

**TENANTS' AND LEASEHOLDERS'
CONSULTATIVE FORUM****22 JULY 2008**

Chairman: * Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

Councillors: * Bob Currie * Yogesh Teli
Phillip O'Dell

* Denotes Member present

Tenants' and Leaseholders' Representatives

Representatives from the following Associations were in attendance:

Alexandra Avenue Tenants' and Residents' Association
Antoney's Close Tenants' and Residents' Association
Berridge Estate 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
Pinner Hill Tenants' and Residents' Association
Woodlands Community Association

In total, 13 tenants/representatives attended the meeting.

PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS**RECOMMENDATION 1 - Estate Services**

An officer introduced a report which outlined the proposals and actions to improve the provision of estate services to Council housing estates.

The officer referred to the report published by Brent Housing Partnership recommending that a number of improvements to services would ensure value for money. The officer confirmed that short term action plans, such as the deep cleaning programme for internal areas of all Council blocks had been produced as a direct response to the findings of the report. He stated that the mechanism for deducting payments for non-service delivery by internal contractors had been introduced and any subsequent deductions made would be returned to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) as reserves or spent on estates as appropriate.

The Chairman addressed the comments made in the published report relating to the grounds maintenance service and advised Forum members of the areas needing particular focus. He confirmed that despite short term measures having been implemented, options for the future should address measures valued by residents, provide value for money and restore civic pride.

During the discussion on this item, Members and representatives of Tenants' and Residents' Associations raised a number of issues, which officers responded to as follows:

- representatives of Tenants' and Residents' Associations were welcome to attend Public Realm Team meetings;
- a programme of meetings to involve Tenants' and Residents' Associations in the development of specification for estates services would be arranged;

The Forum having noted the short term improvements under paragraph 2.2 of the report

Resolved to RECOMMEND: (To the Portfolio Holder for Adults and Housing)

That the options shown under paragraph 2.4 of the report of the Divisional Director of Housing be considered during the consultation period.

[Reason for Recommendation]: To meet with the Council requirement to consult on any proposed changes to housing services.

(See also Minute 149)

RECOMMENDATION 2 - Minor Amendments / Revisions to the Housing Allocations Scheme

An Officer introduced a report on minor amendments to the Housing Allocations Scheme. The officer confirmed that more major alterations would be proposed in 2009/10 as part of a wider review incorporating, for example, Central Government's drive to reduce overcrowding.

In response to comments made by the Forum, the officer advised that:

- the change in the minimum bedroom standard for same sex children and adults would be addressed next year when the department would be required to meet the Government standard on overcrowding;
- families were expected to use a second living rooms as a bedroom, under the current allocations policy but not the main living room;
- incentives were used to encourage residents living in accommodation that is under-occupied to release the property to applicants who have a greater need.

The Forum having noted the contents of the Minor Amendments to the Housing Allocations Scheme report

Resolved to RECOMMEND: (To the Portfolio Holder for Adults and Housing)

That the comments of the Forum be incorporated in the report for the Housing Allocations Scheme prior to its submission to the Portfolio Holder for approval.

[Reason for Recommendation]: It has been identified that the London Borough of Harrow's Choice Based Allocation Scheme (or "Locata") for permanent housing may need amendment to fully comply with existing legislation. Upon further consideration of the Scheme, it was apparent that there were also areas that would benefit from updating, in order that they might reflect current best practice. The proposed amendments and improvements were not representative of major change, which would be subject to formal consultation. There was an intention to invite tenants and leaseholders to have the opportunity to give consideration to the proposed improvements and revisions and offer comments before formal adoption.

(See also Minute 153)

RECOMMENDATION 3 - Homelessness Strategy 2008-13

An officer presented the Cabinet report on the Homelessness Strategy for Harrow that would be delivered between 2008-13. The report was originally presented to Cabinet on 17 July 2008. The officer confirmed that the update was legally required and would reflect current good practice. Members of the Forum were asked to make comments on the contents of the report, which would be reflected in the final version of the Strategy.

The officer outlined the current criteria for allocations and advised that there was a shortage of rented affordable housing. The Forum was advised that the Homelessness Strategy supported Corporate policies, including the Corporate Plan, and the Local Area Agreement as well as, departmental initiatives, such as, the Supporting People programme.

The officer outlined how the application of the four key priorities contained in paragraph 2.4.1 of the report would reduce the number of families in temporary accommodation by 2010. These included:

- preventing homelessness and tackling high demand and the wider causes of homelessness by encouraging people to consider private rented accommodation as an option;
- securing accommodation for homeless people across a range of tenures, and managing and reducing the use of temporary accommodation by working with private landlords;
- supporting vulnerable homeless people, including young and single homeless, in accessing settled homes and sustaining their tenure through the use of mediation services;

- regularly reviewing the homelessness strategy, to ensure it is effective, adapts readily to the changing external environment and that the Housing Needs service provides good value for money through floating tenancy support.

