

SHARING INFORMATION

The sheltered schemes at Simmonds Court and Richard Moss House in central Winchester have enjoyed their first information sharing sessions over a cuppa. Subjects have covered general maintenance, communal cleaning and the standard of grass cutting and shrub borders, and Glynis Cole is very happy to arrange more if you are interested.

If you would like to be kept up to date on the issues that matter to tenants, then give Glynis a call on Freephone 0800 716987 and get your sheltered scheme in on the action.

WHO PAYS?

Cyril Gilbert-Wood writes, "I live at Kings Worthy and recently three things happened there, all of which cost us money:

- we had abandoned cars which had to be removed,
- we had rubbish (doors, pallets, large plastic containers) fly-tipped,
- a communal green plastic wheelie bin was burnt to the ground, which had to be removed and replaced.

We are grateful to our Area Housing Manager for sorting all these things out promptly on our behalf but each of these acts of vandalism costs tenants money to put right. Therefore all of this unnecessary expense will affect the service we receive and the rent we will set later in the year.

Who pays? Well, it's not rocket science as my grandson says. I remind all tenants that there is a very real connection between vandalism, abandoned cars and fly tipping and the service we can expect and the rent we are required to pay.

GRASSED OFF

Weeke residents enjoy and appreciate their large grassed areas and mature trees but unfortunately that pleasure turns to dismay as their problems return each autumn. "Fallen leaves create a hazard for the elderly and mums with young children especially," says Alan Rickman a member of the Weeke Tenants Steering Group. "Not only can it be dangerous underfoot, but it is a backbreaking task just trying to keep your own area clear. Sometimes you can fill six black sacks just to make an impression on your own front garden, paths and steps and the pavement outside your home."



Alan Rickman and Betty Westcott get down to basics

"We will be actively pursuing a long-term solution to this annual problem through TACT and the city's Property & Contracts Forum to see if we can get the County Council on board to provide a more proactive approach. We want Weeke residents to feel safer and enjoy a cleaner environment, instead of paying the price for enjoying the greenery around us."

The new Weeke Steering Group has already notched up its first success. Working with their Area Housing Manager, in response to their recent leaflet drop, they have been able to get extra litter bins sited at the bus stop.

YOUR HOME

In this edition you will have read about Options Appraisal. This means that central government, local government, TACT and your Tenants Associations are now considering the future of your homes here in Winchester.

Local Tenants Associations and TACT groups will be reading and thinking about this Options Appraisal, seeking a balanced view and considering the concerns of all tenants, not just TACT members. At the time of writing TACT does not yet have a collective view but it does know that it has a duty of trust to seek knowledge.

As the Chairmen of TACT, we seek the fullest possible view from all tenants, who surely must have concerns for the future of their homes. One way of doing this would be to support your local tenants association or by joining one of the TACT groups.

In the months and years that lie ahead, decisions will be made concerning your home - central government is demanding this. If you are interested in the future of your home join TACT or your local tenants association. We do sincerely believe that this is a practical method of having your input into the future management of your home.

Call Cyril Gilbert-Wood or Bryan Whitfield if you want to find out more about TACT. Their details are below:

Cyril Gilbert-Wood BEM
22 Mountbatten Place
Kings Worthy
Winchester SO23 7PL
Tel. 01962 884505

Bryan Whitfield
20 Hilly Close
Owslebury
Winchester SO21 1LW
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ConTACT

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LOOKING AFTER YOUR INTERESTS

Ken Gore writes: Over the last few years the Property & Contracts Forum has been looking after your interests with regular meetings every two months. The purpose of these meetings is to ensure that the companies that carry out the contracts for our Council do so to the specification set out in the Tender that the Council publishes.

We are concerned to notice that SERCO has been lacking in the way that it delivers its service to us, the tenant. There seems to be:

1. **an inability on their part to carry out their ten year contract,**
2. **a lack of consideration to the tenant when problems are reported to them and also getting them resolved,**
3. **broken appointments,**
4. **a lack of information to the tenant as to why they cannot do the required work on the day and date given,**
5. **not doing the required work on the new day and date,**
6. **and an unhelpful attitude when ringing SERCO to find out why they could not attend at a given time.**



Ken Gore

These are genuine complaints that you have given to members of the Property & Contracts Forum and to TACT, which we are trying to get resolved on your behalf as we feel that the SERCO management team is not giving tenants the service you pay for and deserve. We understand that as a result of our complaints, changes have been made in the SERCO administrative team, however we would like to stress the importance of filling out the green card after work has been done on your home. In this way the Council can assess how the SERCO contract is being administered.

