

-TENANTS ADVISORY GROUP

Monday 28 January 2002

PRESENT:

Councillor ELKIN (Chairman); Councillor BELSEY (Deputy Chairman); and Councillors LEGGETT (as substitute for Potter), Mrs MURRAY and Mrs POOLEY.

TENANT REPRESENTATIVES:

Hampden Park Tenants Association – Mr D McGOWAN

Compton Court - Mr J RIDDINGTON

Old Town Tenants Association - Mr S NORWOOD

Langney Central Tenants Association – Mr M BRYAN, Mr B ELPHICK

Archery Court - Mr D LEWIS

New Derby House – Mr SHREEVES

North Langney Tenants Association - MS I SIMS

Stirling Court - Mr P WALLIS

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr N Fuller (Director of Housing, Health and Community Finance), Ms J CANNY (Head of Housing Management), Ms G MORGAN (Tenant Participation Officer), Mr A CHANNON (Tenant Services Manager).

(Apologies for absence were received from Mr and Mrs Kenward, Mr D Young, Mrs J Croft and Councillor Potter).

20. MINUTES. The minutes of the meeting held on 16 October 2001 were submitted and approved and the Chairman was authorised to sign them as a correct record.

21. STAFFING ISSUES. A copy of the current staffing structures, including Housing Management and Housing Needs and Strategy, had been circulated with the agenda, following a request by Members at the last meeting of the Tenants Advisory Group. Members noted that a structure would be circulated every six months and a report detailing staffing changes would be written as and when necessary.

NOTED.

22. PROGRAMMED WORKS/MAINTENANCE CONTRACTS. A paper summarising contract work currently being undertaken or planned had been circulated with the agenda.

§ Window Replacement - Members were informed that there had been some delays to the introduction of the window replacement contract and that the full programme should be starting in May 2002, with full completion by October 2002.

§ Conversion of Gwent Court - Members were informed that that extensive consultation had been carried out with the tenants of Gwent Court regarding the conversion to one and two bedroom self-contained flats. Tenants would be offered assistance with the temporary move to other accommodation while the work was carried out. Tenants would also be given the opportunity to remain in their new accommodation or return to Gwent Court once the works had been completed. It was anticipated that the work would commence in May 2002.

§ TV Systems - Members were advised that the Council were planning to carry out two pilot schemes for the installation of IRS (Integrated Reception Systems) which would replace existing TV installations with combined terrestrial and satellite TV and radio reception. An initial system was proposed for one Retirement Scheme namely Gwent Court, and one General-purpose block of flats. However it had become apparent that the market was still unclear as to the future direction of IRS. Further research would be required.

§ Members requested further information regarding the installation of a lift at Archery Court. The Group was advised that the works were due to commence Monday 28 January 2002, Ms J Canny stated that she would investigate why the work had not commenced and report to the Tenants directly on the morning of the 29 January 2002.

§ Argyll Court - The Group was advised that the Council were awaiting revised costings for the lay-by scheme at Argyll Court; the works would commence before the end of the current financial year.

The Group also discussed various other aspects including contractor obligations especially heating and gas servicing. Tenants were urged to make use of the Tenant satisfaction survey so that any problems could be dealt with quickly.

NOTED.

23. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION STRATEGY 2002 TO 2005. The Group considered the report of the Director of Housing Health and Community Finance regarding the Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy 2002/2005.

Members were advised that two versions of the strategy had been prepared, a complete document for statutory and voluntary agencies and a shortened version designed for distribution to members of the public, which contained advice and information. The two documents had been forwarded to all tenants representatives with a questionnaire for feedback.

The draft strategy would then be reviewed and amended following the aforementioned consultation. Members noted that the final strategy would be published on the 1st April 2002.

The Group was also advised that the activities of the Partnership, during the lifetime of the strategy, would address six priority areas that reflected a balance between the demands of the community that had been evidenced through consultation and data collection exercises and the crime reduction priorities from the Home Office. These were:

· The fear of crime	· Substance misuse
· Violent crime	· Vehicle crime
· Domestic burglary	· Anti-social behaviour

Each section of the strategy contained targets and actions. The actions would be monitored in order to assess their effectiveness in achieving crime and disorder reduction targets. Targets for violent crime, domestic burglary and vehicle crime would be taken each year from the Sussex Policing Plan. An annual report on performance of the partnership would also be published.

The Group discussed various aspects of the strategy including reporting incidents, substance misuse, the 'Right Here, Right Now' scheme and the use and difficulty of serving Anti Social Behaviour Orders.

The Group was also informed that the Neighbourhood Warden Scheme bid had been successful and recruitment would begin as soon as possible.

NOTED.

24. BEST VALUE REVIEW OF HOUSING MANAGEMENT (PART 2). The Group considered the report of the Tenant Services Manager regarding the progress of the Best Value Review and highlighting a specific recommendation about the Tenants Advisory Group.

