

TACT (Tenants and Council Together)
Minutes of meeting held on Thursday 19th January 2023, 10.30am
Walton Room, the Guildhall, Winchester

Attendance:

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| David Light (Chair) | Stanmore |
| David Chafe (Vice Chair) | Stanmore |
| Lin Mellish (Communications) | Kings Worthy |
| Sue Green | Stanmore |
| Jackie Jones | Stanmore |
| Carole Bull | Abbotts Barton |
| Gillian Gutteridge | Hyde |
| Chris Bone | Abbotts Barton |
| Sandra Salter | Winnall |
| Victoria Pemberton | Kings Worthy |
| Karen Alexander | Stanmore |
| Monica Gill | Central |
| Eddie Morgan | Easton |
| Julian Perkins | Hyde |
| Pat Haste | Chesil Lodge |
| Delyse Timmerman | Central |

Guests:

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| Cllr Paula Ferguson | Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Community and Housing |
| Cllr Caroline Horrill | Shadow Portfolio Holder for Housing |
| Dee Jenkins | Performance and Projects Manager |
| Janette Palmer | Housing Policy and Projects Manager |
| Karen Thorburn | Service Lead – Strategic Housing |
| Kevin Reed | Senior Private Sector Housing Officer |
| Lucy Spence | Tenant Involvement Officer |

| | Actions |
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| <p>1. Welcome, introductions and apologies</p> <p>Apologies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ David and Linda Blyth ▪ Valerie Adcock ▪ Ted Shepherd ▪ Doug Dobson ▪ Jackie Jones ▪ Peter Beard ▪ Dick Johnson – Finance Manager: Housing | |

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| | <p>Before commencing the meeting The Chair passed on the sad news that Sheila Burns and Sue Down, both longstanding members of TACT, recently passed away. He wished to express condolences on behalf of all of TACT to their families.</p> | |
| 2. | <p>Minutes of meeting on 23rd November 2022</p> <p>True record Minutes proposed as being a true and accurate record with the amendment requested by Cllr Horrill that the minutes are changed to read `Shadow Portfolio Holder for Housing. Agreed by all present.</p> | |
| 2.3 | <p>Matters arising - actions from previous meeting</p> <p>Updates and feedback on actions from the previous meeting set out in an Addendum circulated at the meeting. No queries were raised.</p> <p>Feedback on how TACT's views have been used.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HRA budget paper – is on this meeting's agenda. • Mini survey of TACT / independent review – The Chair will discuss this under the next agenda item. • Carbon Survey – Those who attended the focus groups have received feedback. The recent Heating Survey is still being analysed. | |
| 3. | <p>TACT Chair TACT Review</p> <p>Results of the Tenant Engagement Review survey completed before Christmas 2022. There were 16 responses to the consultation questions.</p> <p>100% of respondents agreed with the statement made by officers as to why the council should have a tenant engagement plan – 'To know our customers and their priorities to shape our business on balanced feedback'.</p> <p>Question 2 – Do you support a review by an outside organisation? Yes - I support an independent review - 10 No - I don't support an independent review - 5 Not Answered – 1</p> <p>Question 3 - Do you have a preference as to who you would like to carry out a review? I don't support a review - 1 I think a review can be completed without bringing in an independent organisation - 4</p> | |

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| | <p>ARCH (Association of Retained Council Housing) - 6 HQN – Residents Network (Housing Quality Network) - 6 HQN (Housing Quality Network) - 2 TPAS (Tenants Participation Advisory Service) - 10</p> <p>Janette Palmer clarified the position from an officer perspective. HQN have been requested to submit a proposal and quote to undertake a review of the tenant involvement service.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A question was asked as to what HQN would do? <p>The review will look into how the tenant engagement service works across the council. This will include the Building and Fire Safety resident information and all areas that come under The Charter For Social Housing Residents: Social Housing White Paper. Where the service is falling short? Who we're not talking to? Etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How were HQN chosen? <p>HQN are seen as sector leaders. Other organisations either didn't offer this service or would approach with a different focus.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can tenants influence policy change? <p>Janette stated that tenants influencing policy change is the reason for tenant engagement. An example was given about issues with rat tunnels in a garden left over after vermin control has been completed. Gilly Knight spoke to the tenant about individual issues after the meeting.</p> <p>A TACT member stated that they should also be involved in the review process. Janette confirmed that TACT and other involved tenants will have the opportunity to be involved.</p> <p>Janette asked whether a separate independent review of TACT outside of the council led project was required. The Chair asked the group how they would like to proceed. All present agreed that TACT should be included in the review rather than carrying out something completely separate. This is as long as tenants are involved with the review.</p> | |
| 4. | <p>Gilly Knight, Corporate Head of Housing HRA Budget Options Update</p> <p>Gilly explained she is here to give an update following the briefing in December when all involved tenants were invited to attend. There are not many options within the budget and this is recognised, mostly due to unprecedented inflationary rates affecting the HRA planning and budget options.</p> | |

