

**Café Conversations
Frocester Cricket Club
22nd February 2022**

Background

This was one of four tenant Café Conversation events planned for this year. Café Conversation events are an opportunity for tenants to meet socially and discuss a particular theme which affects them as customers of SDC's housing service. On this occasion, we used Frocester Cricket Club to host this event and despite competition from Sherborne's 'Fish n'Chips lunch we had a very good turnout and a great sociable vibe. The themes under discussion were **Tenant Participation activities** and the **Tenant Handbook**. Tenants told us a lot about they thought of our forthcoming tenant proposals and made some really good suggestions which have been incorporated into the Tenant Participation Strategy. Given that the Government's White Paper proposals put 'listening to tenants' at the forefront of their plans, SDC's strategy in this area will be of immense importance.

To help us get a feel for the best times of the day for tenants to engage with us, we held conversation sessions across the whole day; one in the morning, then afternoon and lastly, one in the evening (6 pm).



Consultation on Proposed Tenant Participation Activities (forthcoming strategy)

A range of opportunities are proposed, under the umbrella of **Stroud Tenant Voice**, which is designed to fit in with tenants' availability and individual preferences. We asked our guests to share their views on the following options.

A one-off instance such as a:

- **Tenant event**
Previously we had district-wide annual events with themes. One year it was around 'Living with Dementia' and the following year 'Younger for Longer'. This year we are

proposing a '**Generation Games**' theme with the intention of hosting intergenerational activities to promote health and wellbeing amongst all ages.

From tenants' comments it's clear that there is enthusiasm for an annual event although a **theme** around getting information and advice around **budgeting**, claiming **benefits**, **heating** and **insulation** etc. would be more beneficial this year given concerns around the increases affecting the cost of living.

- **Estate Walkabout**

The return of Estate Walkabouts was welcomed. Tenants are interested in meeting their Housing Officer (HO) and building a relationship with them while touring their estate. They would also like to meet tenant volunteers in their area, too. Some concern was expressed with regard to including neighbours with disabilities. We can adapt this activity to make it inclusive.

- **Café Conversations**

All who attended were in favour of this type of event and want to see them being held on a regular basis around a theme and in different districts. It was felt that the social side of it was very important element.

Of interest, all Independent Living (IL) guests expressed a desire to resume coffee mornings especially in the Cam/Dursley area where, pre-pandemic, four schemes took it in turns to host a coffee morning (a free mini bus was available at that time). IL guests want to build on coffee morning activities so that they can eventually host annual fetes etc. News of the quarterly themed meetings that Lynne Mansell's team are scheduling (following recommendations from a recent IL Focus Group) was shared with guests.

Comments made on 'post it' notes have been captured and can be found in Appendix 1

Volunteer Roles

From discussion and written comments, it's clear that there is **little appetite for a volunteer title or an I.D. badge** for the roles of Neighbourhood Ambassador and Green Champion (a new role we are proposing).

There was a fair amount of interest in volunteering for 'Empty Homes Inspector' another new volunteer role being proposed.

In all we received a number of expressions of interest in volunteering. See below:

Neighbourhood Ambassador – two people

Empty Homes Inspector – five people

Focus Group (Taster Workshop planned for Monday, 23rd May) – two people

Green Champion – three people

Consultation on Tenant Handbook (online)

This was an interesting session with a lot of queries focussing on contact and communication. Officers, who 'on hand', were able to answer questions and show guests how to navigate the landing page so that they could see how certain types of information could be accessed more easily.

Most people felt that the handbook information was sufficient for their needs although there was concern that contact details weren't prominent enough on SDC's landing page.

Non-consultation themes

In addition to the themed conversation topics there were concerns around the following:

Communication (see miscellaneous comments). In addition to comments received at two recent tenant engagement events this is one of tenants' top concerns. It was felt a regular newsletter (with themes similar to Housing's internal newsletter, "The Huddle") would go a long way towards satisfying tenants' need for keeping abreast of what's going on. Guidance manuals for some aspects of the service would also be helpful. For example, how tenants moving into flats should deal with different types of waste.

