



**Customer Opinion Panel Minutes**  
**Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> September 2015 – Council Chambers**

**Gosport Borough Council**

Stuart Palmer - (Interim) Housing Services Manager  
 Charles Harman - Head of Operational Services  
 Denise Hudson - Resident Involvement Officer  
 Sam Downing - Resident Involvement Officer  
 Angela Penfold - Principal Housing Officer  
 Val Leopold - Senior Housing Officer  
 Syed Haque - Housing Officer  
 Laura Wise - Admin Officer

**Guests:**

Mrs M Cook	Mrs J Johnson	Mrs V Twyman	Miss R Walker
Mr B Wakefield	Mrs S Greenwood	Mr P Batty	Mrs P Grant
Mr T Bott	Mrs T Bott	Mr J Mardle	Mr B Pullen
Mr G Lidgley	Mr D Redford	Mrs R Hill	Mr Thomson
Ms J Light	Mr B Hudson	Mr R Forster	Mrs L Hay
Mr E Withers	Mr K Burns	Mr J Cante	Mrs S Kimbley-Brown

**Apologies:**

Mr B Sherman	Miss S Bellerby	Mrs L Smith	Mrs J Brown
Mrs M Griffin	Mrs S Spelzini	Mr Lewis	Miss J Reed
Mr Good			

		<b>Action</b>
1.	<p><b>Welcome and Introduction</b></p> <p>Denise Hudson opened the meeting and gave introductions.</p>	
2.	<p><b>Denise Hudson – Resident Involvement Update</b></p> <p><b>Novus Contract Monitoring Group</b> – Denise explained that there is an opportunity for 4 tenant volunteers to work with Gosport Borough Council and Novus to monitor the painting contract. An advert has been placed in the next edition of At Your Service newsletter asking for volunteers. Denise stated tenants interested in joining this new group should contact the Resident Involvement Team to register interest.</p> <p><b>At Your Service &amp; Annual Report (2014/15)</b> – these will be ready for delivery at the beginning of October.</p>	

	<p><b>Contract Monitoring Group</b> – Denise promoted the work of the Contract Monitoring Group and confirmed the next meeting will take place on Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> September 2015, 10 am – 1pm.</p>	
3.	<p><b>Charles Harman – Managing Empty Property Update</b></p> <p>Charles Harman gave a presentation/update on how Gosport Borough Council manages its empty property service. Charles highlighted issues with the service and stated he would go into more detail about this process at the Contract Monitoring Group Meeting on Thursday, 17<sup>th</sup> September. (Please see attached presentation).</p> <p>During the presentation, the following questions/comments were raised:</p> <p>Question: Are Kier using some of their workforce who should be working on voids to work on other things?  Answer: Of course Kier have to manage their workforce and the competing demands between Voids, Day to Day repairs service and planned maintenance. They will switch operatives around to do that, as you would expect, but they have not taken operatives away from Voids and that has not been the reason behind the increased ‘turnaround’ times at Kier...that seems to have been caused by a spike in the number of voids coming through, some properties in particularly poor condition and (early on in the year) the impact of the Christmas break on figures now that we are calculating on calendar days rather than working days. But their performance is recovering; it’s been a temporary blip rather than a permanent issue.</p> <p>Question: The figures popping up on the presentation suggest it’s taking two and a half times longer to deal with a void property...take the contract off of Kier.  Answer: I am not pleased with the overall figures but understand what you are saying. We are talking about a 25 day increase overall but that isn’t solely down to Kier.</p> <p>Dealing with the void (empty) property service is only one aspect of the work that Kier do and there are many reasons why it is taking more time than it used to – as I have explained in answer to the last question. We do need to reduce the time that it takes to re-let properties but the Kier turnaround time is only one part of that; and a relatively small one.</p> <p>Question: Kier apprentices should improve the void times, why aren’t they?  Answer: Apprentices are learning and have to go to college; they cannot be left on jobs by themselves. Apprenticeships are more about the future and should be seen I think as an investment in the future local skill base.</p>	

Question: At Tower Hamlets they take the top 3 people to look at a property and they don't have to re-advertise the properties.

Answer: You are allowed to do this and it may be something we consider; but it is not without its challenges.

