

Tenants' & Residents' Forum



TAI CANOLBARTH CYMRU
MID-WALES HOUSING
Yn barod amdani Equal to the challenge

Ty Canol House

6th June 2014

Minutes

Attending:

Bryan Owen - Chair

Christine Field

Debbie Crewe

Brian Christopher

Board Member:

Vic Brown

Staff and Guests

Hannah Jones – Customer Services Team Leader

Nia Boyd – Community Participation Officer

Aidan Ackerman – Director of Customer Services

Moira Hurley – Income Management Team Leader

Charles Brotherton – Director of Finance

Leigh Wallace – Maintenance Officer (attended lunch break)

Mike Williams – Maintenance Officer (attended lunch break)

Sandra Jones – Welfare Advice Advisor (attended lunch break)

Apologies

Mike Williams

David Evans (Board Member)

Phil & Kim Taylor

Heather Jones

Ann Burton

1. Tenants' Time

Communication

All attending felt that communication between staff and tenants was poor and that there was still room for improvement since the restructure. BO explained that he reported a blocked sewer on the 25th may, e-mailed 3 members of staff but has still not had a response.

All agreed that it would be useful to have acknowledgement that the e-mail has been received by Customer Services and that it was being dealt with – holding e-mail.

Action – Nia to introduce the new maintenance team staff Mike Williams and Leigh Wallace to TaRF during the lunch break.

Action – Nia to investigate holding e-mail.

Action - All TaRF members to ensure that all repairs, complaints and concerns are logged with the Customer Service Team on 0300 1113030 or online through the website. It will then be passed to the relevant member of staff to deal with it.

WHQS Kitchen Upgrades

TaRF members felt that there was not enough choice or consultation in the installation of new WHQS kitchens. BC explained that cupboards had been put on the walls where the tenant didn't want them and no explanation was given by MWAH as to why the cupboards had to go in a set place.

Also, the old cupboards taken down bare spaces were left leaving tenants to paint & make good. Members felt that the walls should have been painted first. It also said that when the new cupboards are fitted that there is less space than in the old cupboards. Tenant wasn't consulted or given a reasonable explanation as to why the cupboards were put where they were.

Bryan informed that WG are looking into tenants monitoring WHQS.

Action – Nia to speak to Richard Grant for explanation.

Action – Nia to relay disappointment over lack of consultation and choice to Contracts Team.

Action – Bryan Owen to E-mail Vic with guide to WHQS standard

2. Minutes of last meeting

Minutes of the last meeting were gone through for accuracy and accepted.

3. Matters Arising

- 3.1. Green Stream Carpets – See section 6 of minutes. Aidan provides update on new carpets and paint initiative.
- 3.2. Meeting with Carl re. service charges – successful meeting with Carl with 4 tenants attending. The following point was raised: If there is a tree in somebody's garden which is taken down, but the tree was there before the tenant moved in, who is responsible for the charge? Does it go onto the tenant's service charge or should it be covered by the Association?

Action - Jonathan Davies (Service Charges) or Joanne Hughes (Grounds Maintenance) to attend the next meeting to discuss.

- 3.3. New roles under the new structure – Hannah explained that some new members of staff have been featured in the Newsletter. It was agreed that a complete new structure chart would be brought to the next meeting.
- 3.4. IT training – Hannah explained that training courses were taking place in the board room every Monday morning. Nia met the course leader on 02/06/2014 and was waiting for confirmation from Coleg Powys re. future training dates as there was only one session left. TaRF members felt that they would benefit from IT training and asked for the next training sessions to be widely advertised.
- 3.5. Tenants' Facebook Page – Aidan offered assistance from Dean in IT to help tenants to set up a Facebook page.

It was also noted that the Association's website needs updating. Dates for meetings such as Board and TaRF are out of date by over a year. The page dedicated to Tenant Involvement also needs updating.

Action – Phil to update.

- 3.6. LTPS – Hannah explained that the Local Tenant Participation Strategy is a document that all RSL's need to do. Welsh Government (WG) stipulate 3 key objectives for engaging tenants, every social landlord builds on these

by stating what they are going to do and how they are going to do it. Hannah explained that she had done two LTPS during her time as TP Officer which formed the basis of her job role. Nia will be doing the third one which needs to be submitted to WG in March 2015. To do this Nia will be looking for feedback from tenants to find out what worked well in the past and what they would like to see in the future.

- 3.7. Bryan informed that TPAS and WT have had their budget cut by 1/3 for the next two years, and there is a possibility it will be let out to an agency.

Action – Nia to explain in the next meeting how she intends to gather feedback from tenants and seek TaRF approval.

- 3.8. Aidan explained that a zero tolerance cold calling policy had been adopted by MWA and that all contractors needed to make before calling at a property. This sparked a discussion over the roll out of new kitchens under WHQS not being to a good standard and lack of tenant's choice.

Bryan asked why contractors were used from Merthyr Tydfi to deliver the work? Aidan explained that conversations were had with local contractors Celtic & EOM but EOM didn't want the contract and Celtic were not up to the right standard. MWA felt that the company from Merthyr did the work to a high standard and that they had a good reputation amongst other social landlords. Celtic were introduced to them and were given advice on how to work more efficiently – sharing best practice.

Action – have a person from the contracts team to discuss the planned maintenance work in the next meeting.

4. New Strategy for Debt Collection

Moira introduced the new members of the Income Management Team.

Sandra introduced as the Welfare Advice Advisor, her main purpose is to target 3 areas 1) those taking up new tenancies, 2) ending tenancies and 3) those in receipt of receiving a notice seeking possession. Sandra is also responsible for identifying and referring people who need financial help.

Christine asked for an update on Universal Credit (UC). Moira explained that it had not been introduced yet but it was the Government's intention to pay all benefits to people on the same day in one lump sum. Likely to be introduced in 2015.

