

Meeting
Tinkers Bridge Meeting Place
7th June 2018



Attendees:

John Orr (Chair), 37 residents of Tinkers Bridge and 7 representatives of other parts of the Woughton area

Guest Speaker:

Michael Kelleher, Service Director, Housing and Regeneration, Milton Keynes Council (MKC)

- 1 The chair opened the meeting by asking for a minutes silence for Jo, a resident of Tinkers Bridge who has died tragically. He welcomed members and guests, particularly Michael Kelleher. He explained that at this special TBRA meeting, the only item of business would be an opportunity to hear from Michael and to ask him questions. After an address by Michael, questions would first be taken from Council tenants to Michael as the representative of their landlord. Later in the meeting, wider issues such as Regeneration would be discussed.

- 2 **Address by Michael Kelleher**

Michael began by describing the different elements of his role of Service Director for Housing and Regeneration:

- Landlord function to Council tenants and leaseholders.
- Reduction of homelessness
- Communities including emergency planning, community safety, anti-social behaviour and the private rented sector.
- Regeneration, including overseeing the work of YourMK on behalf of MKC
- Strategic housing function. This can involve other types of housing, such as housing association tenancies.

Michael also described the current restructuring of the Housing Department, which will enable it to provide a better service to tenants. There will be an engagement team which will have two functions – income collection and estate management. Previously income collection was the bigger of these two functions but now this will be changed round, with a bigger neighbourhood team, consisting of 18 officers each covering about 600 Council properties. All estates, including Tinkers Bridge, will have a named housing officer.

The restructuring will also involve the creation of a homelessness prevention team, aiming to reduce the number of rough sleepers and of families in temporary accommodation. Progress is already being made in these areas.

The Regeneration function will be informed by a report that is going to Cabinet in July, following concerns about community engagement so far in the regeneration process. While Community Engagement Teams will work with all residents, they will start work first in the regeneration areas.

In response to a question from John, Michael said that he had worked in Housing since 1992 and had been in Milton Keynes for the last 14 months. He acknowledged that his department had not got everything right in the past but said that he wanted to stay to put things right.

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Questions from Council tenants (grouped by subject matter)

3.1 Poor condition of houses

A number of tenants described the poor state of repair of their houses, whether from the time they moved in or due to poor maintenance since then. Included in the areas of concern were houses without skirting boards, with condensation and poor heating and broken showers.

Michael replied that he would prefer to deal with individual issues by the tenants informing him in writing. He gave his email address – Michael.kelleher@milton-keynes.gov.uk. He said that unless he hears from individual tenants in this way, he only has the word of Mears and YourMK about how maintenance is going. They report customer satisfaction of 98%. If tenants are not happy with YourMk's response to complaints they should consult him as he can override Your MK's decisions.

John said that TBRA would like to help tenants to take forward these concerns and to hold the Council to account for them. He introduced Councillor Pauline Prop, the member for Tinkers Bridge on Woughton Community Council, who is also available to take up complaints by individual tenants. Michael K. Stressed that it is the Housing Dept.'s responsibility to deal with repairs and it should not be necessary to engage Councillors.

3.2 Response to recent floods

Numerous questions were raised about the recent floods and their causes. They included:

- Clearing of gutters: will this be done for all the Council houses?
Answer: Yes this will be done as part of the flood follow up.
However, it must be done properly and will take some time, probably a month to six weeks.

- This is the second flood in two years and some residents are now being refused insurance. Will the Council help them get insurance?
Answer: There are limits on what the Council can do. Some councils do offer their own insurance but it still has to be underwritten by an insurance company. The Council will look at ways to mitigate this problem.
- Drainage – there are inadequate numbers of downpipes and insufficient drainage in the gardens.
Answer – this will be looked at as part of the statutory investigation into the flooding, which will include independent reports. The Council will act on the recommendations in these reports.
- Prevention of future floods – will YourMK be asked to do this?
Answer – yes we will investigate reasons why some properties were flooded while others nearby were not. Where it is easy to find the cause, this will be put right. In some cases, for example where a number of neighbouring properties were flooded, it may be harder to pinpoint the exact cause.

3.3 Joint tenancies

A council is allowed by law to add an extra name to a tenancy only once. If the situation then changes and a request is made to add a different name, this can be done by creating a new tenancy agreement or by offering a different property.

3.4 Overcrowding

In response to a question about overcrowding, Michael explained that overcrowding is assessed by comparing the number of people living in the house and the number of habitable rooms. If the tenancy is one room short for the number of people, this is classified as overcrowding but it has to be 2 or 3 rooms short to qualify as statutory overcrowding, where the Council has an obligation to re-house. A tenant can adapt, for example a dining room, into a bedroom if desired.

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Questions about Regeneration

4.1 Are there plans to knock our houses down or are they going to be brought up to standard?

Answer – All decisions will be resident led. Nobody will be forced off the state. If you are moved temporarily as the estate is regenerated, you have a right to return as a Council tenant. In Milton Keynes the principles behind Regeneration are place, people, and prosperity – enabling people to make their own lives better.

There are no plans to knock the whole estate down but if people want it that is what will happen.

4.2 What about residents who are not Council tenants? Our lives are on hold.

Answer – It will depend on you. If your house is demolished we will have to pay you the market rate and an enhancement. Early engagement is key. Engagement teams will be coming out later this year.

4.3 Will the Council use the flooding as an excuse to do what they want with the estate?

Answer No. Councilors want regeneration to be resident led. There will be an open ballot. This is part of the report that is going to Cabinet in July.

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Other questions

5.1 Street lighting – residents reported problems with trees obscuring street lighting which led to fears of going out at night. John said it was Council policy to let trees grow.

Answer – this is the responsibility of the Service Director, Public Realm. Michael will take this up with him.

5.2 What are we doing about the rat problem?

Answer – Michael acknowledged that this is a big problem which he had not come across elsewhere. Again, he will discuss this with the Service Director, Public Realm. He cautioned, however, that if money is spent on curbing the rat problem that will leave less available for other matters such as repairs.

5.3 Fuel poverty it is estimated that 15% of houses on Milton Keynes are now in fuel poverty. Five years ago non-Council houses on the estate were insulated at a cost of £1 per house. This was not done in the Council houses. What will the Council do about this?

Answer – this is not a landlord responsibility. The council's statutory obligation is to keep their properties wind and water tight. They can choose to provide insulation but do not have to do so.

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Further actions

6.1 Individual tenants to send concerns directly to Michael at michael.kelleher@milton-keynes.gov.uk

6.2 As many issues have not been covered, Michael agreed to come back to a future meeting.