

Mid Wales Housing Association's Tenants' and Residents' Forum

June 7th 2013

Ty Canol House, Newtown

Attending

Bryan Owen - Chair	Sue Dixon
Brian Spencer	Phil Taylor – Deputy Chair
Nigel Toy	Brian Christopher
Fiona Lunnon	Christine Field
Michael Williams	

Staff and Guests

Hannah Jones - Tenant Participation Officer
Charles Brotherton – Director of Corporate Services (Part)
Maureen Woosnam – Information and Performance Co-ordinator (Part)
Robert Dearden – Asset Manager (Part)

Apologies

Aidan Ackerman	Ann Burton	Heather Jones
Gwen Tyler	Jim Baker	Kim Taylor
David Evans	Debbie Crewe	

1. Tenants' Time

This section's minutes were provided by Bryan Owen – Chair of TaRF.

TARF members queried notes from last meeting "Matters Arising" when a tenant asked for someone to attend his place to see about grass cutting. The reply was that someone will come out to visit later in the year. We felt that this remark was not appropriate and would like someone to attend now than later.

Although we held a discussion recently on services charges, members would like a more in depth discussion with more of the finance team at the next TARF meeting. It was also asked that TARF members who attend the next TARF to ask for their

services charges sheet so that they can discuss their own services charges for their own estate.

2. Minutes of last meeting

Minutes of the last meeting where gone through.

Pg 4 Bryan Owen asked for an update on Board discussions regarding having fewer meetings. Hannah reported that Board do not want to have any less meetings than they currently have and neither do they want to see less TaRF meetings taking place.

Pg 5 Phil Taylor asked that TaRF meetings be advertised on facebook a week prior to meetings. Hannah will make sure this is done.

A discussion ensued regarding membership to facebook. At the moment the Association's facebook page is open to all. Phil Taylor wants the page to be for tenants only. Hannah reiterated that the reason the page is open to all is to involve the wider community where the Association operates. The Association has mixed estates in places where there are tenants of the Association, private tenants, owner occupiers etc. The page is open to give all an opportunity to comment on the work the Association does. It is there for info for anybody who is interested. Phil was concerned that in the past there have been non tenants writing bad things about the Association on the page. Hannah said that the Association welcomes any comment that a member of the public may have and explained that it was better for the Association to see the comments and deal with them than to not know about them at all. Hannah suggested that maybe TaRF would like to set up their own separate facebook page. Members liked this idea. Sue Dixon suggested that this could feed into the main page with updates from TaRF meetings. Members could monitor their own page and only allow tenants to view that page.

3. Matters Arising.

It is requested that Jonathan Davies (Service Charges Coordinator) go and see Mr Toy as soon as possible.

Quarterly Meetings with department representatives regarding Tenant Participation. This is starting in June. Hannah will provide an update at the next meeting.

Gardening Competition – This has gone in the spring newsletter. There will also be a photo competition in the autumn newsletter.

Cold Calling – Robert Dearden was present to give an update about what the Association is doing about this. The appointments scheme which the Association has been piloting (whereby tenants from the Newtown area are put through to the one contractor directly to make an appointment) has been extended to Llanidloes, Sarn, Churchstoke and Montgomery. Robert reported that the scheme seems to be working quite well. He will be writing out to the tenants who have used the service in August to gain feedback with a view to rolling out the scheme.

4. Robert Deardon - Contractors

Robert reported that the Association has started action against 2 of its contractors. It has been recognized that there are quality issues, problems with attitude towards residents and the Association and void costs have gone up which are partly down to contractors not giving a fair days work. They have been issued with an improvement notice which lasts 3 months. If work doesn't improve, work will be taken from them and given to another contractor. Bryan Owen reported that tenants of an Association in North Wales will release 10 properties for planned maintenance initially and only release more after contractors have passed an inspection of their work. Robert said that he would be happy for more involvement from tenants as it improves contractor work; he invited any interested party to go out with Richard Grant (the Association's technical coordinator) to inspect work.

5. Hannah Jones – TP Budget, Chips and Chat and Board Membership

The Association is on the look-out for new Tenant Board Members and invited TaRF members to apply or put forward names of those they thought may be interested. Fiona Lunnon expressed an interest.

The TP budget was given out. The budget for the year stands at £11782.90

Mo Woosnam entered the meeting to discuss Chips and Chat with Hannah. Mo thanked Bryan Owen for all his involvement with Mid Wales Housing and attendance at meetings.

