

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

LANDLORD SERVICES PARTNERSHIP SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP

28th SEPTEMBER 2009

A. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

B. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of interests.

C. WIDENING TENANT INVOLVEMENT

C.1 John Swanton introduced this item before opening it up for discussion by the SIG. The Audit Commission had recommended that Waverley should reach out more widely to tenants rather than focus on communication through the Tenants' Panel. This would not lessen involvement with the Tenants' Panel but add further channels of communication. Progress had been made in the following ways: -

- Over the next few months the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) would be coming to Waverley to look at current practice and how this can be improved. (The first part would be a self-assessment by Waverley of how the service matched up to the standards which were expected from an excellent service).
- A mystery shopping exercise had been carried out with tenants to test Waverley's telephone response system for good, courteous service, with a good response.
- John Swanton welcomed the setting up of a new tenants' group at Farnham (Heath End) and hoped that there would be others. Waverley would be happy to listen to anyone who had something to say, whether formally constituted as tenants' associations, or not.
- A neighbourhood agreement had been negotiated with the Chantry Community Forum during the summer and the tenants at Roman Way, Farnham had now requested one too. The agreement would cover other service providers, such as the police.

C.2 The challenge was to find other ways to get people involved when they had busy lives to lead. It was easier to get tenant involvement over big issues and more difficult when tenants had no major complaints about the service. Waverley had set up a stall at Ockford Ridge fete and this had shown that some people do not want to get involved in formal structures. Other channels of communication were valuable to reach these tenants so that there would be a range of opportunities for tenants to tell Waverley what they wanted.

- C.3 The SIG noted that although over 400 tenants had been invited to take part in the mystery shopping exercise, there were only 30 positive responses. 20 had attended a training session, and 9 people actually took part in the exercise, 3 of whom attended a follow-up session. Officers would be going back to those who had dropped out along the way to see if there was anything they could have done to keep them involved. In future Waverley would link up with Woking and Guildford Borough Councils with the tenants of one council mystery shopping the services of another which the SIG felt would be valuable.
- C.4 The SIG noted that the Tenants' Panel had also been busy. It had held coffee mornings in various locations. This had led to a new Member on the Tenants' Panel and the setting up of a new tenants' association. The Tenants' Panel were holding several meetings with Guildford tenants in the near future. It was recognised that some of these might feed in to the Tenants' Panel but others might not wish to do so.
- C.5 The SIG considered the issue of funding for new tenants' associations and groups. Set up costs were likely to be about £75 for stationery, postage etc. and there might be marketing costs. The new tenants' association at Farnham had been offered a slot in ITN (Independent Tenants' News). Funding was an issue for the SIG to consider and make recommendations.
- C.6 The SIG considered the need to communicate with private owners on estates so that issues were considered for all residents, not just tenants. However, many issues related to non-landlord functions funded from council tax rather than the HRA. The SIG recognised that the appointment of a TPO would be valuable to encourage groups and keep them involved. Local councillors also acted as a channel of communication between tenants, residents and Waverley.

D. HRA SUBSIDY REVIEW

- D.1 The SIG noted that Waverley was currently paying around £11 million in negative housing subsidy. Under the proposed new system, Waverley would be likely to be given an assumed debt of around £180-200 million which would initially result in payments of about £10-10.5 million. The initial result might therefore seem beneficial to Waverley. However, there were other points to be considered.
- the proposed system flouted normal accounting principles in that the debt did not relate to any asset received nor would it ever be reduced
 - payments would increase in line with interest rates and could become unaffordable
 - the assumed additional £1 million stream of money is not enough to fund the expenditure required to meet Waverley's

capital needs, some of which were not included in the capital programme, and it might not be possible to borrow against it. These needs included bringing the stock up to the Decent Homes Standard, improving sheltered housing schemes, providing aids/adaptations for an increasingly ageing/infirm population, and carbon reduction proposals. Waverley's capital programme was funded by disposals (Right To Buy and others) and a Revenue contribution (the Major Repairs Allowance). RTB disposals had dried up. The assumed extra £1 million revenue would not provide the level of capital funding Waverley had had 3 years ago.

- the Government would still control rents.
- The formula for working out the amount of "debt" was unfavourable to Waverley in that it depended on the value of the housing stock, rents and the amount of negative housing subsidy, all of which were in Waverley's case relatively high.

D.2 The SIG noted that Waverley was meeting other local authorities on 2nd October to discuss their responses to the consultation. Waverley's draft response would be shared with the Tenants' Panel. Unless there was a consensus, it seemed likely that the primary legislation needed to introduce the changes would be dealt with by the next government.

E. OCKFORD RIDGE CONSULTATION EXERCISE AND PROGRESS

E.1 The SIG received an oral progress report from Clare Jones. A consultation exercise had been carried out with all tenants and residents (with different questions for residents) to find out how they felt about living on the estate. The response had been very positive with the overwhelming majority wanting to stay there. Tenants had indicated that their top priority was double-glazing, followed by bathroom configuration and situation and thirdly, kitchen improvements.

E.2 The SIG noted that despite the layout issues within the homes, both Thames Valley Housing Association and Sentinel Housing Association had indicated that the estate was suitable for improvement rather than redevelopment; it did not have the characteristics of a failing estate because tenants liked living there, properties sold easily on the open market, it was a "garden suburb" development and its deficiencies could be overcome by refurbishing and extending homes.

E.2 The Executive would consider a report on 29th September recommending a programme for installing double-glazing and new front doors where these had not been replaced.

F. FUTURE TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

The Chairman said that he would like the Tenants' Panel to bring other issues to the meeting. Tenants' Panel members responded that they would like to discuss asset management. It was agreed that they would email John Swanton or Clare Jones with an indication of the focus, whether information or otherwise.

G. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting was scheduled for 25th January 2010.

The meeting closed at 8.40 p.m.

Present at the meeting

For Waverley Borough Council

Cllr Keith Webster (Chairman)
Cllr Mike Causey
Cllr Stuart Connolly
Cllr Victor Duckett
Cllr Mrs Patricia Ellis
Cllr Peter Isherwood
Cllr Stephen O'Grady
Cllr Ken Reed

The following officers were present:

Clare Jones
Linda Redford
John Swanton

For the Tenants' Panel

Mrs Jane Rawlings (Vice Chairman)
Mr Ralph Anwar
Mr Brian Ekins
Mrs Kathleen Hall

Mr Ivan Keemar
Mr George Merrony
Mrs Christine North