked if customers can appeal against a declined application. LW said yes customers can appeal.</p> <p>DS asked LW why should a tenant want to join. LW said that the membership gets the tenants closer to the running of the organisation.</p>	<p>LW</p> <p>LW</p> <p>LW</p> <p>LW</p> <p>LW</p> <p>LW</p>
<p>6.</p>	<p><u>Customer Involvement Forward Plan</u></p> <p>JF started by saying that Bracknell Forest Homes wants to improve on different areas, and ensure the right groups are involved and the right flow of consultation is undertaken. JF went through each point on the customer involvement forward plan. Suggestions were put forward throughout.</p> <p>NW said that the Panel seems to be towards the end of each work area, could they not be involved at an earlier stage to plan. JF said some the areas have already begun, but upcoming areas the Panel can definitely be included at an earlier stage.</p> <p>TR asked if the voids group were looking at structural voids. JF said it is about the lettable standard which would apply to structural or standard voids, at the point they are being let.</p>	

<p>CL said that some of the dates need to be altered, JF agreed to do this.</p> <p>HBa said the Housing Sounding Board had not received anything from Bracknell Forest since last year. LW said it had been such a busy year, but the Housing Sounding Board will be involved a lot more in the upcoming months, as shown in the forward plan.</p> <p>NW asked what exactly the Housing Sounding Board receives once they have filled in a questionnaire, etc. JF said each person gets a voucher, a thank you letter and a copy of the headline results and how to request the full report. It was suggested that all members of the Housing Sounding Board should receive the headline results, even if they had not responded.</p> <p>NW said he would like to go to some of the pilot schemes that have been completed in Priestwood for the major works, and talk to the customers - everyone agreed this was a good idea. BM said it would be better to know about any complaints now so that they can be rectified before the main programme goes ahead. PJ said it would be better to visit tenants at their homes, because they would feel more free to say if there were any problems. HBo said only 2 people should visit at a time and it should be a man and a woman, so people do not feel threatened. BM, NW, PJ and HBa volunteered. SL suggested that the resident liaison officer also go. NW said it takes away the tenants' independence and they might not feel as though they can be negative about anything. RG suggested also calling first to make an appointment. BM suggested offering a voucher for any inconvenience. HBa said to tell the tenant the visitor's names, so they know who they are waiting in for.</p> <p>NW said that he had recently met Ian Harries who is a consultant working with BFH at the voids meeting and said he was very impressed.</p> <p>NW said that he would like to see all new leaflets brought to the Panel for discussion.</p> <p>BM said that she thought this edition of Spotlight was very good, everyone agreed. SL said that her contact details were incorrect.</p> <p>NW said he thought Spotlight was very good, but BFH may need to be more honest if services need improvement. TR said if anyone is unhappy about anything, then all they have to do is write in and we will publish your question or query and an answer. CL said the editorial board members are all attending estate walkabouts to encourage customers to write in. PJ said problems should be acknowledged and that Bracknell Forest Homes is working towards a solution rather than no problems publicised at all.</p> <p>HBo asked if the Handyman position in the NEAT was still going ahead. LW said yes, now that the manager is in place,</p>	<p>LW to discuss with Karen Novell</p>
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	<p>other vacancies can be advertised. RG suggested having a list of elderly vulnerable people that live on their own so that the handyperson can help them too. Rather than just within the schemes. LW said that is definitely something we can look into. The tenant census information we have received asks questions about age, disabilities, etc. this can be compiled into a list.</p>	
<p>7.</p>	<p><u>Feedback from other meetings</u></p> <p>MM started by saying that the BFLA AGM was held last Wednesday at South Hill Park. It was very well attended, including LW and Caroline Titley. Chris Mansfield from Bracknell Forest Council gave a talk about the Regeneration project. Its all on track, MM asked if the finance was affected by the credit crunch and Chris Mansfield assured MM it was not. Simon Lloyd is the new vice chair, however there were no nominations for secretary or treasurer. PCSO Mary Parker would like to attend all future BFLA meetings. Neville Campling and Simon Lloyd have showed interest in joining the Panel. Litter was a big concern at the AGM. MM will speak to BFH staff and report back. NW asked if local councilors were involved. If not, they should be taking some responsibility for issues such as litter. HBa expressed his agreement.</p> <p>CL gave feedback from the Strategic Housing Partnership and said the council is starting to look at spending the capital receipt from the transfer on affordable housing. There is a new head of Housing, Simon Hendy who could come to the Panel JF said that this could tie in with Clare Dorning re Choice Based Lettings.</p>	
<p>8.</p>	<p><u>Any other business</u></p> <p>CL said he no longer wants to arrange transport for members of the panel. EM will now be arranging transport.</p> <p>DS congratulated the editorial board on the latest edition of Spotlight. DS wanted to know what the difference between the Tenant and Leaseholder Panel and the Customer Involvement Group. JF explained.</p> <p>TR wanted to nominate MR as the representative for Wildridings. TR proposed, BM seconded and 13 votes were made by a show of hands.</p> <p>BM proposed GM as the representative for Crowthorne, RG seconded and 14 votes were made by a show of hands.</p> <p>MM said that he had received a message from the Thames Valley Police Community Messaging service, warning elderly people of “distraction burglary” a white male is door knocking claiming to be from the council and asking for money. MM wanted to make everyone aware of this.</p> <p>NW said for the next meeting, he would like any other business brought to him before the meeting starts so that he can allow</p>	<p>EM</p>

	time. TR said members may think of something during the meeting. NW said that's fine, but if you know beforehand, that you want to mention something, to let him know.	
	<u>Date of next meeting</u> Wednesday 29th October 7-9pm Berkshire Court	