Please do not be afraid to complain - it is your right to have your repairs carried out in your home within a reasonable time and not to have to put up with broken appointments and excuses. TACT and your Tenants Associations are there for you if you have difficulties or you can ring 01962 840222 and speak to Clive Broomfield, who is the Property Services Manager or someone in his department.

WE ALL NEED A FRIEND

In the last edition of ConTACT we explained why TACT was a member of TPAS (the Tenant Participation Advisory Service). TPAS provides a free advice and information service for tenants of social housing and each of its members can call on it for support and advice at any time.

We asked TPAS to attend our last AGM as TACT feels passionately that all City Council tenants should be informed of the future options for social housing - our homes here in Winchester. The government's vision is to improve social housing and deliver decent homes and it will be the government that is the driving force for these changes, known as Options Appraisal. ***So what are these options?***

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- 1 To remain as we are - probably not an option if central government has anything to do with it.**
- 2 Arms Length Management Organisation - an ALMO would take over management of some services, while the Council remains the landlord.**
- 3 Private Finance Initiative - this is where a contract is let to a managing agent to manage the stock. Private money is invested with the Council, giving land to build private housing. You remain a Council tenant.**
- 4 Large Scale Voluntary Transfer - LSVT means a permanent transfer to a new or existing Registered Social Landlord.**

At a time when tenants need independent, professional advice more than ever, we must acknowledge that we are going to have to pay for an Independent Tenant Advisor (ITA), called a Tenants' Friend.

This service, paid for on a consultancy basis, would support tenants and leaseholders for many months during the life of a major project like this, the aim being to provide tenants with a source of independent advice, totally separate from the Council.

Council tenants can prepare a proposal for precisely what they require of their ITA, with the aim of supplementing or challenging information from both local or central government. This could include holding public meetings, producing newsletters, home visits, re-writing information in Plain English - the possibilities are endless. Thus the service provided by an ITA would be far more comprehensive than the general advice that we have access to from TPAS at the moment.

This service would of course have cost implications, which would have to be met from Housing Revenue Account* funds, as it appears that there is no funding available from central government. TACT has written to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to protest at the lack of funding, which we estimate will cost at least £30,000.

TACT is therefore recommending that we need to employ an Independent Tenant Advisor - a Tenants' Friend - to help us during this Options Appraisal of our homes. We will need a sustained effort, together with project management, as complicated decisions about our homes need to be made by all of us in the months ahead. TACT has already recruited a panel of nine TACT members who will form the selection panel to interview the candidates.

* The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is the council account into which rents and any money from the Government are paid. It pays for repairs, managing and maintaining the housing stock, and repaying any money borrowed for past building and improvements.

STOP PRESS

TACT has now selected TPAS (the Tenant Participation Advisory Service) as our Tenant's Friend.

Watch out for more information from TPAS in the near future.

WORDSEARCH WINNER

Congratulations to Mrs. Joan Cooper from Richard Moss House, whose correct entry was drawn in our Zoological Wordsearch. Your prize is on its way Joan!

TACT meetings are open to all City Council tenants and leaseholders and new members are always welcome. Meetings of the Afternoon Group are held on Wednesdays at Makins Court, Alresford (from 2-4 pm), and of the Evening Group on Wednesdays at The Guildhall, The Broadway, Winchester, (from 7.30 - 9.30 pm), unless held jointly - see dates below:

19 November

21 January

18 February

17 March

21 April

GET IT TAPED

If you are visually impaired or have a friend or neighbour who would like CONTACT delivered to their home on an audio cassette, please call Glynis Cole on Freephone 0800 716987 for your copy today.

WORTH A WALKABOUT?

