



## MEETING MINUTES

- Purpose of Meeting**
1. Welcome and Introduction
  2. Lead member of Housing James Poland Councillor's Role and Duties
  3. Decant and Disturbance Policy
  4. Update from Members
  5. Actions form previous meeting
  6. Any other business

**Date** 19<sup>th</sup> January 2023

**Venue** The Hut, Old Ashby Road, Loughborough

### Attendance:

Members	Janice Wright Phil Hudson Craig Jordan Christopher Hipwell Stuart Wells Dianne Lockwood Ireen Kennedy Paul Maine Christine Maine	Senior Citizens Forum (SCF) Fielding Court Association Ashby Road Estate Community Centre Selbourne Court Fielding Court Association Chapman Street Park Court Chapman Street Garden Association Chapman Street Garden Association
Guests	Helen Kennedy Andrew Everitt-Stewart Councillor James Poland Andrew Staton	Customer Engagement Officer Customer Engagement Officer Lead member of Housing Landlord Services Manager
Apologies Chair	June Bush William Clark Tracey Riley Jackie Thomas Mark Biggs Simon Waldran Gerry Ryan Trish Edwards Wayne Bridges	Thorpe Acre Community Association Unicorn Street Chapman Street Staveley Court Thorpe Acre Community Association Brooke Street Shepshed Oxford Court Syston Staveley Court Brooke Street Shepshed



## 1: Introduction

Everyone was welcomed, no new members have attended.

It was discussed that we need to recruit new members and we appreciate we need to hit the digital inclusion and tenants that work during the day, if any members have any ideas to contribute to let the Customer Engagement team know or to help spread the word around. We are hoping the Network Event will help promote engagement where our new leaflet will be available. The Customer Engagement part on the Charnwood Borough Council website doesn't get many views so we want to refresh the content of the site and make it more streamlined. Everyone was thanked for their consistent commitment to the Forum and how valuable it is to us.

It was questioned what the budget is for promotional work to help promote Customer Engagement, and that it would be a good idea for the new leaflets to be distributed to the Councillors - **ACTION**

It was asked what is happening with the Digital Inclusion project and it was advised that this has been placed on hold. Customer Engagement will chase this up with the relevant department - **ACTION**

The Customer Engagement Team produced a handbook to help tenants understand how to report a repair online. This was a step-by-step guide however some members thought it was confusing. Therefore it was asked if a quick reference guide could be produced– **ACTION**

## 2: Lead member of Housing James Poland Councillor's Role and Duties

Councillor Poland introduced himself as the lead member for housing and explained that he has been in the role since 2020 and enjoys interacting with the public and councillors. He also explained what his role entails and took questions during the discussion:

There are 52 councillors at Charnwood Borough Council. Their main aim is to represent the community and be the access point for residents. Therefore, acting as community champions and to be the link between residents and the Council.

Councillors are appointed in May and there is one lead Councillor. They generally have more than one roll and cover all elements of Charnwood Borough Council.

A councillor's purpose is to be a critical friend to the Council as they are not Council officers, and to monitor performance of the Council and add value in any way they can, representing the housing department and the public. Also, to ask questions that tenants need asking.

On a day-to-day basis Councillor Poland has regular meetings with the Director of Housing and Wellbeing looking at policies and making sure that these are fit for purpose and taking into account the 'laws of unintended consequences'. Then taking these policies to the Housing Management Advisory Board, where the policies are scrutinised, and any questions answered which is a vital part of the process.



A question was asked about feedback, and it was commented that tenants rarely receive it. It was agreed that this is lacking and would be looked at with updates in Your Homes Matter being a good starting point.

A question was asked about improving communication to tenants and the Borough in general. It was explained that a smart phone app is being planned for easier access to services. It has no live date yet but will be Borough wide. If the Council app takes too long, then Councillor Poland would like to develop a housing app in the meantime. However, to develop this technology is time consuming and expensive.

It was asked about sheltered courts with shared amenities as this is not what tenants would like and it was explained that all properties are being reviewed, and St Michaels Court is being completely redeveloped to bring it up to date. If courts cannot be redeveloped, then Charnwood Borough Council will look at selling the land and reinvesting.

A recent newspaper article about voids in Charnwood was mentioned and the vetting procedure was discussed as communities need to work together so this is very important. It was suggested that homeless people could be housed in the many voids but it was explained that this would have to be sensitively done to make sure that communities work well together.

It was explained that when properties are upgraded then these should ideally be offered to tenants living in outdated properties.

It was asked if Charnwood Borough Council was planning to build new properties, this is expensive, and the right to buy policy can then come into being meaning that stock has to be sold on too quickly. Developers must provide 40% of affordable housing in new settlements, this can be shared ownership, rented etc, of they can gift properties to Charnwood Borough Council as part of their social stock.

Charnwood Borough Council will occasionally purchase properties for specific needs, maybe profound disabilities, or similar situations.

The point was made that residents are disappointed with all the new student accommodation being built in Loughborough as that this has inflated the price of private rent in the Borough.

