

Minutes of City Housing Liaison Board
Thursday 22 June 2017, 6.30 pm – 8.30 pm,
Committee Rooms 3 and 4, Council House, Victoria Square

Present:

CHLB Members

Joan Goodwin (chair)
Eddie Howard (vice chair)
Malcom Nicolls
Zafar Mir
Herma Hughes
Alex Harrison
Eric Shipton
Gillian Richards
Mike McCartan
Andrew Thompson
Stuart Richings
Bridget O'Brien
Alan Morrow
Carl McCooty
Jeff Horton
Diane Griffiths
Jennifer Walters
Samantha Vaughan
Jaq Robinson (Observer)

HLB

Yardley Wood
Highgate & Ladywood
Druids Heath
Washwood Heath
Shard End
Harborne
Sutton Coldfield
Ingoldsby
Hodge Hill
Aston
Quinton
Weoley
Billesley
Yardley
Hall Green
Bartley Green
Lozells & East Handsworth/Handsworth Wood
Perry Barr

Officers/Councillors

Councillor Zaker Choudhury
Martin Tolley
Tom Taplin
Pat McWilliam
Rob James
Pete Hobbs
Margaret Calleja
Amjeed Kabil
Tanya Faruki
Colin Hanno
Sharon Gayle

South Yardley
Head of Service East/South/Capital
Capital Investment Team
Capital Investment Team
Service Director – Housing Transformation
Integrated Service Head – Housing Services
UC Lead – Change and Support Service
Change and Business Development Officer
Acting Business Development Manager
Resident Involvement and TMO Manager
Tenant Participation Officer, Perry Barr District

Apologies:

Debbie Kadr
Ann Holtom
Albert Harrison
Derrick Novell
Councillor Griffiths

Sheldon
Erdington and Tyburn
Frankley & Cockhill
Acocks Green

1 **Welcome**

Joan Goodwin welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for coming.

2 **Minutes of the Last Meeting – 25 May 2017**

Corrections: Alan Morrow – attendance was not recorded

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as a correct record.

3 **Matters Arising**

- Joan Goodwin asked if everyone received the previous year AGM minutes, and the Subgroup terms of reference – All responded yes. Joan reminded everyone about the amendment of the constitution to reflect the selection process as specified in the terms of references.
- Eric Shipton – reported that he attended Arch meeting. Eric stated he was the only representative at the meeting that took any information re fire safety.

4 **Chair's Comments**

Joan Goodwin - Chair CHLB

“Following the Grenfell Tower tragedy the fire safety in all high rise towers is being reviewed across the Country.

In Birmingham we have issued letters to all our residents in high rise towers. Firstly stating none of the materials used in Grenfell Tower have been used on BCC Towers. Safety advice has been given and all our high rise towers checked, and we do safety checks on a regular basis and these checks are logged. West Midlands Fire Service works with us and also checks our high rise towers.

BCC is listening to all recommendations that are coming out from the Government and will be following all safety guidelines requirements.

Tonight Martin Tolley is attending to answer questions and we are compiling a hand out of most frequently asked questions and answers to enable HLB members to re-assure residents in their area.

CHLB has called a special meeting and this is being arranged and fire board and Police will be at this special meeting. I wish to re-assure once again the safety of all our residents is paramount and every attention is being put to any guidelines by BCC

Joan Goodwin
Chair CHLB

7 Letter to Tenants – Fire Safety – Martin Tolley

Martin Tolley stated that for clarity, none of our blocks have used the cladding materials used at Grenfell. Where BCC have used cladding or done some refurbishment we have used high standard fire resistant materials, but we are still testing our blocks and doing thorough safety checks. Martin then went on to outline a letter that has been sent out to all residents living in high rise towers and all HLB's. Briefing notes have also been sent to all elected members, HLBs, TMOs. Martin then went on to inform the board that staff are working with WMFS Fire Safety Officers who will be going to blocks to provide some re-assurance to residents, checking communal areas etc.

Residents contacting the service will be provided with reassurance messages via the contact centre and by housing staff. Local staffs are also being briefed. Martin also stated that BCC have their own "in house" team of officers who are accredited fire risk assessors and administer our fire prevention programmes. All have received formal Fire Risk Assessment training and the required refresher training from West Midlands Fire Service designated training department and through the British Safety Council.

