

TENANTS' AND LEASEHOLDERS' CONSULTATIVE FORUM MINUTES

25 FEBRUARY 2010

Chairman: * Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

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

In attendance: Susan Hall Minutes: 249 and 252
(Councillors) Narinder Singh Mudhar Minute: 246

* Denotes Member present

Representatives of the following Associations were in attendance:

Antoney's Close Tenants' and Residents Association
Eastcote Lane Tenants' and Residents' Association
Harrow Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Association
Harrow Weald Tenants' and Residents' Association
Leaseholder Support Group
Little Stanmore Tenants' and Residents' Association
Weald Village Community Association

242. Attendance by Reserve Members

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

243. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that the following interests were declared:

Councillor Bob Currie declared personal interests on the substantive items on the agenda, in that he attended monthly meetings of the Eastcote Lane Tenants' and Residents' Association. He would remain in the room whilst the matters were considered and voted upon.

244. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2010 be taken as read and signed as a correct record subject to the following amendments:

Minute 235 - INFORMATION REPORT - Draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget 2010-11 to 2012-13

Bullet point 7 to read: 'the Interim Head of Home Ownership would be attending meetings of the Leaseholders' Support Group (LSG) to provide information';

Minute 235 - INFORMATION REPORT - Draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget 2010-11 to 2012-13

To include the sentence: 'A Member requested that officers from the Housing Department provide him with a copy of the letter detailing electricity charges.'

245. Public Questions, Petitions and Deputations

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were put, or petitions or deputations received at this meeting under the provisions of Advisory Panel and Consultation Forum Procedure Rules 16, 14 and 15 (Part 4E of the Constitution) respectively.

RESOLVED ITEMS

246. Director's Report

The Interim Head of Asset Management provided an oral update on behalf the Interim Divisional Director Housing on the following matters:

Pilot for Environmental Scheme

He advised the Forum that a property in Harrow had been awarded a grant to pilot a national scheme to monitor the effectiveness of environmentally friendly enhancements to properties, such as, heat recapturing and water recycling. Once adapted, the property would be monitored over a two year period. He added that officers would report back to the Forum on the progress.

Caretaker Vehicles

He added that three out of six new caretaker vehicles had arrived, with the remaining three due later in the year. These vehicles would enable caretakers to be better equipped when clearing buildings.

Access Harrow

Access Harrow staff had been trained to receive calls regarding resident services.

Kier Group

A discussion took place regarding the Tenants' and Residents' Associations' (TRA) visit to the Kier Group offices in Harlow, Essex. TRA Representatives stated that Kier directly received calls relating to repairs and benefited from a more direct approach to resolving problems. In response to a suggestion from a TRA representative, the Chairman stated that he would be happy to endorse a visit to the Kier Group offices in Harlow for Housing officers.

In response to various questions by TRA representatives, officers stated that:

- Access Harrow staff would receive calls relating to resident services. There was to be no change to repairs call which Access Harrow staff already dealt with. Housing officers would manage more complex queries;
- the Interim Head of Asset Management would provide more detail on service changes involving Access Harrow at the next meeting of the Harrow Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Association (HFTRA);
- it was anticipated that service changes would improve residents services and streamline processes in order to drive efficiency;
- service changes would be implemented at an officer level. Consultation had included the Head of Service Access Harrow who attended a meeting of the Forum in 2009;
- as the Kier contract was moving into its latter stages, suggestions that could be included in the next tendering process would be welcomed by officers.

A Member who was invited to speak to the Forum added that Access Harrow staff had received intensive training over the past three years, which had resulted in service improvements.

RESOLVED: That the oral update be noted.

247. Parking Enforcement Proposals

An officer introduced a report of the Interim Divisional Director Housing, which provided an update on the current position to procure a parking enforcement contract, and set out an alternative method to control parking on housing estates.

The officer stated that the aim of these proposals was to find the most cost effective means of solving the issues regarding parking on housing property.

A Leaseholder Support Group (LSG) representative congratulated officers for a comprehensive report and proposals for parking enforcement. The Forum expressed their thanks in particular to Navid Deen for his efforts in initiating the scheme.

In response to various questions, officers stated that:

- existing parking permits for Cowan Avenue and Northolt Road were issued at an annual cost of £52;
- if the proposed parking measures were well received, the parking proposals would be introduced to other sites across the borough by the end of 2010;
- two potential parking enforcement contractors had been interviewed. The systems discussed would not have been as effective and would cost considerably more to implement;
- each household would be asked to consider buying a parking permit;
- after a period of two years, revenue from the sale of parking permits would meet the initial set up costs incurred;
- officers would investigate whether certain residents were contravening rules on the repairing of cars on estates.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

248. INFORMATION REPORT - Introductory and Demoted Tenancies

An officer introduced a report of the Interim Divisional Director Housing, which set out proposals for introducing Introductory and Demoted Tenancy regimes for council tenancies.

