

**TENANTS' AND LEASEHOLDERS'
CONSULTATIVE FORUM****3 JULY 2003**

Chair: * Councillor Phillip O'Dell
(See Minute 71)

Councillors: * Billson ** Knowles
Margaret Davine (1)

* Denotes Member present
(1) Denote category of Reserve Member

Tenant and Leaseholder Representatives

Representatives from the following Associations were in attendance:

Alexandra Avenue Tenants' and Residents' Association
Antoney's Close Tenants' and Residents' Association
Brookside Close Tenants' and Residents' Association
Cottesmore Tenants' and Residents' Association
Harrow Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations
Eastcote Lane Tenants' and Residents' Association
Harrow Miscellaneous Properties Tenants' and Residents' Association
Pinner Hill Tenants' and Residents' Association
Woodlands Community Association

In total, 15 tenants/representatives attended the meeting.

PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS - NIL**PART II - MINUTES**

71. **Appointment of Chair for the Meeting:**
In the absence of Councillor Currie, the appointed Chair of the Forum, the Members were invited to put forward nominations for a Chair for the meeting. Councillor Knowles was nominated and seconded. Accordingly it was
RESOLVED: That Councillor Knowles be appointed Chair of the Forum for the purposes of this meeting.
72. **Appointment of Chair:**
RESOLVED: To note the appointment at the meeting of Cabinet held on 20 May 2003, under the provision of Committee Procedure Rule 7.2 (Part 4B of the Constitution), of Councillor Bob Currie as Chair of the Forum for the Municipal Year 2003/04.
73. **Attendance by Reserve Members:**
RESOLVED: To note the attendance of the following duly constituted Reserve Members:
- | <u>Ordinary Member</u> | <u>Reserve Member</u> |
|------------------------|----------------------------|
| Councillor Currie | Councillor O'Dell |
| Councillor Burchell | Councillor Margaret Davine |
74. **Councillor Currie:**
Members and Tenant and Leaseholder Representatives wished Councillor Currie a quick recovery from his illness.
75. **Declarations of Interest:**
RESOLVED: To note that there were no declarations of interests made by Members in relation to the business transacted at this meeting.
76. **Arrangement of Agenda:**
RESOLVED: That (1) all items be considered with the press and public present;
(2) under the provisions of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the following information be admitted to the agenda as a result of the special circumstances and reasons for urgency set out below:

Agenda Item 12: Customer Charter for Housing Services

Special Circumstances: The draft service standards were not available when the agenda was published.

Grounds for Urgency: To enable the draft service standards to be consulted on at the Tenants and Leaseholders open day on 8 July and then by the Best Value Steering Group.

Agenda Item 13: Garage Management – Best Value Review

Special Circumstances: The Performance Improvement Plan – Management of Garages and Parking was inadvertently omitted from the agenda.

Urgency: To enable the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Consultative Forum to consider the Performance Improvement Plan in conjunction with the report.

77. **Minutes:**
RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2003, having been circulated, be taken as read and signed as a correct record.
78. **References from other Committees:**
RESOLVED: To note that there were no references from other committees.
79. **Public Questions:**
RESOLVED: To note that there were no public questions to be received at this meeting under the provisions of Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure Rule 15 (Part 4E of the Constitution).
80. **Petitions:**
RESOLVED: To note that there were no petitions to be received at this meeting under the provisions of Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure Rule 13 (Part 4E of the Constitution).
81. **Deputations:**
RESOLVED: To note that there were no deputations to be received at this meeting under the provisions of Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure Rule 14 (Part 4E of the Constitution).
82. **Matters Arising from the Last Meeting:**
- Three Year Stock Investment Forward Programme (Recommendation 1): A representative of ELTRA requested a date for the commencement of window replacement work, and were concerned that existing louvres were not secure. Officers were unable to provide a date but advised that the delay had possibly been caused by the need to provide a choice.
 - Locata Scheme Update (Recommendation 2): Locata staff had contacted the Hatch End Library and had been advised that Uxbridge Road was the correct postal address.
 - Poor Condition of Pavements and Roadways on the Brookside Estate (Minute 62): The South Harrow Pilot staff had been made aware of the matter. An officer advised that the condition rather than the cleanliness of pavements and roadways was at issue, and that the problem related to whether Housing or Highways had responsibility for the land in question. Discussion was taking place over the division of land.
 - Time Taken to Process Housing Benefit Claims (Minute 62): An officer from Housing Benefits was in attendance at the meeting. The previous meeting of the Forum had been advised that it was taking 80 days to assess new claims against a Government target of 14 days. The target was considered to be very demanding and the situation had been compounded by the fact that the assessment form was a 50-page document. Councils had had to take on the Government's verification framework, meaning that evidence provided by the applicant had to meet Government requirements. This included the provision of original documents by the applicant. The officer advised that currently less than 10% of new claims were ready for assessment on the day that they were received.

