

## **Tenants Consultative Committee Meeting Minutes – 9 July 2012**

### **Representatives of the Council**

Cllr Dent Coad  
Cllr Condon-Simmonds  
Cllr Blakeman  
Cllr Pascall  
Cllr Coleridge  
Cllr Rossi  
Cllr Palmer

### **Representatives of Tenants' Associations/ARBs**

John Paul Ajunonwu	TRELICK TOWER
William Anderson	WHITCHURCH HOUSE
Tony Annis	TAVISTOCK ROAD
Fred Besant	CONVENT ESTATE ARB Chair
Victoria Blair	TAVISTOCK CRESCENT
Mary Benjamin	
Margaret Grayling	WORLD'S END (WERA) ARB Chair
Lina Lens	SILCHESTER ESTATE
Barbara Manifold	CHESTERTON SQUARE COMPACT
Michael Miller	OBSERVER (Elm Park House)
Don Nelson	TAVISTOCK ROAD
Maura Penasa	SOUTHERN ROW
John Rendall	WORLDS END ESTATE
Iain Smith	POND HOUSE
Anthony Ward	TALBOT HOUSE
John Wilson	WHITCHURCH HOUSE
Caroline Mcdouall	
Rosemary Stevens	CHESTERTON SQUARE COMPACT
Sarah Frater	LONGLANDS COURT

### **Representatives of the Tenant Management Organisation**

Robert Black	Chief Executive
Sacha Jevans	Director of Customer Services
Yvonne Birch	Head of Strategy and Engagement
Mark Anderson	Director of Asset Investment and Engineering

### **Council Officers**

Amanda Johnson	Head of Housing Commissioning
Jane Trethewey	Head of Housing Strategy & Regeneration
Gilly Tobin	Senior Housing Policy Officer
Ruth Angel	Housing & Regeneration Project Manager
Yinka Odusina	Neighbourhood Management Co-ordinator
William Parsons	Housing Commissioning Officer

## **1.0 Matters Arising from Previous Meeting**

- 1.1 There was a mistake in the meeting minutes from January's TCC event, in that the word 'Not' was missing from the paragraph below.
- 1.2 Tony Ward expressed concern that the Royal Borough's capital works programme did not match the needs and wants of residents associations. He sought clarification on what works needed to be carried out at World's End, as mentioned in the Stock Options Survey. In response, Robert Black said that the TMO would not undertake works that are **not** needed and clarified that within its 20-year aspirations plan for TMO stock, there is a priorities list.

## **2.0 Jane Trethewey – Housing Regeneration and Development Presentation**

- 2.1 A presentation was heard on the reasons for the Council initiating some small scale housing development, known as Hidden Homes, and also regeneration projects on its housing estates. The Council's motivation is both to meet housing need by delivering new homes, and to find ways to improve the quality overall of affordable housing in the borough. Some examples were given of schemes that are already underway or that are being consulted upon now with residents. Examples of other potential schemes under consideration were also given, with an indication as to why these are of interest. The meeting was asked to consider whether there are other sites and opportunities that the Council should be assessing for a regeneration approach.

Residents were then invited to ask questions on the presentation content.

- 2.2 An issue was raised by Maura Penasa about Octavia House and the underground stream running beneath. The stream is causing damp to the properties directly above it. Mark Anderson from the TMO is currently looking into this.
- 2.3 The issue of keys for TMO properties being cut and sold was raised, in that a small number of tenants are doing this and then illegally sub-letting their properties. Sacha Jevans advised that in the previous financial year the TMO had recovered 19 properties as a result of sub-letting and that the TMO would always welcome any intelligence on illegal sub-letting activity. Cllr Palmer advised that with the support from RBKC fraud team, an exercise was completed last year to identify illegal sub-lets, including the use of packages requiring signatures, door-to-door checks and bank checks. A finding from this fraud exercise revealed that statistically sub-letting in RBKC is much lower than had been expected. Sacha Jevans confirmed that the TMO will follow up on any reports of illegal subletting.
- 2.4 John Wilson posed a number of questions/observations to Cllr Coleridge:

### **3.0 TMO Repairs**

- 3.1 There needs to be effective reporting systems in place for repairs. The TMO should take account of the impact of the backlog of repairs on the future capital programme i.e. external decorations. Cllr Coleridge advised that the stock condition survey is currently being updated so that we can confirm the final spend required. There will then be a business planning process that will consider the requirement for additional funding.

### **4.0 Roofspaces**

- 4.1 (resident) queried why the TMO do not promote the development of roof spaces. The resident advised both the TMO and leaseholders would profit from this. Cllr Coleridge advised that we should promote the use of roof spaces where appropriate and that this would likely lead to an increase in service charges. Cllr Coleridge also noted however, that the letting of roof spaces will always be subject to the terms of the individual lease arrangements.

### **5.0 Muslim Heritage Centre**

- 5.1 This has a car parking area that could be developed. Cllr Coleridge confirmed that there is an ongoing discussion about this site and it will be redeveloped in the future.
- 5.2 Michael Miller questioned the mobile phone masts at Elm Park House seeking information as to what happens with the rents generated from these. Yvonne Birch & Mark Anderson advised these are redistributed into the Housing Revenue Account but that not all masts generate rent. Concern was also raised about the lighting and security plans. Mark Anderson confirmed that there are no major capital works planned at the moment.
- 5.3 John Rendall expressed support for the planned development works at Worlds End, and said that this has 100% support. He advised that further thought be given to the proposed layout. John Hebditch also raised concerns over the issue of illegal subletting.
- 5.4 Sarah Frater had concerns about leaseholders who purchased their properties under the right to buy schemes, about what would happen if they then needed to be decanted under regeneration plans. Cllr Coleridge advised RBKC had published a decant strategy that is available to TMO residents; a copy of which will be sent to Sarah Frater. Cllr Coleridge also noted a leaflet is available explaining the regeneration of Silchester and the subsequent decanting of this estate.

