



BIELD HOUSING & CARE
Minutes of the meeting of the Partnership
Forum
04 May 2023
Stirling Court Hotel

Present:

Deborah Docherty	DD	Bridge Court
Gillian Merrett	GM	Ashgrove Court
Joe McLean	JM	Jamaica Court
Margaret Smith	MS	Gordon Court
Iain Kirkman	IK	Dean Court
John Thompson	JT	Craigengar Park

Apologies:

William Smalley	WS	Lynn Court Oban (Chair)
Maria Duncan	MD	Inchkeith Court

In Attendance:

Zhan McIntyre (ZM)
Head of Policy & Customer Standards

Tracey Howatt (TH)
Director of Customer Experience

Heather Thomson (HT) (Teams)
Head of Maintenance & Contracts

Robert Black (RB)
Customer Standards Administrator

- Action 1. ZM - to feed this back to SMT about visits to developments.
- Action 2. ZM - to enquire about the communal heating controls within developments and how its operated.
- Action 3. ZM – to ask Liz Peacock and Ron Mould to attend next partnership forum meeting to give updates on NetZero.

- Action 4. ZM – Will look at a poster to promote considerate parking, look at putting this into the tenant handbook and having an article in the tenant newsletters.
- Action 5. Letter of thanks to be sent to both members stepping down.
- Action 6. Letter to be sent be sent to Robin to be excused.
- Action 7. Tenants to be booked on to the relevant networking events.
- Action 8. Work with tenant participation team lead and Development and Business Growth team to get the NetZero group started.
- Action 9. ZM to take issue of carpet cleaning to Head of Housing
- Action 10. RB to post out Portal booklets to MS and IK
- Action 11. ZM to check on winner and issue voucher

1. Welcomes & Introductions

ZM – Extended a warm welcome to everyone to the latest Partnership Forum (PF) meeting. Introductions from all members.

2. Apologies & Absence

Apologies were received from William Smalley and Maria Duncan.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Minutes were agreed.

Update from previous minutes/ matters arising:

Visits by Bield staff

ZM – informed about the visits to developments by Area Housing Managers (AHM). The purpose of these visits is to ensure regular communication and engagement with tenants, as well as to address any issues that may arise. These visits will occur twice per year:

Quarter 1 (April – June) will focus on mandated topics that are applicable across all areas. The feedback received during this visit will help inform decision-making and improve services.

Quarter 3 (Oct – Dec) The second visit will follow up any issues that arise from the first visit. Additionally, Area Housing Managers will provide updates on any changes or developments within the business. This visit will also form part of our rent-setting engagement.

ZM emphasized the importance of feedback and gathering statistics on the number of meetings held per year to assess the effectiveness of the visits and ensure continued improvement in tenant satisfaction.

Lounge and Heating

ZM – Acknowledge that the communication regarding the installation of the communal thermostats has been poor and expressed Bield's commitment to improving communication in the future. ZM proceeded to present data demonstrating the energy saving achieved through the implementation of communal thermostats, emphasising the positive impact on Bield's carbon footprint. Went through data regards saving from having the communal Thermostats within the communal areas. Stated this is helping with energy savings and Bield's carbon footprint. ZM will ask for thermometers to be placed in communal lounges.

IK – raised concerns regarding tenants' inability to control the heating and hot water charges, leading them to turn off the heating as a cost-saving measure. IK also mentioned tenants

were experiencing discrepancies in the timing of heating shutdowns, as they were informed it would occur at 11pm, but it was turned off much earlier, leaving them cold. IK sought clarification on the correct information regarding heating shutdown.

IK also wished to know if the surplus monies from the heating and hot water charge was ringfenced to invest in NetZero.

TH clarified that the heating charge is specifically allocated to cover heating and hot water expenses, ensuring transparency, and evidence of the expenditure passed onto tenants.

IK – Happy if the surplus money is being used to fund NetZero later.

Car Parking

ZM informed the attendees that a letter regarding parking had been shared with the Area Housing Managers (AHM). However, it was clarified that Bield staff does not have the authority to enforce parking regulations. ZM suggested that the letter could be distributed to all within a development if a parking issues arise.

JT raised the question of obtaining disabled signs for the area behind the disabled parking bays.

ZM stated that since Bield staff cannot enforce parking, obtaining disabled signs for behind the disabled parking bays would not be a matter that Bield would pursue.

IK suggested that the installation of bollards within the carparks would be the most effective way to prevent parking issues.

JM mentioned that Jamaica Court has a barrier system at the entrance of the carpark which is locked and only accessible to tenants.

