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**STIRLING TENANTS ASSEMBLY**  
**MEETING HELD ON**  
**TUESDAY 14<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY 2012**  
**IN MAYFIELD CENTRE**  
**AT 10.30AM**

**1. Present:** Michael Griffiths, Hugh McClung, Thomas Brown, Sarah Fraser, Alec Lamb, Cathy Traynor, Marie Balfour, Philomena McClung, Richard Waddell, Emma Meldrum [STP]

**Apologies:** Cathy Traynor, Duncan Faichney, Mary Rainey, Moira Robertson

**2 Approval of minutes [10.01.12] and matters arising.**

Proposed- Philomena McClung    Seconded Richard Waddell

**Matters arising: 10.01.12**

2.4-2.13 Can the group send a congratulations card to Alexa Brown for her pending wedding. Philomena to make card and send to Alexa.

5.1 Michael asked about the Service Level Agreement- Hugh said that they sub group will be working on it soon.

**Other matters arising**

Alec Lamb never received his minutes for this meeting

Need to get loop system back from Alec Walker- Hugh to write letter to Alec thanking him for his efforts

**2. Speaker: Steven McCabe Income Maximisation Officer- Housing and Customer Service**

2.1 Stated that he was not going to go into too much detail on the proposed welfare reforms, as they are still at the Bill Stage and changes will go ahead, however he will provide an overview of what the Income Maximisation Team have been doing recently.

2.2 At the heart of what we do is helping tenants in getting them the right benefits, dealing with job seekers allowance, pension credits, community care grants, HMRC and CTC/WTC

2.3 Eammon O 'Boyle has recently started working on appeals, helping tenants whose benefits are being reviewed/cut/amended. For example working with tenants who have recently been declared as fit to work by the new process implemented by the DWP.

- 2.4 There are 3 Income maximisation officers- Eammon O Boyle who covers homeless tenants and also private tenants. Graham Reid who works in Fallin office and Steven McCabe who works from the Cornton Office.
- 2.5 The main issues with the past way of working were that tenants were only approaching the service when they were in arrears, which meant that the officers were not getting to tenants when they needed the initial support.
- 2.6 However now, the team is working more proactively, the team are looking to find the tenants who need support before they get into arrears.
- 2.7 Graham Reid and Steven McCabe hold open surgeries one morning per week in different offices. Steven McCabe works in Cornton on a Thursday morning and Raploch on a Friday morning. Graham Reid works from Fallin and Bannockburn.
- 2.8 Thomas Brown asked why there was no surgery at St Ninians. There is no local housing office, but there are facilities at the Community Centre that could be used. Steven McCabe will raise Thomas' concern with Carol Ann Lydon. Steven did mention that the officers do carry out a lot of home visits.
- 2.9 Steven mentioned how they currently obtain details of tenants who may need their help is as follows; they receive a list from customer services, which contains details of tenants whose Housing Benefit has been suspended. This suspension happens prior to their Housing Benefit being stopped, due to a change in circumstances. This suspension will continue until the customer informs Customer Service of the actual change. Here the Income Maximisation team can catch tenants before problems arise and they contact them proactively to set up meetings.
- 2.10 Steven mentioned that he has a good working relationship with Housing Benefit and the Team Leader will contact him before they cancel Housing Benefit in order that he can attempt to contact the tenants again.
- 2.11 Steven showed the group a case study whereby one tenant approached him with concern for her son who had just been paid off work due to ill health. Steven looked into his and her situation and generated a significant increase in benefits coming into the house, as they were currently not claiming all they were actually entitled to. This meant the mother received full housing benefit, and that no further arrears would accrue.
- 2.12 Steven asked the group if they had any other ideas about how they could proactively get in touch with tenants, and that he was open to suggestions.
- 2.13 The second case study was a tenant who was at the final stage before the eviction process started. However Steven intervened and set up the tenant with her correct benefits. In this situation if he had been introduced to the tenant months before, this situation would not have happened.
- 2.14 Hugh praised the services that the Income Maximisation team carry out; however he is concerned about all the customers whose benefits are being cut due to the new 'fit for work' testing that is going on, and that these customers might be missed by the Income Maximisation Service. Steven mentioned that with the current system they have in place with Housing Benefit, customers who have their benefits changed will be on the list provided from Housing Benefit Service.
- 2.15 There was a general discussion around the unfairness of the new system, and sometimes many medicals do not actually include a physical examination. It was mentioned here that the DWP do not take medical information into account until the appeals stage. Hugh and Michael mentioned cases they were working on and the difficulties that they face.
- 2.16 Hugh asked Steven about Universal Credit and whether the Council was drafting a response to be sent to the Government- Steven was unaware of this happening but mentioned that Eammon had collated a report and passed it on to Carol Hamilton.
- 2.17 There was also general discussion around changes to housing benefits affecting various families/couples etc and the group's consensus was that these changes are very unfair.