### **6.0 Gilly Tobin – The Tenancy Strategy and Tenancy Policy**

- 6.1 Gilly Tobin presented on the changes to tenancy length permitted under the Localism Act. The Localism Act 2011 set in legislation the ability of social housing landlords to issue tenancies for fixed lengths of time. This includes

Council landlords. Fixed term tenancies are for a minimum of 5 years, but 2 years in exceptional circumstances which will be defined by the landlord. At the end of a fixed term tenancy, the tenancy will be reviewed and re-assessed to determine if the tenancy will be re-issued. These changes apply to new tenants.

- 6.2 For the Council, this means Producing a Tenancy Strategy in consultation with local housing associations setting out the broad principles for the granting of tenancies in the Royal Borough; and producing a Tenancy Policy, which will set out the tenancy lengths that will be used and how the tenancy will be re-assessed at the end of the term for the Council's housing. This will impact new tenants only.
- 6.3 The Council's draft Tenancy Strategy was consulted on a draft between 15 March 2012 and 18 June 2012. This included the TMO Board, Resident Engagement Panel and copies to all ARBs. The key points are:
- 5 year terms as a minimum tenancy term expected, although 2 year tenancies can be granted in exceptional circumstances.
  - Affordable Rent tenancy rent levels must take into account future welfare reform, and in particular Universal Credit.
  - Support households to move when their property is no longer suitable for their needs.
  - Examine each tenancy for re-issue on a case by case basis, rather than applying criteria which exclude someone who is working from having their tenancy re-issued.
- 6.4 The Council are now developing their Tenancy Policy. In summary the key principles are:
- 5 year tenancies to be used with 2 year tenancies in exceptional circumstances
  - Assumption to renew all tenancies unless high arrears, poor behaviour, interest in another property or earning above an amount yet to be decided
  - Tenants who earn more will pay more to stay in the property (dependent on the changes proposed by central government)
- 6.5 The next stages will be:
- Publish our Tenancy Strategy (September 2012)
  - Develop our Tenancy Policy over the summer
  - Start consultation on the Tenancy Policy from September to December 2012
  - Implement and start to issue fixed term tenancies early in 2013

Residents were then invited to ask questions on the presentation content.

- 6.6 Some concerns amongst residents regarding 2 and 5 year tenancies; under what circumstances would either of these tenancies be issued? Gilly Tobin advised that the norm was likely to be a 5 year tenancy agreement, but that in some cases it would be necessary to issue 2 year tenancies. Both of which

will be reviewed at the end of the term. Gilly Tobin advised that this was still at the consultation stage and would be clarified in the tenancy policy. Cllr Coleridge added that these new tenancies are directions from central government under the Localism Bill. Further, that RBKC are under increasing pressure to make best use of the housing stock, and that, as an example, a single person occupying a 3 bedroom property is not good use of stock. Therefore under the new tenancies the TMO will be given the flexibility to review and where necessary down size residents or move residents depending on housing need. Cllr Coleridge also added that the reviewing of individual tenancies will concentrate on a person's housing need at the time of review, including their financial situation and whether they can be expected to rent or move into the private market. The Council are still awaiting information on the criteria for assessing income in relation to the current government consultation on 'Pay to Stay'.

- 6.7 William Anderson questioned whether this would affect elderly residents occupying sheltered accommodation. Cllr Coleridge advised that ordinarily tenants signing up to sheltered accommodation would automatically become secure tenants, and flexible 2 and 5 years tenancies would not apply to them. Cllr Coleridge also emphasised that the new tenancies will only apply to new tenancy sign ups post Localism and not affect tenants with secure tenancies retrospectively.
- 6.8 Aisha Braitwaite expressed concerns that the proposed changes did not take account of the needs of vulnerable groups and were not realistic.
- 6.9 John Paul Ajunonwu questioned the TMO's policy of void turnaround times and the issue of empty properties. Sacha Jevans noted that the TMO's void turnaround times are now down to 25 days and that during this time certain works may need to be done in order to re-let the property; from a performance point of view this time period is good. Cllr Coleridge added that should people be aware of properties being left unoccupied for long periods, then identifying the relevant registered social landlord and informing them is the most helpful thing to do.
- 6.10 Lina Lens asked with regards to the 2 and 5 years tenancies, if a tenant had spent money re-decorating their property and were not re-issued another tenancy, would there be any form of reimbursement. Cllr Coleridge advised that tenants are allowed to paint and decorate but that on expiry of a tenancy properties may need to be modified or returned to their original condition before being re-let. As a result, it would not be possible to reimburse residents for any decorative or improvement works they may have carried out independently.

## **7.0 AOB**

- 7.1 Don Nelson commented on the positive experience people had in moving into sheltered schemes.

- 7.2 The removal of analogue TV aerials was raised following the switch over to digital in April 2012, and whether all of the aerials including existing cable work would be taken away. Yvonne Birch advised that some residents refused to have their aerials taken down and that some of the existing cables have been incorporated into recent Virgin Media packages. As a result, it is not possible to have these removed as some residents are likely to lose their media packages.
- 7.3 Don Nelson asked if additional bins could be provided at the refurbished Portobello Square. Cllr Coleridge stated that there was a policy to reduce the use of bins and said that this would be looked into.