

THE MINUTES OF THE 23RD ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
OF THE
DONCASTER FEDERATION OF TENANTS' & RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATIONS
HELD IN THE MANSION HOUSE
ON THURSDAY 18TH MARCH 2004 AT 7 PM.

ATTENDANCE

Standing Joint Committee

Lyn Ralph	Chairperson
Moira Hood	Secretary
Sue Wilkinson	Treasurer Frank Knapton
Vera Boughen	
Emrys Fowler	
Mavis Williams	
Mick Solomon	
John McGuinness	
George Hardy	
Sid Hall	
Sid Bennett	

Guest Speakers

Chris Mills	Portfolio Holder/Cabinet Member for Homes & Housing
Alan Fiddler	Interim Head of Housing
Steve Gayle	Tenants Participation Advisory Service TPAS

Tenants and Residents Association / Tenants Associations

Arksey TARA
Balby Bridge TARA
Balby West TARA
Broomhouse Estate TARA
Clay Lane TARA
Craganour Place TARA
Cromwell House TA
Cow House Lane Residential Park TA
Darlington Grove
Ennerdale TA
Graham House & District TARA
Groves and Avenue TARA
Hexthorpe TARA Instoneville TARA
Intake TARA
Intake High Rise TARA
Kirkstone Close TA
Mexborough Common TARA
Morton & Chaucer TARA
Moss Road TARA
Orange Croft Residential Park Assoc
Poets Corner TARA

Polton Close TA
Radburn Road TARA
SARA TARA
Stainforth TARA
Tarran Bungalows TA
Wheatley Park Community Action Network TARA
Windhill Estate TARA
Woodfield TARA

Apologies

Roger Taylor	Chief Executive DMBC
Paul Hart	Executive Director Neighbourhood Services
Sp. Kevin Lincoln	South Yorkshire Police
Cllr Mc Lister	DMBC
Sue Riordan	DMBC Housing Services

1. Welcome

Chairperson Lyn Ralph welcomed everyone to the 23rd Annual General Meeting and introduced the guest speakers Councillor Chris Mills, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Service, Homes and Housing and the interim Head of Housing Mr Alan Fiddler.

Steve Gale from the Tenant Participation Advisory Service TPAS who is working with the SJC and Doncaster tenants on the Options Study was also introduced to the audience.

2. Opening Address, Portfolio Holder Chris Mills

"Thank you for that introduction and thank you for inviting me here tonight. As Lyn says, I'm Chris Mills and I am the Portfolio Holder/Cabinet Member for Homes and Housing. I was appointed to this role in May of last year and it is a role I am honoured to hold. I feel that I have come to this role at a very important time for housing in Doncaster. We have much to deal with all at once.

Like all local authorities' Housing departments "experts" from outside the Council inspect us. Anyone who is involved with schools will recognise something similar in the Ofsted inspection system.

We did not do very well in 2001 nor in 2002 and we had to do better in 2003. Through working with the Standing Joint Committee and with others, improvements were put in place that are providing a better service for the tenants in Doncaster.

I am pleased to be able to say that these changes were recognised by the inspectors when they came in the autumn and they have now made us a one star authority. We still have some distance to go but we are travelling in the right direction.

We are all aware that lifestyles around are changing. There are more single adult households. The open plan estates that were the sought after ideal a couple of decades ago are now less favoured and defensible boundaries around properties are preferred. Although we still lie behind the more southern counties of the UK life expectancy in Doncaster is increasing.

Aspirations are changing. More people who are coming now into a council tenancy see this as a stepping-stone and in fact Right to Buy is increasing-likely to reach 1000 properties by the end of this financial year. No area is entirely a council estate any more.

At the same time as the number of council properties is decreasing-house prices in Doncaster are increasing. The Halifax assessment last year showed for the first time that the average house price in Doncaster was over £100,000. Young people are finding increasing difficulties in setting up their first homes.

The challenge to all of us, tenants, DMBC staff and Elected members, is to plan ahead to try to match social housing properties across Doncaster to these changing needs-always, of course, mindful that the council itself is not allowed to build new homes. So matching supply and demand is a problem for us all.

