



**Tenancy Sounding Board Minutes**

**Date: 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2011**

**Ferris House 10am – 12pm**

**Attendees:** Sue Shepherd, Michael Cook, Gerry Lee, Allan Healey, Alan Moreton, Henry Vincent, Carol Moreton

**Staff:** Kelly Webster, Elaine Williams, Tom McQuaid, Joanne Pascoe, Rebecca Jinks, Joanne Morris

**Apologies:** Pam Maude, David Titley, Liz Bracelin, Rose Davies, Donald Armstrong, Hildegard Cook

**Apologies not received:**

**Purpose of the meeting**

*(e.g. agenda items)*

**Action**

1. Welcome, introduction and apologies
2. Minutes of the previous meeting and actions arising
3. Tenancy update;  
Rents  
Lettings  
Tenure
4. Budgeting Leaflet update
5. Report from Action Teams  
Financial Inclusion Strategy  
Leaseholder and Shared Owners – Service charge review
6. Dulux paint pack
7. Local Offers
8. Identify outcomes of meeting
9. AOB
10. Time and place of next meeting

**General discussion items**

*(bullet points)*

1. Sue welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Minutes from last meeting were discussed, the group were happy they were a true representation, proposed and seconded.
3. Tenancy Update -

#### **Rents/Income management**

Updates were provided on Income Management. Following a presentation, the group were very pleased with arrears performance. Gerry raised some queries regarding money outstanding to sewerage charges at Mawgan requesting an explanation for what this was for, Tom McQuaid provided further details and gave a summarised update on situation with the case going through court at the moment and how the outcome of this case may impact on us and the rest of the residents at Mawgan.

#### **Evictions**

Kelly advised the group that we came very close to evicting someone this week, with them clearing £2k of arrears on the day of the eviction. Sue asked what happens to the children when families are evicted, Kelly confirmed that Cornwall Council's Housing Needs Team and Social Services are both informed weeks before the eviction to ensure children are always looked after in these unfortunate events. Coastline also work with both agencies to try to prevent the eviction and find a solution.

#### **Recharges**

Recharges were discussed as Michael was concerned about the large debt levels, and suggested we request a deposit at sign up which is kept as a 'damage' deposit. IT was advised this would not be feasible as most customers are on very low incomes and could not afford this, and it goes against what we are about as a social landlord. Moving in is also an expensive time for our customers and a large amount of outlay for carpets etc is already difficult enough for them to find. Kelly advised the monitoring of property condition is monitored through tenancy management and breaches enforced through the tenancy agreement. Kelly also stressed the additional Annual Tenancy Visits being carried out which are highlighting some of the issues with neglect and / or damage. The Income Management team also feedback to the Tenancy Management team if they come across a particularly bad property.

Michael requested a brainstorming session at the next sounding board meeting on re-looking at the way recharges are dealt with / could be prevented, and also requested a copy of the tenancy agreement be sent to him to look at the terms and conditions in more detail. Kelly will add this item to the next agenda.

#### **Lettings**

Joanne Morris provided a detailed update on lettings performance and in particular the Trevu Road development, how the scheme was being advertised etc. Alan queried whether there was an age restriction on this development, Jo clarified that this was the case on certain units, some were only for over 50's.

#### **Under-Occupancy**

Jo updated the group on under-occupancy and Coastline's approach to dealing with it, some questions were raised by the group with regards to the government's proposals. Statistics were provided enabling the group to see the scale of the problem and the potential impact.

Jo provided a detailed update on the recent downsizing blitz day with the outcomes from the day. Jo also went through a presentation of the Downsizing Scheme and leaflet showing the sounding board amendments / suggestions. The group were happy with leaflet and felt it was very well laid out, this scheme will commence in April 2012.

Alan asked if members from the sounding board could be involved in future under-occupancy blitz days. Jo advised there are likely to be issues around data protection, but agreed to find out whether this would be possible.

### Tenure

Kelly updated the group on the latest information regarding affordable rent tenancies, and confirmed that the proposals have changed yet again in the last few days with a stop being put on the use of 5 year assured shorthold tenancies. Kelly advised there is still a lot of information yet to be ironed out around mutual exchanges etc but we would keep the group updated as things develop.

The Trevu Road development was discussed as this was to be one of the first sites to go live with affordable rent tenancies.

#### 4. Budgeting leaflet

Jo gave a brief presentation on the budgeting leaflet showing an electronic version on the overhead projector, and all suggestions and amendments that came from the group have been taken on board. The group were happy with the leaflet.

#### 5. Report from Action Teams:

##### Financial Inclusion Strategy

Kelly set another date for the 9<sup>th</sup> January 2012 for the group to re-write Coastline's financial inclusion strategy, **this has since been moved to 5th March 2012 to avoid any clash with the office move**, and to enable the Income Management Team to focus on recovering some of the arrears gained over the festive period. Letters have gone out to those who have requested to attend, lunch will be provided.

##### Leasehold & Shared Owners - Service Charge Review

Tom McQuaid provided the group with a detailed update on the recent service charge review with HQN.

Tom advised that the findings suggest that CHL are ahead of many other providers, we had performed very well in the review, and thanked the customers for their involvement.

Tom will return to the April sounding board meeting with the final report.

#### 6. Dulux decorators pack

Sally Miles from Dulux attended and gave the group a presentation on the Dulux decoration vouchers/packs which are given out to new customers when they move in also entitling the customer to a 33% discount on extra paint if ordered when redeeming their voucher. Sally advised a DVD is now also available to show customers how to use their pack.

The 25% discount available for customers and staff proved very popular with the group who all felt this, and the idea of the pack in general were both excellent. Questions were raised by the Sue around the various options that are available eg. Could more paint be provided if someone does not need brushes etc? Sally advised this was not possible, but they could issue a 'room only' option if they were advised in advance.

Sally left a number of leaflets etc for those that wanted further information.

#### 7. Local Offers

A detailed run down of performance against the tenancy local offers was given to the group, who were happy with performance.

The group was asked to look at the current local offer:- ***'We will work in partnership with Cornwall Council to ensure that new and complete housing benefit claims are processed within 8 weeks.'***

It was agreed at the 6 monthly consultation event that this local offer was unmanageable and would need replacing.

A proposal to create a new local offer was put forward which states ***'We will support our customers to sustain their tenancy by pro-actively managing rent arrears'*** with a target of 2.1% as per the PIP.

Everyone agreed that this would be a suitable replacement.

#### 8. Outcomes from the meeting

Kelly asked the group to look at and discuss the outcomes of the meeting to ensure the meetings were representing value for money, and actually making a difference. A number of outcomes were put forward and listed below. Kelly advised this will happen at every meeting from now on to ensure the group is outcome focused.

- Customers now aware of the Dulux paint pack and how the scheme works
- Customers now have a better understanding of under-occupancy and the changes that are being brought about by the government, enabling them to make informed decisions.
- The group have helped design and decide on the new budgeting leaflet which will assist customers in managing their finances, saving them money and reducing financial exclusion, and arrears.
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#### 9. Next meeting

The Tenancy Sounding Board meeting date is 1<sup>st</sup> February 2012