

## Tenant Communication & Support Group

### Minutes

Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> November 2023

10- 1:30pm, at Victory House

#### Attendees

**Tenants:** Cathy Combs (CC), Loraine Darmon (LD), Vicky Baxter (VB), Sarah Boycott (SB)

**Staff:** Emilie Hildreth (EH) Tenants & Communities Manager, Rebecca LeCaille (RL) Tenants & Communities Officer, Lou Chapman (LC) Head of Communications

#### **Apologies:**

<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>Discussion Points</b>	<b>Actions</b>
<b>Apologies</b>	None	
<b>Agree minutes from last meeting</b>	All happy with previous minutes.	
<b>Declarations of Interest</b>	None	
<b>Vice Chair/Members responsibility</b>	<p>CC introduced the idea of a Vice Chair.</p> <p>CC invited interest in being Vice Chair. LD and SB expressed an interest.SB asked requirements of the Chair.</p> <p>RL explained that in the New Year there will be training. In short, the Vice Chair would be expected to chair meetings in the Chairs absence. Also, they attend SQC meetings 2:45 to 4:45 or in the evening. This is a good exercise anyway to see what happens at SQC. Saffron and SQC Members are supportive. CC explained two of the members are not staff, and are tenants of other HA's.</p>	

	<p>LD offered to take role of Vice Chair for 6 months, followed by SB who will take the following 6 months.</p> <p>Members were invited to shadow CC or LB at a meeting. Members who have an interest in the Board would find particular benefit from shadowing a meeting. Good for all members but especially if Members have interest in the Board at a later date.</p> <p>CC moved on to responsibilities, indicating it is not just the Chair who can approach Saffron with issues. For example, LD and VB may see something on the FB group, they should feel free to email RL. It IS not necessary for everything to go through CC. As an example, on Saffron there was a page about boiling a kettle. CC explained she found it insulting to tenants dealing with mould. CC advised Saffron Communications Team who took the post down. Other Members can do this.</p> <p>RL raised the issue of emails asking Members to please send responses, even negative, so that we know messages have been received. This is one of the commitments Members of the group make.</p> <p>CC raised the issue of agendas. CC asked members to provide details of what others want to see on the agenda. Open invitation to others to raise agenda items for meetings.</p>	
<p><b>How to review a letter</b></p>	<p>LC joined via Teams to give Members some pointers on how to review letters.</p> <p>LC gave a presentation to members. (appendix a)</p> <p>LC explained that she has conducted training in the past with staff and some of this information is contained in the presentation. LC explained training will be ongoing with staff.</p> <p>The presentation ended with a few examples; these were letters which Members were able to comment on to get an idea of what this task will involve going forward.</p> <p>One of the letters raised the issue of identification and calling card. Members felt it very important that anyone visiting homes on behalf of Saffron should have their own identification as well as the letter of authorisation from Saffron. If photographs are required, it is important to point this out as the taking of photographs of people's homes causes particular concern.</p> <p>SB asked why some letters are sent to LC/Communications and some are not. LC felt this was down to individual choice, but that her Team would not have capacity to review all letters.</p>	