Moira presented MWA's new initiative to get the first month's rent from tenants on the day that they receive the keys as Universal Credit will be paid 4 weeks in arrears in one lump sum. The first payment being 6 weeks in arrears. Moira explained that

the aim is to be proactive to prevent people from going into arrears in the future and that MWAHA are trying to protect tenants from going into debt.

There were concerns from all TaRF members that tenants wouldn't have one month rent spare on handover day. Where will the money come from while people wait for UC to come through? Aidan & Moira explained that we will be driving tenants away from loan sharks and high interest pay day lenders (such as Wonga) and encouraging tenants to work with MWAHA to tackle debts rather than go to lenders or loan sharks.

Brian commented that salaries are paid in arrears and that UC is the same as receiving a salary, in arrears.

5. Court Costs

Aidan explained the changes which are proposed by the Court system in England and Wales to raise the court fee of possession cases from £100 to £250 for an online applications or £280 for a non-online application. MWAHA will always seeks to undertake an online application and sees court order or an eviction as failure on MWAHA's part and the Association want to help tenants avoid any additional costs.

Bryan asked how long can it be between a tenant receiving a possession order and appearing in court? Approximately 6 weeks which means rent will accumulate over this time.

6. Dulux Paint & GreenStream Carpet Tiles – update

Tenant auditors (Bryan, Brian and Phil) found that MWAHA needed to improve the quality of their re-let properties. Aidan thanked them all for their hard work.

6.1. Partnership with Dulux to get paint and painting tools:

Pilot scheme has had positive feedback. Charles has approved £10k into this years (14/15) budget to cover the cost of the decorating allowance. Will analyze every month and look to increase throughout the year if necessary.

Bryan stated the Dulux paint was the Trade paint. The best.

Q. Bryan asked what the average cost per tenant so far?

A. £180 for a full pack for a 3 bed/house.

6.2. GreenStream:

Pilot to be rolled out in partnership with PCC and Newydd.

Action: Aidan to provide more of an update following the start of the pilot scheme.

7. Tenants' Online Account – update

Online accounts – Aidan explained that it has been placed in this year's IT strategy. Conversations with Capita are going on at the moment and will have more to report in September/October once discussion have occurred with Capita and web developers.

8. Rent Policy Options

Charles discussed benchmark rent following the introduction of new WG rent policy in April 2014 (presented to TaRF in February). New policy introduces a different method to setting rents.

Charles asked for feedback on how we should do this.

Q. Vic asked if the system decided for benchmark could be rolled out over the other rent systems.

A. Yes it could.

Q. Charles asked if rent should be linked to property value?

Debbie felt that people like to live where they grew up, where they have family connections etc and that this method would be unfair as desirable villages would be expensive for local people.

A. General consensus – No, rent shouldn't be linked to property value.

Q. Should rent reflect market rents?

No comments from TaRF. However Vic felt that market and benchmark rents shouldn't be compared because of different needs.

Q. Should it reflect local earnings?

Debbie expressed concerns over the closure of 'blue collar' jobs in an area leaving behind 'white collar' income statistics.

Vic asked if disability benefit be included as 'earnings'? No, MWHHA doesn't want to set individual earnings for individual people.

Debbie ask how many of MWHHA tenants receive housing benefit (HB)? Charles explained that half MW tenant receive HB, 10% of which receive part HB, 40% of which receive full HB. The other 50% are not in receipt of HB.

Q. Should rent be adjusted to the energy efficiency of the home?

Vic highlighted that an EPC hadn't been issued for his property. No further comment was made on this proposal however.

Q. Should there be a limit on the level of rent? Is £2 a week reasonable?

Brian gave the example that £2/week on affordable weekly rent could be significant but the same increase for affordable weekly rents would have a greater impact.

Action: Nia to send the presentation to all in the meeting.

Action: All to review the presentation and revisit in the next TaRF meeting.

9. Maintenance Feedback Forms

Nia requested feedback from TaRF members on the format of the reactive and planned maintenance feedback forms and asked for ways in which response rates could be improved.

Feedback from members revealed:

- Generally happy with the clarity and of the questions to both questionnaires – suggesting slight amendments to the reactive repair.
- Happy that the questions analysed the service well enough for MWHHA to analyse contractor quality and performance.
- Recommended sending the forms out as soon as the work is complete so it's fresh in their minds.
- All members felt that a scale of 1-10 was the preferable format to the answers.
- Always include free post envelopes to increase response rates.
- If a comment is made, especially if it's about poor workmanship then they would like a response, meeting from the relevant person in the Association.

- Whichever department issued the work instruction for planned maintenance work should have ownership of the feedback and analysis.
- Would be interested to see the results of the surveys published in the newsletter or online. There is a feeling that filling the forms in is a waste of time as MWA doesn't do anything with the feedback.

Action: Nia to find out what happened to the recommendations made by the Audit Committee and report back in the next TaRF meeting.

10. Community Chest Fund

Nia explained that there is £15,000 to be spent on community engagement projects and asked TaRF how this could be spent. Nia suggested that the money could be split into smaller chunks and tenants could bid for it by telling MWA how they would like to spend it. Everyone agreed that this was a good idea as people could bid for anything they felt was needed in their community. ideas suggested:

- training courses for people in DYI
- community garden
- play areas
- get everyone on an estate to paint communal fencing if its run down.

Agreed that it should be advertised as a competition in the next newsletter.

11. Any Other Business

11.1. Any other business items have been covered in the tenants' time minutes.

11.2. Nia asked for ideas on how we could increase the number of people attending TaRF and make it more accessible to people who don't live close to Newtown.

Members explained that the meetings have been moved to other locations in the past but nobody turned up.

12. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be 1st August 2014