But what about the properties we do have?

The Government has set a decent home standard, a home that is weatherproof, warm and has a kitchen and bathroom of modern design etc. This is a very minimum standard. I am sure that all of you, like me, think that this is the very least that Doncaster tenants should have.

We have made some progress towards achieving this standard for our homes but there is a long way to go yet. **But decent homes are not enough.**

Together we can create neighbourhoods where people choose to live, in which people feel secure and most of all, neighbourhoods of which we feel proud. This won't happen overnight and it won't happen because I or the Council say it should happen. It will only happen if it is what we all want and if we all play our part in making it happen.

I know that all of you here tonight understand just what I mean because it is people like you who involve themselves in their local areas, in Tenants and Residents bodies, that are making the difference, the difference that is being recognised. Neither these council officers nor I can be in your neighbourhoods every hour of every day, but you are.

It is the effect you are having in partnership with officers, Elected Members and others which is starting a momentum of change. No one says it is easy, and I am sure you regularly have days when it is one step forward and five steps back but that never stops you making that forward step again.

It is together that we can achieve and the achievements are for now and for the future-for our children and our grandchildren.

From the bottom of my heart I want to thank all of you here tonight-the Standing Joint Committee (whose enthusiasm keeps me going if I am having one of those days), Elected Member colleagues, all the staff across Homes and Housing who give me such great support, but most of all, all **of you.**

You, who give your time and your energy so generously to improve your local areas-together we can make the differences we all want to see.

Together we can achieve decent Homes in Decent Neighbourhoods."

3. The minutes of the last AGM 20th March 2003

The minutes were agreed a true record

Proposed Sid Hall, Balby West TARA- seconded Frank Knapton, Morton & Chaucer TARA.

4. Matters arising from the minutes There were no matters arising from the minutes

5. The Annual Report

Lyn Ralph went through the annual report inviting questions or comments from the audience. Cliff Whinfield, Groves and Avenues said that he thought the report was better presented this year. There were no further comments.

6. Treasurer's Report

Members accepted the financial report without any questions arising from it. Lyn Ralph thanked Sue Wilkinson, who had taken on the role as treasurer from Dave Allott, for the excellent job she had done as treasurer.

7. Motion Proposed by Clay Lane TARA

"The Standing Joint Committee of the Doncaster Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations has the right of co-option to the Standing joint Committee for the benefit of the tenants and residents that body represents. The terms and qualification for the co-option will be limited to members of Tenants' and Residents' Associations, Tenants' Clubs, Community Based Housing Management Forums and the Tenants Commissioning Board, The period of co-option to be determined by the Standing Joint Committee but to be limited to the period of twelve calendar months"

Moira Hood proposed the motion on behalf of Clay Lane TARA giving the reasons why they thought such a proposal was necessary.

Roger Haldenby Intake High Rise TARA supported the proposal as he said that he was well aware of the workload that was falling upon some people. Emrys Fowler Stainforth TARA stated that the motion should have gone out to members earlier and the SJC should have discussed it. In reply Moira Hood said that the motion along with other paperwork relevant to the AGM had been sent out to secretaries before this evening and as it was Clay Lane TARA and not the SJC who had proposed the motion it did not need to be discussed by the SJC before it was put to the membership this evening. Emrys went on to say that he fully agreed with the motion. There were no speakers against

A card vote was held which resulted in a large majority in favour of the motion with no votes against. Bob Baker Hexthorpe TARA asked if co-opted members would have voting rights or not? He proposed that a vote should be taken on whether they

should or should not. The result of the card vote on this issue was 67 voted yes they should and 27 voted no they should not.

9. Introduction of new TARAs

Lyn Ralph welcomed the new TARAs that had been set up during the year and thanked the Community Liaison Team for their hard work. Arksey TARA
Bankwood Estate TARA, Rossington
Cathedral TARA, Dunscroft.
Graham House & District TARA, Kirk Sandall.
Kirkstone Close TA, Bentley
Model Village TARA, Woodlands
Mount Pleasant Residential Park TA
Redmond Community TARA, Carcroft
Rossington Safer Streets
SARA TARA, Skellow.