We believe estate walkabouts can get a lot done, but The Worthys TA are a disappointed bunch right now. Paul Bungey and his team turned out in July to meet the Area Housing Manager and David Taylor from Grounds Maintenance, who paid a flying visit, but there was no representative from the Highways authority or the Area Property Surveyor and high hopes of getting results on the ground were dashed. Tenant participation does work, but it needs a bit of an effort all round to make it work properly.

TEN GO TO BRUM

The TPAS conference held this year was the biggest ever with 780 delegates. The speaker at the opening session was Beverly Hughes MP, the Deputy Home Secretary, who spoke about government strategies to deal with anti-social behaviour within communities. These included introductory tenancies, licensing and housing benefit sanctions. The general consensus among delegates however, was that these measures could only have limited success and in the case of the latter, was probably unworkable.

More work at grass roots level was needed, i.e. within the communities themselves and the success that could be achieved with direct action was amply demonstrated by two of the workshops on Saturday.

The first was a community re-entry programme developed through the experience of Michael Ekwulugo, a black South African of privileged background, who entered into a life of crime in Birmingham after encountering prejudice against his aspirations in this country. Upon being challenged in his behaviour, he finally saw the light and directly from this sprang the Men2Men mission, which acts as a complementary service to other agencies trying to engage disaffected sections of the community. The Men2Men project works with some success to dispel the illusion of failure of young men in the Handsworth community of Birmingham through instilling a sense of purpose and self-worth by teaching communication, social and interpersonal skills, as well as aggression control and fatherhood responsibilities.

The mentoring of victims by those who had already tackled similar problems was also the theme of the second workshop, Exploring Community Housing. This related to the English Churches Group's



Bags packed and ready for the off.

development of Brydon House, run largely by the residents for the re-integration of young people who have turned to crime in order to fund a substance habit. Entry is purely voluntary and residents must abide by a set of rules drawn up with the input from those already there. This is a stage by stage programme where one can graduate, upon successful rehabilitation, from just a room to a small self contained flat before entering the outside world completely. There is no time limit set on this as it has more to do with confidence than time, but those who have succeeded to this stage assist in the programme for newer residents. Delegates could judge the success of this programme for themselves as two of the former residents turned tenants, Jason and Matthew, conducted most of the presentation themselves. I think I can speak for the two other attendees from Winchester when I say that we were all very impressed by these young men.

The above are just two of a varied and interesting programme of workshops. Though this was my first attendance at a TPAS conference, I felt very much involved and also privileged that I was given the chance to learn so much in one weekend. Thanks also to Glynis, Dominic and the TACT members that attended, for helping to make the 15th annual TPAS conference such a memorable occasion for me.

Pam Hatcher-Thorne,
TACT Member, Winnall

INTO THE FUTURE

A wide and varied selection of workshops and debates took place at the TPAS Crystal Ball Annual Conference, from Housing Law Reform, involving older people, innovation into action, sheltered housing in tenant participation to name just a few. Exploring supported housing was one of the workshops I attended. Presented by Rachael Byrne (staff) and Matthew Kearney and Jason McGuffie (tenants) of English Churches Housing Group.

Matthew and Jason, both drug addicts in their time, became residents in one of English Churches Housing Groups homes, to get into one of these homes you have to:

1. **Want to come off drugs and stay off drugs**
2. **Undergo blood and urine tests for the first few weeks**
3. **Random tests after that.**
4. **Regular group therapy three times a week.**
5. **Work on projects with others in home.**
6. **Be trained in skills to make you self - sufficient for life outside home.**

To start with they are given a basic room to keep clean and tidy. Next they progress into a flat of their own providing they haven't lapsed. Previously earning money through part time work locally, there are local traders involved in this scheme where items can be purchased for the flats TV etc.

After a given period of being free from drugs they are allowed to have a flat found outside of the scheme and start a life of their own free from drugs but with support if needed.

I know this requires money but I feel that if we stop all these schemes starting up what chance do young people like Matthew and Jason have, I am pleased to say they should soon have flats of their own outside the scheme but with support. Many people have gone through the scheme and they now live and work in the community. I was moved by the presentation of Matthew and Jason and wish them "God-Speed" for the future free from drugs.

At the end of this session I felt guilty that tenants like myself often put up a fight to stop special needs supported housing in our own back yard.

Alan Rickman,
TACT Vice Chair - Evening Group