



– BIELD HOUSING & CARE

Minutes of the meeting of the Partnership Forum

6th February 2025 | Westport, Linlithgow

Present: John Thompson (JT) Craigengar Court (Chair)
 Iain Kirkman (IK) Dean Court
 Deborah Docherty (DD) Bridge Court
 Gillian Merrett (GM) Ashgrove Court
 Maria Duncan (MD) Inchkeith Court
 Margaret Smith (MS) Gordon Court

Via Teams: Charles Craske (CC) Kingsburn Court
 Joseph McLean (JM) Jamaica Court

In Attendance: Alan Morris (AM)

Tenant Engagement & Participation Lead

Kalli Fox (KF)

Community Connection Officer

Robert Black (RB)

Policy & Insight Officer

Tracey Howatt (TH)

Director of Customer Experience

Arthur Akugbo (AA)

Head of Finance

Gavin Wright (GW)

Head of Property Management

Lynne Walker (LW)

Project Co-Ordinator

Apologies: William Smalley

Action 1: Laundry Cleaning maintenance procedure (GW)

Action 2: Compensation amount (GW)

Action 3: Templates for RTO to Gordon Court (AM)

Action 4: Bad weather/storm newsletter. (KF/AM)

Action 5: Broken heating procedure (GW)

1. Welcome and Introductions

AM welcomed all to the partnership forum and all officers and members introduced themselves.

AM explains the meeting will be slightly different this time round, rather than being policy heavy, it was the opportunity for members to meet other officers and Heads of departments.

2. Apologies and Absence

William Smalley

3. Minutes from previous meeting and matters arising

JT – Asked why in the previous partnership forum meeting the percentages for the rent increase were lower than what was sent out to tenants via email?

AM – Explained that at the time it was a hypothesis, and it was more to discuss the options available, such as if tenants should have the opportunity to pick, would they always go with the lower? In the previous meeting this was proved to be incorrect and the members cancelled out the lower option.

TH – At the time financials were different when the previous papers were completed, and at the time there was not such a big rise in National Insurance, which is going to have an impact on rent prices due to staffing costs, the contractors costs, which is covered through the rent figure. While we worked hard for the amount to be lower, the government's increase in national insurance and lowering the threshold for individuals to earn hit us and everyone hard and we had to make changes. With this change in national insurance we are looking at spending at least £700,000 out with our control. Like everything the cost of materials, goods, contractors and their staff is on the rise. One thing we have been looking at to change is the how the service charge is written out in the rent letters. Previously the service charge used to be separate, and you could see what was getting paid for through the service charge, then we put the rent and service charge into the same bracket.

JT – have you discussed this with the council?

TH – we always go to local authorities on this, so we can make sure we meet the requirements with housing benefit. The only thing compared to years ago was that we paid contents insurance, now we do not.

JT – Staff were not paid for?

TH – No that is eligible, unless it is person centred. Our rents and staffing are 100% housing benefit eligible. If there is an individual case, then they need to speak to the Area Housing Manager for their development.

JT – Was the rent and service charge put together because council's would not cover before?

TH – No that is not true, they were not moved together because they were not eligible.

JT – So it does it not matter if it is old or new buildings?

TH – It depends on the service, costs are based on repairs needing done.

IK – So service costs are based on the individual specific, rather than the same for all Bield properties?

TH – That is correct.

JT – They can cut costs, like staff at retirement housing developments.

TH – You might feel like that, but a lot of others value having a development manager and retirement housing assistant. Someone who is there, if and when they need the help. We are always looking at the bigger picture and currently looking at the Independent Living Model.

AM – The issue with national insurance came as a shock to everyone, but there was a lot of lobbying done, people worked hard so social landlords like ourselves did not feel the impact of it.

TH – Everything will be impacted, that is including price of food etc.

IK – Can I discuss the issues at Dean Court? I am wanting to know how many of the developments have been checked RAAC?

TH – I do not know how many have been checked, but I know we are at the end of surveying. Ceilings needed to be removed and kept open to look at this. We are expecting to come to Dean Court at the end of this month.

IK – We have been told work will end in the summer. There are serious issues within the development with electricity hanging down, there are ceiling tiles been taken off and left open and RAAC is now exposed. This particular area is below and flat roof with the chance it might flood. This is a safety hazard, also within the corridors is a gas pipe that feeds the boilers for the development. There are power cables dragged along walls and connected to power connectors and held together with insulating tape.

