

# Minutes

**Name:** Meeting 12 Service Charge Working Group  
**Date:** Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> January 2024  
**Time:** IT Checks 18:15 – 18:25 Meeting 18:30 - 20:45  
**Venue:** Teams Online

<b>Attendees</b>
<b>Residents</b> Barbara Cliffe (BC), Jean Harry (JH), Michael Roberts (MR), Roger Hankey (RH)
<b>Milton Keynes City Council</b> Andrew Hodgson (AH), Amanda Griffiths (AG), Lorri Bubb-Olukanmi (LB), Bob Bridle (BB), Catherine Arnold (CA), Mohammad Bari (MB), Brighton Eraki (BE) Sebastian Kulig (SK)
<b>Guests:</b> N/A
<b>Apologies:</b> Roz Duffy, Rahima Ahmed
<b>Note taker:</b> Sebastian Kulig

REF	ACTION	RESP
1	<b>Welcome and Apologies</b>	AH
2	<b>Approval of minutes</b>	AH
2.1	Updates on actions from previous minutes <a href="#">(click link to watch)</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>AH discussed the open space grounds maintenance cost, which was initially estimated at £300,000 but is now closer to £550,000. However, this figure includes the sheltered housing schemes in the mapping, which only relates to the people living in those schemes. This cost needs to be removed from the total, reducing the original £550,000. The exact reduction is uncertain until the mapping process is completed, but it is estimated to be around £150,000.</li><li>We are still awaiting external legal advice. Trowers &amp; Hamlins have now been asked to provide this advice and have started to work on our leases. The impact of any decisions based on this advice will be formally communicated to residents as part of the annual rent increase and leasehold estimates processes.</li><li>BC suggested corrections to the minutes, including replacing “full recover” with “full recovery” in 3.2 and changing the wording in 3.3</li></ul>	

	<p>to “the group thought.” She clarified that the argument about legal advice in 3.5 was not hers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AH confirmed that last month’s prize draw winners have been informed.</li> <li>• In response to RH’s query about sheltered housing, AH confirmed that gardening service charges will not change for now. A new Landscape Services Officer will first consult with residents to ask what gardening services they want us to deliver. Any new service charge will only apply after consultation has been completed. Priority given to sheltered schemes.</li> <li>• AH and RH emphasized the importance of good living standards in sheltered housing. AH said the contractors should be managing tasks like carpet shampooing and furniture cleaning and revealed plan to implement a window cleaning contractor. Changes are planned for the next financial year.</li> <li>• The minutes were approved with no further changes.</li> </ul> <p><b>ACTION:</b> SK to adjust previous minutes and republish.</p>	SK
<p>3</p> <p>3.1</p>	<p><b>Update from focus group</b> Results of cleaning and caretaking consultation (<a href="#">click link to watch</a>)</p> <p><b>Response Rate</b> BE presented the results of the caretaking and cleaning consultation voting. The voting response rate was at 5.44% (out of 2904 properties, there were 158 votes). The split of the votes was 69% tenants, 28% leaseholders, and 3% shared owners.</p> <p><b>Results of Cleaning and Caretaking Satisfaction Survey</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 42% of votes said they were satisfied with the cleaning service.</li> <li>• 47% of votes said they were satisfied with the caretaking service.</li> <li>• 44% of voters agreed that the Caretakers keeps them informed.</li> <li>• 43% of votes agreed that they know how to report issues with cleaning and caretaking.</li> </ul> <p><b>Results of the Main Voting on Cleaning and Caretaking Service</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 86% of voters agreed that the cleaning and caretaking service should continue to be delivered in-house, with a review in 12 months.</li> <li>• 86% of voters agreed that the new Cleaning and Caretaking Service Standard should be adopted from 1st April 2024.</li> <li>• 43% of voters preferred Model 3 – Flat Rate if it comes to charging method.</li> </ul>	BE

