



WATFORD COMMUNITY HOUSING TRUST TASK GROUP

Tuesday, 30th July, 2013

2.30 pm

Publication date: 19 July 2013

AGENDA

Membership: K Collett, J Connal, S Johnson and A Joynes and A Khan (Chair)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE
2. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS (IF ANY)
3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Pages 1 - 4)
4. RESIDENTS' SURVEY (Pages 5 - 12)

To consider residents' views on the Watford Community Housing Trust's repairs service

5. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To agree the date for the next Task Group meeting

Agenda Item 3

WATFORD COMMUNITY HOUSING TRUST TASK GROUP

16 April 2013

Present: Councillor Khan (Chair)
Councillors Collett, Connal and Joynes

Officers: Committee and Scrutiny Officer
Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer (RW)

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

The Task Group was asked to elect a Chair for the Task Group.

AGREED

that Councillor Khan be elected Chair of the Watford Community Housing Trust Task Group.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Councillor Johnson.

3. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

There were no disclosures of interest.

4. SCRUTINY PROPOSAL – WATFORD COMMUNITY HOUSING TRUST

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer explained the documents with which the Task Group members had been supplied.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer referred to the Performance Data report, which had been presented to Call-in and Performance Scrutiny Committee in 2009. She advised that much of the information was now out of date; the Housing Trust intended to update this information to provide performance statistics and benchmarking. She added that the Councillors' news sheet had been included and said that the Trust had asked whether the Task Group would like any other information to be forwarded as background information.

The Chair stressed that the group was keen to work with the Trust as it was felt that officers performed well. He added however, that some local residents had raised specific concerns.

Further Information considered necessary to carry out the review

Councillor Collett noted that it would be useful to obtain information on how complaints from tenants were dealt with. She asked whether a form were available for tenants to use in order to feed back on repair work by contractors.

Councillor Joynes questioned whether there was any form of quality control for work provided.

The Chair said that it would be wise to ascertain what procedures and policies were in place to aid vulnerable residents such as the very young or the elderly. He added that the Task Group should also identify what procedures were put in place to remedy problems.

Members commented on individual situations where problems had not been resolved in timely fashion.

Councillor Connal explained that residents were unsure whom to contact in order to achieve a speedy result; Councillor Joynes considered that timeframes for completion of work should be written into the service level agreement.

Councillor Collett said that it would be useful to know which tenants had recently requested repair work and what their experience had been. She added that in the event that tenants had had cause for complaint it would be instructive to know what procedures they had employed to complain, the quality of response and whether the matter had been resolved to the resident's satisfaction.

Questions to be raised with Watford Community Housing Trust

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer suggested that the Trust be presented with scenarios and asked what processes would be employed in those cases and what further steps would be taken if residents were not satisfied with results. She urged that these questions should not be specific residents' cases.

Councillor Collett noted problems which had occurred in relation to void properties.

The Task Group agreed that it would be wise to understand the procedure regarding void properties: specifically the process of making the property available for the new occupants.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer suggested that questions on void properties could be linked with queries on repairs.

The Chair said that it would be relevant to know what internal checks and control systems were in place; Councillor Joynes added that it was important that constant reviews were conducted in order to understand which processes worked well and which did not.

The Chair raised the issue of the recently-introduced service charges stating that he had received a considerable quantity of casework on this matter.

Councillor Collett advised that several residents had contacted her as they felt that they were paying twice for the same work to be carried out. She added that there appeared to be several different ideas on what the charges were actually for and suggested that more clarity was required.

The Chair agreed with other members of the Group that the Trust could be more transparent when dealing with these charges.

How the Task Group wishes to gather the views of residents and tenants.

The Chair asked from whom the Task Group would like to obtain evidence and information. He considered that information from the Trust would be imperative and added that it was probable that at least two residents from his ward would be prepared to give evidence.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer reminded Members that questions should be limited to the scope of the Task Group and should not include any other matters.

The Task Group then discussed how evidence could be gathered.

The Chair referred to page 3 of the evaluation table and said he considered that evidence could be gained from a survey of residents and also through the Trust's annual report.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer explained that whilst the Council did not have access to residents' addresses, it would be possible to conduct the survey with the assistance of the Trust and residents' associations. She added that surveys could also be achieved through invitation to tenant groups although numbers of invitees should be limited. She suggested that a meeting could be arranged where small groups of residents could meet with Members on an informal basis in order to discuss issues on which they had concerns.

The Task Group considered that this would work well as invitees could include a diversity of local residents and feedback would also be easier to obtain through a focus group. The Chair advised that residents could write comments for posting in a 'suggestions box' if they did not wish to speak to individual councillors at the meeting.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer suggested that a letter of invitation be drawn up which could be forwarded to tenant groups.

It was noted that it would not be possible for officers to minute the informal meetings with residents.

Suggestions to advertise the survey included an item in the Watford Observer, information in the 'About Watford' magazine and a poster.

It was considered wise to conduct the survey before consultation with Watford Community Housing Trust.

The Chair suggested that other councillors could be invited to the consultation meeting with the Trust.

ACTIONS:

1. To devise a survey for residents asking for their views on:
 - Communication with the Trust
 - Repairs
 - Complaints
 - What the Trust does well and what could be improved

Members to format questions and email to other members of the task group by the following week.

2. Service Charges:
 - To request clarity from the Trust on what the service charges cover.
 - It was agreed that different areas of the borough would require different letters on this issue.
3. Informal meetings:
 - Members to collect information at the informal meetings and then collate responses.
 - A box to be made available for written comments.
 - A meeting room to be booked: possibly the amenity area on the ground floor
 - Two sessions could be held on the same evening: possibly at 6.00 p.m. and 7.00 p.m.
4. Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer to email Councillor Johnson to update on the current meeting.