Since 2005 and the introduction of the Regulatory Reform Order, Landlord's became responsible for managing fire risk assessments where communal areas exist.

To comply with this BCC undertakes annual inspections city wide on approximately:-

- >200 Tower Blocks
- >1800 Low Rise Blocks
- >500 Properties that have communal areas.

All our blocks have a current fire risk assessment and are inspected on a rolling 12 month basis for a full fire risk assessment

Any subsequent remedial works identified through inspection are carried out within the appropriate time scales. As part of BCC programme of fire stopping works we provide the following:

- Half hour fire stop communal doors and screens.
- Fire stopping to ducts and cupboards on communal landings.
- Improved fire safety signage.
- Self-closing refuse chute hoppers.
- Class O fire retardant decorative coatings to communal areas
- Sprinklers installed to bin rooms.
- All flats that have given us access have had wired/battery operated smoke alarms.
- Individual flats have half hour fire stop entrance doors.
- Fire stopping to risers.
- Installation of emergency lighting/standby battery systems.
- Tower blocks have had a secure key safe box installed which includes drop key and fob for access for the emergency services.

BCC also have a programme of on-going maintenance, renewal and upgrading of communal emergency lighting.

Martin went on to outline preventative measures which include:

- Daily inspections of all high rise blocks
 - Lift/Lift Doors
 - Roof Area and Access
 - Tank Room/ Lift Motor Room
 - Landings/No Smoking/Fire signs Store cupboards
 - Dry Risers visually – checked Fire hoses (where applicable)
 - Doors/Door Closers/Fire Door & Partitions
 - Chute Area/ Room/Hoppers
 - Window Catches/Glazing
 - Stairs/ Stair Rails
 - Lights/Light Shades
 - Communal front & rear entrance doors
 - External Area
 - Store sheds
 - Bin Room including guillotine
 - Time of inspection
 - HAV equipment not used signature required
 - Information displayed cupboards
 - Regular fire risk assessment
 - Weekly caretaker block inspections
 - Testing of dry and wet risers
 - Emergency lighting/stand by battery systems are inspected quarterly
 - Testing of sprinklers to bin rooms quarterly
 - We have regular meetings and liaise with West Midlands Fire Service and other midlands social housing providers and share good practice.
 - Robust test and inspect electrical wiring programme.
 - All emergencies are reported immediately and escalated to the supervisor if required.

Night inspections

- These are carried out to blocks across the cities which are linked to the security service to identify any Health and Safety risks including the removal of any hazards, checking the dry/wet risers and the removal of any rubbish that can create a fire hazard.

We also have a monthly high rise audit report completed which looks at the following aspects.

External

- Litter
- Bulky rubbish
- Graffiti
- Door entry system
- Bin room
- General appearance

Internal

- Communal entrance
- Lifts
- Stairs
- Landing
- Internal glazing
- Internal graffiti
- Chute rooms
- Health and Safety/ No Smoking Signs
- Completion of HOUS1176
- Daily block inspection sheets

Rob James thanked Martins team for the joined up efforts.

Any questions:

Andrew Thompson – Aston: outlined that following the announcement of the retrofitting of sprinklers, he stated that the predominantly working class and vulnerable tenants of the 231 high rise blocks deserved their safety to be taken seriously and he was reassured by the announcement by the Leader of the Council. Andrew stated that however there were a number of further concerns about fire safety, and although Rob James was right in his public statement that every block has a Fire Risk Assessment, Andrew stated that he had seen a number of recommendations in Fire Risk Assessments that were un-actioned 18 months later. Other concerns include:

- a) the scope and thoroughness of the assessment, the qualifications and independence of the assessor
- b) the possibility of any building or refurbishment works carried out since the assessment affecting the validity of the assessment
- c) robust electrical safety including PAT testing of residents equipment and circuit safety and function
- d) the immediate removal of gas supplies in High Rise blocks with the provision of electric cookers or grants to affected families
- e) continued integrity of fire barriers including fire doors and walls

At that point the Chair tried to stop Andrew to which he stated that as a disabled representative of a number of tenants in High Rise Blocks including many who were disabled and receiving packages of care. Andrew would not accept the chair trying to close him down, at this point Rob James intervened and said let him continue.

Andrew then went on to point out that there were no personal evacuation plans for disabled residents (although the need to do so was a debateable point nationally) which were in some recommendations, and availability of occupancy lists in the

event of fire

Martin responded that a report will be gathered and any measures identified appropriate measures will be taken.

