

MINUTES OF RESIDENTS' FORUM

Wednesday 16th December 2009



Present: James Scott (Resident Involvement Officer)
Sally Thirkettle (Housing Manager)
Martin Buddery (Operations Director)
Councillor John White (Board Member)
Mr J Simmons Mr B Cotier
Mr F Woods Mrs J Simmons
Mrs P Kirk Mrs S Woods
Mr A Rogers

1. INTRODUCTION & APOLOGIES

James introduced all attendees. Apologies were received from P. Kemp.

2. FEEDBACK FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

None discussed

3. HOW ARE WE DOING?

Sally talked through some of the Society's performance figures covering areas such as Customer Services efficiency, estate services resident satisfaction, complaints, rent arrears, day to day repairs done within target time, voids etc. Discussion ensued around various areas and residents were pleased that Colne is largely hitting its targets or appears on course to do so in most areas. However, Martin noted that there have been an increased number of complaints regarding gas servicing and that this appears to be largely due to a major change in the contractors' personnel. However, this will be monitored closely to ensure that any current problems are resolved. Performance will be reviewed towards the end of the financial year. Sally said that although rent arrears are going down gradually it is unlikely that this years target will be met. Approximately half of the figure is due to councils, rather than residents, being in arrears.

One resident said that Trevor Bentons turned up without phoning first. Martin said that this was fine if they were in the area before the appointment was due and simply asked if it was convenient to carry out the works early, although residents should not feel under any obligation to allow works to be carried out at times other than the stated appointment.

4. SHORT NOTICE INSPECTIONS

James provided some background on the new regime of short notice inspections, explaining that Colne will face an inspection by the Audit Commission with just 5 days notice at some point in the future. He further explained that these inspections will focus on outcomes for residents. Martin said that Colne are currently recruiting residents who would like to become involved in producing a self assessment document which will be useful at inspection time – response from residents has been very healthy so far. A one page leaflet explaining this in more detail was passed to all attendees.

5. POLICY REVIEWS

Responsive Repairs and Maintenance Policy

Martin outlined the main points contained within the current policy and reminded all present of the response time categories currently employed. Discussion then ensued around whether Colnes' policy should state that we aim to complete repairs in one visit, whether the policy should specify what repairs Colne is not responsible for (as in the Repairs handbook), whether the policy should say more about how we respond to the needs of residents with disabilities/elderly residents/residents with long term illnesses, whether we have got it right in terms of what repairs are treated as emergencies and urgent and what are routine, whether our approach to appointments is right, whether the policy should say what information residents get about repairs performance, how this is communicated and how often.

One resident asked about jobs that are considered residents' responsibilities (e.g. bleeding radiators, light bulb replacement and window cleaning) and how this works in terms of those who are physically incapable of carrying out these tasks. Martin said that Colne will take this into account and he agreed with residents that this may need to be made more explicit in the policy.

Residents agreed that it seemed like a good idea to merge 'A', 'B' and 'C' emergency response categories as long as any 'dangerous' works were treated with maximum priority.

Residents agreed that the policy should state that Colne aims to complete repairs in one visit.

Residents agreed that the policy should state explicitly what information residents get about repairs performance, how this is communicated and how often.

Residents said that confirmations/reminders of repairs appointments would be a good idea, although also noted that certain methods (e-mail, text messaging) would be limited by the number of residents in possession of the particular technology required.

Martin explained that due to around 1 in 10 routine jobs needing to be pre-inspected, the extra time that this takes means that some jobs can fall outside of Colnes 15 day target for routine repairs. He added that, on average, most housing providers have a routine response time of 20 days. Residents agreed that increasing Colnes' routine response time to 20 days (which may then cover the time taken to pre-inspect and carry out the repair) seems like a sensible idea.

Asset Management Policy

Due to lack of time Martin asked all attendees to take away a short document which outlines what the policy is intended to do, why it is relevant to residents and why their input is important. He also outlined minimum property standards (which Colne exceed in many areas). He asked residents to feedback to the Society on the discussion points at the end of the document.

6. FURNITURE SCHEMES

This item was added to the agenda at the request of a resident. James outlined some of the ways that residents in different areas can dispose of large household items (e.g. furniture, white goods etc) via charitable organisations or local councils. These included the British Heart Foundation, Chelmsford Borough Council, Colchester Furniture Project (The Shake Trust), Colchester Borough Council, the CROFT community project (Chelmsford), Emmaus, Freecycle, Give or Take, Tendring Furniture Scheme and T.R.E.E. (Tendring Reuse Employment Exercise).

7. RESIDENT 'ROUND UP':

CONFIDENTIAL – full minutes only available to attendees.

9. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING:

6.00pm on 17th March 2010. Greenstead Community Centre, Hawthorn Avenue, Colchester, Essex, CO4 3QE.