Question: Is the bidding system working?

I have data on this and will go into more detail at the Contract Monitoring Group Meeting next week.

Question: At a previous COP, Corinne Waterfield said 2 strikes for bidding and then refusing a property and then you are out.

Answer: Yes I'll come to that in my presentation.

Question: Are the sizes of properties are a problem?

Answer: As you might expect the figures show higher refusal rates for some types of property than for others. We have a low refusal rate on 3 bedroom houses and bungalows but a higher refusal rate on a 2 and 3 bedroom upper floor flats.

Question: I would like more information on those who aren't bidding and why.

Answer: We do not have much information on those that are not bidding; but I will however be going in to greater details at the Contract Monitoring Group on the reasons people are giving for refusing properties.

Question: You've restricted too much in your policy.

Answer: We do have to look at that in more detail. Clearly an allocations policy directly affects who is allowed to register for property and who can bid on what properties. It would appear from the data that we started having a problem with turnaround time shortly after a new allocations policy was introduced in November 2013.

Question: With the bedroom tax, do tenants have to give one month's notice to leave their property?

Answer: No, GBC tenants get to move at the earliest opportunity. It may however be different for Housing Association tenants.

Question: Next year, you are building 14 x 2 bedroom properties and 2 x 3 bedroom properties, will they be advertised at the same time and will people have to bid on all of the properties if they are interested?

Answer: Yes; there is not a different method of allocation these properties being considered.

Question: I would like more data about the reasons why 27% of people turned down the properties offered.

Answer: I will be going in to greater detail at the Contract Monitoring Group on the reasons people are giving for refusing properties. Although I will say now that it would appear that

	<p>compared to other authorities a 27% refusal rate is quite low compared to others – although we do need to double check that information.</p> <p>Question: I would like a list of the address of hard to let properties.  Answer: I will not be able to give exact addresses but I can give you their locations.</p> <p>Question: is the offer policy different for tenants compared to non-tenants?  Answer: Who gets The offer of properties is split three ways; it used to be approximately one third went to homeless applicants, a third to waiting list applicants and a third to those in existing accommodation. This has changed though and I will provide the latest figures we have.</p> <p>(addendum: The split of the % of general needs lettings (2014-15) is:  Waiting lists: 58.06%  Transfer (existing council tenants): 26.61%  Homeless Households: 15.32%)</p> <p>Question: People’s expectations are high, do you think they are expecting too much?  Answer: Generally I do not think they are too high. People’s expectations have risen over time [20 years ago a potential tenant might not have expected central heating or double glazing for example] but they do know what is on offer in other housing sectors such as housing association properties and the private sector. The challenge for this council is to keep up with those expectations by investing in the stock as best we can while maintaining social rent levels.</p> <p>Question: Can we have a sinking fund to put aside for repairs?  Answer: I know that is how some landlords work, and there are some advantages but I understand that (financial) legislation prevents local authorities from undertaking such a scheme.</p> <p>Question: Is the 5 year (flexible) tenancy an issue?  Answer: No, not at the moment, but that is because there are no 5 year flexible tenancies that have yet come up for review. We will get a clearer idea about that when they do, in 2 years’ time.</p> <p>Charles agreed to provide further information about empty properties at the next Contract Monitoring Group Meeting (17<sup>th</sup> September).</p>	
4.	<p><b>Stuart Palmer – Housing Service Review</b></p> <p>Stuart Palmer introduced himself and explained that he has been</p>	

	<p>contracted to work for the council until December 2015 in order to carry out a review of the Housing Service. He stated that a 'break out' session with COP based on the following questions would help his report:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) When contacting the Housing Service, what is your experience as a customer?</li> <li>2) Do you find it easy to get the information or contact you need?</li> <li>3) What is important to you and why?</li> <li>4) What do you think we do well?</li> <li>5) What would you like to change/improve and why?</li> <li>6) What could we do that would help to improve the housing service for you?</li> </ol> <p>Please see attached document listing all the comments from the break out session.</p>	
5.	<p><b>Date of next COP</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> November 2015</b></p>	

**Distribution:-**

Attendees, HMT, Chairman of Community Board, Housing Spokesmen, Group Leaders, Web Site