



DARLINGTON
Borough Council

OPERATIONS GROUP
Housing & Revenues Division
Town Hall, Darlington DL1 5QT

Tenants Panel – Monthly Meeting

Thursday 22nd May 2025

Location – Park Place, Darlington

Minutes

Present: Matthew Hufford (Tenant Involvement Officer), Sara Lunn (Tenant Involvement Officer), Sam Pounder (Housing Apprentice), Amy Harden (Housing Asset and Compliance Officer), Christina Hall (Housing Officer), Daisy McCarthy (Lifeline Apprentice)

Tenants Panel Members Don Aitchison (Branksome Hall Drive), Frank Hunter (Roxby Court), Tanya Caenazzo (Heighington), Carl Bennett (Branksome Hall Drive), Carol Bradbrook Taylor (Park Side), Christine Fishwick (North Riverside), Hugh Mortimer (Park Place), Karen Wright (Lingfield), Sylvia (Park Place)

Apologies: Denise Parkin (Haughton), Dawn King (Bank Top)

		ACTION
1.	<p>Introductions – Apologies for Denise Parkin,</p> <p>Carl (Branksome Hall Drive) Don (Branksome) Frank (Roxby Court) Karen (Lancaster) Hugh (Swan Street) Carol (Park Side) Sylvia (Swan Street), Tanya (Heighington), Christine (North Riverside) Matthew Hufford, Sara Lunn, Sam Pounder, Amy Harden, Christina Hall and Daisy McCarthy</p>	
2.	<p>Fire Policy</p> <p>Amy started the meeting by addressing the fire safety policy update. She mentioned that the policy is still being worked on and will be sent out tomorrow with some feedback questions. She mentioned that the update is to adhere to updates to the legislation and will cover all buildings from now on. She continued by saying that the Stay Put policy now also applies to flats, and that fire doors are already being upgraded to meet new regulations. They will have a phased implementation to time undertaking of work. Amy also mentioned that the Stay Put policy will be discussed further once it has been finalised.</p> <p>Fire risk assessments have been reviewed and updated to coincide with new legislation. There is a big emphasis on why communal spaces need to be clear, and how fire spreads outside of properties (eg</p>	

	<p>balconies). Tenants may have action taken against them because of this.</p> <p>Sylvia asked for clarification on refusal of access, Amy responded that this means to storage in communal areas, and that it will be specified more in the finalised policy. Christina further clarified that it will be electrical cupboards and similar spaces within properties.</p> <p>Carol asked about her bungalow not having a back door and not having fire doors at all. She asked further about whether these properties will be getting new fire doors. Amy responded that at the moment only communal areas are getting fire door upgrades. Carol expressed that the fire department were shocked that her property only had one fire exit. Amy asked for a location which Carol responded, "Tennyson Gardens and Shakespeare Road". Amy continued by saying that the new fire doors require an annual inspection, and a visual inspection every six months by the tenancy team.</p> <p>She continued that as part of these inspections they will need access to homes to check the fire doors. Communal corridor doors will be checked every 3 months.</p> <p>She further clarified that she is hoping the finalised policy will be emailed out tomorrow.</p> <p>Don raised concern with the Stay Put policy and stated that the noise from the alarms are too uncomfortable for him, and that he would leave the property immediately. Sara responded that she was aware that tenants were divided on the Stay Put policy, but clarified that the policy is in place for safety and is being followed by other local authorities. Don also asked about a large fire and stated that it would be chaos, and Sara responded that it helps the fire department if everyone is inside so fire fighters are not risking their lives to help someone who isn't there. Carl stated that he was in support of the Stay Put policy, and also mentioned that there are headphones you can buy if the noise from the alarms is too uncomfortable. Sara mentioned that the team could ask a member of the fire department to attend a tenants panel in the future if the panel would want that.</p> <p>Christina added that the advice was always to stay put to reduce risk on the person and the fire department. She clarified that if you are to leave to not return to the property until the fire department declares the property is safe. John raised concern about waiting</p>	
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	times for the fire department, and Christina clarified that even a standard fire door should hold for at least 20 minutes. Sylvia also asked if the flat doors have fire protection and Christina confirmed that they do, but the new doors have stronger protection.	
3.	<p>Scrutiny / Feedback</p> <p>Matthew started by stating that going forward they will send the panel members an email detailing what the team need scrutinising and will also send panel members a list of questions to go through over a call after a week. He clarified that simple things will still be done over an email, but more specific things will be discussed through a phone call discussion. Sara also clarified that panel feedback is very important, and Matthew added that the aim is to make the feedback process easier. He continued that feedback isn't being discussed during the panel meetings because some members may not get the chance to share their thoughts. Several panel members agreed that this method will be easier for giving feedback to the team.</p>	
4.	<p>Mystery Shopping</p> <p>Matthew asked which panel members took part in the previous Mystery Shopping, and then stated that this upcoming Mystery Shopping event will be targeting the same department as the previous but over email this time to test how good the email service of Customer Services is. He continued that this could be something they actually need help with or something that panel members just want checking quickly. He continued by giving examples of some of the feedback the team would be looking for and stated that panel members could also ask questions as members of the public. Matthew asked if the panel would be happy to do this and they all agreed.</p> <p>Sara added that the team will be liaising with the panel to ask which of the questions they would like to do to ensure that not everyone asks the same questions, as this will be flagged by Customer Services.</p> <p>Don asked for clarification on asking about homeless advice, and Sara clarified that the panel members could state that they are a friend.</p> <p>Carol asked about PhotoID being required for checking rent accounts and stated that she does not have any PhotoID.</p> <p>Tanya asked about emailing in, and asked whether the systems will automatically link email accounts to their tenancies. Christina clarified that customer services would not know that a person is a member of the tenants panel just from an email.</p>	