Lyn thanked them all for forming their associations stating that it was the best thing they could have done in these unsettled times. Everyone has a right to be heard and have the right to vote for change if they do not agree with anything. Joining a TARA allows you to do this it gives you a better chance of finding out and having a voice in what is happening in your community

10. Introductions of Nominees for the SJC

The 8 tenant and 2 resident nominees seeking election to the SJC were invited to stand when they were introduced to the meeting

11. Steve Gayle, Tenant Participation Advisory Service TPAS

Lyn Ralph introduced Steve Gayle TPAS who has been helping as independent tenant advisory during the Option for the Future of Council Housing Exercise.
"Great crowd, great turnout here tonight. I was appointed to work with the tenants of Doncaster Council on the Options study. Every council in the country is going through or have already gone through this process. Looking at the future not just about bricks and mortar but about communities Have you all had copies of the Green Paper and have you all filled in your questionnaires? We have been working hard with groups of tenants and the Tenants Commission looking at each option in detail. Last week we were working on drawing together what we have discussed to prepare a report to present to the Mayor on our views. Thanks to all who have attended and taken such a keen interest. We have visited other authorities to see what they have done. We have been door knocking, holding meetings for focus groups trying to raise awareness amongst tenants. I hope the Mayor will take account of what you say. The final proposal in the form of a White Paper is expected in June. TARA members are working hard to sustain their groups, getting tenants involved is quite a challenge"

Lyn thanked Steve before inviting questions.

Q. Where has the Tenants Commission got its information from?

A. Some of the information has come from the Council's Business Plan, Stock Condition Surveys and Housing Needs Surveys. Other information has come

from an independent report. We have looked at each option and what it means for Doncaster tenants, 5 options but the Government have rather pushed Councils into a corner. it will be down to the Mayor to decide.

Q. Why can't the Council get funding, if they agree to give away their homes they can?
A. Government policy restrains Councils from borrowing but Housing Associations are not under the same constraints

Q. What about leaseholders in caravan parks we seem to get left out every time?
A. Different consultation would be needed in your case, as your circumstances are different from council housing tenants.

Q. What about the obligation on the Council to provide accommodation under homelessness legislation?

A- It wouldn't affect it as the Council has nomination rights.

12. Interval-Collection of Ballot Paper

13. Raffle

The sum of £100 was raised by the raffle

14. Interim Head of Housing, Alan Fiddler

"As interim Head of Service I have had some difficulty in putting something together to say tonight. I feel very privileged to be here and I do not take this position lightly. I consider it an honour to be the Head of Homes and Housing in Doncaster.

The difficulty wasn't anything to do with that I have to be careful what I say, to the contrary I feel comfortable in what I am doing with the service, what needs to be done and working with you the tenants and staff in making it happen.

The difficulty also was not with how I would say what I have to say, all of you who know me, some better than others, know that I usually say what I mean and am to the point. I might not say what people want to hear but I say what they need to know, the facts-the truth.

No the difficulty wasn't anything to do with the job or what to say or how to say it. it was the same difficulty that I had with the AGM report. Because Chris, Lyn Moira and myself work so close together we are in danger of repeating the same things and talking about the same issues.

Common bond- same vision for the housing service, sometimes there might be confusion as to who is the tenant representative, who is the politician and who is part of the paid service. I don't think that is a bad thing I just wish that that sort of working relationship, that mutual understanding could be rolled out across the authority including all tenants, all politicians and all staff.

Possible or impossible.

You don't have to agree all the time you just need to share a common objective and trust each other. A Common Objective. The improvement of the Housing Service and its housing isn't a bad, starting point.

I have tried to consider different issues or to look at them in a different way. We have and will touch on the re-inspection, housing options, decent homes, the Green Paper and the White Paper.

