

# Mid Wales Housing Tenants' and Residents' Forum

## Meeting – Plas Dolerw 5<sup>th</sup> February 2010

### **Attending: Tenants Forum Members:**

Bryan Douglas Matthews	Susan Dixon
Debra Douglas-Matthews	Sandra Burt
Bryan Owen	Kath Rees
Christine White	Mary Vaughan
Megan Jones	

Jim Lloyd	Chair of The Board
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### **Staff Members:**

Jane Jones	CASS Manager
Aidan Ackerman	Director of Operational Services
Patrick Tyrrell	Acting Director of Corporate Services
Hilda Fix	CASS

Peter Bungay	Welsh Tenants Federation
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### **Apologies:**

Debbie Crewe	Heather Jones
Anne Burton	Keith Rowlands

At the beginning of the meeting the Chair read out a statement and tendered his resignation as Chair of TaRF with immediate effect, although remaining as an ordinary member. He resigned over the issue of the conflict of interest brought up at the recent Board Meeting: it was his opinion that there was no conflict of interest and both he and another member felt compelled to resign from the Board. He also felt unable, therefore, to continue as Chair of Tarf. He complimented Jane Jones and Aidan Ackerman and thanked them for their hard work. He believes any opinions will in future be construed as negative and that TaRF will, in future, be ineffective.

With the agreement of those present, Bryan Owen, as Deputy Chair took over as Chair.

JJ stated that the Association would now be actively recruiting new members for TaRF. A member commented that active recruitment was brought up 12 months ago but that nothing had been done. JJ reported it is now in the Business Plan for next year and that MWAHA will recruit a dedicated Tenant Liaison officer, which is something TaRF have been requesting for some time.

One member, attending for the first time, was doing so as she and her neighbours had no real idea of what the purpose of the TaRF was.

Patrick mentioned the legal issue with regard to Tenant Board Members and the question of the conflict of interest. This was discussed around the table. Jim Lloyd discussed conflict of interest with regard to his other responsibilities and that he is careful not to bring tenancy issues to any Board he is/has served on and that he endeavours not let items crossover the need to wear two hats. He was representing MWHAs Board at this TaRF meeting: mentioning the good results from the status survey.

The Minutes of the meeting of 4<sup>th</sup> December 2009 were read through for accuracy and accepted. Any changes are detailed below.

### **Matters Arising**

- The problem with arials was brought up.
- The TEG grant was unsuccessful: the main reason being that WAG believed that MWHAs should be funding the activities listed within the TEG application.
- Complaints are kept on record permanently (not just for three months). In response to a question by a member it was clarified that the complainant would know who is dealing with the complaint as there is a name at the bottom of the letter and a reference number.
- Tenant Satisfaction Survey. A member had previously proposed that MWHAs should find out more about their tenants. The profiling section at the back of the Survey addressed this, though of course was only completed by just under 50% of the tenants. The information provided by those completing the survey will be uploaded onto the Housing system over the next few months. Aidan said that his team would be targeting the non-responsive tenants to try to obtain profiling information. This would be updated when the Association is aware of a change in tenants' circumstances. It was asked if a date could be added to the system to show when the information was last updated. This was considered to be a good idea.
- Incentive of £100.00 Jane apologised but did not remember making a remark about a £100 incentive, but that a working group was required to see if an incentive was possible. Members present did question the need for an incentive.
- Tenant and Residents' Association (TRA) representatives. There is currently only one TRA in existence and members had been invited to the TaRF meeting.
- Complaints. Patrick showed those present the complaints booklet and the letter that goes out. It was thought that a line should be inserted in the letter regarding the next stage. Specific complaints are given a direct line and the CASS number was given for general complaints. In response to a query Jane reported that all complaints are logged and are therefore given a reference number. It was requested that all calls are logged, even if the call is put through to a specific person. It was stated that other HAs log all incoming calls and that MWHAs should be able to do the same. Jane explained how

Contact Management worked and the different streams, i.e. Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB), Call Backs, Complaints and Compliments. Patrick asked for an explanation of the ASB system and how the letters were auto generated. Peter explained how Merthyr Tydfil logged all incoming calls on sheets: the caller; who it was directed to; the nature of the call; what happened afterwards etc. These sheets were reviewed every three months to look for any trends. He also said that the systems within different organisations vary considerably.

