

Minutes



Allocation Customer Focus group meeting held on 23rd October 2008 @ Hounds Gate

Present:

Pat Greenwell, Lynn Mitchell, Graham Ward, Sue Lomax, (NCH), Bernadette Lawley, (NCH), Valerie Schneider, Kate Bowley, Elaine Crofts, (NCH), (minutes).

Apologies:

Sheila Thwaites, Ennis Peck, Sue Taylor

No contact from Cynthia James

1.0

Actions from previous minutes (1-3 on Agenda)

BL introduced herself to the group and asked if any one would like to Chair this meeting because the Chair and Vice chair were not available. The group agreed for **BL** to chair.

SL confirmed to the group that the previous chair Kay Loft had not responded to any of the correspondence sent. The group were happy with the appointment of the new chair (Sheila Thwaites, and vice chair, Ennis Peck.

Minutes of the last meeting on 21st August 2008 were approved as true copy.

KB requested if there had been an update on the Local and Sensitive Lettings area i.e. Sneinton.

SL confirmed that Stuart Smith still working on this project with the housing office and information will be fed back at the next meeting.

VS asked what links were in place with the NHS.

SL confirmed that there are some links with NHS, but this is an area that can be explored further when we review our existing links with current services users.

KB, informed the group about a newsletter from NHS "POSITIVE" which is very informative.

GW suggested that the group make better use of the resource centre for future meetings, or use a smaller board room.

Action

SL/PG/SS

Review of the procedure to allow joint visits to void properties to be carried forward to next meeting.

VS asked what is in place to assist people to stay in their own Homes in light of the present financial instability and the Governments current agenda.

SL confirmed that Housing Aid has funding which is being used to develop services in providing options to people which allows them to have access to trained negotiators who may be able to act on their behalf with their landlords.

A group discussion took place on how best to provide and access debt counselling and financial support services.

BL confirmed FIO role, Debt surgeries use of the St Ann' and Bulwell advice centre.

4

Support Needs Assessment Review

SL distributed The "Support Needs and ASB Risk Assessment Procedure and Protocol" consultation draft, for discussion within the group. **SL** confirmed that some feed back had already been received from Jane Lewis, Domestic Violence Strategy officer, Gary Harvey, Housing Solutions Manager and frame work. Feedback form group was requested to be sent to **SL** by 31st October 2008.

PG asked as a matter of course if we confirm the nature of a mental illness with customers Doctors, specifically those with mental health issues, carers of disabled people, before an eviction takes place.

BL confirmed that there is a robust procedure in place to identify vulnerability and decisions to evict is always made after investigating cases thoroughly. **BL** confirmed although specific cases could not be discussed at this meeting, NCH would take appropriate action in order to tackle inappropriate behaviour and that each case would be dealt with on an individual basis.

GW wished to publicly thank NCH and NCC on how we are dealing with ASB cases; he stated that in his opinion they are being dealt with "consistently fairly and properly". He felt that this was a clear signal to new tenants that ASB will not be tolerated. Group agreed.

BL thanked him for his positive feedback and stated that she would feed this back to the relevant teams.

KB requested to know how we deal with tenants who damage property.

BL confirmed that there is a re-charge process in place to recover monies from tenants who deliberately damage their home. All tenants who move to another NCH property must have a satisfactory transfer visit at their home before they are allowed to move.

PG stressed to the group that housing office staff work hard to solve ASB issues but they are not helped by the courts and

legislation, when wishing to take appropriate action, this includes rent arrears cases.

PG asked the group not to under estimate the scale of depression, when being used as a defensive in ASB or rent arrears case, and the level should always be taken into consideration.

BL confirmed again that all cases are dealt with on an individual basis. The right to a home is a basic requirement and we should strive to ensure we understand customer's needs and work with them to ensure negative behaviours are changed and people need the options and support to do this.

SL thanked the group for all their comments and stated that this was the importance of the circulated documents and stressed that all their comments would be welcome.

PG asked to see final version of the letters which are referred to at the end of the document.

GW asked if it was up to date in terms of Housing Law and the recent changes on 1st October 2008, re Family intervention.

BL confirmed that the FIP are also being consulted with.

LM requested clarification on the following scenario:-

What would happen to a "carer" under the age of 60, who's joint tenant died (sheltered accommodation) in terms of succession rights.

BL and SL confirmed that the right of succession is to the tenancy not necessarily the property. Qualifying criteria must be met, but again we would look at cases on an individual basis. NCH can apply to the court for possession even if a legal succession has taken place. For example on the grounds of under occupation, this is to ensure NCH make the most appropriate use of housing Stock, in these circumstances alternative more appropriate accommodation would have been offered.