Key points / questions

- IK - asked if any board members will visit the complex?
Action 1. ZM - to feed this back to SMT.
Action 2. ZM - to enquire about the communal heating controls withing developments and how its operated.
Action 3. ZM – Will ask Liz Peacock and Ron Mould to attend next partnership forum meeting to give updates on NetZero.
Action 4. ZM – Will look at a poster to promote considerate parking, look at putting this into the tenant handbook and having an article in the tenant newsletters.

4. Membership Update

ZM - Kath Harrows & Di Joseph have handed in notice to step down from the Partnership forum.

ZM – Robin has not attended the last 4 partnership forum meetings.

IK – asked if it was still one member of the partnership forum per development/ area. Asked if it would be a good idea to open this up to help with PF numbers.

Action 5. – Letter of thanks to be sent to both members stepping down.

Action 6. Letter to be sent be sent to Robin to be excused.

5. Recruitment – Tenant Participation Manager & Customer standards Administrator

ZM introduced RB as the Customer Standards Administrator within the Policy and Customer standards team. RB will be responsible for assisting in the administration of the tenant groups among other tasks across the team.

ZM announced that the position of Tenant Participation and Engagement Lead had been advertised. Interviews for the role are scheduled to take place on the 11th April, with a tenant interview panel to be involved in the process. ZM opened the floor for any members who would like to volunteer to be on the panel.

ZM highlighted that the role of the Tenant Participation and Engagement Lead will involve promoting tenant engagement groups and actively working to increase the number of participants within these groups.

6. TP Updates

PF Current Membership - 9

BIG Current Membership – 5

Looking to recruit.

No meetings held – resource issues, group will reconvene in Q1.

Communication Champions Current Membership – 6

Current programme of work: Tenant portal and allocation policy review.

Future programme:

- Performance report
- Rent setting
- Customer portal

Next Meeting 18th of July 2023

Compliments & Complaints Collective Current Membership – 3

Current Programme of work – Meeting Postpend

Next Meeting 11th of July 2023

Equality & Diversity Network Current Membership – 4

Current Programme of work – Allocation policy review

Next meeting 25th of July

RTO's – 0.

Interested tenant list - 53 tenants on list.

7. Learning and Networking Events

Opportunities for 2023/2024 -

- SFHA Housing Scotland Annual conference 6th & 7th of June at Radisson blue Glasgow DD shown interest
- TPAS Tenant Group Basics – what a group needs 9th of May 2023 (Online) MS shown interest
- TIS Member Gathering 18th of May 2023 at Crowne Plaza Edinburgh. JT & MS shown interest
- TIS -Tenant member forum 7th June 2023 (online)
- TPAS Conference no date set as such, but it is normally the end of June and is usually held in Clydebank.

IK – provided an update to the members regarding the NetZero networking event he attended. He expressed that the event was highly informative and discussed various aspects of funding NetZero initiatives.

ZM clarified that NetZero targets are set externally, mostly by the government. Discussions are ongoing regarding the funding mechanisms associated with achieving NetZero goals.

IK raised concerns about tenants paying more and expressed hope that any surplus funds generated would be ringfenced for

investment in NetZero initiatives. However, IK acknowledged that significant changes in infrastructure and transitioning to NetZero may take time due to the associated costs and funding challenges.

GM prioritised the proper insulation of all estates before considering the installation of solar panels and wind turbines. This approach could lead to quicker implementation and contribute towards achieving NetZero targets.

ZM emphasised that the organisation is actively working towards energy targets in line with Energy Efficiency Standards for Social Housing 2 (ESSH2). ZM expressed the importance of establishing the NetZero group to facilitate further discussions and gather ideas on making housing more energy efficient.

Action 7. – Tenants to be booked on to the relevant networking events.

Action 8. – work with tenant participation team lead and Development and Business Growth team to get the NetZero group started.

8. Service Charge Discussion

ZM clarified that the Communal Heating and Hot Water charge is not new addition, but was previously included in the rent charge. The separation of this charge was done for transparency purposes due to the significant increases in energy costs. ZM apologised for any concerns caused when the rent letters were sent out. The collected funds from this charge are ringfenced for energy-related expenses. If energy prices decrease, it may result in reduced costs for tenants in the following year when the rent is set. Bield is part of the Scottish government's energy procurement to obtain the best possible prices.

TH – RSL have managed to keep their cost lower until now but they are having to increase their charges.

MS raised a question regarding the customer satisfaction survey and whether the preferences for the percentage of rent increase were taken into account during the decision-making process. It feels like tenant views are not taken into consideration.

ZM explained that the board does take tenant preference into account when setting rent charges. However, the organisation also needs to consider costing factors to ensure financial stability. The board is typically presented with different scenarios, and tenants choices are definitely considered within these three points.

TH suggested that Bield should consult with tenants during October/November regarding rent setting. The result of this consultation would be part of the information presented to the board for approval.