- Stock Condition Survey. Aidan reported that with effect from April photos will be taken of properties at tenancy sign up as a record of the property condition when taken over by the new tenant.
- Broken Windows. It was reported that Board had done nothing regarding this issue. JJ stated that different HA's did different things regarding broken windows: MWHA's current policy is that we do not pay. Patrick will review the broken window policy. It was asked if MWHA carried insurance if the broken window was as the result of a crime. JJ confirmed this but pointed out that there is an excess of £2,500.00.
- The fact that no equality and diversity training had yet taken place was mentioned. JJ said that TPAS could be asked to provide training, but one member disagreed because the training should be allied with MWHA Policy. JJ stated that TPAS could be provided with a copy of MWHA's policy. Peter pointed out that Equality and Diversity is currently being reviewed by WAG but that a first review meeting had not yet been arranged.
- HEES Grant. The HEES Grant had been looked into by a previous Director, but not taken up. Aidan will look into EAGA grant to see about free insulation.

### **Code of Conduct**

Aidan brought up the Code of Conduct and thanked Bryan Owen for his help in compiling it. He explained the summary card which is to be carried by all contractors. One comment was whether the MWHA logo could be made bigger so that the Code of conduct could go into the middle of the logo. The contracts for all contractors will be up in March and Aidan explained that MWHA are currently going through the process of tendering for new contracts. If the Forum were happy with the Code of Conduct, this could be included as part of the contract, and it would be a breach of the contract if it were not adhered to. This would come into effect after April. Aidan explained that the Code would have to be allied with Undod and agreed with them as part of any new contracts. Members were happy with the Code of Conduct and approved it.

### **Community Strategy**

A member suggested producing a CD for tenants who could not read or were blind. Peter Bungay went through the Ombudsman report and gave out copies of the Ombudsman recommendation and explained how it related to the draft code of conduct.

Peter went through the handouts that had already been given out regarding APE, how customers judge us from the communications and their outcomes. He explained that every member of staff of the Association is a communicator depicting what the organisation is about. The Audit Commission realises that there is a pledge

with any communication strategy i.e. reply to e mails within 2 days. A group could be formed to look at any communication policy if one is needed. Peter mentioned that MWA should not be insular and should publicise the things that we do. Staff should attend meetings. He went over how to develop a communication strategy. Tenants are inducted with paper handouts whereas a round table discussion could achieve the same purpose. He mentioned that a fund would be available from T24 for £1,000 for training in the area for tenant groups. Also the Financial Services Authority (FSA) are putting on free debt/financial management training.

Annual visits to tenants were mentioned: Whilst it is acknowledged that a minimum of one visit per annum should be the aim, this is not always practicable: JJ stated that, as an alternative, a flyer will be sent out inviting tenants to request a meeting with staff. Peter brought up the concept of yearly inspections of all properties, especially visits to people who have not contacted the Association for a long time. Peter mentioned 10% stock surveys (generally carried out by most social landlords) and if they were legal under the law (Housing Act 2004) and whether they covered all the different set of hazards. He stated that there is no delay with the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) and that, with the recession; the Association will have to work more closely with tenants due to budget restrictions. It was suggested by a member that any tenant that has not contacted the Association for some time should have their property included in the stock condition survey.

Aidan stated that he would look into visiting with the stock condition survey and JJ said that many tenants do not wish to be visited and that is why the tenants will be invited to request a visit. All visiting officers will in future carry a visiting card to leave if visiting and the tenant is out. It was suggested that tenants who have not contacted the Association within a year should be contacted to see if everything is fine. JJ agreed. The question was asked where the Association stood with regard to bathrooms and the WHQS: Aidan stated that the stock condition report had been delayed and that the final results should be available week commencing 15<sup>th</sup> February. The known weaknesses are window frames, kitchens and showers installations.