TH – I was under the impression remedial work has been done?

IK – (passed out pictures which were taken 05/02/25 – TH currently has copies of these).

TH – I know there has been a lot more testing done at Dean Court.

AM – Moving onto Actions from previous meeting. I discussed with Ron (Mould) getting airfryers, heated blankets, however there is no money in grants for it this time round.

GM – Something we can keep note of and add for next year.

AM – Ron is always looking for grants and funding.

GM – I want to discuss laundry cleaning maintenance, is there a procedure in place for this? A lot of areas within developments are not well kept and do not show an inviting place for people to live.

TH – There is a mould leaflet, we can get that sent back out into developments.

RB – Zhan (McIntyre) did ask for laundry cleaning to be upped.

GM – We need to see the procedure and see that it is being done, like what you have in public toilets, to say it has been cleaned. Sometimes there is damp laundry left lying within the machines.

DD – is that not a resident issue?

GM – Yes.

4. Arthur Akugbo – Head of Finance

AM – Over to Arthur – Head of Finance.

AA – Thank you for inviting me to the forum. In finance we do not get the opportunity to come and out meet tenants and I am planning on staying for the rest of the meeting.

Today my intention is discuss finance, the structure and what we do as a whole. There are three main areas:

Payroll – paying staff

Financial Accountant – income (rents) and payments, such as paying contractors

Business Partners – work with front line staff and offices for budgeting and forecasting.

Currently we have discussing the upcoming budgets with each department, however as previously suggested things have happened out with our control such as the national insurance, so we have had to look at things again. We forecast every quarter and review where things have happened both good and bad, we might find a budget needs to be increased. We rely heavily on colleagues to let us know how to/where to spend money. There are budgets with assets and one with operations.

Financial accountants produce accounts on time so the business partners can take over from there and work with departments. The end of year audit is done every year with our auditors and send the report to the Board to make the income we receive is going to the correct places. Happy to take any questions.

DD – How many staff do you have?

AA – 11 staff.

IK – Was there any additional costs which came from the storms?

TH – We had some, but nothing major. What I will say is the team worked well together to keep impact to a minimum.

AM – What is the cost to the organisation for national insurance? What happens when expenditure exceeds income?

AA- £700,000 to £800,000 added. We constantly monitor the budget and there are controls in place for not spending more than we bring in. We have growth strategy that bank need to see, to see that we are growing and a profitable organisation.

MD – Is there a big profit at end of year?

AA – Last year we were in deficit. This year we are hopefully going to break even or have a small profit. I cannot say exactly where just now. It is in our interest for us to be surplus, so we can pay money back.

AM – Do Bield have any loans?

AA – One from the government, which is having its last payment made this month. This was an interest free loan, with 5 years of equal repayable amounts. This was taken to start immediate works on fire safety. Bield has not borrowed money for a long time.

AM – Does growth and new builds come hand in hand?

AA – We do not have the money for new buildings, with the price of things and the way things are it costs millions.

TH – There is some funding available for new builds through HAAG, however there is issues and delays. We are looking to have a new build programme.

JT – Does it need to be new builds you get funding on?

TH – It totally depends, discussions need to be had with government, we need make sure our current buildings are safe and for purpose. We need to look at everything and that includes looking after our current properties as well as looking at new. With big repairs we need to see if something is viable or it would be better to rebuild. We have not built anything since 2017/2018, and we want to get building again. AA is there to make sure we do not spend too much.

AM – How have you seen the budget change?

AA – With staffing costs, repairs, maintenance.

AM – So the age of buildings is a factor.

GM – Plus the fact there is no maintenance on current products such as laundry, soft furnishings. If these were maintained well, then they could essentially last longer.

AA – This is why us in finance need staff in different departments and works well.

AM – What is the auditing process like?

AA – On the 31st March we stop processing due to the end of the financial year, but the books stay open. In May the first draft is sent to accountants and auditors will spend time in house looking through books and asking questions and seeing if what we have down is correct. They will scrutinise everything from expenses to expenditure everything that relates to Bield. They will write an end of year report and accounts will be signed off in August by Board. April to June are our busiest times, then from September to now we are busy consulting with departments working on budgets. Bield is a big organisation and there is a lot to go through. The Board have to accept budgets and everything before anything happens, that's why everyone who holds a budget is involved.