Ideally the assessment would take place within a 35-day period. Officers were required to write back when information or supporting documents were missing, and allowed a 14 day period for a response, but would consider responses within a four week period. Ten new staff had been employed, were undergoing training and would focus initially on new claims. A procedural change would mean that claims that arrived with all supporting information would be dealt with first.

A representative was concerned that applicants could be left unable to pay their rent whilst awaiting assessment. The Head of Housing and Environmental Health Services advised that the Housing Benefit and Housing Management teams worked closely together, and that Housing Management staff had read-only access to the Housing Benefit IT systems so were able to identify those whose applications had been delayed. He advised that all potential evictions were referred to him. Current arrangements would need to be reviewed with the introduction of the ALMO.

A representative of Cottesmore TRA drew the Forum's attention to difficulties he had encountered contacting Housing Benefit staff on behalf of a friend. An officer advised that she appreciated his difficulty but pointed out that three officers manned the telephones from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm and that increasing staffing levels on the telephones would decrease the number of staff available to carry out assessments. Officers were looking to move towards a call centre approach, but there was no timeframe for this at this stage. Written correspondence took a lower priority than claim forms.

A letter was distributed to invite tenants and leaseholders to a customer forum to be held on 16 July.

- Housing Estate Redecoration (Minute 62): Representatives were concerned that work had been taking place in conditions that were unsuitable. The Head of Housing and Environmental Health Services advised that it was unclear as to whether there had been a categorical agreement that work would not take place at certain times of the year, or whether the decision was to be taken on the basis of a technical judgement, in combination with an assessment of the level of inconvenience that would be caused to residents.

A representative of Woodlands Community Association informed the meeting that a contractor had told him that work would not be continuing during July, as he would be working at schools. The representative felt that this was unfair to tenants. Officers agreed that this was unacceptable.

A Member enquired as to how closely contracts were monitored. The Head of Housing and Environmental Health Services responded that work was checked and that partnering arrangements were being developed with contractors to bring greater control and to improve the quality of work.

- The Introductory Tenancy Scheme (Minute 64): Further to the offer of a mediation service discussed at the last meeting, an agreement was entered into with Ealing Mediation Services (EMS) for a trial period of 12 months. An introductory session for residents had been arranged for 24 July at Churchill Place, at 7:30 pm.
- Matter Raised by the Woodlands Community Association – Rainwater Drainage around Block 28-33 Brockhurst Close (Minute 67): Following concerns about the non-performance of the contractor who submitted the lowest tender, an officer met with the company to discuss the matter. The contractor's allocation of work had been reduced by one third and officers were not aware of any further problems.
- Matters Raised by the Eastcote Lane Tenants' and Resident's Association – Car Park – Hamilton Crescent (Minute 66): A representative advised that the notice forbidding the parking of vans was still in place. An officer noted the comment.
- Matters Raised by the Eastcote Lane Tenants' and Resident's Association – Fencing to Communal Gardens – Stuart Avenue (Minute 66): An officer advised that a letter would be sent out shortly to confirm the proposals following consultation. Most were in favour of the proposals, which included fencing and a security gate to the car park, and the work would be funded from the Minor Improvements Budget. The TRA would be informed of the start date.
- Matter Raised by the Brookside Close Tenants' and Residents' Association – Grounds Maintenance (Minute 68): An officer advised that a meeting had been

arranged with Contract Services to discuss the situation. Consideration was being given to the provision of a separate grounds maintenance contract for the estates. The representative who had raised the item asked whether he could be kept up to date, and officers advised that they welcomed his input.