3.2	<p><b>The next steps</b> (<a href="#">click link to watch</a>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BE discussed the <a href="#">service standard</a> the group has set up to guide improvement efforts, categorizing satisfaction into Good, Poor, and Very Poor. The group voted to keep the service in-house with a 12-month review period and there will be a six-month progress assessment. Audits will be conducted monthly as part of the standards. The flat rate model was chosen for charging, pending council approval. If approved, the 2024-25 budget will set the flat rate at an estimated £3.12 per week, subject to staff availabilities.</li> <li>• The final list of blocks for cleaning and caretaking services is being finalized. Some areas may not require cleaning due to their setup but will still need caretaking for health and safety reasons. Residents will receive letters confirming these decisions.</li> </ul>	
4 4.1	<p><b>Main Activity</b></p> <p>Formal consultation results to all stakeholders/ (<a href="#">click link to watch</a>)</p> <p>What information should be published online</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AH shared a draft document summarizing consultation outcomes. The document will undergo further review and need NH approval. To take account of what customers have told us the document will be short, with more detailed information available online or by post. It will be sent with the rent increase letter to tenants.</li> <li>• RH raised concerns about accessibility for those without online access or who struggle with reading small print. AH suggested involving sheltered housing staff or managers in future consultations. AH discussed using technology for feedback, not key decisions.</li> <li>• AH outlined the next steps for the consultation process, including sending rent review letters and preparing for queries. They will address specific errors, such as incorrect service charges, and allocate resources to manage queries from March to April. If a mistake is identified, they will reduce the service charge from the start of the new financial year.</li> <li>• AH highlighted how we are collaborating with colleagues in the Environmental Services Team to improving the housing (HRA) land and tree management. A new Landscape Servicing Officer will be recruited to manage housing work and assist with consultations. The Resident Engagement Team will also be heavily involved. We will initially bring housing land to a basic standard. AH proposed a fixed recharge of £150,000 or 33% of the council's spend on trees, whichever is lower, to be allocated to housing land where one-third of Milton Keynes' trees are located.</li> </ul>	AH

4.2	<p><b>The future</b> (<a href="#">click link to watch</a>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AH identified a need for improved internal communication and committed to enhancing trust and communication in the coming year.</li> <li>• AG stressed the importance of engaging with residents' associations. AH mentioned a positive interaction with Julia Bandy, who is eager to lead a gardening initiative. The finance team will step back, allowing the new Landscape Services Officer to collaborate with Julia.</li> <li>• JH suggested improving basic communication more before expanding engagement efforts. RH suggested involving parishes. BC proposed setting up a customer panel to address complaints, which could be advertised in rent letters. AH said he would ask NH if an advert could be put in the rent increase letters to ask for panel volunteers.</li> <li>• MR discussed his group experiences, highlighting issues with complaint handling. AH acknowledged these and suggested additional training for the customer services team, so they were better equipped to deal with housing matters.</li> <li>• RH expressed concerns about the confused within the Council around sheltered housing and general needs accommodation and how its managed. AH stated that the consultation had highlighted a number of issues which senior managers are now aware of, and future works are likely to take place this year.</li> <li>• BE proposed in-person consultations and voting for residents, tenants, and leaseholders. AH agreed and suggested public meetings for direct communication. BC emphasized the importance of active participation in meetings.</li> <li>• AH concluded that the consultation process helped break down the "silo mentality" and identified areas for improvement, including treating sheltered housing the same as normal general needs properties with additional support for different clientele.</li> </ul>	All
5 5.1	<p><b>Any other Business</b></p> <p>Thank you and close (<a href="#">click link to watch</a>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AH thanked the group for their hard work and shared that they have achieved a lot since the first letter went out in February 2022. He mentioned that they will be introducing new things making MKCC more efficient which should directly impact all residents. He also shared his desire for other departments, particularly around resident engagement, and neighbourhoods, to lead on everything while finance would be a support. AG expressed that she valued the opportunity to work closely with the group and learned through the process. She emphasized the need to continue to engage and engage wider.</li> </ul>	AH
<p><b>Date of Next Meeting:</b> No further meeting planned at this stage</p>		