The officer advised that Introductory Tenancies would apply to all future tenants for a period of 12 months. She added that:

- if an Introductory Tenancy agreement had not been breached, it would automatically become a secure tenancy;
- if the tenancy agreement had been breached, the Council would have discretion to extend the Introductory Tenancy for a further 6 months, or issue a Notice of Possession Proceedings (NOPP);
- Introductory Tenants did not have the right to buy or improve their home or exchange their home with another tenant or sub-let part of the property or take in a lodger;
- an appeals process would allow Introductory tenants to request a review of the Council's decision to issue a NOPP. This would be within 14 days of serving the notice.

The Forum noted that Demoted Tenancies were introduced by the Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003 and provided for social landlords to apply to court to demote an otherwise secure tenancy. It was also noted that:

- if anti social behaviour (ASB) continued after the tenancy was demoted, the landlord could seek possession of the property;
- Demoted Tenants did not have the right to buy or improve their home or exchange their home with another tenant or sub-let part of the property or take in a lodger;
- the demotion period would last for 12 months. This could be extended if possession was sought during this period;
- tenants could appeal and request a review of their case within 14 days of receiving notice to demote the tenancy.

In response to a question by a TRA representative, an officer stated that:

- the new regimes would be a legal means to enforce the rules;
- the proposals would be subject to consultation in conjunction with the report on Dangerous Dogs in Social Housing.

An informal vote took place on the opinions of the TRA representatives present, as to whether the regimes should be introduced. The representatives voted unanimously in favour of the Introductory and Demoted Tenancy regimes.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

249. INFORMATION REPORT - Dangerous Dogs within Social Housing

An officer introduced a report of the Interim Divisional Director Housing, which set out the actions that Residents' Services and the Environment Protection Community Safety team wanted to take to address the concern of dangerous dogs within its housing stock.

The officer advised that the Housing Department intended to:

- micro-chip dogs with for free where existing tenants volunteered to have their dog chipped, and it did not contravene their tenancy agreement;
- amend and enforce tenancy agreements, leases and issue handbooks;
- publicise and educate owners about the responsibilities of a responsible dog owner;

- increase working partnerships with internal and external agencies to address the problem;
- seek legal advice when altering tenancy agreements.

It was noted that:

- those tenants who had purchased dogs after the proposals were introduced, would be required to seek alternative arrangements to have their pet micro-chipped;
- no financial assistance could be provided by the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) to micro chip dogs in leasehold properties.

The officer advised the Forum that an advertisement on this initiative would be placed in the next issue of the Homing In magazine.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

250. INFORMATION REPORT - Leaseholder Service Review - Terms of Reference, Framework and Timetable

An officer introduced a report of the Interim Divisional Director Housing, which set out an approach to the calculation of home owners service charges together with progress on production of service standards.

The officer advised that a new ten point plan had been drawn up with the input of the Interim Head of Home Ownership Services and the Leaseholder Support Group (LSG). The officer advised that the ten point plan would allow legislated requirements to be open fair and reasonable for all home owners.

A TRA representative expressed their appreciation at what officers had achieved within the report.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

251. Suggestions for agenda items for next meeting

The following were suggested as agenda items for the next meeting of the Forum:

- Service Improvement Plan - Update;
- Report on Tenant Service Authority;
- Repairs Improvement Group;
- Financial Report - Revenue and Capital;
- Garage Lettings;

- Kier Contract;
- Estate Steering Group - Focus Group;

RESOLVED: That the items be noted.

252. Any Other Urgent Business

Questions:

In response to a question by a TRA representative, the Chairman voiced concern at the significant implications of a European Court of Justice's decision requiring Harrow Council to provide family housing for a non-British citizen in the borough.

In response to a question by a TRA representative, the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Safety advised that 450 applications for Neighbourhood Champions had been received and 270 of those had received training.

Vote of Thanks:

Members thanked officers for their work in supporting the Forum, and residents for their attendance and contributions.

253. Date of Next Meeting

RESOLVED: To note that officers would consult Members and TRA representatives to arrange a TLCF meeting in June 2010 so that substantive items can be addressed sooner.

254. Extension and Termination of the Meeting

In accordance with the provisions of Committee Procedure Rule 14 (Part 4E of the Constitution) it was agreed at 9.55 pm to extend the closing time of the meeting.

RESOLVED: That the meeting continue until 10.15 pm.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 10.05 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR BARRY MACLEOD-CULLINANE
Chairman