



Minutes of Leaseholder Forum held at Council Chamber, SCDC, 2 February 2017

Attendees (Leaseholders)		Attendees (Leaseholders)	
Patti Hall (Chair)	Cottenham – Franklin	Adrian Prentis (AP)	Cottenham - Stevens
Anne Beavis (AB)	Over – The Doles	Pat Day (PD)	Comberton
Janet Billton	Great Shelford	Bridget Newman (BN)	Bassingbourn – Spring
Judy Carter	Sawston – Plantation	Sheila Marriner (SM)	Papworth Everard
Fred Whybrow	Over	John Talmadge (JT)	Melbourn – Vicarage
Jackie Whybrow	Over	Valerie Talmadge (VT)	Melbourn – Vicarage
Lin Heaton	Barton	Les Rolfe (Secretary)(LR)	Bourn
Bridget Hatherley	Comberton	Barbara Tomes (BT)	Barton
Joy Churcher	Barton	June Flack (JF)	Waterbeach – Chapel
Glynis Goff	Waterbeach – Chapel	Dawn Goodchild	Meldreth
Barbara Howlett (BH)	Willingham	Chris Hull (CH)	Bassingbourn – Limes
Margaret Jeffries (MJ)	Barton		

Initials are used in the minutes to indicate those who were involved in discussions

Attendees (SCDC Representatives and guest speakers)	
Peter Moston (PM)	Resident Involvement Team Leader
Abbi Murray (AM)	Assistant Accountant
Geoff Clark (GC)	Neighbourhood Services Manager
Becky Gane (BG)	Leaseholder Services Coordinator
Alasdair Gladman (AG)	Grants Validation Officer
Shirley Stephen (SS)	Community Impact Team Leader
David Purnell (DP)	Asset Manager
Liam Flatters (LF)	Contracts & Lands Surveyor
Chris Brown (CB)	Contract Manager (Sustainability)

Agenda item	Topic	Action by -
1	<p>Welcome, Introductions and Apologies</p> <p>Patti Hall welcomed all those attending and all those present introduced themselves.</p> <p>Apologies were received from (leaseholders) Carol Greensmith, Janet Prentis, Mike Massey, Jill Maclean, Mrs Barnes, Jim & Carol Duffy, Mr Staines, Mrs Marshall-Staines, Janet Huxley and (SCDC representatives) Wayne Newman.</p> <p>Please advise Becky Gane to give your apologies should you be unable to attend a meeting or if there is any particular subject you would like to see on the agenda in future.</p>	All

2	<p>Minutes of the previous meeting The minutes of the previous meeting were taken as read and agreed as a true record.</p>	
3	<p>Matters arising AP asked that all those whose initials appeared in the 'Action by -' column made the effort to report back to those present by, or at, the next forum. PD asked about the removal of the alarms system and was advised that this subject would be dealt with later during the forum.</p>	
4	<p>Occupational Therapy and the Home Improvements Agency Alasdair Gladman explained that he was responsible for administering grant allocation for SCDC within the private sector which includes leaseholders, but not tenants. He used a quote to describe what he deals with – 'old age never comes alone'. Working with Occupational Therapy (OT), the Home Improvement Agency (HIA) and the Disabled Services Grants (DSG) the aim is trying to keep people living how they want to for as long as possible. Grants are available to help with access and accessories such as grab rails, steps and ramps and adaptations to kitchens and bathrooms. The maximum grant is currently £30,000. They are subject to means-testing although anyone receiving certain benefits would be exempt, others would have to prove their financial status. OT and HIA will help with completing the application. Quotes for the work required must be obtained but the HIA will also help with this. Additional fees are charged by HIA but these can be added into the grant. The DSG, once approved, is a mandatory grant. This means that SCDC have to pay it. SM asked how to get through to OT as it had proved difficult in the past. AG said that he had come prepared with various information leaflets which would be available at the end of the meeting.</p>	
6	<p>Maintenance and Repairs Costings David Purnell explained how the system used to operate and how it had changed over the last few years. Prior to 2010 all work was done by direct labour employed by SCDC or Cambridge City Services. The contract was awarded to Mears for five years from 2012 with a possible five year extension. The contract was based on a 'price per job' system but was a partnering system to allow for changes to be made. Performances were checked in November 2015 and changes were made. The contact centre has been moved from Welwyn Garden City to Mears Cottenham offices based at Travis Perkins depot. SCDC surveyors are also now part-based there allowing them to work more effectively. From 1st April this year the contract is changing to a 'price per property' system for tenanted properties with a maximum built in for exceptional circumstances. This will not affect leaseholders as all communal areas, including the communal rooms, will remain on the 'price per job' system based on an average of work over previous years. It also allows both sides to have better control of their cashflow. Call-outs will now only be either emergency or appointable. This will also allow flexibility for Mears to deal with other problems whenever making a visit. The risk will be transferred to Mears who will be more inclined to get it right first time, every time and they are introducing new training for their operatives. BN complained about access to her electricity metering and control box which was high on an internal wall. DP said that SCDC were upgrading tenanted properties to counteract such problems. CB pointed out that all internal problems were the responsibility of the leaseholder. GC offered to arrange or recommend electrical contractors at the leaseholder's</p>	

