

**TENANTS' CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE  
MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON  
WEDNESDAY 9<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2013 IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER  
KENSINGTON TOWN HALL AT 6.30 PM**

**PRESENT**

**Representatives of the Council**

Councillor Timothy Coleridge (Chairman)  
Councillor Judith Blakeman  
Councillor Maighread Condon-Simmonds  
Councillor Emma Dent Coad  
Councillor Marie-Therese Rossi

**Representatives of Tenants' Associations/ARBs**

Bramley House	Gemma Clarke
Chesterton Square Compact	Fred Besant
	Rosemary Stevens
Convent Estate	Guilia James
Cremorne Estate	Beata Newman
Elm Park Estate	Michael Miller (observer)
Ingelow House	Shirley Berry
Kensal House	Brian Hinton
Pond House	Iain Smith
Sir Thomas More Estate	John Hebditch
	Caroline McDouall
Swinbrook Estate	Tom Fitch
Talbot House	Norman Dunne
	Anthony Ward
Tavistock Road	Tony Annis
World's End (WERA)	Margaret Grayling
	John Rendall

Mr McQueen

**Representatives of the Tenant Management Organisation**

Robert Black	Chief Executive
Yvonne Birch	Executive Director of People and Performance
Sacha Jevans	Executive Director of Operations
Anthony Parkes	Executive Director of Financial Services

**Council Officers**

Laura Johnson	Director of Housing
---------------	---------------------

Ruth Angel	Housing Regeneration Project Manager
Celia Caliskan	General Needs Housing Commissioning Manager
Amanda Johnson	Head of Housing Commissioning
Steve Mellor	Group Finance Manager
Veronika Strilkova	Housing Review Officer
Gillian Tobin	Senior Housing Policy Officer
Charles Franklyn	Governance Officer

## **1. Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from: Sarah Frater (Longlands Court)

## **2. Introduction**

Councillor Coleridge opened the meeting.

## **3. Minutes of the meeting held on 9 July 2012**

These were agreed.

## **4. Matters arising**

Item 4.1. - Mr Hebditch questioned the assertion that service charges would rise if roof spaces were developed. Cllr Coleridge said that an increase in the number of rooms would inevitably lead to greater service costs, though overall charges would be reduced. Mr Fitch suggested there should have been specific actions relating to the marketing of roof spaces.

## **5. Housing Revenue Account - Rent Report 2013/14 (Steve Mellor and Anthony Parkes)**

Mr Mellor introduced the presentation by saying that the report would go to the Housing and Property Scrutiny Committee on 16 January and then would be the basis of a Key Decision to be taken by Councillor Coleridge, Cabinet Member for Housing and Property.

Under the new self-financing regime the level of debt in the HRA needs to be sustainable from local resources. £24.9m has been added to the Royal Borough's debt, by central government.

The **TMO management fee** has been kept as low as possible e.g. by enforcing a pay freeze. The TMO contribution to Business Rates has been

£140K following a change in Council policy. Despite the challenging economic climate the TMO has employed two additional welfare officers to deal with the consequences of changes to the benefit system. Additional income is being generated e.g. from developing car parking space.

**TCC Managed Budgets** - Wilmot Dixon took over the maintenance contract following Morrisons' withdrawal. This has resulted in additional expenditure, which was anticipated since Morrisons got into difficulties because of the losses they incurred on the contract. Managers are closely monitoring the bad debts situation since the changes in benefits from April 2013 may push people into debt.

- Mr Hebditch complained about refurbishment work being undertaken in mid-winter. Lead roofing was replaced by felt which was not satisfactory and was merely a short-term fix. He further complained that T|MP staff failed to respond to complaints. Mr Parkes responded by saying that the TMO had listened to these comments and as a result winter work was rescheduled. Sacha Jevons undertook to look into Mr Hebditch's specific complaints.

*ACTION: SJ*

**Rent Setting** - The Council is obliged to adhere to the Rent Restructuring Regime which should lead to greater comparability across regions. The aim is for rents to converge in 2015/16, though this may not be possible in all cases in Kensington and Chelsea. Over the next 5 years there will be a shortfall and steps will need to be taken to ensure there is a working balance to ensure that adequate refurbishment works can be continued. Cllr Coleridge said that the proposed rent increases will be lower than in previous years, but he endorsed the view that a capital budget will be required for maintenance work.

