

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

TENANT AND LEASEHOLDER COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 8 APRIL 2008 AT 7PM

Present:

Terry Anderson	Alison Moore
Liz Belchamber	David Payce
Pat Brosnan	Viv Phelps
Josephine Browning	Joan Smith
Stephen Collier	Tony Bodgin, (ECC)
George Hood	Steve Warran (ECC)
Gemma Lissaman	Jenny Berry (ECC)

1. **Apologies** were received from Alison Baxter, Gina Goodfellow, Bob Halpin, Lyn Kaczanow, Rod Simons and Marion Watkins (Moirra Barker, late apologies)
2. **Accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 28 February 2008**
Agreed.
3. **Matters arising from the minutes**

Item 4: Stephen Collier, Rod Simons and Lin Kaczanow all attended the Beacon Heath forum recently and it was a positive meeting. Local meetings at Hamlin Gardens and Shilhay are forthcoming.

Item 6: More representatives are needed for the Resident Auditor Team.

Item 7: Alison Moore and Viv Phelps attended the ARCH Tenants Conference and benefited from meeting with tenants from other areas of the country. Viv Phelps has written a report that will be included in 'Insight'. Four tenants and four members of Exeter City Council (ECC) staff attended the DEFRA training at the Eden Project and completed the DEFRA questionnaire about the day and an ECC 'Green Housing' questionnaire.

Item 8: The Chair has written two letters to the Committee member whose conduct had given cause for concern. Hopefully the issue has been resolved but further action can follow if necessary.

4. **Housing Service Improvement Plan**

All members have received the final version of the Housing Service Improvement Plan that has been developed as a result of the mock inspection carried out last year. The document lists the ECC Housing section's strengths noted by the HQN inspectors, then outlines the major service reviews and major projects that are planned. Following this, specific actions and recommendations to improve parts of the City Council's service are listed together with timings for achieving targets and the name of the person who is responsible for coordinating each task. The next section deals with Performance Management with the purpose of improving outcomes from Housing including all staff from the Head of Housing down to front

line staff within the section. Target setting procedure follows and takes into account previous and likely trends, relevant procedure changes and economic factors. An example of this is the target for void property turn around, which has changed from 45 days to 23 days. The 21-day target proved unrealistic (24.8 achieved last year) because of an increase in need for re-plastering and major works including rewires, installation of gas central heating, kitchens and bathrooms affected by the good take up of the downsizing programme. The next section deals with the Service Review Methodology outlining how reviews of each service or policy area will be carried out on a rolling programme. (Jenny Vernon to look at this and TALC involvement in more detail during Training at the end of the meeting). The final section is a project timetable for the Devon Regional Choice Based Letting Scheme.

Feedback on Service Improvement Plan progress

TALC requested a quarterly update on progress with actions completed/not completed and reference to the relevant page number in the Plan. A report will be brought to the Committee in July and the Plan document will be updated on the City Council Intranet site. TALC will be involved in carrying out the Plan so will have ongoing knowledge of progress.

Housing Operations Manager Appointment

Steve thanked Terry, Alison, Viv and Joan for their valued input to the interview process for the new Housing Operations Manager position. The person selected is Lawrence Blake who is currently an Area Housing Manager, carrying out a similar role with Swaythling Housing Association in Dorset. He is expected to take up the new position on 30th June after giving three months' notice to his current employers. In response to a TALC question, Steve confirmed that Lawrence Blake is expected to interact closely with the TALC Committee in driving through the Service Improvement Plan.

Extra-let

Following another question, Steve explained that Extra-let is part of the Homelessness prevention strategy within the strategic section of Housing and offers a letting management service to private landlords in order to let properties to people who are currently homeless. This reduces the number of people accommodated by the Council in Bed and Breakfast and therefore saves money.

5. Any Other Business

Unoccupied properties – concern was raised about a council property that had been unoccupied for about 6 months because the tenant is in hospital and it appears likely that he will not be returning to the property.

Action can be taken if a tenant on Housing Benefit is in care permanently but Housing Benefit will continue to pay rent whilst it is possible that the tenant will return. If the tenant pays full rent it is more difficult to take action. There is usually good liaison between Social Services, the Primary Health Care Trust and ECC in these cases.

Communication issues - Painting of Rennes House – Concern was expressed that despite requests for external decorating to be carried out, work started this week to decorate internal walls, doors and other communal areas on the Ground

Floor of Rennes House. Fire doors were propped open throughout the weekend. No advance notice of this work has been given to tenants or displayed in the communal areas. This situation was felt to be representative of the lack of communication between internal sections of the Council with each other and with tenants.

Steve Warran disagreed that this was typical of the Housing Service, as generally internal communication is good. However it is accepted that specific problems do arise, bearing in mind the vast amount of housing repairs that are carried out (over 12,000 per year). The repairs survey results show a 98% satisfaction rate with repairs.

Action: Steve Warran will look into the above situation

Housemark

The Housemark web site was recommended to tenants and residents. This holds information regarding good practice and benchmarking in local authorities (if they have supplied their information). Exeter City Council's quarterly indicators are currently held on the site and finance information will be added at some time. David Smith had asked for names of tenants and residents wishing to access the site in order that they can be registered.

Action: David Smith to be advised that the following requested registration:

Terry Anderson
Stephen Collier
Viv Phelps

Liz Belchamber
George Hood
Joan Smith

Pat Brosnan
Alison Moore

Alison Baxter and Lyn Kaczanow to be invited to register in view of their current involvement with TALC.

Nos 204 & 206 Sweetbrier Lane

Concern was raised about the state of maintenance of the communal area of these flats and that as nothing had been done presumably ECC was unaware. Stair treads were uneven, front edges were missing and raised flooring had been noted as a safety issue. There was also rubbish piled up and more rubbish is being added. Steve Warran pointed out that priority inspection of flats is carried out on some estates but others are inspected less frequently. There is a cyclical programme of maintenance to communal areas.

Action: ECC to inspect.

External Drying areas – Rifford Road flats

The issue was raised of redundant walled drying areas being used by people to dispose of rubbish that was then being collected by ECC. It was suggested that knocking down these areas and landscaping them would overcome the problem. This had been discussed with the estate officer but there was no money in the budget to do this. Steve Warran confirmed that there is not enough money in estate improvement budgets for this type of work. Fly tipping is a major problem

in the city and two men in a van are employed full-time to tackle it. However, by dealing with the problem effectively there is a tendency to encourage fly tipping.

Action: Estate Officer to pass on findings re. drying areas to Shaun Baker.

Leaseholder fees

The reasons for a significant increase in Leaseholder fees this year, whilst tenants rents had only risen by 5.2%, was queried along with concerns about value for money for costs in respect of management.

Steve Warran pointed out that costs (previously broad estimates) are now based upon specific estimates and that accurate statements of costs are calculated at the end of the year and an adjustment is made accordingly for the following year. The fees for management cover ECC costs for such things as repairs and estate management. The forthcoming review of costs for maintaining blocks of flats will lead to a clear breakdown of costs and more accurate apportionment between leaseholders and tenants. It will then be possible for tenants in a block of flats to influence the levels of service provided in relation to what they are prepared to pay for them.

Tenant Training

Following the meeting further training was given by Jenny Vernon.

Date of Next Meeting: Wednesday 23rd April 2008