	<p>expense. JF said that, when she had a similar problem, Occupational Therapy refused to pay for meters to be moved.</p> <p>It was generally pointed out that leases were assigned with the property being accepted 'as seen', and that there could be no later alterations.</p> <p>VT complained, again, about street/footpath lighting outside her communal rooms. DP asked for specific details and LF said that it had been passed to Balfour Beatty who dealt with street-lighting and was now being referred to SCDC Environmental Services. LR queried specific costings which appeared on service charges for work on communal areas and rooms some of which seemed exorbitant and that, despite SCDC surveyors saying that the costs/work involved were acceptable and reasonable, why had Mears agreed, in one instance, that they had overcharged and issued a part-refund. It was explained that, on a 'price per job' contract some common works were priced very competitively, other less-common work such as fencing could be more expensive. From a SCDC point of view it was 'swings and roundabouts' which balanced overall.</p>	
<p>7</p>	<p>Service charge breakdown and access to information</p> <p>This item was to be postponed to the next forum but Abbi Murray was able to respond to a couple of queries.</p> <p>AP and LR both queried the amount of time it took for final/actual service charge statements to arrive, often six months after the end of a financial year, and another two to three months before a full breakdown could be seen by which time it was very difficult to query charges as much eighteen months after the event. How would AM survive if every leaseholder asked for a full breakdown of their service charge, which they are entitled to do.</p> <p>SM asked why cleaning materials were so expensive compared to what residents could purchase for themselves. She also queried about the quantity being delivered to her communal rooms in Papworth. SS explained that the amount delivered was ultimately divided by the cleaner who was responsible for twelve schemes and the costs were equally divided. Every communal room was cleaned every week and the amount of cleaning materials used was the same at each scheme.</p> <p>CH asked about the use of the communal rooms and was advised that this would be commented on later.</p>	
<p>8</p>	<p>Neighbourhood Services update</p> <p>On the subject of the alarm system GC said that the response service contract has been awarded to Hereford Housing who had offered a better service than the existing provider. They also only targeted smaller schemes which they better understood. The transfer of all personal data was currently being organised and each user would be contacted in due course.</p> <p>The recent scrutiny project on the use of the communal rooms by the TPG had now been completed and the findings and recommendations had been presented to SS and Anita Goddard. They would be presented to the Housing Portfolio Holder next month. There was to be a tenancy audit intended to gain knowledge of every household and the results will be analysed to provide the correct services. A pilot audit was carried out last year in Great Shelford. Every tenant and leaseholder would be visited to answer a series of questions. It would also identify any problems as yet unknown to SCDC such as a recently visited property which was found to be in a very bad condition because the tenants did not know how to get things put right. GC pointed out that 90% of SCDC officers time was spent dealing with just 5% of tenants.</p> <p>On smoke alarms CB said that Tunstall had offered a wireless system on the existing alarms but some were not working well. Inspections were carried out across the district and Estate Officers test individual alarms regularly. SM said that she self-tests</p>	

