

Social Inclusion Scrutiny Committee

Tenant Participation Working Group

Notes of a meeting held on Monday 23 February 2004

Present: Cllr Shaw (Chair), Tony Gamble (TCC), Ed Butler (LBC),
Maureen Little (Beds Pilgrims), Mike O'Sullivan (Beds Pilgrims),
Paul Hemming (Aldwyck)

Apologies: Linda & Ray Mitchell (TCC), Jill Jackson (Social Services),
Cllr Timoney, Cllr McGarvie

1. Welcome

Cllr Shaw opened the meeting.

2. Notes of the meeting held on 28 January 2004

The notes of the meeting held on 28 January 2004 were agreed.

3. Policies and Statements from Housing Associations

a) Beds Pilgrims Housing Association

Maureen Little the Community Development Officer from Beds Pilgrims presented their policies and statements. The housing association has recently gone through a review of all policies relating to all tenants, service users and leaseholders.

Tenant Communication Strategy

Came into force in April 2003. The aim of the policy is to respond to the strategic direction set out in their corporate plan, taking into account the principles of the investors in communities accreditation programme, which the Association is currently piloting and also supports the sustainable communities project plan. All staff and departments are involved in its implementation and departments are asked to develop an action plan that is monitored by a steering group of the Customer Services Committee enabling customers to become involved. The five main objectives are to:

- i) Involve tenants collectively and individually in the development, delivery and review of service standards
- ii) Develop structures and mechanisms that provide tenants with greater choice and more voice
- iii) Enable tenants to become more influential by supporting them to develop their knowledge, skills and capacity
- iv) Increase accountability
- v) Encourage and support tenants who want to become more actively involved in tackling social, economic and environmental issues of benefit to their communities

The sustainable communities project plan has three themes:

- a) resident and community involvement
- b) improving the quality of life
- c) tackling poverty

Tenants Panel

Became operational from 1 February 2004. Their main purpose is to provide a process for tenants to support the association in decision-making and is a way of providing open, honest and constructive feedback. All tenants are given a chance to participate and are consulted on a regular basis. Each department is asked to develop an action plan that is monitored. Results from recent consultation show tenants preferred to be contacted four times a year, and for this contact to be made through focus groups, internet, home visits, phone or by mystery shopping. The information collected is feedback to those involved and reported quarterly in the newsletter. The Customers Services Committee takes the ultimate decisions forward.

What are the Association's views on tackling poverty and improving quality of life for tenants?

The Association works in partnership with other social housing landlords and local businesses developing a range of initiatives training opportunities offered residents equipping them with skills to enter employment. Advice and help to residents in relation to benefit entitlements is also offered. In relation to improving quality of life, the Association recognises that residents living in social housing are more likely to suffer from crime, poor health, low educational attainment etc. for these reasons the association aims to work with other agencies and residents to improve the quality of life for all residents. One example given was the association is shortly to enter into partnership with Electrolux and is also working in partnership with Papworth and Presentation housing associations to deliver community development for that area.

What are the Association's views on setting up a joint management boards with other housing associations?

The Association is willing to work with anyone as long as it is of benefit for that area.

What are the Association's views on areas already in receipt of SRB funding?

The Association cannot see a problem with this and has in the past funded 50% towards Street Wardens in Bedford the rest came from Bedford Borough Council.

There then followed an in depth discussion in which, a view was expressed on if the council decided to change the structures already in place, which would need the Executive approval. It was mentioned that the council would shortly be conducting a stock option appraisals review and part of that review would include the communication strategy for tenants, which is done by the ODPM. If as part of this scrutiny review a recommendation was made to change the structures in place, it could affect the council's 2 star rating. The review should look at other ways of forming a joint working group. If a joint management board were to be considered there would be a need to consider separating the tenant participation function from within housing and placing it within

community development. There would also be the need for housing associations to maintain their individual structures, which would include neighbourhood renewal people who would feedback what is happening in the community.

The group further discussed the lack of communication between the Council and housing association agreeing that this is one of the biggest problems causing work to be duplicated. It was noted not all tenants wanted to get involved and the importance of working together. Beds Pilgrims and Aldwyck were asked if they were invited on area tours, as this was a way to become involved in what's happening in the communities in which they have housing stock. It was mentioned that there is a Bedfordshire Tenant Participation Group who work on community issues who should ensure all three counties are involved.

All new tenants at Beds Pilgrims are informed about tenant participation. Tenants are kept up to date with what's happening in their area, which works well in Bedford where the Association has a large amount of housing stock but becomes difficult to maintain with properties based outside Bedford.

The association is a multi cultural organisation housing people from black and minority ethnic groups and is in the process of gaining accreditation for IIP (investors in people). This accreditation is already set up in two communities who are working with the police. Two small working groups have been formed with responsibilities for shared ownership and BPHA tenants. The working groups carry out the work with little involvement from the housing association.