Telephone contact, a number of guests talked about contact by telephone. Officers explained that there's a team rota to support telephone queries; Where possible, the officer on telephone duty will try to resolve a telephone query straight away. Where this isn't possible they relay information to the relevant Housing Office to undertake. Our guests were pleased to hear that Housing Officers concentrate on being out and about on their patches as much as possible and then pick up emails/voice mails at the end of the day.

This is a very quick summary of the event and you will see that there are a number of other issues/topics apart from those identified above (See appendix 1). Overall, it was a very good day with attendance at different sessions giving some indication of what times best suit the majority of tenants (and takes some account of preferences according to age group). Face to face meetings on winter evenings are clearly not popular although online meeting opportunities may overcome this.

This feedback helped to inform the 'Tenant Participation Strategy' and will assist in the forthcoming improvements planned for the online Tenant Handbook.

Overall experience of the Café Conversation sessions at Frocester (out of 10)

Score out of 10	No. of guests
10	6
9	2
8	8
7	2
6	1
No score given	1

Appendix 1 - Tenants' Comments

Café Conversations - 22nd February 2022

One-off activities

Annual Event proposal

- Choose a different title to 'Generation Games'. Off-putting to both young and older people. Generally, will receive negative comments at this sort of event. Follow up issues that are raised – this is important.
- Suggest that music is a good draw and usually well-received. Soft play is another draw for families.
- In a place like Dursley the best times to have this type of event is when there's a holiday such as the Dursley festival, Christmas or Easter time.
- Tenant events – invite utility companies, P3, include Crafts/fun to join in. Katherine Allan – re: independent events
- Play to 'discuss' topics
- Budgeting, Pension Credit, Accessing Food Bank

Estate Walkabout

- Yes – need to re-start. Invite residents in specific area as well as councillors etc.
- Take account of disability - Contact with people with disabilities
- Need to be able to include those not able to 'walkabout'
- IL walkabouts, discuss with Lynne
- Invitations to all areas
- In favour of estate walkabouts and would like feedback
- Too many changes to Housing Officer – lack of continuity

Café Conversations

- Can be good if not dominated by one person
- Do them more local to area i.e. WUE
- Cover Furniture Recycling in Café Conversations
- More regular Café Conversations to build confidence after Covid
- Hold Conversation Cafés around the district i.e. I live in Dursley
- More localised Conversation Café, for example Brimscombe/Dursley – in localities
- Please consider holding Conversation Cafes in Wotton – there's the Civic Centre and the Keepers Community Hub

Other activities suggested:

- Carers Coffee meeting
- Smaller events – area based
- Quarterly meetings on particular subjects to encourage people to come along to events
- Coffee mornings (Independent Living) – there used to be a free mini bus for schemes in Cam & Dursley
- Transport

Miscellaneous Comments

- Training on how to manage a meeting correctly
- How do we stop domination in scheme meetings?
- Mature/experienced staff who have understanding of elderly
- Council staff to be aware of allowing everyone to have a voice
- Removal of carpet from voids property – waste!
- Reporting issues – communication
- Need feedback after moving in to property – new tenant re: void issues
- Contact details for local wardens etc. needs to be on display but noticeboard keys lost – find them or change boards (Draycott?)

