



# SWINDON TENANTS VOICE

## NOTES OF MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 17<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2008

Ruth Kiddle (Chair)  
Krystyna Tworek (Notes)

### **Present:**

**STV Members Present** - Peter Armstrong, Paul Burgess, William Dickens, Derek Fry, Frank Gething, Peter Hobson, Shirley Jones, Ruth Kiddle, Phil Lango, Nat Lannin, Peggy May, Gene Nygaard, Percy Ruck, Vasanti Thakrar, and Florance Tindall.

**Observer** – Margaret Hudson.

**Council Officers Present** – Bernie Brannan, Peter Holohan, Paul Wilkins, Howard Sinclair, Geoff Mann, and Krystyna Tworek.

**Capita** - Ruth McGrady.

**Councillor Present** – Doreen Dart.

**DWA:** Deborah Walthorne (*Independent Tenant Advisor*).

**Apologies:** Norris Kiddle, Carolanne Bond, Richard Bustin, Derek Dowdeswell, Keith Hartigan, Wendy Welch, Sandys Powell, Councillors: William Morton, Brian Ford, Garry Perkins, David Glaholm, Mavis Childs, David Renard, Steve Wakefield (*Mayor*), David Wren (*Deputy Mayor*).

### **1. Request for Minute Taker, Welcome and Apologies**

After a request by Ruth Kiddle, Krystyna offered to take notes at the meeting. Ruth welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Howard Sinclair, Ruth McGrady and Geoff Mann, all of whom had an allocated slot on the Agenda. A list of members' apologies was read out.

## 2. Housing Benefit Update – Ruth McGrady

Ruth gave a brief update on Housing Benefit, the main points were as follows:

### **New claims:**

- (a) An increase in July and August by 1.79%, on last year.
- (b) Claims are dealt with within 3 days.
- (c) There were 892 new claims in August alone.
- (d) Staff number had increased to 24.
- (e) Processing time can take up to 23 days, if we have to chase up any outstanding documents.
- (f) In August, claims dealt with within 7 days = 99%. Our target is 93%.
- (g) In August, claims dealt with within 14 days = 96.61%. Our target is 90%.
- (h) Currently there are 2,731 outstanding documents to be processed.
- (i) Increase in staff numbers to clear the backlog in the next two months.

### **Change in circumstances:**

- (a) An increase in July and August, where 250 notifications a day were being received.
- (b) In August alone, 2,377 notifications were received.
- (b) Dealing with general enquiries, eg Hostels, evidence, appears, etc average at approx 1,633 per week.
- (c) 24 staff dealing with new claims and changes in circumstances.

### **Call Centre:**

- (a) Experiencing teething problems whilst training new staff.
- (b) 15 staff employed.
- (c) Number of calls had increased.
- (d) In August the Call Centre received 3,510 calls, 101 of which were abandoned.

**Action: Since the meeting, Ruth has confirmed that there is a 5% tolerance on abandoned calls at the Call Centre. (Information requested by Derek Fry).**

- (e) Call-back facility is available.

**Action: Margaret Hudson to send Ruth an email regarding a problem she encountered with “Call-back”**

- (f) Calls in September up to the date of the meeting numbered 1,409.
- (g) Opening times have been extended, and are now as follows:

Monday	8am - 6pm
Tuesday	8am - 6pm
Wednesday	8am - 6pm
Thursday	8am - 8pm
Friday	8am - 6pm
Saturday	9am - 1pm

**LOCAL HOUSING ALLOWANCE (LHA)**

- (a) This is a facility for people who are not capable of managing their own finances.
- (b) Moving more people over to BACS

**What's new:**

- (a) ESA – Employment Support Allowance
- (b) DWP Benefit – should not affect HB – still waiting on guidance from DWP, effective 27<sup>th</sup> October 2008.
- (c) EPP - Extended Payment Periods – 6<sup>th</sup> October 6<sup>th</sup> 2008. It will not be necessary to submit a new claim form, will be deal with as change of circumstances. There will be a 4 week buffer for those returning to work.
- (d) Pension Credit - change in October 2008, whereby the backdating time is going to be reduced from 52 weeks to 12 weeks.
- (e) One Stop Shop opening times have been extended as follows:

Monday	8am - 6pm
Tuesday	8am - 6pm
Wednesday	8am - 6pm
Thursday	8am - 8pm
Friday	8am - 6pm
Saturday	9am - 1pm

- (f) There is a Customer Services online survey on the web site, with a toggle for expressing an interest in attending a customer forum.