It was asked if Councillor Poland is involved in planning for Houses in multiple occupation (HMO'S) but he is not as this is semi judicial and ward councillors deal with this.

It was asked that if a tenant makes a complaint, and it is logged and acted upon, how does the complainant know that this has happened, and how do they make sure that the work is carried out. It was explained that again, this is an area that needs work and feedback seems to be lacking at Charnwood Borough Council.

A question was asked about void properties at Park Court, these have been updated but have been empty for a long time. Also, three flats are empty at Fielding Court. It was explained that COVID has played its part in causing a backlog, plus having no contractors, and potential tenants can be waiting up to 18 months. Eligibility for these is split into 3 bands depending on the individuals housing need. More sheltered accommodation is available, but the wait for larger properties can be up to 3 years.

A point was raised that foreign nationals can have trouble understanding and filling in housing application forms, and one tenant explained that some potential tenants had to wait 10 weeks to get help with their application



Councillor Poland explained that working with the hubs is very important and that councillors are there to work with tenants and residents.

Councillor Poland also explained that all councillors have a members grant, this is a £500 grant, and they can award it at their discretion. He encouraged tenants to make use of it.

It was asked if there was funding for more mobility scooter accommodation as there is now much more demand for storage with their popularity increasing, it was explained that this is a known issue as they must be stored externally from living accommodation due to fire regulations.

Finally, the issue of tenants having contents insurance was discussed and committee members pointed out that this should be made a condition of tenancy.

### 3: Decant and Disturbance Policy

Andrew Staton thanked the members for their input and explained how much we appreciate the valuable contribution and input the Charnwood Housing Resident Forum have when looking at documents like this policy.

It was explained that this policy will go to the Housing Management Advisory Board and then to Cabinet for approval. These are statements of intention on what we want to do, and the procedures are how we get there. Andrew is hoping to bring together a range of internal processes and join them together in this document.

#### ***Various points were made on the Decant and Disturbance Policy as follows:***

**Introduction:** There are occasions when we need to move someone out of their home for reasons concerning their property in which they live. There will be works that are required to be carried out to the property which is rendered as uninhabitable, and this could be because of the tenants not adhering to their rights and responsibilities and need to be decanted whilst work is carried out.

**Point 1:3, the need to decant a tenant:** The reasons we need someone to move out has been categorised into planned or unplanned, temporary, or permanent. We can forward plan a decant however sometimes we don't know it is going to happen, for example, a fire takes place in the property or there is a 2-inch crack in the wall, so there are occasions when a decant is unplanned. Deriving from this, we have to ask if the person can move back to the property in future, or if they need to be moved permanently.

**2 Objectives:** this summaries on what we want to achieve from this policy and enable us to apply a consisted approach for everyone.

**Point 3 Scope of this policy:** This is who and what this policy applies too. This section states introductory and secure tenant dwelling but does not include garages and shops.

**Point 3:2** there is another bullet point to add to this section to include that Charnwood Borough Council will have to manage the tenancy if the property is to become unfit. We cannot just decant tenants for reasons by example of hoarding or Anti-social behaviour issues. This needs to be stated in the section as these types of issues are dealt with differently.



**Point 4a:** This sets out a general statement of decanting on how we handle the process and how we make sure that the tenant is not financially worse off due to the decant. We need to place the tenant back into the position they had of been before the decant and not to make them worse off. There may be occasions, under an urgent situation that a property isn't available for the tenant to move into, so we have to consider temporary accommodation like a Bed and Breakfast.

The council have an allocations policy, and this is part of Strategic Housing, this sets out how and whom we will allow and accept on our housing register. This decant policy falls out of this statement, the foundation for allocations is to make the best use of our stock and giving an element of choice as much as possible. We wouldn't tie up a property due to a decant that may be in high demand, for example a large 4-bedroom house, so point 3a states although decanting falls out of this allocation policy, we will find properties for that person to move into temporarily that they would be eligible for if they were to be applying on our housing register.

**Point 4b Disturbance payment:** This sets out what we will pay for if we require someone to move out. These are designed to make the tenant no worse off if this process hadn't taken place.

**Point 4b 4:** This is a list of things that we will pay for. We will pay for the cost of removals however there are occasions when tenants offer to do this so this will be the tenants choice. We also allow for the fact that under certain circumstance, for example the vulnerable or elderly, we will also pay for packaging. We will also pay for storage if it is found unreasonable for the tenant to be able to move all their belongings in their new decanted property. This applies to moving out and also back into the decanted property. Travel expenses are also paid for if they have had to move out of the area and need to travel to work that is of a further distance.

**Point 4c:** When someone moves temporarily, they will remain the legal tenant of the property they are having to move out of. They will still be responsible for rent on that property and service charges; however, they won't pay rent on the temporary property. The tenant will be responsible for all outgoings on the decanted property including service charges for example, but not limited to, gas and electricity.