Councillor Choudhry asked the question whether maisonettes will also be fitted with sprinklers. **Reply:** No only high rise. Low rise do not fall under the same fire regulations as high rise.

Jennifer Walters – Lozells & East Handsworth & Handsworth Wood: enquired why high rise water hose appliances had been taken out.

Martin responded that modern day firefighting techniques far by pass current techniques.

Stuart Richings – Quinton: queried the fire risk assessment process for Sheltered Housing.

Martin responded that there is a robust policy in place; however, he would pass on comments to the senior manager who manages the service.

5 Rent Arrears / Universal Credit

Margaret Calleja gave an overview of the current position regarding Universal Credit/Rent. Margaret enquired if anyone knows person on Universal Credit, the team would welcome feedback on how the service has affected them.

A detailed hand-out was distributed and the main points included:

- Full service also known as Digital Universal Credit is coming to Birmingham
- Chelmsley Wood Job Centre Plus goes to Digital on 5th of July
- The 12 job centres in Birmingham move to Digital in November and December 2017.
- 2018-2022 migration of tenants who remain on “legacy” benefits
- Families with 3 or more children will not move to Universal Credit until 2018.
- Pensioners not affected, working age only.

Information will be put on the website to advise claimants of which postcodes are affected and a sub group is being developed to expand info on Birmingham.gov.uk website.

Universal Credit is paid differently from other benefits. It'll be paid once a month, usually into bank, building society or credit union account.

If recipient lives with a partner and both claim Universal Credit, household will receive a single payment that covers both

The process of verifying identity is not done by the government itself but is handed over to a range of outside companies

Libraries can assist if people need help using the internet and the job centres can also provide help and advice. Staff training is being delivered and planned across services.

The Illegal Money Lending Team is also interested in finding recipients who are on Universal Credit and struggling with managing finance to pilot new payment method. Universal Credit team will update at future meeting.

The Financial Slide, which was not included in the presentation pack, will be added with the notes.

Question: Jeff Horton – Hall Green: enquired when recipients will be advised of mass migration. Any existing tenants that move onto UC will be offered support from the Rent Service as soon as we become aware that a UC claim has been made. The team is currently designing a support process and this will be implemented before full service comes to Birmingham. UC Team should receive notification from the DWP to request proof of rent when a tenant makes a claim for UC and this acts as notification.

Eric Shipton – Sutton Coldfield: enquired what processes are in place for persons who don't have the relevant verification documents.

Response: Margaret stated that if a person does not have sufficient ID to verify through the gov.uk process they can go to the job centre and they will be asked some questions to verify. See info below

Link <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/introducing-govuk-verify/introducing-govuk-verify>

It takes about 15 minutes to verify identity the first time a recipient uses GOV.UK Verify, and a couple of minutes any time after that..

The company chosen may ask some questions, or perform other checks using photo identification and financial information before confirming your identity to the government department recipient is trying to use (e.g. to HMRC if you're doing your tax).

Each certified company has different ways of verifying recipients' identity, and the options are growing all the time.

Using certified companies makes GOV.UK Verify a safer, simpler and faster way of accessing government services online.

It's safe because information is not stored centrally, and there's no unnecessary sharing of information. The company you choose doesn't know which service you're trying to access, and the government department doesn't know which company you choose.

It's fast and simple because applicants can do it all online, without going to prove your identity in person, or waiting for something in the post.

Eric Shipton – Sutton Coldfield: enquired whether there will be a charge to recipients to get ID verification?

Response: Margaret stated there is no charge. There is a list of authorised companies on the Universal Credit.Gov website.

Eddie Howard – Highgate: enquired what Landlord Service is putting into place for new tenants who will be on Universal Credit.

Response: Margaret will contact Karen Markall in Landlord Services to respond regarding the 12 week process for new tenants and the pre tenancy strategy.

Gillian Richards – Ingoldsby: enquired what outreach work had been undertaken to get the message across to tenants affected by Universal Credit?

Response: Margaret stated that the Financial Inclusion team had undertaken some work. However, there have been no specific events. There are however, work coaches who operate from various Job Centres.

Margaret stated that publicity information is still ongoing.

