

Tenant & Leaseholder Consultation Group Minutes

Wednesday 13 December 2006 at 7.00pm at the Buckerell Lodge

Attendees:

Des Scanes (Aldens Road)
Jose Welham (Aldens Road)
Alison Moore (Chestnut Avenue)
Vivian Phelps (Teazle Court)
Mr & Mrs Swain (Teazle Court)
Mrs Browning (Carlyon Close)
V Thompson (Hamlin Gardens)
David Harris (Brook Close)
Cllr Dilys Baldwin (ECC)

Bryony Stevens (ECC)
Lyn Kaczanow (Widgery Road)
Paul Taylor (Pellinore Road)
Joan Smith (Rennes House)
Chris Symes (King Arthur's Rd)
Jenny Berry (ECC)
Tony Bodgin (ECC)
Steve Warran (ECC)
Richard Ingram (ECC)

Apologies:

Kirstine Symes, Bob Halpin, Gladys Tyrell, Terry Anderson

Introduction

Tony Bodgin opened the meeting and explained that the next meeting on Wednesday 17th January will be the normal quarterly meeting when David Smith will attend to provide Performance figures for discussion.

Tenant & Leaseholder Committee (TALC)

Arrangements are going ahead towards setting up the Tenant & Leaseholder Committee, in line with the Constitution agreed in July, with meetings to start from April 2007. Anyone who wishes to represent his or her area of the city can apply as detailed in the forthcoming edition of Tenants News, which will be posted by direct mail soon. Information is included on how to obtain a nomination pack and on submitting a nomination form.

Housing Strategy Review and Strategy Review Questionnaire (Bryony Stevens, Housing Enabling Officer)

Bryony explained that the Housing Strategy, which covers the Council's plans for all types of housing in the City, is being reviewed. She circulated the questionnaire and leaflet giving information about the Review and asking for people's views on the Council's housing priorities and policies. The leaflet is being sent to a variety of statutory and voluntary agencies and others with an interest. All the information will feed into the revised Strategy. Bryony hopes to produce a more 'user friendly' Housing Strategy document.

Members of the group were invited to complete the questionnaire and give any further comments, returning the form using the Freepost facility. The Strategy Review will be

completed in time for the June Scrutiny committee and Bryony would like to return to present the results to tenant representatives next year.

In response to a question about the trend in social housing in Exeter resulting from the Government's 'Right to Buy' initiative, the meeting was advised that currently more units of social housing are being built each year than those being lost through the 'Right to Buy' Scheme and in years to come it is expected that other social housing will outnumber council houses.

Neighbourhood Management Policy

This policy has been produced because the Government and the City Council want residents, both private and council, to be more involved in the management of their estates. The policy is designed with the purpose of identifying issues and their severity and finding possible ways of resolving these issues. Sometimes because of mixed tenure and private ownership it is not possible for the Council to sort things out on their own, but the intention is to have a holistic approach to obtain solutions over the long term with resident involvement being key to this.

Estate management within the City Council has been spread between six estate management officers to give equivalent work loads according to demand. In addition, Gaye Pengelly has been appointed as Anti Social Behaviour Officer working across the Council's housing citywide. Similarly estate inspection visits have been scheduled with frequency ranging from every two months to just occasional, prioritised according to need. Visits will be started gradually, in order to limit the inflow of resident requests and to avoid unrealistic raising of residents' expectations. Inspection will be of the external environment only, except for flats where the communal areas will be included. In some cases photographs will be taken.

Visits are being arranged to include representatives of resident associations and where there is no association, tenants who have previously expressed an interest in involvement will be invited to attend. They will be able to check outcomes following inspection. It is hoped that Ward Councillors and either local Police Officer or Police Support Officer will also attend (to help with issues such as abandoned cars). A Council administrative support worker will log all issues with action required and carried out. Referral will be made both within Exeter City Council and to external agencies, Ward Councillors and to the Portfolio holder (currently Dilys Baldwin). From inspections already undertaken, common issues (ie grounds maintenance, repair issues, removal of rubbish and graffiti) and the need for changes in budgets are emerging.

Standard letters about issues picked up on the inspections have been prepared ready to send to residents. They will either commend on a particularly tidy property or request action where a property is particularly untidy. In this case follow up inspection and letters will be sent according to the result of the letter(s), and will either commend on improvement or again request action. A log will record which letters have been sent out, with date and property.