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| <p>Any rent increase will be challenging for tenants. The report to Cabinet on 9 February will be proposing a 7% increase, in line with the government rent cap.</p> <p>Gilly stated that 30.6% of tenants are currently receiving housing benefit. We have a tenancy support team who are there to offer help and advice to tenants with financial management. This may be looking into different tariffs available to them for their household utilities.</p> <p>In comparison to other social housing providers – we are of the understanding that most are looking at a 7% increase.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A tenant commented that as a working household they are starting to struggle. They are starting to ask questions around whether they can continue on their salaries or whether they should be claiming benefits. <p>Karen Thorburn, Service Lead – Strategic Housing, commented that as a local authority housing provider the council is very aware of difficulties increasing. There is a website called 'entitled to' https://www.entitledto.co.uk/ that lets you know if you become entitled to any benefits and what household support funds are available.</p> <p>Cllr Ferguson stated that a 6% and 7% increase options were looked at. Taking into consideration inflationary costs on the HRA budget, this works out at an extra £1.449 million extra that has to be found. The council listened to tenants' concerns for those tenants on affordable rents, these will also be capped at 7%.</p> <p>It was suggested that this can also be discussed at the TACT support meeting next week.</p> <p>Cllr Horrill suggested that tenants want clarity on where the money will be and has been spent.</p> <p>Cllr Ferguson informed the group that it has been requested that the emergency welfare fund, set up as a one off fund during Covid, will run year on year.</p> <p>A TACT member gave some advice about how to keep homes warm and ventilated. He stated that although it sounds the opposite of what should be done, opening windows occasionally will keep your home warmer. Especially if you are drying clothes indoors. If you are not keen on opening windows, choose times of day. For example, midday on a frosty day, the air is dryer outside and would be a good time to open windows.</p> | |
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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A tenant asked how they apply for food vouchers. They tried to look for details but couldn't find anything. Information about food vouchers can be found on the tenancy sustainment pages of the website or by phoning the team on; 01962 814 918. https://www.winchester.gov.uk/housing/tenancy-sustainment-service • A suggestion from a tenant was discussed that information could be sent with the rent increase letter directing tenants to support available. Gilly commented that this was a great suggestion and will take it back to the team. <u>Dee Jenkins said she will look into compiling information about what support is available.</u> <p>Janette commented, for clarity, that the rent increase plans to keep the service as it is currently. There will not be excess with this increase. Cllr Ferguson reiterated her point made earlier that the increase just covers the inflationary increase.</p> | Dee Jenkins |
| 5. | <p>Kevin Reed, Senior Private Sector Housing Officer Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) Policy</p> <p>This grant is aimed at owner occupiers or those in social rented housing from a landlord other than WCC. WCC tenants come under the HRA budget.</p> <p>The private sector DFG budget is 1.2million per year. This is likely to remain the same until 2025.</p> <p>Currently the policy covers things like, level access and ramping. Looking to implement change to include welfare, heating, relocation and top-up grants. The previous policy written in 2019 introduced discretionary funding above a maximum of £30.000. This policy is looking to cap the maximum grant at £100.000. This is to maximise the budget spent to more applications.</p> <p>Examples of how the different grants may be used was given.</p> <p>The welfare grant, for example, may be spent is to help facilitate the discharge from hospital and pay to clean and declutter a home.</p> <p>The heating grant – historically the grant has been able to assist with this, but in reality it hasn't helped a lot. It has only really been available via a referral from an outside organisation or Occupational Therapist (OT).</p> <p>Relocation grant – an example was given of a situation whereby adaptations are required to a property, but this may not be cost effective. The money would be better spent to help with finding an alternative property.</p> | |