AM – So there is a lot of external influence?

AA – 100%. We need to consider everything and rely on departments for information. Rent is the only thing set for the year, whereas other prices of things can change.

DD – How long for expenses to be paid?

AA – Staff are different to tenants. Staff expenses have to be in by a certain point within the month and added to their wage on pay day. Tenants are slightly different, we do two BACS runs a month and an Ad Hoc run a month. Rents and compensation come in through CX.

TH – If there is an issue with compensation, and it is for a whole development then it should all be done at the same time, but unfortunately if they ask for bank details that is what could hold up any payments.

GM – We need to be told if something is not working but in hand. Such as tumble dryers/washing machines, they are out for 4 weeks. Is there a way to get a poster to add to the machine?

KF – Yes that is something we can look at. The issue just now is parts are taking a while to come, it is the same all over.

TH – Is there digital noticeboards in developments?

KF – Not in all

TH – This is what is good about the digital noticeboards, if there is a repair needing done such as heating off or washing machine, we can put a notice on the digital board.

GM – Is there emergency lighting in flats?

TH – No there is not.

GM – I think we need some sort of storm help for individuals who are cognitively impaired.

KF – We could do a storm/bad weather checklist/newsletter.

MD – What happens to BR24 in power cut?

TH – There are leaflets which can go out to tenants when there is a power cut explaining what to do and the procedure.

JT – Does each demographic area have a budget?

AA – No, just property as a whole.

TH – Each property maintenance officer will have part of the budget for their patch area.

GM – wants to discuss tenant satisfaction survey. There does not seem a lot of people wanting to be involved in tenant engagement.

KF – That is correct, that is why we are out trying to get individuals involved, but it all depends on the individual.

AM – This brings us onto the Tenant participation update.

5. TP Update

AM – Looking to start in March – Sustainability and Scrutiny

Scrutiny Group:

Current work	Terms of Reference
Code of Conduct	
Recruit Members	
Future Programme	Exercise to be decided

Regarding members – we are looking at it being one tenant only from a development.

Communication Champions:

Current Members	7
Current work	Performance report for tenants
Future Programme	Bield Bulletin

Compliments and Complaints collective:

Current members	4
Current work	Review sample of complaints
Future Programme	Meet in Feb 2025

Bield Equality Network:

Current membership	7 (+3 since last update)
Opened to officers as well	
Current Work	National Award
Future programme	

Sustainability :

Current membership	
Current work	Meeting held with Net Zero Carbon Manager to discuss potential agenda
Future programme	First meeting held in March

RTO:

Number of RTOs 3 Potential

Regional Forums:

Number of regional forums Initial talks in Leven and possibly Bothwell area.

Tenant Insight Network (TIN): 300 people

RB – Regarding satisfaction surveys, quarter 4 has just went out to the last patches and currently we have a 37% return rate, which is roughly 1350 returns before Q4. Within quarter 4 we already have 166 returns. The data will be used for the ARC.

6. Small Grant Fund

KF – This is how we got participants for the small grant fund. This time we decided to do it different, we emailed out using the TIN and to yourselves, we have two members do the scoring for the small grants and had 2 ladies who have not joined anything join and development manager from Dean Court. This was done online via teams, all interested were sent out paper work prior to meeting and throughout meeting everyone put their scores forward. This time round we had 28 applicants with 5 winners. The applicants who sadly missed out will be added to our community benefit list. The applicants wanted all sorts including a lot of board games, seated exercise equipment to bus trip.

The winners where:

St Andrews Court

Clyde Court

Lynn Court

Quayside Court

Brae Court.

7. Gavin Wright – Head of Property Management

GW – I started the post on 1st October 2024, I was previously a surveyor and worked for Clackmannanshire council. There has been a lot of changes within property over the last few months.

Asset Management is now different, it is broken into two, we have property management and development and Investment which is Liz Peacock's team. My team is property management and we are broken into three –

Repairs – day to day repairs, standards/costs

Compliance – making properties secure and safe such as gas and lifts.

Voids – which covers procedure, and moving into good properties.