In answer to a question from Paul Burgess, Ruth confirmed that the shortest processing time is 3 days, as long as all the correct documents

have been supplied, and the longest is 50 days, due to non-supply of documents, despite numerous requests.

### 3. **Mutual Exchange – Geoff Mann**

Geoff is the Area Housing Manager responsible for mutual exchanges. He tabled a document, entitled “Property Inspection Report – Exchange by Deed of Assignment”, a copy of which is attached as an appendix to these notes.

Some Housing Association and Secure Tenants have a right to exchange their property. The Neighbourhood Housing Officer, prior to an exchange, inspects the condition of the property. Geoff outlined the procedure for submitting an application, and the process that is followed.

### 4. **Gardening Project – Howard Sinclair**

A draft Garden Information Sheet had been circulated to all STV members with the Agenda, and Howard requested that any comments/feedback etc should be directed to Geoff Mann. He also presented a PowerPoint presentation, on “Tackling Untidy Council Gardens across the Borough”. A copy of this presentation is attached to these notes.

Howard advised the meeting that there is a garden maintenance scheme (minimal service) available through Swindon Commercial Services (SCS), for those tenants who cannot manage to look after their gardens, either through illness or disability. This information will be included in the final version of the Garden Information Sheet (GIS).

**Action: Howard Sinclair to include this information in the GIS**

Howard also confirmed that eviction of a tenant, because their garden was in a mess, would be a last resort. The tenant would be encouraged to tidy up the garden.

Various members at the meeting expressed concern about tree stumps, parking on grass verges, messy gardens in private properties (eg ex council properties), as to whether the Council has any influence. Any such issues could be raised through a tenant’s local Councillor.

**Action: Vasanti Thakrar requested the telephone number for Swindon Commercial Services’ Recycling Centre – this is Swindon 463463.**

As the GIS needs to be issued as soon as possible, it was agreed that Geoff Mann would be meeting with a group of STV members to finalise

the Sheet.

**Action: Geoff Mann**

## 5. **Review of STV Feedback Forms**

This Agenda item has been deferred until the November meeting.

## 6. **Independent Tenant Advisor for Housing Options Appraisal - Deborah Walthorne of DWA Associates**

Deborah presented an excellent PowerPoint presentation, entitled "Introduction to the Options" a copy of which is attached to these notes.

**Action 1: Deborah to provide the presentation on an audio CD for Paul Burgess**

**Action 2: Deborah to obtain members' contact details from Paul Wilkins in order to send out additional material**

Deborah pointed out to the meeting, that as STV member, each member's role was to represent their neighbours, whilst the consultation process was being carried out. All information needs to be shared and passed on, to as wide an audience as possible.

**Action: All STV members**

Deborah confirmed that during the consultation process, DWA representatives will be going out to different areas, have drop-in sessions, focus group, road shows and conferences.

Nat Lanin complimented the editorial team for the content and presentation of the Newsletter that had been sent out to all tenants.

Pete Holohan confirmed that the whole consultation process will be a clear and robust one, and that the Council, as the landlord, will take responsibility for getting the message out to all their tenants, to attract as many of them as possible.

## 7. **Christmas Event**

Wendy Welch had previously agreed to check on venues, prices and menus, but as Wendy was not present, the Chair was not aware of the outcome. The Chair will contact Wendy and advise members as to what arrangements will be made.

## 8. **Minutes & Matters arising from Meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> July 2008**

Many thanks to Wendy Welch for producing the Minutes from the 5<sup>th</sup> July meeting, which were agreed and approved.

## 9. **Any other Business**

The Chair reported that TPAS had announced a new Award Scheme, which has 5 categories. The Chair suggested that STV members may wish to consider nominating Swindon Borough Council and Swindon Commercial Services staff for these two categories for an Award. This item will be discussed further at the November meeting – more information to be provided. Applications close on 2 February 2009.

**Action: To be discussed at November meeting.**

A senior officer from Wiltshire Police has offered members of STV to visit the Communications Room at Wiltshire Police HQ in Devizes. 6 members present indicated that they are interested in such a visit.

**Action: Peter Hobson to co-ordinate**

## 10. **Close**

The Chair thanked everyone for attending the meeting, and there being no further business, the meeting closed at 9.00pm.

The next STV meeting will be held on Saturday 15 November 2008 at 9.30 am in Committee Room 6.

## Appendices

### Property Inspection Report – Exchange by Deed of Assignment *(Example)*

Name of Tenants.....

Address.....

Telephone.....