As key issues in specific neighbourhoods are identified, residents will be consulted to

agree a two to three year plan of ways to try to improve their areas. Sometimes these will involve other agencies, for example with plans to provide a community base, library, café, etc, and funding possibilities will be investigated. Sometimes issues will be more easily resolved, for example in supplying better lighting.

Future estate inspection dates will be publicised in Tenants News and it is hoped that greater awareness will lead to increased pride and respect within neighbourhoods. Ideally targets will be realistic and achievable, and it is hoped that more interest and involvement from residents will follow on from a few noticeable estate improvements. Exeter City Council is hoping to gain 'Respect Action Area' status that will attract funding to support it.

Some debate followed, with the following points arising:

- The Tenancy Agreement covers enforcement of standards for tenants, with eviction as an ultimate outcome. For leaseholders injunctions can be used and since the 2002 Anti Social Behaviour Act lower burden of proof is required.
- Since Gaye Pengelly's appointment as Anti Social Behaviour Officer, all incidences of anti social behaviour have been logged with 150 cases arising already. A lengthy process follows with different stages leading up to eviction as the ultimate outcome only if no other stage is successful.
- Tenants Associations are successful in gaining improvements to their areas and can exert greater pressure than individuals. The Whipton, Widgery and Bennett Association was given as an example, where residents successfully lobbied for the provision of children's play areas.
- Area inspections may bring awareness of local issues that will be resolved more readily with pressure coming from a Tenants' Association. Exeter City Council will support tenants who want to become an organised group, but are unable to form groups in areas where tenants do not respond.
- Serious problems arising from drunkenness and people leaving clubs at night time are experienced at Shilhay, but mainly affect just ground floor tenants and leaseholders in Teazle Court and Weavers Court, and a few near Exe Bridges. Other residents are apathetic towards organised representation. It was agreed that these issues require attention from the Council and other agencies to seek solutions.

Please ring either Steve or Tony if you would like a copy of the Neighbourhood Management Policy

Resident Auditor Team (RAT)

Phase one of this project is coming to an end and the team's report highlighting successes and shortfalls in the Council's service was presented to Manager's on Wednesday 11th December. The Group's contribution has been impressive and their involvement will continue with further training and looking at programmed repairs. This will include mystery shopping as before. As a result of work so far, the Council has begun work on up-dating and producing clear and informative leaflets for tenants and residents about different council services. David Smith will be conducting a policy review programme over the next three years and the RAT team will be involved.

The Audit Commission will definitely not be coming during 2007/08, but ECC will be having a 'mock' inspection from an external company instead, probably in September or October 2007. When the real inspection takes place, this will have an effect on the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) so it is essential that issues raised by the RAT team are addressed. A team will be set up with senior managers, front line staff and tenants/residents. Debbie Hay will be working with groups of staff in 2007/08 in planning/committing to definite improvement, including resident involvement.

The next meeting will consider the Housing Management Business Plan, which will be the main driver for change. **Copies of the plan will be provided to members in advance of the meeting.**

Tenants Website

The site is now being up-dated by Steve Deakin with minutes, Tenant Handbook and sections on the two tenants associations at Countess Wear and Widgery, Whipton & Bennett. Links will be put in to different organisations and to strategy documents.

Tenants News

An Editorial Panel has been set up and will meet next year to consider a 'new look' Tenants News. The panel will set a timetable with deadlines for receiving articles and each stage through to distribution to tenants. The newsletter will be given a new name and ideas are welcomed. We would also like any contribution of articles, jokes, recipes, etc to consider for publishing.

Tenants asked if the Council's bid for **unitary status** would be featured in the Tenants News, but this is an issue for wider community consultation, so might not feature. The timetable regarding unitary status is as follows:

11 January 2007	deadline for completion of the bid document
End January 2007	submission of the bid document
April 2007	Government initial decision about councils selected, followed by three months consultation period
July 2007	Government final decision
If unitary status confirmed,	
2008	election of shadow council
2009	Start of unitary authority

Further information can be found at www.communities.gov.uk and Exeter City Council bid information can be found on www.exeter.gov.uk.

Next Meeting – Wednesday 17 January 2007