Peter mentioned the Mid Wales Regulatory Meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> February at the Mill House Community centre in Newtown. 10.30 for 11.00. At the meeting there will be a discussion on the new Tenant Advisory Panel for regulatory reform, budget cuts and other tenancy issues. All are welcome.

### **Rent Review**

Patrick advised that the rent increase would be 2% in line with WAG but there would be some additional increases in service charges (especially where aerials were concerned). It was mentioned that the sewerage charges (Belle Vue) had increased significantly. Aidan confirmed that this was the case in certain locations and that these increases were being looked into in relation to service charges. Tenants are being advised as to inappropriate material being put into the sewerage system, the manhole covers are being sealed and tenants being advised as to the pumping system that is installed. Patrick said that extraordinary costs would not be passed to tenants via the services charges.

Jim Lloyd and Aidan Ackerman left the meeting after the lunch break.

### **Tenant Board Member Elections**

JJ brought up the Tenant Board Member election for this summer and that a survey had been sent out asking tenants what form the Board Members elections should take. They are presently elected by tenants whilst other Board Members go through an interview process. The questions being: do you feel that we should conduct an assessment of prospective members to see if they have the necessary skills; should tenant board members go through the same process; should Tenant Board Members be treated in the same way as ordinary board members; and should the election be based trying to achieve representation across the geographical area.

One member felt that tenant board members should be processed to see they are competent. One view was that the Association wanted representation from all areas on a representative basis rather than on a number of votes basis. All but one agreed on an interview/informal discussion. There was a discussion as to whether this interview should be before or after the vote. One member believed that independent members are treated differently from Board Members. The issue of people travelling long distances was raised. All were in agreement for equal treatment for all Board Members, with 2 abstentions. It was acknowledged that a process has yet to be developed, but all except one agreed with the concept that Tenant Board Members should be constituency based. The time commitment required in attending Board meetings, conferences, training etc was highlighted.

### **Tenants Day / Conference**

JJ advised that each section in the Association had a Tenants Champion: members asked for a list of these people (detailed below). It was mentioned that the AGM/Fun Days had not in the past been successful. The Tenants Conference could be held in the new offices and the work and responsibilities of each section could be explained to attendees. There could also be workshops e.g. mediation, tenant participation and moving forward, etc. A member of staff is keen to hold art sessions with children to have something for the youngster – also face painting etc. It was suggested that tenants from other housing associations could be invited: this could help bring in speakers and make the day more interesting and enjoyable. Suggestions put forward included: health monitoring; table and chair conference facility; Dean Marsh mixing records; Meet the Contractors; Meet TaRF; Organisations would be asked to attend - CAB, Credit Union, Coleg Powys. There were however concerns over how much transportation would cost – JJ pointed out that this is something that Associations with a diverse spread of properties has to cover but that the tenant participation budget had been increased considerably for 2010/2011 to help cover any costs. The Mid Wales 50 Group would also be written to regarding this idea to obtain views.

### **MWHA Section Tenant Participation Champions:**

Customer and Support Services  
Housing Services

David James  
Jean O'Neill

Asset Management  
Development  
Finance  
Information and Performance

Jo Corfield  
Andrew Jones  
Sandra Jones  
Mo Woosnam

### **Tenant Welcome Packs**

This has gone to Board and was discussed at OMT. It is still in agenda, but there is no specific budget for the next financial year. It was suggested by a member that Tesco/Morrisons/Somerfields could be approached to sponsor these packs.

### **Tenant Inspectors / Mystery Shoppers**

This was put to Board and is in the LTPS Action Plan for quarter 3 2010/2011, though a review of the Action Plan may result in a delay with the start of this. It is thought to be a very good idea but very complex and time consuming for those taking on this role: it was mentioned the length of time the training took.

### **Other Business**

A member brought up the planned maintenance that was presently being carried out on the windows and doors at Belle Vue and that there had been no communication with tenants regarding this. Also that any special instructions with regard to tenants were not being passed on to contractors. JJ said that she would look into these issues.

### **Date of Next meeting**

April 16<sup>th</sup> 2010 – venue to be confirmed.