IK proposed involving the Partnership Forum to assist in agreeing on the percentages to be included in the consultation process.

TH recommended the Participation Lead assists in developing the survey and creating more realistic options to be presented to tenants in next survey.

JT inquired about the return rate of the survey conducted this year. ZM mentioned it was between 25% & 30%

GM mentioned the timing of survey during the previous year was not ideal, as it coincided with Christmas and postal strikes, causing delays in its delivery and completion.

ZM agreed the timing could have been better and state that the surveys will be sent out to tenants during October/November this year.

IK expressed concerns about some individuals not receiving their full entitlement of Housing Benefit due to the separation of charges.

TH clarified that Housing Benefit should still cover the communal cost, and the only costs not covered would be personal energy consumption within tenants' flats or food costs for those on the meal service.

IK mentioned that Falkirk Council is only paying part of the communal charge.

TH asked IK to inform the Area Housing Manager (AHM) about the issue so they can work together to resolve it with the local authority.

GM brought up the topic of service charges covering window cleaning and inquired whether it should also include communal carpet cleaning across the estate. GM asked about the refurbishment cycle for carpets.

TH explained that the lifecycle of carpets is typically 10 years, and local managers should ensure that the carpets are cleaned appropriately when required.

GM asked if there was a protocol or schedule for carpet cleaning across the estate.

ZM noted that there currently may not be a protocol in place but agreed to provide feedback to the Head of Housing.

Action 9. ZM to take to the issue of carpet cleaning to Head of Housing.

9. Property Update

HT provided an overview of the property team's activities, covering responsive repairs, planned maintenance, compliance in property management, and other significant areas of control.

HT mentioned that the design briefs for bathroom and kitchen upgrades are being updated. The team's focus is on improving the grounds and landscape, as many developments have not been upgraded in this aspect for a long time. Enhancing grounds can contribute to a better and more welcoming environment for tenants potentially benefitting their mental health. There is also significant focus on addressing mould, and the team is developing an electronic form to record mould and dampness inspections, with follow-up inspections scheduled.

IK enquired whether NetZero initiatives would be included in the costs and works programmes.

HT explained that a combined approach between sustainability and property teams would deliver NetZero initiatives through specific programmes. However, they are still awaiting new targets to be set by the government for Associations. One of the significant challenges is transitioning from gas heating systems, as all new properties after 2025 will not be allowed to have gas heating. There is scope for piloting heat source pumps and solar panels, but it is crucial to evaluate the suitability of these solutions for large residential use.

GM suggested caution when replacing gas heating systems.

HT mentioned that pilot schemes are currently being trialled, and Bield are observing the outcomes from other organisations. However, the trials taking place might not be suitable for large residential use, as the temperature may not be sufficient for tenants' flats.

GM enquired about the status of installation upgrades across the estate.

HT confirmed that cavity installation has been carried out across the estate. Contractors are using thermal imaging to capture and areas of concern. However, there is currently limited funding availability for insulation projects, and the competitive nature of securing funding presents a challenge.

HT – Best solution is to have a system that is effective at point of use and is not more onerous on the Tenants, staff and contractors. Our current systems are Gas/Hydro ready.

JT questioned whether Bield is moving away from storage heaters.

HT explained storage heaters can be cost-effective when used efficiently, but they are challenging to operate.

JT asked about the upgrade of windows and doors in the area.

HT clarified that windows and doors are typically replaced simultaneously within the development, unless specific assets have significant damage. The life cycle for replacement is around 25 years, depending on the condition of the assets, which may necessitate adjustments to the replacement schedule.

JT questioned why only three walls get panelled in wet room.

HT explained that initially, allowing tenants to have one wall for their own design was the intention. However, HT acknowledged the suggestion and promised to pass it on to the design team for further consideration.

JT raised concerns about contractors working at height on a three-story building and whether they should be tied in or have safety harnesses.

HT clarified that contractors should not work at height for more than three minutes without having a scaffolding platform. JT was advised to raise concerns with the Property Management Officer, as all contractors should carry out risk assessments when working at height.

MS enquired about why shower drains are not cleaned when contractors are present to clean showerheads.

HT explained those contractors are primarily there to disinfect showerheads to prevent legionella outbreaks. Cleaning the drains at the same time would incur additional costs, and would possibly be a different contractor.

MT suggested that cleaning the shower drains during the contractor's visit could save on plumber call-outs for frequent blockages.

HT acknowledged the suggestion and stated that she would pass it on to her team for consideration.

GM asked about the lifecycle of communal carpets and whether they should be professionally cleaned to maintain their condition.

HT state that carpets should be replaced every 10 years, but the schedule is currently behind due to the constraints of

COVID-19 and BREXIT. Cleaning of the carpets falls under the housing team's responsibility, but if the issues is raised locally, it should be addressed accordingly.