A number of comments on the report made by the Tenants' and Residents' representatives on the Forum included;

- Tenants' and Residents' representatives had experience of problems with homelessness within their households;
- there were not enough affordable properties for Harrow residents;
- residents who lived in homes that were under-occupied should receive an incentive to move to smaller accommodation;
- some agreements for private sector accommodation could last for a period as little as six months;
- affordable housing should be provided in new housing developments;
- families with small children were often allocated accommodation, such as high rise flats without a garden that did not suit their particular needs;

The Chairman confirmed that all comments received would be considered when the Strategy was considered for approval.

The Forum having noted the contents of the Cabinet report and the Homelessness Strategy

Resolved to RECOMMEND: (To the Portfolio Holder for Adults and Housing)

That the comments received be reflected in the final version of the Strategy before formal submission by 31 July 2008.

[Reason for Recommendation: All councils were required, under the Homelessness Act 2002, to have a five-year Homelessness Strategy in place, based on a full review of homelessness and homeless services. Harrow's existing Homelessness Strategy was developed in 2003 so the Council was required to develop a new Homelessness Strategy for submission to Corporate Leadership Group by 31 July 2008.]

(See also Minute 154)

PART II - MINUTES

138. **Appointment of Chairman:**

RESOLVED: To note the appointment at the meeting of Cabinet on 15 May 2008 of Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane as Chairman of the Tenants' and Leaseholders Consultative Forum for the Municipal Year 2008/09.

139. **Attendance by Reserve Members:**

RESOLVED: To note that there were no Reserve Members in attendance at this meeting.

140. **Declarations of Interest:**

RESOLVED: To note that the following interests were declared:

<u>Agenda Item</u>	<u>Member</u>	<u>Nature of Interest</u>
10. Housing Performance Report 2007-08 and plans for 2008-09) Councillor Bob Currie	Councillor Bob Currie declared a personal interest in all items of the agenda, in that he attended monthly meetings of Brookside Close Tenants' and Residents Association and Eastcote Lane Estate Tenants' and Residents' Association. Accordingly, he would remain in the room when the items were discussed.
11. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Outturn Report 2007-08		

- 12. Estate Services)
- 13. Housing Capital Programme)
- 14. Right to Manage Process)
- 15. Mill Farm Close Regeneration Programme)
- 16. Minor Amendments/ Revision to the Housing Allocations Scheme)
- 17. Homelessness Strategy)

141. **Arrangement of Agenda:**

RESOLVED: That all items be considered with the press and public present.

142. **Minutes:**

RESOLVED: That subject to the following amendments, the minutes of the meeting held on 28 February 2008 be taken as read and signed as a correct record of the meeting:-

Amend the attendance list to include:-

- (i) Councillors Barry Macleod-Cullinane and Susan Hall as backbenchers
- (ii) Brookside Close and Eastcote Lane Estate Tenants' and Residents' Associations as having attended.

143. **Appointment of Vice-Chairman:**

RESOLVED: To appoint Councillor Bob Currie as Vice-Chairman of the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Consultative Forum for the 2008/2009 Municipal Year.

144. **Public Questions:**

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were received at this meeting under the provisions of Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure Rule 16 (Part 4E of the Constitution).

145. **Petitions:**

RESOLVED: To note that no petitions were received at this meeting under the provisions of the Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure Rule 14 (Part 4E of the Constitution).

146. **Deputations:**

RESOLVED: To note that no deputations were received at this meeting under the provisions of Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure Rule 15 (Part 4E of the Constitution).

147. **INFORMATION REPORT - Housing Performance Report 2007-08 and plans for 2008-09:**

An officer introduced the report that provided an update on performance and delivery of key services in 2007/08 and highlighted the initiatives and targets for 2008/09. The officer outlined the current mechanism for measuring the success of the service in the form of star ratings and confirmed that the Housing Department had achieved a three star rating on 31 March 2008.

The officer drew particular attention to:

- the reduction in the average time taken to re-let empty properties from 33 days to 23 days;
- the increase in the amount of rent collected last year which was an improvement on the previous year of 2006-07;
- the changes in tenancy management, in particular, the introduction of new tenancy conditions to all assured tenants and the continued implementation of the Respect Agenda;
- areas of estate improvement were discussed and recommendations by Tenants' and Residents' Associations in previous meetings, such as, the restoration of the Grange Farm play area had been delivered;
- the new partnership contract with Kier Building Maintenance for the delivery of repairs to council homes. The officer reported that Kier confirm that 99.6% of residents were satisfied with the repair work carried out to their property;
- the 37% reduction in the number of non-decent Council properties since Kier Building Maintenance took over the contract in October 2007 and the plan to complete the programme by April 2009;
- the restructure of Residents Services in April 2008 to include anti social behaviour officers, an arrears collection team and the maintenance of the patch based housing officer;
- proposed improvements in the website to improve access to staff and services;
- the intention to improve customer care standards to reflect those required at a Corporate level and by Housing internally;
- the implementation of a Tenant satisfaction survey to take place in August or September 2008 for all residents' to complete and return. The Chairman confirmed residents should clearly outline whether they were a tenant or leaseholder when they returned the survey, to avoid confusion.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

148. **Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Outturn Report 2007 - 08:**

An officer introduced the report and explained that the end of year Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget had achieved a £518,000 surplus which surpassed the original budget because of income and expenditure variations.