I am sure that many of you will have heard it all before and be bored. I am sure that many people who choose not to attend meetings have heard it all before. I think many people prefer to listen to rumour.

I am sure many of you and the people of Doncaster would now like to see some conclusion. I wish that we were in a position to tell you tonight the direction Doncaster was going with its housing.

Consultation means consultation, it means talking to you and all the other tenants of Doncaster. It means talking to all the staff and stakeholders in social housing. It means listening to everybody's views. Participation also means participation, you will be included in the decision making process.

However, for you to play a full and meaningful role you need to be aware of the processes, the workings of the Council, the options and the implications of these options. But this inclusion should extend to a wider remit than just the housing options and future management of the service. It should involve everything that we do that impacts on you and all other Tenants of Doncaster.

The Mayor has given us extra time to influence the decision, do not underestimate the task and the implications. We must ensure that it is the right decision for Doncaster and that Doncaster is ready and able to implement the change.

Everything we do will contribute to the future stability of the service and that must be done together in partnership, in honesty, in openness, in trust for not just you but for your neighbour, your family and future tenants."

15. Question and Answer

Q. Alan Fielding, Ennerdale TA: Alan Fiddler, Chris Mills don't know but does the Mayor know what the option will be?

A. Cllr Mills: The Mayor doesn't know because he hasn't heard all your views yet. I would be disappointed if he did before he had heard all your views in fact I would be worried if I thought he knew at this stage.

Q. Poets Corner TARA, Mexborough: What is happening over probationary tenancies?

A. Lyn Ralph - There is now a new tool to use in the fight against anti-social behaviour the demoted tenancy. This is much better than introductory tenancies as it can be put on any tenant whether they have been in their house 5 weeks or 5 years if they are guilty of anti-social behaviour. Where as introductory was placed on all new tenants this new demoted tenancy is directed at any tenant who steps out of line no matter how long or short their

tenancy. When we have talked to tenants they feel that the new demoted is fairer as it only targets the guilty.

Q. Un-named tenant: When I lived at Chesterfield I experienced introductory tenancies and felt stigmatised. Felt everyone was watching you all the time and you didn't have all your rights.

A. Jayne Hurley- I have been asked to look at introductory and demoted tenancies and as part of this we shall be holding a discussion day on the 19th April at the Rugby Ground, Armthorpe Road. You are all welcome; it will be a full day with workshops.

Q. Council shift from one area to another-two years of hell before taken to court for eviction

A. Cllr Edgar: It wasn't as simple problem, it does in some cases take time-estate workers worked hard on the case.

Q. Julia Wroot, Intake: Do introductory/demoted tenancies, ASBOs etc speed up the process?

A. Lyn: Yes, the court doesn't have a choice, evict with Anti-Social Behaviour Order if it is broken.

Q. Frank Knapton: We appreciate Jayne is going to give us a presentation. An introductory tenancy gives powers to fast track. I propose as a sounding board we have a show of hands, seconded by Jenny Pearson. Demoted or introductory-demoted highest vote

16. Result of Ballot

Tenants

Sid Hall	3 years
Lyn Ralph	3 years
Kevin Millington	3 years Mavis
Williams	3 years
Val Holmes	2 years
Henry Mooney	1 year
Julia Wroot	1 year

Residents

Frank Knapton	3 years
Linda Teasdale	2 years.

17. Chairperson's Closing Address

"Well it will soon be time for you to go home and forget about the AGM for another year. Put your feet up with a hot cup of tea or whatever your tipples and watch Emmerdale or whatever you set the video for before you came out this evening