Lounge	Average/ Good	Poor	Damage/works	Council	New tenants responsibility	Outgoing tenants responsibility
Door						
Walls						
Ceiling						
Windows						
Floor						

Kitchen	Average/ Good	Poor	Damage/works	Council	New tenants responsibility	Outgoing tenants responsibility
Door						
Walls						
Ceiling						
Windows						
Floor						
Units						
Tiles						

Hall, Stairs, Landing	Average/ Good	Poor	Damage/works	Council	New tenants responsibility	Outgoing tenants responsibility
Door						
Walls						
Ceiling						
Windows						
Floor						
Banister						

<b>Bathroom/WC</b>	<b>Average/ Good</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Damage/works</b>	<b>Council</b>	<b>New tenants responsibility</b>	<b>Outgoing tenants responsibility</b>
Door						
Walls						
Ceiling						
Windows						
Floor						
Suite						
Tiles						

<b>Bedroom 1</b>	<b>Average/ Good</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Damage/works</b>	<b>Council</b>	<b>New tenants responsibility</b>	<b>Outgoing tenants responsibility</b>
Door						
Walls						
Ceiling						
Windows						
Floor						

<b>Bedroom 2</b>	<b>Average/ Good</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Damage/works</b>	<b>Council</b>	<b>New tenants responsibility</b>	<b>Outgoing tenants responsibility</b>
Door						
Walls						
Ceiling						
Windows						
Floor						

<b>Bedroom 3</b>	<b>Average/ Good</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Damage/works</b>	<b>Council</b>	<b>New tenants responsibility</b>	<b>Outgoing tenants responsibility</b>
Door						
Walls						
Ceiling						
Windows						
Floor						

<b>Bedroom 4</b>	<b>Average/ Good</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Damage/works</b>	<b>Council</b>	<b>New tenants responsibility</b>	<b>Outgoing tenants responsibility</b>
Door						
Walls						
Ceiling						
Windows						
Floor						

<b>Other Rooms</b>	<b>Average/ Good</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Damage/works</b>	<b>Council</b>	<b>New tenants responsibility</b>	<b>Outgoing tenants responsibility</b>
Door						
Walls						
Ceiling						
Windows						
Floor						

<b>Exterior</b>	<b>Average/ Good</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Damage/works</b>	<b>Council</b>	<b>New tenants responsibility</b>	<b>Outgoing tenants responsibility</b>
Shed						
Front Garden						
Back Garden						
Trees						
Fencing						
Gates						
Drive/Paths						

<b>Welfare Adaptations</b>	<b>Average/ Good</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Damage/works</b>	<b>Council</b>	<b>New tenants responsibility</b>	<b>Outgoing tenants responsibility</b>
Grab Rails						
Shower						
Hand rails to path						
Wheelchair access						

Inspected by.....

Inspection date.....

Passed for Exchange.....YES/NO

If no Re-Inspection date.....

Passed for Exchange after Re-Inspection.....YES/NO

**Tenants Statement**

If any items detailed as the outgoing tenants responsibility are not completed, I/we accept that I/we will be liable to repay in full the costs to reinstatement

*I/we confirm that I/we have read and understand the contents and the implications of this form*

Signature of outgoing Tenants.....dated.....

Signature of outgoing Tenants.....dated.....

**Tenants Statement**

I/we agree to accept any items listed as the new tenants responsibility

*I/we confirm that I/we have read and understand the contents and the implications of this form*

Signature of incoming Tenant:

..... dated.....

Signature of incoming Tenant:

..... dated.....

(Example)

**SWINDON BOROUGH COUNCIL – HOUSING DEPARTMENT**

**EXCHANGE BY DEED OF ASSIGNMENT – DISCLAIMER**

**ASSIGNEE(S):**

**ASSIGNMENT ADDRESS:**

Following the inspection of the above property, there may be items or repairs, which will **NOT** be the responsibility of Swindon Borough Council.

Swindon Borough Council will **NOT** undertake any repairs to items that have been damaged, altered or removed from the property by a previous tenant.

You will have received a copy of the inspector’s report listing these items. You must be aware that this list may **NOT** be comprehensive, as the property will have been furnished and carpeted when inspected.

Swindon Borough Council will not undertake the removal of any rubbish that may have been left by a previous tenant or undertake to clean a property that has been left in a poor condition by a previous tenant.

If the tenancy is terminated, you will be liable for any costs incurred to reinstate damaged, altered or missing items, even though they may **NOT** have been damaged, altered or removed by yourselves.

**INCOMING ASSIGNEE(S)**

I have read and accept the above statement:

Signed.....

Signed.....

Witnessed by an officer of Swindon Borough Council:

Signed.....

Dated.....

*(Example)*