



**STIRLING TENANTS ASSEMBLY
MEETING HELD AT TRAVELLING PERSONS' SITE
ON 15th SEPTEMBER 2015 AT 10.30am**

Hugh thanked everyone for attending and thanked John for use of the facilities at the Travelling Persons' Site. He also thanked Steven McCabe for his attendance.

1. Present:

Alec Lamb, Dolly Gemmell, Thomas Brown, Cathy Brown, Anna Johnston, Hugh McClung, Philomena McClung, Delia Waddell, Richard Waddell, Moira Robertson, Steven McCabe (Stirling Council), Emma Meldrum (STP).

Apologies:

Brian Telfer, Robert Cairney, Michael Griffiths, Cathy Traynor, Meg de Amasi.

2. Universal Credit:

Steven explained that his remit is now with the Allocations Team. However, he advised that Universal Credit has had an impact on arrears. It has replaced 6 other benefits and has been in place in Stirling for a few months. Of the 28 tenants on Universal Credit, 23 had some arrears before being moved to Universal Credit. Total arrears before move had been £20,000 – this has now risen by £5,400. With some of these it may be that they have not yet received their first Universal Credit payment as there are 7 waiting days for most applicants. Stirling Council has applied for alternative payment arrangements for 6 of the affected tenants. 20% of their allowance would be deducted and Stirling Council has no control over this, but a tenant can apply to Department of Work and Pensions to have this percentage reduced. Across the whole district 200+ claims have been made, and 8 or 9 personal budgeting support applications have been put in place. Stirling Council's Money Advice Team will try and help wherever possible. We have real issues with single people under the age of 35 who present at homeless. There is a £45 management fee. Stirling Council have been in discussion with DWP about this.

Another issue Stirling Council are having a problem with is the fact that in alternative payment arrangements DWP use a very long reference number which Council's computers cannot recognise. At the moment we only have 6 affected tenants but this could snowball. DWP have been asked to make the reference number the same as the rent reference number but they have declined.

Edinburgh have said that they will not apply for alternative payment arrangements except under special circumstances.

Obviously, Stirling Council will continue to try and support tenants. Income Maximisation Officers and Housing Officers are visiting everyone who applies for Universal Credit, but it is increasingly difficult as we are limited to what we can offer. We are trying to get Income Maximisation Officers involved in allocations.

Stirling Council are experiencing difficulty with paperwork from DWP. Some of their staff do not seem to have an understanding of housing. On the whole the advisors are helpful but

it is felt that there is perhaps a training need for some staff. This has been highlighted. Steven circulated a paper showing current arrears. The level of arrears is below where we were at the same week of the last 2 years.

Steven then offered to answer any questions from the meeting.

Philomena asked what the £45 management fee was for. Steven explained that the DWP's understanding is that housing associations' rates do not cover homeless accommodation and the £45 is to cover management costs. Steven will seek clarification. Hugh said the £45 is paid to local authorities with all other payments and local authority will have to sort it out. However, Steven said the DHP fund will not always cover the shortfall.

Alec asked what happens to a person who is affected by this. Steven said that person would be passed to the Homeless Team who will try to support them.

Eviction is a last resort and is very expensive. If someone is intentionally homeless the Council are not responsible for helping them. Hugh advised that Scottish Government are looking at the Homeless Persons Act. They have to take account of the effects of Welfare Reform – has to be balanced with those who just don't pay their rent.

Moira queried when this would be rolled out to rural areas, and Steven offered to clarify this for her. Hugh said it goes by electoral boundaries but Moira said that this does not always apply to Universal Credit.

Regarding the 20% of a person's allowance being deducted if alternative payment arrangements are applied for, Hugh queried whether this percentage could be changed. Steven will clarify.

Hugh also said that there had been a clear definition of recognition of reference numbers and asked why it had changed. Hugh will relay this to the tenant representative of Scottish Government.

Hugh thanked Steven for his attendance and for the information he had supplied.