5. **DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

It was AGREED that the next meeting would take place after the forthcoming elections. 13th and 15th May were suggested. Members to email Democratic Services to advise which date would be most convenient.

Chair
Watford Community Housing Trust Task Group

The meeting started at 6.35 p.m.
and finished at 7.30 p.m.

f 30/04

Agenda Item 4

Watford Community Housing Trust Repairs service - Residents' survey

* Please circle as appropriate

1.	Are you happy with the Trust's housing repairs service? YES* / NO*
2.	When you call the Trust with a housing issue are you satisfied with the way in which your issue is dealt with? YES* / NO*
3.	Would you be willing to complete a satisfaction slip once work to your home is completed? YES* / NO*
4.	Once the service charges are agreed and set do you feel it is important for each tenant to receive an individual letter, setting out details of what they are paying for? YES* / NO*

Please use the box below for any comments you may wish to make

This page is intentionally left blank

Residents Survey – details of responses to questions

Brief Summary

A total of 30 responses have been received.

Question 1 – 19 out of the 30 responses showed that they were unhappy with the Trust's housing repairs service.

Q2 23 out of the 30 were not satisfied with the way their issues were dealt with by the Housing Trust.

Q3 24 out of the 30 replied that they would be willing to complete a satisfaction slip.

Q4 28 of the responders felt that individual letters should be sent to tenants with details of their service charge.

A full breakdown of each question is shown below.

Question 1 – Are you happy with the Trust's housing repairs service?

Yes	6
No	19
No reply	2
Other responses	Mostly okay – 2 Sometimes – 1
Additional comments to question 1	Yes – when they keep appointments
	Do all own repairs

Question 2 – When you call the Trust with a housing issue are you satisfied with the way in which your issue is dealt with?

Yes	4
No	23
No reply	1
Other responses	Sometimes - 1
Additional comments to question 2	

Question 3 – Would you be willing to complete a satisfaction slip once work to your home is completed?

Yes	24
No	4
No reply	1
Other responses	Not applicable – 1
Additional comments to question 3	

Question 4 – Once the service charges are agreed and set do you feel it is important for each tenant to receive an individual letter, setting out details of what they are paying for?

Yes	28
No	0
No reply	2
Other responses	None
Additional comments to question 4	

Residents Survey – details of responses to questions

Additional Comments

Complaints:

All complaints fall on deaf ears
One member of staff was 'very rude'
Repairs team are rude and one member of staff was 'extremely rude'
Problems with damp and asbestos, 'very poor quality'
Varied degree of satisfaction
Tenants no longer 'at the heart of the Trust'
There should be a scrutiny committee
2-bed flat modified for disability and then asked to pay bedroom tax
Tenants are frightened of complaining
Response time is poor and main switchboard worse now than previously
No inspectors to look at work
Complaints procedure is not working
Residents are scared and would like a permanent manager
Need a permanent manager in order to feel safe

Compliments:

Sheltered accommodation is good quality
People in Clarendon Road (Trust offices?) are good

Services charges:

Tenants paying for a facility which everyone uses
This is 'grey' area – original letter did not sufficiently explain what charges are for
The Trust listens to tenants i.e. service charges to be phased in over 3 years
Charges not itemised
Asked why home owners do not have to pay service charges
Disabled people are discriminated against
Payments on statements do not reflect payments made
Would like payments to be itemised
Takes a minimum of 3 to 5 days before accounts are credited
Should be itemised
Increase in charges from £450 to £660 in one year
Tenants are charged for services which they do not need
Charges need to be sorted out
There should be individual letters explaining the breakdown of charges

Discretionary payments:

No-one knows what is happening
People are 'upset' at paying Ground Maintenance charges

Communication with tenants:

Trust uses a variety of communication methods to keep tenants aware of issues Managers seem to be 'out of their depth' and do not want to listen
'No clarity' from Trust
Lack of information on: Board membership and home improvement matters
Wants relevant info rather than 'crosswords and recipes' – in newsletter presumably?
'Never' consulted on improvements
Lack of communication
'Not specific enough. It can be very complicated . . . not easy to understand'
Difficult to make the Trust understand the urgency of repairs
Trust does not ring back after message left
Letters are too complicated
No response received
No updates received
No confirmation phone calls or emails received
Residents feels the Trust are not always polite on the phone

Repair services:

Repairs staff take the whole call and make appointment at this point or will call back
Repair to sink unsatisfactory
Waited 7 days for electric heater
Had new doors and windows – all fine
All repairs done competently and within acceptable time frame
Believes tenants should pay for services received
Trust does not complete jobs
Rang for 45 minutes before call was answered
Staff did not seem qualified
Flooring inadequate
Faulty property and issues not resolved prior to tenancy starting
Service very poor
Complaints not resolved
Not happy with response – failed appointments
Does all their own repairs so that 'décor does not get ruined'
Mostly ok
Kitchen renewal – 5 visits
Radiator in communal area has never worked despite being reported
3 weeks to repair bin storage / tap repaired within 24 hours
Satisfaction with repairs depends on staff dealing with issues: 35% good / 65% poor
Satisfied with repairs when appointments are kept
Satisfaction slip should be filled in when work completed
Not happy with support workers – they are not helpful enough
Happier with colour choices and type of repair
Accommodating in getting a disabled shower refitted
Contractors did not give good service and were unhelpful regarding colour schemes
Kitchen refit resulted in less space in kitchen
Another company did good job decorating and repairing ceiling
Repairs take too long
Previous contractors very good and clean, current contractors 'rubbish'
Repair work on-going for some time but has not resulted in any improvement
When a response is received the work is 'sometimes' good
Work on windows and doors not done properly