RESOLVED: That the report and verbal updates be noted.

83. **Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) Update:**

The Forum received a report from the Head of Housing and Environmental Health Services. Following consultation with Tenants and Leaseholders, an application to the ODPM for a place on the third round ALMO programme was submitted on 16 May 2003. The outcome was expected by the end of the month. A successful application would lead to a conditional offer of funding, subject to the ALMO achieving a two star rating from the housing inspectorate on inspection. It was aimed that the ALMO would be operational by December 2003, which was acknowledged to be an ambitious timetable. The ALMO itself would be inspected in May/June 2004, or approximately six months after becoming operational.

A shadow board had been set up, which included five Councillors. Recruitment for the independent board members had commenced and it was hoped to recruit individuals with a financial or technical background. Five tenant and leaseholder representatives would also be recruited.

The Head of Housing and Environmental Health Services emphasised that this was not a stock transfer, and the Council would remain in ownership of the stock, and there may be a review clause in the contract for the ALMO. Housing management staff that would be transferred to the ALMO had been identified, but it was not yet clear which staff in other Council departments would be affected. The Head of Housing and Environmental Health Services raised the possibility that the Forum might need to develop in new ways when the ALMO was set up. The Council, as Landlord, would still need to remain in dialogue with tenants and leaseholders, and would need to consult on matters such as rent increases.

A Member enquired as to whether the Council had been able to learn from neighbouring authorities. The Head of Housing and Environmental Health Service advised that the seven authorities within the West London Housing Group had set up an ALMO, had bid or would be preparing bids. A Member encouraged the TRAs to consider the service outcomes that they wanted the ALMO to deliver. The Acting Chair reminded the Forum that the aim was that housing reach the decent homes standard by 2008, two years earlier than the Government target.

The Head of Housing and Environmental Health Services advised that the Forum would continue to receive updates on progress made.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

84. **Customer Charter for Housing Services:**

The Forum received a report from the Head of Housing and Environmental Health Services. The report set out the background to, and the process for, the development of a Customer Charter for Housing Services, which would supplement the Council's contact standards developed from the First Contact Best Value Review. 'Making Contact' was Harrow's new booklet on corporate customer care standards. The Tenant Services Customer Charter dealt with standards specific to landlord services that would be transferred to the ALMO. The Housing Needs/Strategy Customer Charter dealt with the sections of Housing Services that would remain with the Council.

A drop-in open evening would be taking place on Tuesday 8 July from 5:30 pm to 8:30 pm to which tenants and leaseholders were invited to attend, and the opportunity to give feedback on the charter would be offered. Performance against the housing service standards would be monitored. Tenants and leaseholders would also be consulted on the format for reporting performance on these standards back to them.

Within the Contact Standards – Staff Guidance, the Acting Chair pointed out that the address for the British Deaf Association was now incorrect, as the organisation had moved to Worship Street, London, from Carlisle. An officer advised that the document had originated from the First Contact review rather than Housing Services, but agreed to advise the relevant officer.

The Acting Chair noted that there was no mention of British Sign Language within the 'Making Contact' leaflet, and sought assurance that deaf tenants were being catered

for. An officer advised that a signer was available in housing services, two staff were undergoing training and that portable induction loops were available.

RESOLVED: To note the creation of a customer charter for Housing Services and draft service standards.

85. **Garage Management - Best Value Review:**

The Forum received a report of the Head of Housing and Environmental Health Services. An officer advised that as part of the Best Value *Your Home, Your Needs* the management of the Council's portfolio of garages had been examined. The improvement plan had been partially implemented and had already resulted in a reduction in rent arrears and fewer empty garages.

A number of representatives expressed concern that flammable material was being stored in garages. An officer added that fuel in car engines also carried a risk. He advised that applicants were required to give evidence that a car would be stored, and if there was evidence of misuse repossession was an option, for there were fewer constraining forces than for residential properties. A Member requested that officers find out whether the Council's insurance provision for the garages covered the storage of flammable materials.