Referring to Appendix A of the report, the officer confirmed that:

- there was a 4% increase in total expenditure than was originally forecast, as a result of:
 - (i) the increased contribution to the repairs account in relation to contract termination costs and the day to day maintenance of council homes;
 - (ii) salary costs;
 - (iii) the rise in energy costs;
 - (iv) increased bad debt provision for rent and service charge arrears.
- The total expenditure could be offset against an underspend in other areas because of a £200,000 contingency provision for unforeseen items;
- the reduction in the level of capital receipts from the sale of right to buy properties led to an increase in the cost of borrowing;
- decent homes works was funded partially by the revenue contribution to capital received from capital receipts and government funds;
- additional income was received from the 53 week rent year and savings of £53,000 were made in the leaseholder service charge provision;

During the discussion on the item, Forum members raised a number of issues, which officers responded to as follows:

- bad debts were written off when they exceeded the six year arrears period outlined in statute;

- there was no direct correlation between voids and debts;
- garages were advertised for rent in the "Homing In" magazine and advertising in the local press was another option that could be pursued;

The Chair responded to members concerns regarding the management and use of garages and confirmed that:

- a work programme to review rent charges on garages and regular inspections would be devised to address concerns;
- officers would prepare a report to address their concerns about garages being used for commercial purposes;
- the possibility of developing areas were anti-social behaviour, in relation to the use of garages, had become an issue and would be investigated.

RESOLVED: That the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) position for 2007-2008 be noted

149. **Estate Services:**

Having resolved to recommend that the options under paragraph 2.4 of the report of the Divisional Director of Housing be considered during the consultation period, the Forum

RESOLVED: That the short term improvements under paragraph 2.2 of the report be noted.

(See also Recommendation 1).

150. **INFORMATION REPORT - Housing Capital Programme:**

An officer introduced the report presenting information on the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 Housing Capital Programmes.

The officer advised that Kier had fulfilled their contractual obligations. The figure of 41 properties outstanding for adaptation related to properties that pre-dated the Kier contract. The officer confirmed that the 2008/09 Housing Capital Programme reported at the TLCF February meeting had been revised to include part of the 2009/10 Decent Homes Programme so that tenants could benefit from early investment. The officer added that he was confident the target could be met this year and was pleased with the progress made.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

151. **INFORMATION REPORT - Right to Manage Process:**

An officer provided an update on Right to Manage in Harrow conducted by First Call.

The Forum were advised that First Call would provide a detailed report summarising the results of their findings once the four area meetings concluded by 31 July 2008.

A number of comments made by the Forum suggested that the figures quoted in the report were misleading and it was alleged that the conduct of First Call in obtaining information from residents was questionable.

A Member of the Forum confirmed that he had received complaints from a number of residents and that further investigation was required.

In response to comments made, the Chairman confirmed that the concerns raised by the Forum would be addressed publicly and investigated further. An Officer suggested that residents could approach the Housing Corporation if they wanted to make a formal complaint.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

152. **INFORMATION REPORT - Mill Farm Close Regeneration Programme:**

An update on the progress made on the regeneration of Mill Farm Estate in Pinner was provided by an officer.

A tenant representative commented that leaseholders had more input in the steering group meetings than tenants even though tenants and leaseholders would ultimately decide which Registered Social Landlord (RSL) would redevelop the estate. The

representative suggested that the selected RSL's should meet with tenants on the estate to encourage residents to have direct input in the decision.

The Chairman noted the comments and supported the view that tenants' should be encouraged to be part of the decision-making process.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

153. **Minor Amendments / Revision to the Housing Allocations Scheme:**
Having resolved to recommend that their comments be considered in the Housing Allocations Scheme report for approval by the Portfolio Holder of Adults and Housing, the Forum

RESOLVED: That the contents of the Housing Allocations Scheme report be noted.

(See also Recommendation 2).

154. **Homelessness Strategy:**
Having resolved to recommend that their comments be reflected in the final version of the Homelessness Strategy for approval by the Portfolio Holder for Adults and Housing, the Forum

RESOLVED: That the contents of the Cabinet report and Homelessness Strategy 2008-13 be noted.

(See Recommendation 3).

155. **Suggestions for Agenda Items for Next Meeting:**
Members and representatives of Tenants' and Residents' Associations suggested that a report on how garages are being used by tenants and leaseholders and the amount of rent charged for garages should be included as an agenda item for the next meeting of the Forum.

RESOLVED: That the above be noted.

156. **Date of Next Meeting:**
RESOLVED: To note that the next meeting of the Forum would be held on 11 November 2008.

(Note: The meeting having commenced at 7.36 pm, closed at 10.34 pm)

(Signed) COUNCILLOR BARRY MACLEOD-CULLINANE
Chairman