	<p>her alarms but pendants cannot respond when tested outdoors. They had to be tested through the unit. VT complained again about the user being charge on their telephone account for the test calls and GC apologised again for the lack of information when they were first fitted. (Secretary's note: Many phone companies have an all-inclusive calls option which would cover these test calls. I've never had a charge for a test show up on my bill). BT asked what was going to happen when the obsolete speech modules were removed – a plate would be fitted over the blank space, and VT asked about the obsolete pull-cord fittings – they will be left in place but disconnected and the pull-cords removed. BT also wanted to know if the large outside boxes for the alarm systems would be removed and SS said that they would.</p> <p>AB asked who was doing the tenancy audit and had they got time to do it. GC said that it was being done 'in house' and will include Estate Officers and Housing Officers. SCDC had considered bringing in outside consultants but felt that they wouldn't be interested in the overall result whilst SCDC staff would have a vested interest as it could affect their work. It was expected that they would need to allocate about half a day per week. BT said that they shouldn't be responsible for this along with their other jobs.</p> <p>AP asked if the new lifelines would cost extra, and would running costs still appear on the service charge. GC said that there were no extra costs, possibly savings as there was no repairs contract. MJ said that there had been problems with batteries in the old smoke alarms setting them off. CB said that when the old hard-wired alarms were turned off the batteries would ultimately run out. VT said that when her old alarm went off she had it disconnected by an electrician. CB advised that nobody should attempt disconnect alarms themselves.</p>	
<p>9</p>	<p>Sheltered Housing update</p> <p>Shirley Stephen said that the obsolete alarms and speech modules on those schemes which failed first would be removed first.</p> <p>The Estate Officer rotas have been delayed due to a problem with IT department over setting up new mobile phones which require new numbers. Once available, the rotas will be printed. They will show when each Estate Officer will be available, and where.</p> <p>AP said that rotas displayed in communal rooms were of little use for those who either did not use the rooms or leave their properties. SS said that laminated copies would be displayed on each noticeboard and flyers would be delivered door-to-door.</p> <p>Chair had previously asked for Estate Officer's job description and standards to be displayed and SS said that this would be done.</p> <p>AP asked when smoke alarms should be checked. SS said that those who had lifelines were tested monthly, unless the resident was self-testing, and all others are tested every three months.</p> <p>SM asked about a neighbour who had moved out and had left furniture in the garden. GC said that all tenants must leave a property as they found it. If anything is left behind then a recharge was possible. When asked what would happen if such a charge was not paid GC said that it could be progressed to the courts.</p> <p>SM asked about overhanging trees which had been damaged and SS said that they were being dealt with by SPLandscapes.</p>	<p>SS</p>
<p>10</p>	<p>Resident Involvement update</p> <p>Peter Moston handed out copies print-outs of the Resident Involvement sections of the SCDC Annual Report for 2015/16. The full report is available on the SCDC website along with previous year's reports for comparison. He explained some of the entries such as the number of volunteer hours by residents and the extra £50k budget for additional works in residential areas. It also identifies cost savings made which are to be monitored.</p> <p>The assisted gardening scheme has been reinstated.</p>	

	<p>As a result of discussions at previous Leaseholder Forums the SCDC insurance policy which many leaseholders use has been amended to include accidental damage to fixtures and fittings.</p> <p>On the subject of the lifeline system PM gave a personal account of their effectiveness as his father had fallen in his garden and, using the lifeline, he was able to summon prompt assistance. AB verified this when an ambulance was needed.</p> <p>GC added, with regard to the annual report, that for voids (empty tenanted properties) and rent collection, SCDC are one of the top performing social housing providers in the country.</p>									
11	<p>Any other business</p> <p>PD asked who was responsible for the footpath in Hines Lane, Comberton. LF responded that he didn't know but would find out. AP said that, as SPLandscapes must be due to start the grounds maintenance soon, the maps that were promised had still not appeared on the noticeboards in the communal rooms. SS said that she will ask Debbie Barrett who is responsible for this.</p> <p>CH asked about better electricity contracts. CB said that an internet check through switching sites was the best option. Economy 10, recommended by some present, was only available through E.ON. MJ asked about the electricity collective deal she was on which would run out next month. CB said that this was not arranged through SCDC but that there were many such collectives around. PM said that it had been arranged through County Council and that most collectives did their best to rearrange a new deal and would contact those customers who were affected.</p> <p>BH asked about vehicles parking on grass verges. LF said that he knew about the problems in Willingham and that bollards or other methods were being considered. BH commented about a car, full of rubbish, which was parked outside their communal rooms and that SCDC should make it clear that it was not allowed to drive on the grass. LF said he would visit the area to consider the problem. GC said that these problems should not happen but should be reported to Estate Officers.</p> <p>AB spoke about the Warm homes discount available through many electricity suppliers but that it had to be claimed individually. She also now has a smart meter but, to date, these are only available to British Gas customers. PM advised everyone to check the government website for advice on all utility bills. JT asked about the problem in Vicarage Close, Melbourn caused by too many cars and not enough parking spaces, and the problems of non-resident parking. LF said that two new signs had been ordered and that new plans for additional parking spaces were currently out for consultation.</p>	<p>LF</p> <p>SS</p> <p>LF</p>								
12	<p>Contact Details</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>Chair</td> <td>Patti Hall</td> <td>01954 252289</td> <td>patti@scdc-tpg.org.uk</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Secretary</td> <td>Les Rolfe</td> <td>01954 718150</td> <td>les@scdc-tpg.org.uk</td> </tr> </table> <p>We are also members of the Tenant Participation Group, both Tenant Inspectors and Village Voices so can be contacted on any other subjects as well.</p>	Chair	Patti Hall	01954 252289	patti@scdc-tpg.org.uk	Secretary	Les Rolfe	01954 718150	les@scdc-tpg.org.uk	
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13	<p>Next meeting</p> <p>Thursday 18th May 2017, 10:00 – 12:00 Council Chamber, South Cambs Hall, Cambourne Business Park, CB23 6EA</p>									