

MOBILE HOME RESIDENTS FORUM

Tuesday 25 October 2016

Present:

Councillor Bull (Chair)
Councillors D Henson and Newby

Also Present:

Val Ewings	- Exonia Park
Steve Porter	- Exonia Park
Alan Southard	- Newport Park
Malcolm Thomas	- Ringswell Park
Debbie Schamroth	- Ringswell Park
Geoff Threlfall	- National Association of Park Home Residents
Wendy Threlfall	- National Association of Park Home Residents
Sheila Welsh	- Ringswell Park

Also Present:

Environmental Health Manager and Assistant Democratic Services Officer (Committees)

In Attendance:

Caroline Aird	- Age UK Exeter
Peter Bywater	- Wessex Energy
Denise Dearden	- Trading Standards

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APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

Councillor Bull was appointed as Chair and Councillor David Henson appointed as Deputy Chair.

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APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Hannaford, Councillor Packham, Councillor Mrs Henson, Councillor Leadbetter, Karen Devaraj (Citizens Advice Bureau), Inspector Simon Arliss, Debbie Schamroth (Ringswell Park).

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UPDATE ON ENERGY EFFICIENT GRANTS - PETER BYWATER, WESSEX ENERGY ADVICE CENTRE

The Chair welcomed Peter Bywater, Senior Project Manager of Wessex Energy to the meeting to provide an update on the energy efficient grants.

The presentation is attached to the minutes.

Loans were available from Exeter City Council funding which were assessed before approval and three applications had been declined. Loans were available for up to £10,000 on a term of up to 10 years. Age UK have carried out health checks on applications made for grants/loans but no feedback had been available to date.

£105,000 out of £120,000 grant allocation had been distributed.

The extent of double glazing works carried out to properties had varied from two windows to all windows plus porches. Works to chassis often come hand in hand with insulation works. The loan is also available for other works such as roof replacement.

The Home Heating Cost Reduction Obligation Scheme (HHCRO) provides funding to help eligible people reduce the cost of heating their home through the installation of energy efficient measures. Utility company grants have met the target across most of the measures to standard property types and there seems to be a reluctance to be the first to tackle park home properties. Feelers had been put out to smaller utility companies but no response had yet been received.

There is additional budget through Better Care which feeds into disabled facilities grants and more funding would be coming through this year via Exeter City Council. Discussions were taking place on how this will be accessed and operate.

The Warm Homes Discount appeared to be more inclusive for those that have a meter and further information is awaited on trials. The position was not clear on Fuel Poverty Grants especially for park homes.

The budget will allow for near 80 properties to benefit from various works, an increase from 60 as some properties had only had loft insulation installed. Around 15 properties are still able to apply and benefit from the works. The typical cost of works has been around £5,000-£5,500.

Representatives were asked to feed back to residents that the scheme was a genuine offer and has the backing of Exeter City Council.

Boilers do have a warranty of five years if serviced by an approved gas safe engineer and replacement boilers are carried out as a result of efficiency rating rather than the age of the boiler. Carbon monoxide alarms can easily be obtained and the Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service can carry out health checks.

A second questionnaire will be sent out to properties for feedback.

Concern was raised around elderly residents not being able to repay the loan. The loans were offered by an independent community interest company and some loan applications had been declined with referrals to Age UK.

Caroline Aird advised that a number of residents were not claiming what they were entitled to and needed to review income/outgoings, such as any reductions they were entitled to in council tax, water rates etc. Age UK assist to identify ways of maximising income and reducing outgoings as 40-50% do not know what benefits they are receiving and have not examined their bank accounts. Caroline added that if all other avenues had been explored, they could carry out charitable fund searches. Concern was expressed that a number of elderly people did not have access to the internet, and it was important within park home sites to 'spread the word' on what assistance is available.

It was also noted that the Royal British Legion hold a drop in service in South Street for those with a military background.

Peter Bywater advised that they would hope to have an open house on site that could be used for sharing information with other authorities.

Reference was also made to solar panels which had been fitted to a park home on a site outside of Exeter, but the resident had been requested to remove them by the owner as they deemed it to be an unauthorised extension. Peter suggested that insulation should be the first consideration, and if panels are an option to obtain at least three quotes and use a company that are part of the 'Buy with Confidence' scheme. The Energy Saving Trust calculator also gives an idea of rough savings of solar panels, but it is likely to be between 15-20 years to see a return.

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MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 5 APRIL 2016

The notes of the meeting held on 5 April 2016 were agreed subject to an amendment of Minute No. 2 to read 'Minute No. 13 – Site Licence' in place of 'Enforcement Notices'.

Concerns were raised by a councillor on enforcement notices and works that had not been carried out by the site owners. It was noted that enforcement is issued by a legal process through the City Council and not through Committee.

A Mobile Homes Task and Finish Group would commence in the New Year, and the issue of charging for site licences would be discussed as well as options on how it would be introduced and the best and most efficient way to charge. This would go through the Scrutiny process.

The Environmental Health Practitioner would be attending the next residents meeting, and she would be able to provide an update on issues.

It was emphasised that site licence charges cannot be passed onto residents.

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REVISED TERMS OF REFERENCE FOLLOWING BOUNDARY CHANGES - FOR INFORMATION

The revised Terms of Reference were noted.

The Chair would write to the Portfolio Holders for Customer Access and Place to identify who would be most suited to attend these meetings.

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ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

Suggestions for future meetings included:

- Presentation from the Fire Service
- Police representative to attend – PCSOs visited park home sites on a regular basis as part of making residents feel safer but this no longer happens
- Switching energy provider

Denise Dearden reported that the Council Tax scam was no longer running but may start up again next year - they did have a 14 day cooling off period. The most common scams at present were from people claiming to be from a government department, Crimestoppers or banks. Denise advised that anyone receiving these calls should hang up immediately and report it to Action Fraud.

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DATE OF NEXT MEETING - TUESDAY 4 APRIL 2017 AT 2.15PM

The date of the next meeting was noted.

(The meeting commenced at 2.15 pm and closed at 3.46 pm)

Chair