- Mr Dunne complained about the difficulty in making insurance claims, in the case of a step ladder which was taken. The insurance policy is in fact an RBKC managed policy and personal claims cannot be made against it. Mr Dunne was asked to email Mr Parkes with the details and he will respond, cc to Cllr Coleridge.

*ACTION: AP*

- Mr Miller enquired why the Council was intending to raise rents when Octavia were not. Cllr Coleridge reminded him that the Council was following Government instructions in aligning rents, depending on the area. He said that the rents were merely 20% of the market rent which represented very good value. Robert Black commented that many RSLs set their rents in exactly the same way as the Council. Cllr Coleridge added that many landlords and changing their formula to charging an "Affordable Rent", i.e. 80% of

the market rent, but RBKC has decided to stay with the "Social Rent" formula.

- Mr Hebditch complained about poor quality maintenance work and over-charging. Cllr Coleridge said that these were unacceptable and in a time of financial stringency it was more important the TMO ensured that work was of the highest quality and at the most competitive price.

## **6. Housing Revenue Account Business Plan - Capital Expenditure (Amanda Johnson)**

This is the first time that such a plan has been drawn up for Kensington and Chelsea and it will run over 5 years in all. It will inevitably change over the years. The Stock Condition Survey informs the plan and has been used to identify the resource requirements.

The Plan relates only to capital expenditure requirements, e.g. replacing boilers, becoming more environmentally friendly etc.

Mrs Johnson highlighted the funding gap of £92m between identified needs and resources currently available.

Mrs Johnson invited everyone to look at the Recommendations, which sum up the present situation.

- In response to Cllr Blakeman Laura Johnson said there were no plans to raise funds by building private dwellings on estates.
- Mr Fitch commented that large contracts cost more than smaller ones. The TMO should be more vigilant when placing contracts. He suggested that groups of residents themselves could undertake maintenance work, at a significantly lower cost. Sacha Jevans said the TMO always aimed for best value, and will look at imaginative alternatives. However they have to abide by legislation. Leaseholder may nominate contractors.
- Iain Smith wondered if the standards proposed are higher than the Decent Homes standard which may be unreachable and unaffordable. Cllr Coleridge said that the TMO will have to prioritise work and at the very least do what is required under law. It is about getting back to basics, e.g. not replacing kitchens which are basically satisfactory.
- Iain Smith asked about the installation of double glazing. Mr Black said that this required long term, e.g. 30-year, planning

which is now possible. Hitherto the TMO depended on year-to-year funding from the Council. He said that it would be important for residents to be given advance notice of the plans.

- Ms Newman said that money had been wasted in fitting new fire resistant doors. Mr Hebditch supported this complaint in relation to the Sir Thomas More estate. Mr Black responded by saying that following the Southwark fire tragedies the TMO were required by law to change 700 doors-there was no choice about this.
- Mr Rendall expressed disappointment at the slow progress being made in commercial lettings which results in unrealised income. A garage in the Worlds End estate is  $\frac{3}{4}$  empty and could be utilised to raise money. Some commercial properties remain unlet. Three properties converted under the Hidden Homes scheme are unoccupied. Cllr Coleridge agreed that less bureaucracy and red tape was highly desirable, if it leads to a speeding up of commercial lettings.

## **7. Investing in our Housing Stock (Gillian Tobin)**

Mrs Tobin said there was a need for larger properties, suitable for families, and for more accessible units. More detailed information will be available in the summer and will then be presented to the TCC.

- Cllr Blakeman enquired whether the tri-Borough Community Budgets project would impact on this issue. Laura Johnson responded by saying that the project was led by Westminster and that lifting the borrowing gap was a policy aspiration. One aim is to use funds to get people back to work, though the proposals have not yet been agreed by RBKC. Cllr Dent Coad reported that the Cabinet and Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee had concluded that the Council should not participate in this and she will advise the Leader of the Committee's view.
- Iain Smith enquired about Energy Efficiency Grants. This is a problem for the TMO since applicants have to own the assets. The World's End estate has been offered an energy saving grant but residents have not yet formally agreed. They are concerned about the possibility of the proposed works leading to damp within the flats.
- Caroline McDouall requested that checks be made that the new fire doors are working properly. She said that the priority should

be the efficiency of maintenance works and the maintenance of lifts.

**8. Any other business**

None

Date of next meeting: 8 July 2013.

The meeting ended at 8.20 p.m.