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| | <p>Top-up grants – When adaptations are very expensive this grant will enable the person to remain living in their own home, rather than have to move to a care home. The maximum available as a top-up grant is £100,000.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A tenant asked how are they supposed to know what help is available? <u>Kevin and Dee will liaise regarding what information can be published in the tenant newsletter.</u> • Are charities aware of this grant? The tenant who asked the question gave the example of a family member who lives in a housing association property with a disabled child. Charities should be aware, but we do not control how or when they pass on the information or refer. Housing association residents qualify, they will need an OT referral. This can be the OT employed by WCC. <p>Gilly clarified that the budget for DFGs through the HRA is £806,000 per year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the council's DFG policy similar to this one for the private sector? Gilly commented that it is different in that as a landlord we can act quicker and can offer a more bespoke option. Kevin clarified that for the past 18 months private sector have sat on a housing panel cross working to maximise the housing stock. | Kevin Reed / Dee Jenkins |
| 6. | <p>Janette Palmer, Housing Policy and Projects Manager Draft Housing Tenant Engagement & Communication Plan – 2023 -2025</p> <p>TACT members were sent a copy of the draft plan via email before the meeting and hard copies were available on the day.</p> <p>Janette stated that this is TACT's opportunity to comment on the plan.</p> <p>An introduction and background to the reasons for the plan was given and a summary of the consultation activities outlined. In putting the plan together the team have at what can be learnt from other providers.</p> <p>The areas for improvement includes; a programme to contact tenants we don't hear from and looking into text messaging surveys (to name just two). The plan will be monitored by the Tenant Steering Group. An overview of this group was given.</p> <p>Page 7 of the plan sets out all the methods the council uses to find out tenant views, of which TACT is one. TACT is also the council's formal consultation group where officers go to discuss service improvements, policies, priorities etc. TACT is also part of the formal Governance structure. TACT committee members sit at council decision making committees. The Tenant Involvement</p> | |

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| <p>Annual Report is presented at the TACT AGM, this sets out the performance of the tenant engagement service and the improvement plan progress.</p> <p>The next stages are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply any changes from TACT. • Present the draft plan to Business and housing Policy Committee on 28th February 2023. • Apply changes from committee meeting feedback. • Commission a review by an independent organisation (as discussed earlier in the meeting) • Present the final plan to TACT at the AGM in May. • A tenant commented that not all tenants want to speak to an officer of the council. But by just attending tenant groups and listening you can pick things up. • A comment was made by a tenant of a decommissioned sheltered scheme. Since their common room was taken away they feel they can be forgotten. <p><u>Janette responded to this comment. We will come back with feedback as to how we can improve the social side since the removal of the day / common rooms.</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It may be worth looking into or researching where is best to engage the younger community. It's important that you let the people know who you are and why you are there if it's not a formal meeting setting. Going to sports or social clubs was discussed. Tenants agreed that if you add coffee and cake attendance will increase. <p>Cllr Horrill commented that she is pleased to see the anniversary calls in the plan under future work.</p> <p>A discussion took place about the tenant conference. This used to take place on a Saturday, with activities for children so parents could spend time taking in the information. There were external organisations present. Those TACT members present at the meeting felt this was a good opportunity to invite a broader audience to attend. It was remarked that in the past over 100 tenants attended.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A comment was made that the new sports and leisure facilities don't accept cash. The tenant who raised this has written to centre but has not heard back. This is not inclusive. <p>Cllr Ferguson replied that she will take the comments from today's meeting back to the next board meeting of the sports centre as she is a board</p> | <p>Janette Palmer</p> |
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| | <p>member. This is not good for social inclusion as it excludes rather than includes. <u>Dee will coordinate with Callum in the Communications team how best to get information out to tenants.</u> Cllr Horrill commented that she is pleased this will be taken back to the board as it has been raised previously.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A question was asked about the opinion finding / outreach that is mentioned in the plan. How will this work? Janette replied - we will learn as we go as to what works. Involved tenant could let us know of other groups that tenants attend that would be useful for the tenant involvement team to go along to. Contact would be made in advance, the format would be informal and listening to what has to be said. <p><u>Cllr Horrill requested that elected members be added to the plan as a mode of communication.</u></p> | <p>Dee Jenkins</p> <p>Janette Palmer</p> |
| 7. | <p>Any Other Business</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There have recently been a few posts on Winchester Facebook pages that the council should be aware of. After discussion about what these posts were about Gilly confirmed that the council are aware of the posts about housing and can confirm they are not an accurate representation of the situation. However, is aware they do not make the council look good. It is the Communications team who are responsible for acknowledging posts and comments. • A further comment was made in support of the tenant conference as discussed in the meeting. Cllr Ferguson replied that we are keen to look into what is best, whether it is a conference as we used to have or if it's going to where tenants are already attending e.g. food pantries, warm hubs, having a stand at Tesco on a Saturday morning etc. • Following on from the discussion in the meeting about the Sports centre not being inclusive a tenant suggestion was to hold an event there for tenants. Cllr Ferguson commented that she thought this was a great idea. • A tenant requested that if anyone has used a disposable cup at this meeting, please leave it on the table for them to collect as they are compostable. | |
| 8. | <p>Forthcoming meetings</p> | |



Chair: David Light
Vice Chair: David Chafe
Communications: Lin Mellish

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| | 23 March 2023 - Walton Room – The Guildhall (provisional) 25 May 2023 – AGM – Hope Church | |
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