A discussion was had on how the last 4 Chips and Chat meetings had gone. Some highlights had been helping tenants with WBR advice, receiving compliments regarding cleaning, being able to report planned maintenance for Clerk Court and William Ainge Court and big turn outs at the Cardigan and Welshpool meetings. There has also been a request from some attendees to do a story on how the Association has helped improve their circumstances. Some tenants raised concerns during the meeting about ongoing problems of ASB issues on their estate, and the heating system on their estate. There were plenty of repairs reported throughout the meetings and there was also a suggestion to use a local contractor down in Cardigan to save on costs of sending contractors from Newtown. Aidan Ackerman is looking into this.

There will now be a yearly programme of Chips and Chat events. There will be 12 a year (one a month). We will be visiting 3 specific places 3 times a year and 4 other places which will be different each time.

6. Charles Brotherton – Value For Money.

Charles gave a presentation on value for money (VFM) for members. He spoke of the “3 E’s” – Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness but stressed that the price isn’t the starting point when thinking about VFM. Instead it is about doing the right thing, the best way at the best price. When looking at VFM, the Association is thinking about something which has a relatively low cost, high productivity which provides successful outcomes. The Association’s strategy for getting VFM includes, performance management, benchmarking with other landlords, service reviews, policy choices, procurement and partnerships.

Charles is trying to get everyone in the Association to think about VFM. He wants to get VFM champions and will be presenting to Board, TaRF and staff on the subject. He will be making the suggestion that all reports that go to Board, TaRF or executive teams include a comment on how what is reported offers VFM. He will also be targeting a wider tenant audience by submitting VFM articles in the newsletter.

7. Any Other Business

- The chair commented that recently he had been out with an Asset-coordinator working on the S.A’s “Voids and Relets” audit. He found he was writing everything down on paper then having to go back to the office to transfer it onto the office computer. The chair found this very time consuming. He asked Charles whether a laptop or a tablet would be beneficial to the Asset-coordinators to cut down on their paper work and simply word it down on the computer and then down load it onto the office computer. Charles replied that he was looking into it.
- Jim Baker who is unable to attend meetings had rung Hannah with comments he wanted read out at the meeting.

Jim agreed with the decision on grit bins at the last meeting and added that it was the responsible of the council to provide grit bins.

On the subject of Welfare Benefit Reform and specifically the bedroom tax, Jim wanted to ask whether the Association checked and inspected properties for illegal sub-letting. Tenants are allowed to take in lodgers with the Association’s permission but sub-letting was a breach of tenancy.

Jim raised a concern that the Association needs to do more property checks as some properties are in a poor state of repair.

Jim did not agree with the proposed reduction in meetings. In his view they should still be bi-monthly but that staff should not attend every meeting. He thought the presence of staff might be putting new member off. He suggested that every other meeting could be shorter if staff were not in attendance which would allow a later start for those who needed to travel. Members in attendance agreed that the meetings should continue to run bi-monthly but the Chair commented that he welcomed staff and Board to the meetings. The Chair is happy for staff to attend if they only remain in the meeting for their agenda item. Members also commented that the “tenants’ time” agenda item at the start of every meeting was sufficient to discuss matters without staff present.

Jim wanted an assurance that any public announcements made on facebook be made to all tenants. Hannah said that this was the case with any important announcements through the newsletter and posting leaflets but that due to the immediate nature of face book in conveying a message it was often used for last minute local informational items e.g. community events which in some circumstances may not have been expected and therefore not been sent in the post.

Jim did not agree with a twitter account.

Jim agreed that the Mid Wales 50 Group was definitely a substitute for involvement where people could not attend TaRF. Members agreed.

All members in attendance thought that Jim sending in his comments was a good way for him to be involved in the meetings. The Chair wanted to personally thank him for taking the time to do this and welcomed further comments at the next meeting.

- The Chair requested that once the next round of Estate Walkabouts had been agreed an invite be extended for the Chief Executive to attend one of his choosing. Charles suggested that it would be good if someone of the Executive Team or the Chief Executive should always attend a walkabout.
- The chair asked about HARA report which was to be released on the Welsh Government website last Friday of March. Charles wanted to update members what was happening with the Association’s HARA report on their Self-Assessment as the report was due to be published and on the Welsh Government website by the 31st March. It has not been published yet as the Association is in discussion with them about the content of the document. The Association has objected to the content of the document but also to the tone and wants it to be right as the final document will be available to the public. Meetings have been held and the Association is just waiting for the final draft.

- Members agreed that earlier discussions in the meeting mean they would like a session on service charges with Carol Stovel, Jonathan Davies and Charles Brotherton at the next meeting.

8. Date of Next Meeting

Friday 2nd August 2013 at Ty Canol House form 9.45am-2pm.