GW confirmed that proof of residency is one of the qualifying criteria, and the fact that there is an appeals process which customers can pursue if they do not agree with the original decision not to allow a succession.

VS, informed the group that in law a maximum of 4 people can be signed to a tenancy and as such the tenancy continues to the last remaining survivor.

BL confirmed again the rules of succession are with regard to the tenancy not necessarily the property.

GW asked how NCH are informed about the deaths of their

BL

tenants.

EC confirmed monthly report sent from Birth/Deaths/Marriages, to all local office and the process for each office to investigate in terms of their tenants.

LM, GW and KB discussed several specific cases details of which have not been recorded, but much discussion took place in terms of what support services could be provided. Clarity was asked about the knowledge of staff and more specifically HPM, to be able to make support referrals.

SL and BL confirmed the robust support needs referral process at the variety of stages from application for accommodation, allocations, and lettings and the role of each section in this process.

GW acknowledged the role of the HPM and thanked them for their hard work, support and commitment in providing an excellent service.

5

Update on Review of Housing Register

SL provided the group with an update:-

- Finished RSL tenants and there was a 60% return rate.
- If no response a further letter is sent as part of the review process.
- Applications are now in the process of being closed if the applicant did not respond.
- Further attempts are made to contact vulnerable applicants, before the application is closed.
- Support officers and the medical officers have also been contacting all Band 2, urgent needs priority, applicants with a medical recommendation or management recommendation.
- All register applicants are in the process of being contacted and their review letters will be sent out by the end of November 2008.
- The same principles for closing their applications will be followed, in terms of support needs.

GW asked how we would deal with an applicant that had been closed but maintained they had not received a letter.

SL explained the above and the procedure to reinstate an application within 6 months. A new application, ID and possibly support needs assessment would need to be completed.

6 **CBL Re-implementation Project**

BL informed the group of NCH intention to review the Allocations policy along with choice based lettings in order to stream line the process which will also mean a review of the IT system. There will be a project board to carry out this function which will be brought together to start this review after inspection, December 2008. The latest CLG code of Guidance may also affect the review. **PG** confirmed she will be part of the project.

A visit to 3 ALMO's is also being planned as part of the review.

VS expressed concerns about NCC changing the policy again.

SL stated that it is good practice to continually review our policies and procedures to ensure that NCH are addressing any changes in the code of guidance, to keep up to date and be fit for purpose.

PG confirmed the following:-

- A fundamental review of the policy will take place with consultation with service users, such as RSL partner, waiting list applicants, Private landlords, tenants and other LA.
- How big the task is.
- Regular meetings to be held with **SL, ST and BL** and all comments to be passed to Sushma Cheesbrough, Head of Housing Strategy and Regeneration.

The out come of the consultation exercise, the CLG code of guidance and the final policy document will impact on the IT implementation, as the IT will need to accurately reflect the final policy. (including Victoria Centre)

GW stated that the resources given to the above review including consultation is an excellent example of good partnership working and should be shown to the Audit Commission.

ST to confirm

7 **Housing Services Centre**

All were invited to visit the Housing Services Centre and provide us with some feed back. Most had said they had already visited and were very impressed with the layout and brightness of the room.

Uniforms will be worn by all counter staff. (when received)

GM, asked for some signage adjacent to the wall above Hounds

Gate entrance to enable the location to be identified and seen from either end of Hounds Gate.

Signage to the Internet kiosks. (this may be an issue with the Auditors) (temp ones arrange by EC until Neil is able to arrange)

BL stressed that it was early days but there has been increasing footfall already which is currently being monitored to capture numbers and nature of enquiries.

Discussions took place in terms of location for promotions, i.e. Library, Victoria and Broad marsh centre, Radio, coffee morning. In terms of numbers **GW** suggested that on flyers and promotions, people should be asked to bring a friend. Promotion at Local Area Panels, Housing offices, RSL's locations, Supermarkets, Doctors. Official opening on 28th October 2008, all invited.

8 Any other Business

GW raised some concerns that some of the flats at Victoria Centre are being let to owner occupiers.

PG stated that the position with owner occupiers will be taken into consideration when the policy is reviewed.

SL suggested that to ensure that everyone is clear about the role of the group and how it is developing the terms of reference should be reviewed. The group agreed and **SL** distributed the current terms of reference and an example of the Tenants Rents Panel, for information and some ideas on what might be included.

Some discussion took place and some ideas identified. All suggestions to be sent to **SL** for her to be able to compile the list for the next meeting

9 Date of next meeting

Group requested biscuits for future meetings and mince pies for the next one on 11th December 2008 at 10 – 11.30, venue to be confirmed.

5th February 2009 10 – 11.30 Venue to be confirmed.

BL to NB

SL

BL

SL

SL