How successful have these schemes been?

The police have responded to both the communities with support but have yet to contribute to the scheme. The association has also formed partnerships with community safety to tackling poverty and packs are offered to new tenants advising on benefit entitlements, pensions etc. the housing association also offers support in terms of training and develop within the community helping tenants get back into employment. The association has increased the staffing levels in the community development team to 20 funded of which, 7 are full time, the rest are project based out in the community funded by SRB.

If scrutiny were to recommend that each housing association retains its existing structures, but would like a joint management board arrangement. Would you inform your tenants its existence?

All tenants would be notified of the board's existence.

TG said that for such a recommendation to take place this would first need to go through the tenant's panel and then full council.

b) Aldwyck Housing Association

Paul Hemming the Tenant Participation Officer for Aldwyck Housing Association said Aldwyck takes a different approach. The mission statement is “to provide the best quality housing they can and to offer the appropriate level of support to people of greatest need”. Their goal is “to provide a high quality and effective service for tenants, leaseholders, residents and clients”.

Aldwyck’s residents are very diverse and the Association puts a lot of emphasis on encouraging and motivating residents in becoming active. The Association has in Luton 878 properties in Luton. There largest is located in Lewsey Farm, which has 415 properties. Research shown that the simplest way to get resident input and contributions on how well the association is performing is from the residents themselves, who are in the prime position to judge how good the service is. Results are stored in a customer database and findings are reported to the business committees.

Customer survey programmes are used by the Association to find out what residents think of the service:

- Satisfaction survey was conducted in 2001 that determines priorities for the customer improvement programme.
- A BME satisfaction survey was conducted in 2002 outlined the difference between the different ethnic groups.
- Satisfaction survey conducted 2003
- Leaseholders survey 2003 – commission by the leaseholders service review group
- New tenant survey given on all tenancies – results are reported to housing support services committee
- Repairs satisfaction monitoring – questionnaires are sent to residents so that they can feedback on service received
- Caretaking and grounds maintenance survey – annual review of satisfaction with specific services

The Association holds resident’s conferences twice a year (spring for all residents and autumn for leaseholders), which are workshop based with opening and closing plenary sessions chosen by the residents. These conferences are seen as an opportunity for residents to feedback and raise issues, and can be used as a recruitment mechanism for the:

- Residents consultative committees
- Value management process
- Leaseholders committee set up as a result
- Editorial committee

Housing Officers at Aldwyck play a more active role as they have responsibility for patch based working ensuring face to face contact with residents. Housing Officers are responsible for setting up meetings, scheme audits, scheme improvements and giving support and encouragement to residents groups.

Resident meetings are estate base. Each patch holds two meetings per year. The first meeting will identify problems; the second will feedback the action that has been taken. Meetings are arranged to encourage residents to set up their own groups and to be responsible for setting their own agenda and to determine their frequency.

Scheme Audits

Aldwyck allocates £100k for scheme audits. Each housing officer is allocated £3,000 per patch for improvement schemes. The association was asked about whether they would be willing to jointly fund projects with Area Committees Budgets and could not seeing this being a problem.

Do any of the housing associations use tenant voices?

Beds Pilgrims don't but do require one person to be a BPHA resident and are called community champions.

Aldwyck do have a partnership working arrangements in Broxbourne and accept that they have difficulty with involving the community.

What do you think of inviting TPAS along to this group to give us ideas on getting residents more involved and if they would be willing to share the costs?

Aldwyck agreed in sharing the cost, but were unsure if TPAS would be able to deliver what the group wanted and suggested having a joint group of Landlords like the HARI Group in Watford.

Beds Pilgrims agreed to this suggestion, which should include the Council and said there would need to be some mechanism for allocating responsibility.

It was overall agreed for the need to improve communication and to jointly work together that would be beneficial when applying for funding.

EB said that the community consultation strategy is part of the stock option review. It was agreed for the scrutiny review to recommend a working group of consisting of LBC, TCC, and housing associations be set up and for that group to look at joining up tenant participation across Luton. It was also suggested that the group includes regeneration and community development officers.

Are Housing Association aware of meeting dates for Area Committees?

Neither was aware of this information. It was suggested that dates of meetings should be sent to housing associations, as these meeting are open to all residents in Luton and is another portal where issues could be raised.

Closing Remarks

The group decided that:

1. The group should talk to the HARI Group and include regeneration schemes into consultation.
2. There is a need to set up a group incorporating all seven housing association partners, 2 people from TCC, officers from HSS and member of SI scrutiny committee.
3. Nicola Reeve to be invited to discuss the various consultation methods that are available.
4. It was agreed that for the first item on the agenda for the group should be 'how to include tenants'.
5. All seven housing association partners should be invited to join the group.

Meeting ended at 7.25pm