The Group were informed that a number of items in all three-service areas had been highlighted so far. These would all be investigated for potential improvement or implementation either during the course of the review or in the longer term.

They included:

- Improvements to Rent statements and letters
- Review of rent arrears procedures (to ensure early intervention)
- Promotion of the importance of paying rent and all the different methods available for payment
- Rent account balancing (Investigation of weekly balances)
- Review of nuisance procedures
- Improvements to systems for issuing keys to tenants (particularly communal entrance keys)
- Role of Estate caretakers (how more of their time can be spent on estate management duties)
- Improving publicity for Tenants Associations
- Producing a leaseholder handbook with input from leaseholders

Investigating funding opportunities for tenant groups

Members noted that the Review Group had highlighted the issue of the Tenants Advisory Group itself and how

tenants could be more involved.

In order to allow tenants to have more input into the agenda, it was proposed that the Tenants Association Forum (comprising representatives from all Tenant Associations) be used.

The Tenants Association Forum meets approximately 6 weeks before Tenants Advisory Group (TAG), items that tenants wanted on the agenda could be agreed and reports prepared in time for the next meeting of the TAG.

The Tenants were advised that they could contact either the Chairman Councillor Elkin (01323 415777) or the Housing Officers directly, namely Jan Canny (01323 415306) and Adrian Channon (01323 415325), in order to request that items be put on the agenda.

Tenants were also advised that items may possibly be included after the agenda had been distributed, up to two days prior to the meeting, order to give time for the Officers to prepare and respond. These issues would be considered further at the next Review Group meeting.

NOTED.

25. COUNCIL HOUSING RENT SETTING AND DETAILS OF RENT SETTING PROCESS FOR 2002/2003. The Group considered the report of the Head of Housing Management Officer regarding the new mechanisms for setting rents and also outlining the proposals for the rent levels for 2002/2003 for all of Eastbourne Borough Council's housing tenants.

Members were reminded that Cabinet on the 5th December 2001, had agreed that Council housing rents would in future, be set in accordance with the Governments proposals to achieve rent convergence over a ten-year period. In effect, future rents for all social housing tenancies would be set utilising a specific formula. In simple terms, the higher the capital value of an area, and the higher the local earnings, tenants could expect to pay a higher rent than those living in areas where the opposite factors exist.

The Group were advised that the required rent changes varied from property to property. The range of actual changes on the individual tenants rent levels for 2002/03 varied from a 2.3% reduction to a 9% increase. Some 949 tenants would receive a reduction in their rent and 387 tenants, an increase of more than 4%. The full range of rent changes and the link to property type were detailed in appendix 1.

By 2011/12 it was estimated that 87% of all Eastbourne rents would be within 5% of target. As yet the Government had not decided how those rents not meeting this target would be dealt with.

Members were advised that the Council was obliged to ensure that all tenants were given 28 days notice of any changes to their tenancy, including changes to the rent they pay. Tenants were advised that the letters would not include individual percentage rent increases, but that they would include the actual cost of their rent as at 1 April 2002. Tenants wishing to know the percentage increase could contact Mrs D Sampson (01323 415342), Mrs J Canny (01323 415306) or Mr A Channon (01323 415325) at the Housing Department for further information.

NOTED.

26. OUTCOME OF HOUSING INVESTMENT PROGRAMME BID. The Group considered the report of

the Head of Housing Management regarding the outcome of the Housing Investment Programme bid.

The Members noted that the amount anticipated to be forthcoming as an allocation under the Major Repairs Allowance was for £2,363,000. The sum awarded was for £2,427,000. It was hoped that this would be supplemented by additional funding through the single capital pot and a decision on this would be made by the end of this financial year.

The Group was also advised that the proposed programme contains a variety of works, which Tenants and Members were familiar with. It included:

- Replacement Windows £425,000
- Kitchen and Bathroom Improvements £125,000
- HEET scheme £150,000
- Extensions, Disabled adaptations and Retirement Court Access works £400,000
- Essential repairs including roofing, plumbing, heating and rewiring £660,000
- Environmental Improvements including monies specific to the North Langney area £100,000
- Upgrade/conversions of facilities to bed sitter accommodation £350,000

There were also proposals to continue with the Safer Homes Scheme and to undertake further fire precautions work to the stock. It was also anticipated that further funds would be used for the Cash Incentive Scheme to ensure that the Council continued to make the best possible use of the housing stock. It was anticipated that updates on how this programme would be delivered would be made at future Tenant Advisory Group meetings.

Members also noted that work had already commenced on the development of the next 5-year housing strategy. There would be many more opportunities for Tenants to make their views known and it was anticipated that further reports would be brought to Tenants Advisory Group on this matter.

NOTED

The meeting closed at 7.50 p.m.

D ELKIN

Chairman