Minutes

Name of meeting: Meeting 5 Service Charge Working Group
Date: Wednesday 7 June 18:30-20:45
Venue: Teams online

Attendees **Residents** Barbara Cliffe (BC), Jean Harry (JH), Lee Hall (LH), Michael Roberts (MR), Roger Hankey (RH) Grace Famoriyo (GF) **Milton Keynes City Council** Andrew Hodgson (AH) Catherine Arnold (CA) Mohammad Bari (MB) Roz Duffy (RD) Sebastian Kulig (SK) Rahima Ahmed (RA)	
Guests: Natasha Hutchin (NH)	
Apologies: Julian Cross	
Note taker: Rahima Ahmed	

1	**Introductions and Apologies** AH welcomed all to the meeting and acknowledged apologies	**Action**
2	**Approval of minutes (Video time 00:00- 09:40)**	
2.1	**Updates on actions from previous minutes** • Minutes to the last meeting are approved and on the website. • The definition of service charge and rents will be circulated before the next meeting. • Service Charge estimates are on the website and have bought clarification of our position to tenants and leaseholders. • As requested by the group, full recovery is no longer an option. • Apportionment video has been redone. • For confidentiality reasons, we can only share the totality of salaries. • Discussion over how to deal with building insurance is still in progress. It will be picked up at a later meeting. • Both building insurance and change of payment dates will form part of the leaseholder's consultation. **ACTIONS** a) AH to circulate service charge and rents definition before next meeting. b) AH to provide a proposal for building insurance at a later meeting for the group to approve.	 AH AH

3	**Main Activities**	
3.1	**Update from Natasha (10:02- 1:02)**	

The main points were:
- We are on a journey of service delivery improvement.
- Feedback from this group is being shared across the business and Landlord Board
- Landlord Board is a board of predominantly directors in Milton Keynes and other key stakeholders, senior officers that are responsible for the delivery of Council housing services in Milton Keynes.
- Housing is split between different service areas. Adult Services look after services like Neighbourhoods that deal with people. Environment and Property deal with matters relating to the property, Assets for example. Income, Business improvement, data and regulatory compliance is under Finance and Resources.
- In around six weeks, a consultation regarding the future of our repairs and maintenance service will be taking place. It will lay down all options for tenants and leaseholders to make an informed choice on what they think the core principles should be for delivering the service.
- We are aware that contract management is an area which requires improvement.

Feedback from the Group:
- The group fed back experience of issues with communication flow between services and with residents, as poor. Residents need to know who to contact and be treated with courtesy. The structure is not clear resulting in a lack of ownership and delays.
- The complaints process is not transparent and adds to frustration. Complaints are not dealt within timescales.
- LH suggested altering the email received when making a complaint to add the reference number and short description to indicate which complaint is being acknowledged.
- SK pointed out the *My Council* function on the website where residents can setup an account and follow all requests they have raised.
- BC and GF called for major works to be within the scope of this project.
- Contract management is key. Also dealing with inefficient workers who commit fraud. The group was reminded of how to report cases of fraud to MKCC.

ACTIONS

a) RD to talk to Lisa Beckett about changes to the complaint's response email.	RD
b) AH to invite the Stuart Proffitt, Director of Environment and Property to a future meeting.	AH

	c)	All group to partake in Repairs and Maintenance Service Consultation (when this is released).	ALL
	d)	All group to provide specific details to rentservicechargereview@milton-keynes.gov.uk of fraudulent work. This will be treated anonymously.	ALL
3.2		**Leasehold proposal (1:03-1:17)**	

Leasehold proposal (1:03-1:17)

Approximately 20% of accounts have debts greater than their annual service charge - the majority of these are non - residential leaseholders. Around 50% have clear accounts or are in credit.

AH proposes:

- We don't hold a month's credit on leaseholder's accounts.
- As we align the existing payment cycle to the financial cycle, any credit can be used to against arrears or returned to the leaseholder.
- As the first year is shortened, we ask leaseholders to pay the current year and spread any arrears over a 12-month period.
- Options will be given to anyone with a financial challenge.
- Add service charge certificate details online so many leaseholders can self-help. This will open capacity for officers to deal with complex queries.

Decision 1 Leaseholder certificate details online
Add details of leaseholder certificates online so many leaseholders can self-help.

3.3 Structures- How do we organise the list of service charges (1:18- 1:45)

AH has been working on a property hierarchy spreadsheet. This spreadsheet labels all areas within block and surroundings. The benefit is we can apportion cost more transparently and fairly. Main discussion was:

- To group similar charges together. This keeps costs down and more manageable.
- We would like to be transparent about variable charges to tenants. Rather than sending letters to all tenants we want to put the information on the website.
- There is a lack of trust or understanding of whether council officers will do the appropriate checks and balances to ensure the charges are reasonable and fair.
- MKCC does have a partner organisation that does audit checks and challenges to Mears.
- Group happy for charges to be grouped together, if people have access to further information should they require it.
- Contract management and learning from previous contract will be embedded in service charges going forward.

Decision 2 Tenants service charge components online
Add proposed service charge components for tenants online rather than sending letters to all. Also ask Communications to add on social media pages.

	ACTIONS • Share the internal checks and balances process done by internal accountants in order to sign off variable service charges. If the group is still not happy with our approach, then checks can be outsourced but the residents will have to bear the costs.	CA/AH	
	• AH to speak to Comms about social media	AH	
3.4	**Cleaning and Caretaking service delivery (1:46-1:49)** **Decision 3 Caretaking and Cleaning working group** Create another working group that will deal with caretaking and cleaning charges and service standards.		
3.5	**Environmental works – Open Space grounds maintenance and gardening services (1:50- 2:04)** • Nicholas Hanon Head of Environment and Waste has a team that is mapping all the open spaces which will make ground maintenance charges more accurate. • Parishes were given money by MKCC to deliver landscaping at a specification, parishes precept additional for these specification works. • We will be consulting with sheltered housing residents on the standard and frequency for ground maintenance. **ACTIONS** a) Group can view the interactive mapping with added filters showing various aspects like which roads are adopted, which green areas are currently maintained, etc.	ALL	
	b) If required, further detail about parish precepts can be explained when looking at landscape and ground maintenance at future meetings	AH	
4	**A.O.B Apportionment video (2:05-2:10)** Based on the initial feedback from the first apportionment video, SK and RA created a second version. Group approved of the changes. **Decision 4 Apportionment video approved.** Group approved Apportionment video and it will be added to the webpage.		
5	**Date of Next Meeting:** **Wednesday 12th July 2023 Milton Keynes Council offices MK9 3EJ** Light buffet: 18:00 - 18:25 Meeting: 18:30 till approximately 20:45. The group can also attend the meeting virtually through Teams. IT checks: 18:15-18:25 Meeting 18:30 **ACTIONS** a) Group to confirm whether they will be attending in person by 30th June. (Teams booking will follow after in person booking)	ALL	