**Point 4d Compensation for permanent loss of home:** This is for when someone is unable to move back into their property so in effect, have lost their home. Due to this, there are some legal circumstances that we are required to pay a 'home loss' payment. This is determined by the Government and not Charnwood Borough Council (this does not apply, for example if the tenant has a possession of order against them).

**Point 4e Offsets:** There are circumstance that some tenants may be in rent arrears or recharges, this section sets out where we may deliberately be able to give some discretion, to decide to offset these arrears.

**Point 4f Ex-gratis compensation:** This section covers any compensation payments where there may have been any unnecessary or additional disturbance and distress to the tenant.

**Point 5 complaints and appeals:** If someone is dissatisfied, then they are entitled to complaint under our complaints policy and any statutory rights of appeal can be made to the Upper Tribunal.



## Questions asked:

- It was asked if this policy includes Leaseholders, and it was explained that it does not.
- It was asked who deals with decants and it was advised that it is the Tenancy and Estate Management Officers. They will consult with the Housing Options team and they regularly deal with a decant register, so we are able to ' earmark ' properties for decant, so there is a lot of co working that happens.
- If a tenant must move into a different area, then it will be the Tenancy and Estate Management Officer for the new area who will become their patch officer.
- It was asked if there is tenant who hoards and therefore creates a fire risk, if Charnwood Borough Council would decant them to make the house safe, however it was explained that these types of issues are dealt with differently and wouldn't be covered under this policy.
- Assurance was given to the members that we work very closely with the Tenancy and Estate Management Officers and the Housing team. We also provide support for the tenant to assist them in changes to their Council tax and benefits.
- It was mentioned that when we talk of a 'fee' in this policy it is confusing, however it was confirmed that when someone moves out, they don't have a legal status on the property they are moving into, so we must be careful when referring to rent and charges. Therefore, using the word fee would stop confusion.
- It was asked what contractors we use to help with removals, and it was explained that we use an organisation called G&S, we have a legal relationship with this company however if there is a rare occasion they couldn't help, we do have the ability to search for another organisation that can assist, especially under an urgent situation.
- It was asked what happens if the tenant refuses to move out and it was advised that we have a legal right on the property under the 1985 Housing Act. This allows us to move the tenant out as long as we offer suitable different accommodation.

## ***Comments made for additions to the policy:***

To mention that we provide support to the tenant to assist them in changes to their Council tax and benefits upon a decant.



## 4: Update from Members

**Riversdale Court** – They held a Christmas party on the 17<sup>th</sup> of December 2022 with help of the community initiative fund, there wasn't as many attendees as hoped but this was due to illness.

**Chapman Street Garden Association** – Nothing to report

**The Hut** – They held a Christmas event on the 17<sup>th</sup> of December 2022 which was a great success. They hold a weekly coffee morning on a Friday, and this will be attended by the Customer Engagement Team once a month to assist with any enquiries and to carry out their normal day roles.

**Staveley Court** – Apologies sent.

**Park Court** – Had to put a complaint in again regarding their bin storage as they are finding dog excrement an issue as people are unable to place in bins as they are too full. It was asked out Charnwood Borough Council follow up on complaints, so this is something we need to discuss in future and possibly when we have a guest with regards to this service at a future Charnwood Housing Resident Forum.

**Fielding Court** – They held a Christmas event on the 17<sup>th</sup> of December 2022 however this was disappointingly not very well attended. They have been having issues with residents contaminating bins and that new tenants should be advised on how to use them. Wardens will be responsible for this so contact will be made to ensure they explain the service to new residents in future.

**Selbourne Court** – Nothing to report

**Oxford Court System** – Apologies sent

**Thorpe Acre Resident Association** – Apologies sent

## 5: Actions form previous meeting

It has been advised that some are still outstanding from the last meeting and these will be addressed accordingly at the next meeting.

## 6: Any other business

Recent issues with fly tipping on Fielding Court and Chapman Street. One instance was witnessed by a resident on Chapman Street and will be happy to make a statement - ACTION

The noticeboard on Chapman Street either needs replacing or removing, therefore an officer will obtain photos and report this through - ACTION



## ***Actions:***

It was questioned what the budget is for promotional work to help promote Customer Engagement, and that it would be a good idea for the new leaflets to be distributed to the Councillors - **ACTION**

It was asked what is happening with the Digital Inclusion project and it was advised that this has been placed on hold. Customer Engagement will chase this up with the relevant department - **ACTION**

The repairs handbook needs re-addressing that the Customer Engagement produced to make a little simpler, it was explained that the content needs to be a step-by-step process however a quick reference guide needs to be included – **ACTION**

Recent issues with fly tipping on Fielding Court and Chapman Street. One instance was witnessed by a resident on Chapman Street and will be happy to make a statement - **ACTION**

The noticeboard on Chapman Street either needs replacing or removing, therefore an officer will obtain photos and report this through - **ACTION**

***Meeting Closed At; 4:00pm***

***Next Meeting; At The Hut, Old Ashby Road, Loughborough 1:00pm on the 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2023***