JT questioned why Bield has a high number of voids, currently at 750, and whether there is a particular reason for this.

HT explained that the high number of voids is primarily due to the age group of the tenants. The void turnover rate is around 18% to 20%, and these figures have remained stable for a long period. There is a significant focus on addressing long-term and difficult-to-let voids to improve turnover rates.

10. Policy Review – Allocation Policy

ZM provided an update on Paper 4, which covered the allocation review update.

ZM explained that the current allocation policy is in accordance with the up-to-date legislation. However, there is scope to review and make adjustments to certain areas of the policy to improve allocations.

ZM informed the PF that due to the withdrawal of support services from Homes For You (HFY) software, Bield had decided to come out of the partnership with Hanover and Trust housing associations. As a result, Bield will have its own allocations policy that aligns with the new housing management system CX. This change will enable all tenant and applicant information to be stored on one system, which is currently not the case. 2024 the board has confirmed that Bield will come out of the partnership with Hanover and Trust housing associations.

JT enquired whether Bield's policy is inferior to Hanover and Trust's allocation policy?

ZM clarified that all three organisations currently share the same policy, which was last reviewed in 2019 and in line with current legislation. However, there are areas of the policy that can be examined and adjusted to enhance allocations.

ZM outlined different topic reports that have been identified for the policy review, including legislation and regulation, nomination agreements, equalities, KPIs, taking ownership into account, Local letting initiatives, Veterans, Domestic abuse, point system, application form, Verification, Medical assessment, Sensitive lets, ASM. These can be added to as we develop the policy.

ZM explained that the topic reports allow for detailed examination of each area to ensure compliance with new legislation and guidance, as well as the implementation of best practices.

ZM stated that the partnership forum would have a say in how they would like to participate in the consultation for the policy review.

IK enquired about involvement of local authorities in the policy review.

ZM confirmed that local authorities have been identified as stakeholders and will be consulted as part of the policy review process.

IK raised a question regarding whether the allocation would apply to those allocated tenancies by the local authority.

GM shared concerns about instances where tenants who are unable to look after themselves are allocated tenancies within retirement housing. GM gave an example where a flat had to be renovated after just one month due to it not being suitable for the tenant's needs. GM emphasised the negative impact this has on existing tenants in such developments.

ZM acknowledged the concerns raised by GM and stated this is something that will be looked into during the policy review. Bield will work with local authorities during the allocation process, and considerations will be made based on the suitability of the tenant's care needs within retirement housing. Individual cases involving MAPPA (Multi-agency public protection arrangements) will be addressed on an individual basis.

JT expressed the view that telephone assessments are not sufficient, and applicants should be visited in person to assess their needs and suitability for housing within retirement setting.

ZM – This is something that can be looked into as part of the policy review. The allocation process and assessments will be discussed with those involved to determine best practice going forward.

11. Cx Customer Portal update

ZM demonstrated the Customer Portal to Partnership Forum, providing an overview of its functionality and how it will enhance communication within the organisation. ZM also requested volunteers to help test the portal before its official launch. The aim is to have the portal live by the end of summer.

IK and MS informed attendees that they did not receive the Portal Guidance Booklet.

Action 10 RB to post out Portal booklets to MS and IK

12. Complaint satisfaction Survey – Voucher winner

One winner to be selected between 1-5

MS – Picked Number 3

Actions 11 ZM to Check who the winner is and issue voucher.

13. Dates for 2023/24

Date of next meeting: **3rd August 2023**

- **2nd November 2023**
- **1st February 2024**

AOB

IK requested that all notices that are not displayed on the noticeboards within developments be removed, as they create an unsightly appearance.

GM mentioned that there may be duplicate notices within developments.

ZM informed the attendees that information regarding good housekeeping has been sent to Are Housing Managers and Local Managers. ZM is interested in hearing if there has been any change at the next meeting.

Action 1. ZM – to update housekeeping guidance.

Guestroom and dogs.

ZM explained that the matter of dogs in guest rooms had been brought to her attention.

ZM advised she could understand that people like to take dogs away with them on holiday however we need to think of allergies of other guests.

GM expressed that tenants feel discriminated against when they are unable to use guestrooms due to restrictions on pets. This situation can have a negative impact on mental health. GM suggested that if certain developments across the estate allowed dogs, the guestrooms could be deep cleaned after each visit, and tenants with dogs would be willing to pay more.

ZM explained that the staff does not have the resources to deep clean Guestrooms after every visit.

TH proposed that the decision on allowing dogs in guest rooms should be made at the individual development level, rather than implementing a blanket policy across all developments. It would be based on agreement and preference among tenants within each development.