Andrew Thompson – Aston: asked if the efforts at helping people through the 6 week transition to UC was making any difference given that a quick calculation appeared to show average rent arrears for those on UC to be in excess of 5 weeks

Response: Margaret said she would look into this with the Rent Team and report back.

6. Pingit

Amjeed outlined that the Welfare Reform and Financial Inclusion group met on the 9th May. He outlined that new payments scheme using smartphone apps will be introduced as a new way to make rent payments to BCC. The programme is proposing to use a Barcode/Pingit payment scheme along with Direct Debit.

Individual rent details are held on barcodes instead of plastic cards, which cost £1.06. Barcodes are the low cost solution – These barcodes can be scanned in a post office and also in Barclays Bank, which will allow you to pay at their counters. Everyone will receive a barcode rent detail on their debt recovery letter, quarterly rent statements and annual rent variation letter. Tenants can apply for new barcode details to be sent, if lost or if it stops working. This method of payment only costs 0.36 pence to replace instead of £1.06. A presentation pack was distributed to all present.

Eric Shipton – Sutton Coldfield: stated that he has used the system and in order for the system to work accurately, he had to hold the phone or tablet flat on a table.

Alan Morrow – Billesley: asked whether the facility for going into the bank would still be available?

Answer: Yes

Alex Harrison - Leaseholders Group: asked will tenants be able to over-ride amount due?

Answer: Yes

Malcolm Nicolls – Druids Heath: asked how secure is the system?

Amjeed Kabil responded that once you pass through verification the system is secure.

8. **Kitemark Assessment:** Colin Hanno asked members present if they had received notification of their Kitemark assessment and if anyone had any queries about their score.

Herma Hughes – Shard End: stated that due to the TPO away on leave, no notification had been received.

Jennifer Walters – Lozells & East Handsworth/Handsworth Wood: enquired whether the criteria had been changed since the original inception of the Kitemark Assessment.

Colin explained that the criteria has not been changed, however the methodology previously used for assessing the kitemark has been modified to take in account a scoring system which scored across the following four areas : governance, representation & communication, co-regulation, and monitoring outcomes.

Joan Goodwin supported Colin by providing further clarification and explained the weighting of each category as follow – governance carry maximum of 5 points, representation & communication 5 points, co-regulation 10, and monitoring 3 points. Joan explained that the maximum score a HLB could achieved is 23 and to be awarded with a 2 year certificate HLBs would need to score 20 and above – a one year certificate it is 15 to 19 and below 15 is probation.

Colin circulated the kitemark report which explained the scoring mechanism.

Joan Goodwin stated that there will be measures put in place in order that HLBs in probation will be worked with in order to meet the required Kitemark Assessment criteria.

Joan Goodwin stated that she would be pressing for all HLBs meetings to take place each month.

Sharon Gayle responded that within the HLB Constitution (ratified document) it clearly states that HLBs can meet at least six times each year. There is no stipulation within the Constitution that HLB Boards have to meet every month.

The Chair replied that we went to 6 meetings per year when the HLB met every two months, this was changed during the transformation period from 6 to 10 meeting annually and the constitution will need amending to reflect this. Discussion took place.

Colin explained that since the ratification of the HLB and CHLB constitutions in 2015 there has been discussion with HLBs and at City Board level about changes to the constitutions, he asked if would be okay to amend the constitutions to reflect the various concerns to include number of HLB meetings held annually.

It was agreed that amendments to the constitutions to be shared with HLBs for comments and presented to CHLB for approval.

Malcolm Nicholls – Druids Heath – enquired why there is so little representation from local HLBs at the CHLB meetings.

The Chair responded that all CHLB rep that has not tendered their apologies will be written to.

Eddie Howard Highgate – commented that if HLB groups do not meet the criteria, budgets should be taken away from the respective board.

Alex Harrison – Leaseholders Board: Enquired whether deputies are in place if the nominated person is unable to attend?

9. Any Other Business

9.1 Eric Shipton: what is the proper cost to call in a repair? He has experienced been put on hold waiting for repair to be recorded. The costs add up if you are waiting for a lengthy time.

ACTION: Rob James to look into and report back to next meeting.

9.3 Andrew Thompson – Aston: stated that Manton and Reynolds blocks have been without hot water for over 8 days. Andrew asked Rob what back up plan was going to be put in place for the future.

ACTION: Rob James to pass issue onto Martin Tolley.

10. Date of Next Meeting:

Meeting Closed.