- 2.18 Hugh asked if the Income Maximisation Officers engage with younger tenants. The team link into the Bridge and there is a lot of support available, but you cannot force tenants to engage with services.
- 2.19 Steven currently has 120 open cases and went through statistics with the STA, the main figure being that since the Income Maximisation Service was set up in 2008 **£3,795,732** income from benefits has been generated for tenants.
- 2.20 Sarah Fraser asked if the Income Maximisation Officers could assist tenants who were going into full time education. This is not something that they can offer advice on, but Steven recommend that tenants in this situation contact their university who have discretionary funds they can hand out on a yearly basis.
- 2.21 The group thanked Steven for coming along.

### **3.0 Reports from Chair**

3.1 Report from the Housing Advisory Group; the issue was raised that the Head of Service was now looking to accelerate the heating programme with completion by mid-2013. Hugh said that the Council had previously stated that this programme was originally scheduled to be completed by 2012.

The new decoration allowance was also discussed with an example of the kit produced at the Housing Advisory Group which contained wallpaper/paint/brushes/dust sheets etc all for £80. The new provider is Dulux, and tenants can deal directly with them. The group discussed how now you only get 3 strips out of one roll of paper compared to 4 strips that you used to be able to get.

Hugh also mentioned that he had asked a Council Officer at HAG if tenants could get involved with the self-assessment required by the Scottish Housing Regulator. Before any Landlord completes a self-assessment they are meant to have staff and tenants sit round a table and discuss it. The Council will consider this request.

### **4.0 Treasurer and Secretary Report**

4.1 No reports were available, both Mary and Moira were ill and unable to attend the meeting.

### **5.0 Other Reports**

5.1 Hugh will circulate the report that Moira circulated to the sub group a few weeks ago

5.2 Hugh provided the group with a verbal update-

- agreed to look at what the group was doing
- agreed to look at the constitution, aims/objectives of group (environmental/social)
- felt the need to expand activities of the group
- Group not just to pick up problems but to provide support
- Group needs to look at ways of achieving this
- might need to make amendments to the constitution
- in the next meeting group to clarify the aims of the organisation, decide on whether having spokespersons in certain areas

-to look at what areas committee members may want to specialise in- if they have an interest or experience

- Some individuals might need additional training
- How can get involved with the community
- After each AGM group will need to sit down and plan year's activities, so everyone knows what they are doing for the next 12 months.

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5.3 It was raised that group might want to take holidays from meeting –this can be considered

5.4 If there are holidays and decisions have to be made, then can the office bearers make executive decisions.

5.5 Sub group to meet again at end of Feb 2012.

## **6.0 AOCB**

6.1 Group approved Kisweb to pay for domain name again for 2 years at a cost of £36

6.2 Hugh asked group if anyone was interested in attending CIH conference- no takers, Hugh asked if group would approve him attending on the Thursday. Group are happy for Hugh to attend. Hugh will ask Moira if she wants to attend.

6.3 Hugh asked what Group wanted to do regarding the Open Day- Emma to create a contact sheet/Michael to ask tenants for contact info in order that the STA can communicate with them on a regular basis. Hugh to create a 2 page newsheet and Emma/Hugh to contact Strachan's to see what marketing goods can be purchased at low cost.

6.4 Emma to organise transport to meeting in Fallin and in Crianlarich