

Minutes of the Tenants & Resident Federation Executive Committee Meeting held on Thursday 1st December 2016 @ 11.30am in The Brain Charity, Norton Street, Liverpool L3 8LR

1. **Welcome and Introductions - Present:** Walter Macfarlane, Patrick Rice, Sally Trueman, Richie Kelly, Barbara Fitzgerald, Heather Bruce, Janice Murray, John Gray, Jo Yoxall, Michael Hulme, Maria Milford (Observer - NSC), Mary McAndrew (Observer - Neighbourhood Services Committee) Shirley Ifield (Observer).

Staff: Anna Bishop, Sharon Hutchinson, Jamie Hendry (Staff observer) and Maxine Davis

2. **Apologies:** Anne Robertson, Jean Williams, Mark Hoskisson and Richard Austin. Noted Julie Ann Moss RHO representative had resigned.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting held 3 November 2016 - Agreed

4. **Matters Arising:**

Item 9 – The name change for the National Scrutiny Committee to the Federation Scrutiny Panel to be ratified at the joint meeting on 2 December 2016.

5. **Declaration of Interests** - None

6. **Amendment to Tenancy Policy – Introducing a 2 year fixed term tenancy for the under 35's.** Sue Powell explained that Riverside are introducing a 2 year fixed term tenancy for the under 35's – noted that this proposal was a significant change to the type of Tenancy Agreement that is offered to new tenants of Riverside and that a much broader range of tenants and customers will be affected. From April 2019 the Government will be limiting Housing Benefit and Universal Credit to Local Housing Allowance rates.

- For those on Universal credit the cap will apply to all tenants irrespective of when the tenancy started
- For those on HB the cap will apply to new/renewing general needs tenancies let from April 2016

Local Housing Allowance is a ceiling on amount of Housing Benefit that will be paid and is based on 30% of market rents in an area. Eligibility is based on household size not rent. Noted that limits are based on rent including service charges and expressed concern that this applies to all tenants (not just working age). Under 35's are eligible for shared room rate only unless they are in supported housing. Noted that if bedroom tax is also relevant the higher of the two deductions applies.

Discussion took place around the potential problems of tenants and customers having a shortfall between rent and benefits, particularly for under 35's and under occupiers. Noted that over 20% of Riverside's lettings since April 2016 are to these groups.

The Federation discussed how Riverside could respond to this financial risk and noted the commitment to continue to house those who need homes and to continue building new homes.

Discussed Riverside's proposal to offer two year flexible tenancies (plus 12 month starter tenancy) regardless of employment/benefit status and noted that this would apply where:

- Applicants will be under-occupying their property (including pensioners, previously protected from the Bedroom Tax)
- Any single applicant aged under 35 at the point of letting

Federation expressed concern about what would happen at the end of the two year agreement and noted that the tenancy would be reviewed six months before it ended with an assumption that it would be renewed if the tenancy had been adhered to.

Noted that the Federation's feedback would be passed to the new Neighbourhood Services Committee meeting. Consultation to also be undertaken with the Tenant Panel. Agreed to provide further comments when the draft policy is available in January 2017.

7. Proposed changes to Riverside's Customer Newsletter. Noted the report from James Rae, Riverside's Head of Communications and Marketing and discussed the proposed new approach to Riverside's national newsletters. The current six newsletters will be combined into two in line with the changes to Riverside's structure moving from five to three regions. The national newsletter will be published three times a year and sent via email and post to tenants and customers in social housing and Retirement living. A separate tailored newsletter will be produced for Care and Support residents.

Noted that 28% of total readership is currently online and discussed importance of digital access and local information being available at neighbourhood levels. Head of Communications and Marketing agreed to investigate the issue and Federation noted that this could be done via Riverside's web site and Facebook page.

Discussed importance of tenant and customer input into the national newsletters. Agreed that Marketing would establish an editorial panel with a mix of digital and face to face input.

Agreed the new approach to Riverside's Customer newsletter and noted launch in spring 2017.

8. Feedback from new Neighbourhood Services Committee Induction Day – Noted that PR reported he found the NSC induction day to be useful and informative, especially in terms of getting to know the new Neighbourhood Services Committee members many of whom were new to the organisation.

9. Minutes from the National Scrutiny Committee meeting held 21 September 2016 – Noted

10. Design of the new Riverside Corporate Plan – Hugh Owen. Noted that the current Corporate Plan was in its third year and that consultation on the new plan for 2017-2020 had commenced July 2016. Discussed issues in report detailing feedback from the Resident Involvement/Federation stand at Riverside's Stakeholders Conference held October 2016. Noted the evidence base for the new plan which included an analysis of Riverside's operating context, State of the Group 2016 report, analysis of performance (what needs fixing?) and stakeholder engagement and consultation outcomes.

Noted emerging themes – Going for Growth, Care and Support, Neighbourhoods and Customers and Digital Services.

Members took part in a group activity and debated the emerging themes, key issues for tenants and customers and the role of Resident Involvement. Noted that evidence of input will be documented and kept.

Noted that the content of the new plan would be presented to Group Board in January/early February 2017 with the final draft plan written February 2017 to seek approval in March 2017.

Agreed that Riverside would produce a short tenant facing version of the new plan.

11. Update from the 2016 Annual Report to Tenants Working Group - Noted the working group will meet on 13 December to finalise content. The deadline for all articles is 7 December. Richard Austin and Jean Williams to sign off the report in January 2017.

12. Completion of Core Brief – Agreed the key points to be:

- Amendment to Tenancy Policy – Introducing a 2 year fixed term tenancy for the under 35's.
- Proposed changes to Riverside's Customer Newsletter
- Design of the new Riverside Corporate Plan

13. Any Other Business

- RK approached the Federation for a donation of money towards taking a group of tenants on a day out. It was agreed that this should be deferred to a Federation Officers meeting. **Action:** SH to check whether the Federation is allowed to contribute.

14. Date and Time of Next Meeting:

16 February 2017 at 11.30am at Riverside's Head Office, Speke, Liverpool