	<p>LC asked whether anything formal had been agreed with Groups regarding the reviewing of letters. CC asked whether in light of the Service Charge (SC) letter issue there would be a requirement for a review of all letters. LC explained there is a process, but that the SC letter slipped through the net.</p> <p>RL explained there is no formal timeline or structure for letter review. Some will come up as things are raised for example on the FB group. If letters are because of a project, and going to all tenants, Members will be asked to review these.</p> <p>Survey to increase attendance for the Saffron Community Membership. CC asked if there is any way that LC can do a FB post about what was discussed. If that can be shared and offer the ability to attend meetings to look at similar issues that may interest new members. Also, CC raise the website which is a little woolly. LC agreed it is difficult putting information on the page but not too much so that it is off putting. VB said she was put off in the past as she was unaware that transport was available.</p> <p>RL indicated that this is on the 'Frequently Asked Questions' page. We can make this clearer, not just on the questions page. LC could not see the questions on the page so this is something that can be done. CC felt there needs to be a clear differentiation between SCM and the groups on the site. CC asked Members to look at the page and email suggestions to RL and LC. LC will look at improvements to that page.</p> <p>Scam awareness regarding the survey being carried out. CC asked LC to give background info on TLF so that tenants know why a third party organisation is doing a survey. CC says there is an appetite for a survey to all tenants. RL gave info around the surveys that Saffron do carry out such as the customer satisfaction surveys and the TSMs. RL gave a brief outline of survey fatigue advising how that works and why tenants may only receive one survey even if they have contacted several departments.</p> <p>CC asked how tenants who want to give feedback can do so, is there an independent survey. LD asked whether a survey could go out with the rent letter.</p> <p>LC indicated there could be an opportunity to ask a golden thread question about overall satisfaction. SB asked whether there could be a form on the website which the letter invites them to visit. LD raised that there should also be a document so that people who do not use the internet can participate.</p> <p>LC agreed it is important to consider the purpose of a survey and that enclosing it in a rent letter is good as it is a captive audience. CC raised that the Members could look at the feedback of a survey like that.</p>	RL
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	<p>LC raised that the voice (IVR) message is felt to be long. LC has raised this with Kim. Kim is happy to discuss with the group any changes to the IVR. CC asked Members to call to see what their thoughts are about the message on the phones.</p> <p>LC raised service standards focus groups, the commitments about standards which are published on the website. We did a survey and had a couple of focus groups and created new service standards. LC's Team are updating the standards and they will go to SQC in December and should be published sometime in the New Year. LC indicated they would be shared with the group before published.</p> <p>LC left the meeting.</p>	
<p><b>Service Charge</b></p>	<p>CC raised the Service Charge. The charges have not been passed on to tenants. LD said tenants have taken on properties near green areas not expecting to pay. CC explained that the funds will have to come from somewhere. CC said that as a Team they should deep dive and look at some sort of a blueprint.</p> <p>CC said the groups should raise this blueprint giving details about what needs to be done. Some tenants have four lights, some have green areas, some properties are not near plots of land, and there was concern that the charge is not being shared with private homeowners nearby.</p> <p>LD asked how Members can be sure that if they take time to do this, Saffron will listen to the recommendations. CC indicated the Board are the ones who refused to pass on the charge this time. She felt this was an indication that the Board would listen to their point of view.</p> <p>CC stated that the goal is that tenants will need to be made aware in advance, charges will not be made until 2025 or maybe not until 2026.</p> <p>LD asked whether tenants would be able to see tenders. VB asked about parks and maintenance. CC explained that the lease does give an option for service charge.</p> <p>CC asked members if they were happy to investigate their own areas and create a pilot for the investigation for all areas. A blueprint for the way that the investigation should be carried out everywhere.</p>	

	<p>LD asked can they find out what is in their area. RL indicated that she could get the information.</p> <p>CC asked RL for maps of GM, lighting bills. What is behind the Blueprint to SQC to go to Rent and Service Charge Team. CC wants to do 4 areas to help write the blueprint. How many properties, how many are being charged. What is the criteria for the charges.</p> <p>VB would like an invoice with the bill.</p> <p>SB and VB have separate monthly service charges but not sure what they are paying for.</p> <p>CC indicated that her garden is being cut, it is clearly private gardens, GN properties, which should not be maintained. CC service charge is done from a desk. We need to show the exceptions.</p> <p>LD felt this would result in tenants who are paying wanting much more say in what they are getting for the money.</p> <p>VB felt there should be lights on sensors so that they go off at night.</p> <p>CC agreed it is a huge issue and the groups need to look at it for all tenants. CC asked VB to copy and share her letter regarding the service charge as part of the investigation.</p> <p>LD asked whether this will open the floodgates for repairs cost.</p> <p>SB felt this would not be something that can happen as the Government has stipulated what can and what cannot be charged for and the fabric of the building is landlord responsibility. There is an element of cost recovery. Saffron need to be open about this.</p> <p>CC said the group can also investigate alternative uses such as changing a strip of land to wildflower and cutting less. RL agreed the consultation needs to happen and them doing this investigation will forearm them with the knowledge to be able to participate fully.</p>	RL
<p><b>Review Saffron E-News and Website</b></p>	<p>CC asked members can they recall what was in the E-News. Paula had said in the Exec meeting that the E-News had been well received this time, it was comments staff had received but nothing formal. Suggestions can be emailed directly to the Communications Team.</p> <p>SB asked how often E-News goes out. RL indicated it is quarterly. Large Print is catered for.</p> <p>CC indicated on the website there will be a blog from each group. It is hoped that everyone can be involved. SB asked if there can be one blog instead of separate blogs. CC said that the blog could be used to inform tenants more often what is going on. SB manages a blog for her work and expressed the difficulties. CC not concerned regarding whether it is one blog or two. SB feels it should be genuinely useful and not there for the sake of it.</p> <p>LD felt if they could get the information out about investigation of service charges it would encourage greater participation and may be a positive where recruitment is concerned.</p>	