Just how do we spend our free time? I did something on the 28th February I have never done in my life before. It was the last Saturday and the culmination of Doncaster's d/frost fortnight. Art and Culture all over Donny, I took my 14 year old granddaughter and her friend along to the School for the Deaf for a session Singing for Everybody. They are both music mad and were looking forward to going. We all

thought it was going to be groups of youngsters singing and doing their own thing. When I dropped them off I asked what time it finished and Margaret who sits with me on the DSP Board said why aren't you staying I replied I can't sing and she said this is just for you. So on discovering I wouldn't cramp Naomi and Vickie's style particularly because the majority of people there were wrinklies like me. I said alright and paid my fiver and I can honestly say I have never enjoyed myself so much. No body felt excluded, nobody was embarrassed we all joined in, people from choirs and choral societies who had been singing for years, about 10 or 12 youngsters, Naomi's age and people like me who sang in school choirs when Adam was a lad, who go along to carol services, sing in group singing when everyone has had a drink and you don't feel silly. I was delighted when Margaret said I had a nice voice and sang in tune. But the bit I really wanted to tell you about was I pulled!! There was a man over the other side of the room giving me the glad eye. No he didn't have a white stick!! Even Naomi said that man fancies you Nan. I daresay he was a very nice man, but he looked 70 years old and I thought dirty old man but then I thought a little later on hang about, you get your bus pass later on this year so where do you get off thinking HE is old! You see and I am sure we all feel the same; in my head I am only 18 I just had a very heavy paper round.

I bet you are all thinking what has this to do with housing silly old soul has lost the plot. Well it has in a round about way. We live in homes that we think are perhaps younger than they really are, we stick plasters on them, give them the equivalent of new hips, glasses, even major transplants. When really we should be looking to lobby the Government and our elected members for the right to build new social housing not just through Housing Associations or private investments but also for councils to build new homes.

We have a very healthy waiting list in Doncaster, but we haven't got the right types of homes in the right places people want to live. Now is the time we have got to enter into really meaningful discussions to say just where we the tenants' want our social housing to go This will mean more intensive training and commitment from us all. So that we can ensure social housing isn't squeezed out, as the Government' want.

We have all just finished a very time intensive programme on housing options and have agreed in principle what the outcome may be. It is not what we know the majority of tenants in Doncaster want, which was stock retention, to stay with the Council. This way, because Government edicts wont bring us in the money needed to achieve the Decency standard so the lesser of all evils is ALMO. Because our stock is so varied we have also said that we want mixed solutions. This means that tenants' and the people living in the areas concerned MUST be fully consulted from beginning to end on whether they want PFI, small stock transfer selling empty properties to first time buyers and also using the money made to improve THEIR area within the ALMO framework.

There is still a tremendous amount of work to do this is only the beginning. May I offer my thanks to all the tenants' on the tenants' commission and the community based management boards for the work they have put in this past year. It has been very intensive and time consuming but I feel sure they have enjoyed it once they understood it more.

May I ask you to put your hands together for the Community Liaison team; they do an excellent job, often going the extra mile. They make our job much easier, thank you.

Around the room yet again are the dedicated officers who have given up their time tonight to attend our AGM. We have had sincere apologies from quite a number of staff only because they have to finish all their annual leave before the end of March and many of them are away.

I know everyone has a moan about different problems, we wouldn't be British if we didn't but I know that 99% of DMBC staff across the board want to do the best for the tenants' and residents' of Doncaster, often under extreme pressure. Ladies and gentlemen I give you your Doncaster workforce.

Can I ask you to put your hands together for my colleagues on the SJC they also do a great job and I would be lost without their support and help.

I am sorry if your hands are sore now but can I ask for your appreciation for tonight's speaker Councillor, Mrs Chris Mills, Alan Fiddler and Steve Gayle.

May I thank you all for your input and support without you there is no Federation. You are the backbone

Now the huge push is slowing down to get the housing options underway and the weekly meetings will slow to perhaps every two weeks. We are heading for a new restructure, which will help tremendously. The new partners for the completion of decency standard across the borough are being evaluated then it will be all systems go.

We are working closer with the old DLO who are now Homes and Housing and the them and us culture is quickly disappearing the fantastic job all concerned are doing to improve the service is set to continue. There is still work to do but we can now hopefully see the wood from the trees and can start to breathe again and perhaps slow down a little bit.

May I sincerely thank all of you for the support and friendship you have shown me over my last 9 years with the Doncaster Federation?

Thank you, Goodnight, Goodbye and a safe journey home."