- Open the park or give a date – communicate what’s happening with it (Draycott?)
- No manuals given for my flat – where are they? Guidance about rubbish (block of flats) could be in pack. No beige bags received at ‘sign up’ either
- ‘Rubbish’ rules could be in pack – no beige bags given to me at ‘sign up’
- Would like to get to know community more
- Some notice boards not used at all
- Communications – letting people know what’s going on
- External and internal notice boards not being used (Draycott) and rules on display e.g. rubbish, cleaning, stairwells – beige bags, large items
- Reference number for repair reports needed
- Identify who does what in community
- Posters – make sure they go into many more areas and places
- If you’re asked a question (council staff)... answer it! Yes, we will; No, we won’t
- SDC do a lot of good work
- Polite call handlers (not sure if this is a compliment or if this means call handlers need some training!)
- A regular newsletter to include events at Independent Living schemes (people aren’t aware) + news about things that have been done/going to be done
- Repairs – a lot of tenants are having problems – draughts through their windows and patio doors. Some windows are stiff to open and close. When will the broken window handles be mended at Hazelwood, Stonehouse.
- No one looks at the notice board in the lounge at Hazelwood. Some people see what’s written on the white boards if they come down to the bins or laundry. Information is not shared out. So a newsletter with events on in the area would help. There are plenty of local events on, but we don’t get to know. Stonehouse is a good community to live in, but unless you are on the internet/Facebook you are stumped.
- Council to respond more quickly to suggestions that are put forward
- Not all older people are able to go online
- Newsletter – Email/Paper
- We need communication/feedback/response back from SDC as to what outcomes are from complaints made
- Council should have a ‘Crisis’ protocol i.e Home badly damaged by car, wind etc. Possibly for events such as a pandemic, too.
- No heating for 16 days! Why don’t we get any information about what is done to put things right when we complain?
- What’s happening about fuel costs for communal areas? When will tenants be notified of price increases (service charges)

Volunteer Roles

- Titles for tenants i.e. Green Champions may give someone power

Green Champion

- Green Friend suggested rather than ‘Champion’ although a number of tenants preferred that volunteers didn’t have titles (including Neighbourhood Ambassador/Community Champion).
- Replace ‘Green Champion’ with ‘Good Neighbour’ suggested
- Aspects of the volunteer role should be covered by Ubico i.e. checking how well internal and external cleaning and maintenance is carried out
- How to tackle issues - Better labelling of waste facilities and educational drive suggested

Neighbourhood Ambassador

- Make it positive and simple
- Not in favour of ‘Champion’

- News/information of neighbours in blocks of flats are difficult to relay where display boards aren't being used and setting up a Community Facebook Page isn't any good for people who aren't into technology
- The difference between the statement, "feeding back neighbours" views on services/issues and "reporting repairs/making complaints" needs to be explicit. These two statements (within the same paragraph) appear to be contradictory
- Instead of 'Community Champions' should be 'Community Friends'

Focus Group

- Taster Workshop
- Visibility of staff is a problem. Be seen and known

Tenant Handbook

- What about those without internet?
- Phone good to look at website
- Can use library
- With only a phone, how do you know where to call? (Sign up pack)
- Getting rid of broadband because of cost
- Your neighbourhood most important
- IL schemes need more information (advised about focus group & quarterly meetings)
- Face to face meetings important
- Frustrated with official/formal language
- Good examples (use ASB as example) - Consider ASB Roadshows
- Home Page – phone numbers & contact us
- Asked about registering on homeseecker
- Repairs – response on request – compliment – out straight away
- Asked how Tenants' Voice representatives got into position (voted in by tenant volunteers) – Photos and contact details of representatives "not known"
- Don't know who ambassadors are – being reviewed – some retired not all areas covered. If you volunteer, training given, advice
- Keynotes not produced at present – resources
- Not everyone has I.T. facility
- Paying your rent via web site – changed way of paying – more difficult to pay – put into basket not user-friendly and confusing. No notice of change only happened very recently.
- Contact us/site – speaking to person they want to speak to. Explained that + reporting repair via text number given
- Discussed call into SDC – Customer Services will put you through to appropriate person
- Repairs 754852 – options....why does it go through 766321 not 754852?
- Contact details should be made more clear on Council landing page
- P3 helpful but 6 weeks not long enough for support
- Apathy – people don't want to get informed
- Lots of vulnerable/older people – care is almost non-existent