	<p>Matthew asked if anyone on the panel emailed regularly and the panel responded that they typically don't, and they tend to just log in to the portal.</p> <p>A tenant panel member asked about meeting a homeless person and not knowing what advice to give them and asked what to do in this situation. Christina responded that the homeless person should come to the town hall to present as homeless, and the homeless team will help them. She further clarified that a lot of the places in town are full.</p>	
5.	<p>Community Funding</p> <p>Matthew clarified that the team just need to go through the funding with the panel to ensure that they are happy with it. He asked that the panel tick for approval or disapproval on a table they were given.</p> <p>Sara started with Oban Court who are asking to make their garden more comfortable with some cushions, wood preserver.</p> <p>Sherborne House have asked for a communal shed to put push bikes, lawnmowers and tools in. The tenants have agreed that they will use the shed. Shed to ensure that items are kept safe.</p> <p>John asked about damp in their communal shed and stated that it is because it is made of Tin. Matthew responded by saying the team will ask whether the shed will be tin or wood.</p> <p>Roxby Court have asked for funding for the garden and for a memorial bench which will be located in the outside area.</p> <p>Dinsdale have asked for foldable tables and chairs because there are some but not many. It is noted that they have somewhere to store them.</p> <p>Matthew asked whether the panel will prefer jackets or t-shirts, clarifying that in the past the panel has had t-shirts and jackets that say "tenants panel" on them. The panel agreed that this would be a good idea. 5 members asked for jackets and 6 asked for t-shirts.</p>	
6.	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>Sylvia asked if she could apply for the community fund as she has been planting seeds. Matthew responded by saying that she would be able to do this and will take her details.</p> <p>Tanya asked about the change to contact and stated that tenants thought it was a scam. Sara responded that she had asked the income team, who responded that it was a trial. Tanya continued that with how many scams are targeting tenants they aren't sure whether to trust texts from the council that are</p>	

	<p>unlabelled. Matthew clarified that the reason income have chosen to do it over text is because they had received good feedback last time they tried it. Christina added that income could be asked to start the text by saying who it is from rather than including it at the end.</p> <p>Karen asked about gardening making a mess of some areas, and Matthew responded that the team will look into this.</p>	
7.	<p>Next Meeting – The next meeting will take place on the 26/06/2025 at 2pm</p>	