3. Minutes of Meeting held on 18th August 2015:

Acceptance of minutes was proposed by Dolly, seconded by Moira.

4. Business arising from Minutes:

Item 3.4 – Dolly will dispose of the DMS catalogue. Hugh had asked about lapel badges but, because of the logo and writing, the badges would have been very large. However, they are going to send some samples. Cost is £13.50 each, minimum order 25. It was decided to wait until we see the samples, have a discussion, then make a decision.

Item 6.1 – Moira reported that input regarding cost of heating in rural homes will be finalised this week.

5. Reports:

- 1) Chair – Surveys have been done by the Subsidy Working Group and a report will be coming out. Felt that Scottish Government increase the level of subsidy and look at the effects of environmental impact on certain types of housing. Scottish Government have recognised that the benchmark has not been adjusted since 2013. If an increase is made it is not known where the money will come from. If a registered landlord or housing association do not take up green belt space they will be given a one-off payment of £1,500.

Scottish Housing Regulator has now adopted a mechanism if a registered landlord or housing association is not working properly. Tenants must be allowed to vote on any merger. Regulator has indicated that a pilot will be conducted. If support for the merger is small there can be an appeal by the landlord. Hugh hopes to have more details at our next meeting.

Hugh has been asked to set up a Working Group to look at how tenants can make an impact on housing strategy.

- 2) Secretary – Sessions are being run by TIS and TPAS on “Spotlight on Social Housing Provisions of the Housing Act”. The Stirling one is to be held at Old Viewforth on 12th October 2015. Hugh will book places for Philomena, Hugh, Alec, Thomas, Richard, Delia and Cathy.
Christmas lunch – Philomena will try to book Hollybank for 15th December 2015 following our meeting at the Mayfield Centre.
- 3) Treasurer – Dolly reported the current balance as £6,365.72.
- 4) Housing Advisory Group – Hugh reported on the Housing Advisory Group meeting which had been held on 4th September 2015. Items which had been covered on the agenda were:
- Sale of Land in Callander – some of the land is owned by Housing Revenue Account, some by General Fund. Hugh had reminded the Housing Advisory Group that Stirling Tenants Assembly must be consulted.
 - Empty Homes Project – Hugh had asked for an update on the project and a report of the costs involved. There had been no overspend, and Hugh had made it clear that he was commending the officers involved.
 - Performance Report – was a clear indication of how well Stirling Council is doing.
 - Housing Revenue Accounts – this was to have been a report from Hugh but the meeting he had been supposed to have attended had not yet happened.
 - Welfare Reform – Steven and a colleague had provided an update.
 - Laminate Flooring Policy – it had been made quite clear that no-one who lives above someone else can be allowed to have laminate flooring. Hugh will clarify the situation regarding owner-occupiers.
 - Castle Rock Edinvar Housing Association – have an improvement plan in place. A verbal report was provided on improvements they intend to do.
 - Rent Consultation – Proposals may well be changed depending on costs. There may be a 1% increase. We will be consulted at the next meeting about the proposed increase. There will also be consultation *via* Open Door.
 - Membership of Housing Advisory Group – currently 15 tenants, officers as required, and 4 Councillors responsible for housing. New Director is looking at membership. Consideration to be given to how a member can get an item included on the agenda, how to attract new people to have an interest in the Group, etc.
- An option had been put forward to change the time of the HAG meetings to a time outwith the normal working week, such as evening meetings or weekend meetings. Hugh will let HAG know that our suggestion was to alternate between days and evenings.
- Another option was to reduce the meetings to 4 per year – we felt that the number of meetings should be left as it is at present – Hugh will advise HAG accordingly.
- The option to provide training and support to tenant members was accepted as a good proposal.
- It was also agreed that each tenant representative being allocated a slot where he/she can provide feedback on community issues would be welcomed by most.

6. Date of next meeting
20th October 2015 at 10.30am at Bannockburn Community Centre.