

Partners Residents Open Forum Meeting 18 January 2018

Partners' staff: Tracy Milton, Malikia Brewster, Katrina Dalby

Islington Council staff: Helen McNeill

6 Resident attendees

Discussion Item	Response if applicable	Actions
<p>Universal Credit Presentation from Partners staff, Malikia Brewster and Tracy Milton. Universal credit is a standard allowance with additional payments depending on a person's circumstances which is paid in arrears direct to the recipient. Universal credit does not apply to people of state pension age. Universal credit has already been introduced for new claimants. At the time of the Open Forum, further roll out for Islington was scheduled for 18 March 2018. This has since moved to June 2018. New applicants will continue to apply for Universal Credit and claimants whose circumstances are changing will be added. We anticipate full migration will take place in 2019/2020. Our message to residents is 'Talk to us'. We want to help and have the people and resources to do this, but if we don't know your circumstances or whether you're struggling to manage, we can't offer the right support or guidance. A tenant or landlord can apply for an 'Alternative Payment Arrangement' (APA). This arrangement means that housing benefit element of a tenant's universal credit can be paid direct to the landlord. Partners will soon be sending a factsheet to all tenants with advice on Universal Credit and bank accounts. Partners' residents have access to a Successful Tenancies Advisor, Malikia Brewster. Malikia takes a holistic view of a resident's situation and works with other agencies and partners to help improve their situation. She can also refer residents to Hyde's employment advisors who can provide advice and training.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The most important message we want to communicate to residents is to talk to us. Early intervention is key to minimising debt. If you have questions or concerns, contact us so that we can help before problems become overwhelming. • In preparation for Universal Credit we have recruited an additional member of staff. We will monitor demand and look at further recruitment if necessary. • If residents have disabilities and are anxious about the changes, we'd ask them to contact us to arrange an appointment. We can visit residents at home if that's their preference. • Where residents haven't been in touch with us for a while and if arrears start to build on their account we'll contact them to arrange a home visit or office appointment to discuss their situation. • Our Successful Tenancies Advisor has completed an accreditation which states that she has to be impartial. For every client she has to provide an 'Advice alliance sheet' which explains how residents can get similar information from other sources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partners to share draft letter/factsheet/banking info with Engagement Register for comment before it is sent.

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<p>Malikia looks at maximising income whilst trying to reduce debt. She ensures that clients are applying for all the benefits and any local government help that they are eligible for.</p> <p>Malikia will also look at budgeting and reducing costs where possible. For example, Malikia could negotiate with utilities and service providers to move residents onto better tariffs or agree debt repayment plans.</p> <p>She can also investigate available grants to help purchase essential items such as a washing machine or cooker.</p>		
<p>Open Forum</p> <p>A resident asked whether Partners would consider changing the format of the Open Forum and returning to the previous format with a closed membership. It was also noted that the output from Partners scrutiny exercises should be shared with the Open Forum.</p> <p>Perceived benefits of the old approach were cited as providing an opportunity for residents to comment on matters of housing policy and strategy and to hold Partners and the Council to account. It was also suggested that the minutes in their old format were more valuable than the current way notes are published.</p> <p>Some residents at the meeting disagreed with the cited benefits saying that they preferred the new Open Forum.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partners reviewed their engagement mechanisms in 2015. • Whilst we recognise that some residents liked the old membership approach, it was a source of dissatisfaction for some others. • We proposed moving to a non-membership, open approach which we felt would facilitate a more inclusive form of resident engagement. Through consultation we received overwhelming support for our proposals and Open Forms were introduced replacing the Residents' Forum. • Since the introduction of the Open Forum, we've been pleased that we've maintained a good number of attendees at the meetings. • The Open Forum has delivered many tangible business benefits which have had a positive impact for all Partners residents, e.g. creation of noise leaflets, feedback on ways to improve communal 	

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	<p>area access, improved electrical safety test letters, feedback on proposals to change the way we answer telephone calls, and feedback on our complaints process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents can request 'hot topics' where we focus on a specific discussion issue and arrange appropriate guest speakers. Hot topics have included universal credit, damp works, and leasehold insurance. • Islington Council's Housing Scrutiny Committee is a committee of the Council comprised of elected councillors and resident representatives. Partners residents are welcome to attend these meetings. The Committee has the power to hold the Executive to account and also to consider and shape policy. Each year, the Committee carries out a review of an aspect of the Council's housing services. This could be related to the council's policies, performance or practice. The Committee also looks at how external organisations, such as Housing Associations, conduct their business. During a review, committee members gather evidence in a variety of ways, including receiving witness evidence from officers, residents and external organisations. The Committee may also carry out visits. When the Committee has 	

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	<p>all the evidence they need, they make a number of recommendations to improve services. The Executive then decides if these are implemented, and the Committee monitors progress 12 months on. The Committee also receives regular reports on the performance of housing services. Meetings are held approximately every six weeks at Islington Town Hall. Meetings start at 7.30pm. The Housing Scrutiny Committee is a formal committee of the council and is held in accordance with the procedure rules set out in the Council's Constitution. Meetings are held in public. Agendas and minutes are published on the website and the press and public may attend meetings to ask questions. Committee meetings may be filmed or photographed. Further information is available from the Council's website: http://democracy.islington.gov.uk democracy@islington.gov.uk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Islington Council also runs an annual surgery for Partners residents. Look out in Partners Gazette and on Partners website for dates and details of how to book. 	

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<p>Door and Window Grills A resident asked why Islington Council street properties have had their door and window grills removed but Partners properties haven't.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Islington Council does not have a programme of window grill removals in place. • Window grills are generally removed if a property becomes void or cyclical decorations are required. 	
<p>Major Repairs Communication A resident asked about the communication they should receive regarding their major repair.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repair's appointments are initially dealt with by a member of our Responsive Repairs Team. If the operative establishes that the scope of the works are deemed larger than a day to day repair they will refer it to our Major Repairs Team. • Our Major Repairs Team will liaise with our Cyclical Team so that where it's sensible and appropriate, larger repairs can be completed during cyclical work to minimise disruption for residents. • On receipt of a referral the Major Repairs Team will write to the resident advising them what's going to happen next, what work is expected and who's dealing with the repair. • Once we receive a quote for works we will write again to the resident confirming which contractor will be carrying out the work and how long we expect it will take. • Due to the nature of major repairs we may need to arrange surveys, specialist contractors, insurance claims etc. It can take time to complete a major repair, but we should always keep residents informed of our progress. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partners to investigate individual's major repair.
<p>SHINE Referrals Two residents noted that despite having their heating checked</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents can book a Repairs appointment on 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partners to refer two residents to

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<p>and being told that the heating was working and adequate for the size of their home areas of their house were cold.</p>	<p>www.partnersislington.net or 020 7288 8310 and we can check whether there is any work we can carry out on your windows to minimise drafts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partners Housing Services team can refer residents to SHINE or residents can contact them themselves. The team offer practical advice on a wide range of areas including health and wellbeing, energy efficiency, befriending, fire safety checks, handyperson services and much more. Full details of all their services can be found at www.islington.gov.uk or contact them via shine@islington.gov.uk or 020 7527 2121. 	<p>SHINE.</p>
<p>Permitted Development A resident enquired about whether a skylight in a conservation area should have an article 4 direction notice.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If a resident wants to install a skylight in the front of their property which is in a conservation area, they should first apply for permission. This may not apply to a skylight at the rear of the property, however we would always advise a resident to check first. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partners can provide guidance on previous cases but if anyone has concerns they should raise them with Islington Council's planning department.

Date of next meeting – Thursday 15 March 2018 – 222 Upper Street