A representative pointed out that some garages were too small for modern cars. An officer advised that conversion might be possible, but whilst the Council was still able to let the garages it would continue to do so.

The officer advised that the review was examining the potential for selling or leasing all or part of the garage stock to a private company, an option followed by two local authorities. It was felt that it would be remiss of the review group not to explore all options.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

86. **Matters Raised by Eastcote Lane Tenants' and Residents' Association**

- (i) **Report of the Head of Housing and Environmental Health Services:**
The report addressed matters raised by ELTRA. Discussion focused on the Eastcote Lane estate inspections. Representatives were concerned that items were recurring. An officer advised that the inspection report for May 2003 showed nine repeat items out of a total of forty-nine recorded in August 2002. Six related to grounds maintenance, and a meeting was to be arranged with Contract Services to discuss the failure to comply with the specification. Three items had been referred to the Highways Division and would be raised again at a senior level.

Work had been carried out to alleviate water pooling on a road surface next to 10 The Bungalows, Kings Road. The work had been inspected on two occasions. A further inspection identified a problem with the completed work. Action had been taken to remedy the hazard.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

87. **Matters Raised by Harrow Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations**

- (i) **Matters Raised by Harrow Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations (HFTRA):**

The Forum received a report from the Head of Housing and Environmental Health Services, which dealt with a number of items raised by HFTRA.

Leaseholders not receiving Homing-In: Officers assured representatives that the magazines would continue to be sent.

Cycle Lanes full of parked cars: The Transportation Team was to respond direct to HFTRA.

Obsolete computers: Harrow Information Technology team were devising a disposal policy and interested TRAs were requested to log their interest with the Tenant Participation Officer.

Cost of Cleaning of Communal Areas: The Best Value Working Group was considering the issue of internal cleaning and consultation with residents who

could benefit would be taking place.

- (ii) Consultation on Major Works Programmes:
The Forum received a report of the Head of Housing and Environmental Health Services, which responded to the concern raised by HFTRA that there was a lack of consultation on major works such as window replacement. The HFTRA felt that they wanted to be consulted at an earlier stage and met with officers to discuss this. Officers acknowledged that there was more opportunity for involvement, and that the process could be adjusted to ensure that there was sufficient time for consultation and planning.

RESOLVED: That (1) the reports be noted;

(2) the interim enhancements to the consultation process with TRAs on major works schemes be agreed.

88. **Matter Raised by Woodlands Community Association**

- (i) Verbal Report from the Head of Housing and Environmental Health Services:
The Woodlands Community Association item related to a repairs and maintenance post within Housing Management. The Head of Housing and Environmental Health Services advised that he did not wish to discuss specific posts at a public meeting, because of the possibility that individual members of staff would be identified. He added that in any case there was likely to be restructuring affecting the repairs and maintenance service prior to the ALMO becoming operational.

It was agreed that the Head of Housing and Environmental Health Service would arrange to meet informally with the representatives who had raised the matter.

RESOLVED: That the verbal report and proposed course of action be noted.

89. **Allocation of housing stock:**

Under any other business, a representative of Alexandra Avenue TRA requested an explanation to why an article in the Locata Home magazine had implied that housing stock had been targeted to a specific community grouping. The Head of Housing and Environmental Health Services accepted that the original advertisement for properties in Stanmore Park was unclear and that it had been corrected in the second advertisement, which explained that although the properties were managed by ASRA, a housing association that catered for the Asian community, no preference was given to any particular section of the community. Allocation was determined by housing need.

90. **Extensions to and termination of the meeting:**

In accordance with the provisions of Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure Rule 12 (Part 4E of the Constitution) it was

RESOLVED: That (1) at 10:00 pm the meeting be extended until 10:15 pm;

(2) at 10:15 pm the meeting be extended until 10:25 pm;

(3) at 10:25 pm the meeting be extended until 10:30 pm;

(4) at 10:30 pm the meeting be extended until 10:45 pm.

(Note: The meeting having commenced at 7.35 pm, closed at 10.46 pm)

(Signed) COUNCILLOR PHILLIP O'DELL
Chair