	<p>CC has to have it done by Wednesday, but will send it to Members to review beforehand. LD asked if the blog will be censored and CC indicated that if it is this will be brought up at the Service Quality Committee meeting.</p>	
<b>Lunch</b>	<p>Discuss team day/activity RL to look at the murder mystery with 3 course meal at Mercure Hotel in the New Year. Will discuss with Lauren whether the Scrutiny Group wish to join or have their own event.</p>	
<b>Increase participation/recruitment</b>	<p>RL talked of sharing things on the FB page which has been approved. There is a question whether SCM membership can be simplified. Also, we need to consider how we can incentivise the increasing of membership by other Teams.</p> <p>VB asked how many members were at the meeting. CC felt there were 10 of the 346 SCMs. There are two meetings per year for SCMs.</p> <p>CC advised there is an SQC meeting tomorrow specifically regarding Katherine Deans work on accessibility. RL advised LC will be sharing the report with the Groups once it has been to SQC. VB would like to see that having participated.</p> <p>The next SQC meeting is December 20<sup>th</sup> 2:45pm and if Members would like to attend, they should request now as notice is required. SB &amp; VB would like to attend.</p> <p>SB asked about shadowing CCT. RL meeting with Kim to arrange. Scrutiny Group are happy to take suggestions regarding what they look at. Also, Members invited to attend a Group meeting if anyone would like to see how that works.</p>	SB and VB
<b>SQC Report</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Current FB posts</b></li> <li>- <b>Silo</b></li> <li>- <b>CCT providing incorrect info</b></li> <li>- <b>Alterations &amp; permissions</b></li> </ul>	<p>CC introduced that this report goes to the SQC in December. It must be submitted two weeks before the meeting to be shared. CC asked members what should be included.</p> <p>Suggestions</p> <p>1. The fact that LC had attended to talk about letters. LD asked if letter writing is included in the induction. RL explained that the induction process is being looked but letter writing is not currently included. LD asked, 'are templates used'. SB all regular letters will be template based. LD asked if a spot check of random letters could work. CC asked if letter writing could be part of the TPAS training. RL explained the TPAS training will be to ensure Teams are engaging tenants.</p>	

SB felt that the letters regarding financial burden need more scrutiny than others because the meaning and effect of tenants being felt more deeply.

2. Mould

3. CC raised that there are 3 Tenant Board Members (TBM) who we do not see much of. Could they come in and perhaps raise a project we could get involved with. CC sees one TBM, Talia, but not the other two. Could we come together to ask how we could be more effective. RL to put the idea forward. CC raised that a visit to HOLD and Independent Schemes would be useful.

CC asked for the emails of the three members. RL to provide.

Virtual Meeting is 17<sup>th</sup> January. Face to face is Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> February. CC to ask them to attend one at each meeting for 20 minutes.

4. Correct info out that TLF is sanctioned to carry out a survey. CC introduced that there are calls about grants availability which tenants have not been made aware of and they think they are s cams. Saffron are aware but have not told tenants, this should be on the report.

5. VB raised compensation regarding missed appointments. CC feels there is a pot. LD asked whether tenants are ever charged for missed appointments. RL felt this was not the case. SB asked if there is any reporting around this? RL to check with Kim, Schedulers etc to see whether any work is done around this or there are any reports. CC can include in the report if no work done.

CC asked about an issue that was reported where the appointment was not until December for a leak. RL to chase response.

6. Alterations/permissions policy which had been changed. CC raised that where Saffron used to allow alterations there now seems to be nothing allowed. The policy is on hold until tenants can have their say. The policy is on hold but the Team seem to be working to the new policy which should not have been implemented.

<p><b>AOB</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Timing for virtual meetings</b></li> <li>- <b>Skillcast</b></li> <li>- <b>TPAS Update</b></li> </ul>	<p>CC said do evenings for virtual meetings work. Sunday 10am to 12pm seemed better for members. RL to move the 17<sup>th</sup> to Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> January 11 until 12:30pm.</p> <p>RL will email all tomorrow the £25 voucher for attending today. All Members need to complete skillscast training before the next meeting in February to ensure they still qualify for the voucher as there is a requirement that all training is undertaken.</p> <p>TPAS training. We will be going out to tenant group members to invite them to a working group in February to create the blueprint for task and finish going forward.</p> <p>LD asked about numbers.  RL indicated that a T&amp;F requires 9 people.  There is a rule for task and finish that non-involved tenants take up more spaces than group members so for 9 participants where 5 are non-involved there will be 4 members allowed. Where there are fewer non involved there will be fewer involved allowed.</p>	
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