In my team I believe there needs to be transparency and over the years there has not been good business done. I am pushing my staff to get out and about into developments, seeing the layout, structure and meeting staff and tenants. We need to modernise how we do things and for standards to rise and there has been budgets put

aside for that, we know our developments need to be modernised and painting to be updated. Since we are trying to update our properties, we are looking at what digital aspects we can put in to make life easier. We currently have a pilot project in Biggar – such as looking at boilers and putting sensors in there so instead of heating going down and us trying to sort it, we are prewarned and able to maintain it rather than it going off.

One thing we do need is feedback on repairs and contracts with a good level of satisfaction with service.

GM – suggests taking a look at Carnegie Court Montrose – due to the number of voids.

GW – As I previously mentioned Asset Management is split into two, and closed assets is Liz's team. Previously you could build new builds for relatively cheap due to government funding and the average from to build was £113 to £125k, now unfortunately it costs at least £385K for a new build with very little funding/grants.

GM – We are known for smart tech and leaders within the sector and really first impressions matter and Bield's are bad. We need to know what the maintenance programmes are regarding painting and decorating. We were told plants are a fire hazard and they could not be in corridors.

GW – That is correct, plants and door mat's had to go.

GM – We need to find a middle ground.

GW – I am wanting to bring art work into developments and I want the art work to relate to the area. I think we need to make a change there, we are Registered Social Landlords, not care homes and we need tenant involvement.

It is very early stages, and previously there was very little communication between property and other departments and I am wanting to change that. Previously development managers were not able to see what was going to be happening with their developments, now we are implementing a way for them to look at letters that are planned to go out.

MS – There are issues with contractors such as window cleaners.

GW – There is a window cleaning contract coming soon and that's why we need feedback.

We have budgets for remedial works to be completed, but what is mentioned here today I will make a note of it. There is a design aid in the works and will be coming out which will look at various issues.

JT – The situation with CCTV, there is developments it is not working in.

GW – There are very few developments that there is no CCTV and we are looking at all of this. Some developments need the CCTV updated, and we have a contract for this.

MD – Staff are not allowed to look at CCTV.

GW – That is correct, if there is an incident, then the police will ask us for it, but if it is an incident within the development that does not need the police to attend then the head of service will need to ask for this.

MD – Can I ask about recycling within developments?

GW – This all depends on the local authority. Some local authorities are fantastic, others are not good.

JT – I am wanting to know the life expectancy of kitchens, bathrooms, carpets etc.

GW – This is Liz's team but I will get a list of this.

JT – I know Bield cannot do everything.

GW – The investment team are looking at longer term investments, rather than it being year by year, they are looking for four year plans now.

Currently we need to find things that need to be fixed, so that can be done and will be done. Where we are currently spending money we do not need to be, contractors are charging a lot for poor service.

MD – There is no communication from people, such as the issue with the meters.

GW – That is Ron (Mould), who deals with that. I will pass this over to him.

MD – There is also issue with warden call issues to cottages.

GW – I will speak to Gary (Baillie) regarding this.

MS – We have noticed issues from BR24 with emergency services not getting access at Gordon Court.

GW – We are looking at code words for emergency services. We are looking for CCTV at every front door of the developments with live access to BR24 for this type of issue.

GM – The quality of CCTV is poor though.

GW – It really depends on the developments, some are better than others. This has been raised already and compliance has been asked to go to every development and find out what ones need to be updated.

We have also been looking at ways in which we can recharge tenants such as with fobs, damage, accidental damage. Fobs are expensive, they are roughly £70 to get a new one, and we currently are not recharging for them. However it needs to be a case by case and I think it should lie with housing.

Now everyone has their roles and departments we are hoping people see a change in things, and we are looking at how issues are reported.

GM – If we are going Net Zero, surely we need to look at insulation .

GW – We are going to look at fabric first.

8. Support After Harassment

GM – This is more where to go, what is available after someone has been harassed, and police have been involved.

KF – Ok, so more what support there is in each area. We can look at Scotland as a whole but we would need to look at areas also. This is something I can discuss with Alan and Zhan. We can look to see what external agencies tenants can be put in contact with for that support if they do not feel comfortable doing themselves.

GM – The victims should not need to move out

KF – That is why we have the new domestic abuse policy there, and David (MacInnes) explained that in a previous meeting.

Next Meeting:

1st May 2025

