

TENANTS', LEASEHOLDERS' AND RESIDENTS' CONSULTATIVE FORUM MINUTES

29 FEBRUARY 2012

Chairman: * Councillor Bob Currie

Councillors: * Mrs Camilla Bath * Ben Wealthy (2)
Kam Chana

* Denotes Member present
(2) Denotes category of Reserve Member

Minute's Silence

Following sentiments from Officers and TRA Representatives, the Forum observed a minute's silence as a token of respect for Mrs Julie Cook who recently passed away.

Representatives from the following Associations were in attendance:

Antoneys Close Tenants' and Residents' Association
Eastcote Lane Tenants' and Residents' Association
Elmgrove Tenants' and Residents' Association
Harrow Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations
Harrow Weald Tenants' and Residents' Association
Kenmore Park Tenants' and Residents' Association
Leaseholder Support Group
Weald Village Tenants' and Residents' Association
Woodlands Community Association

97. Attendance by Reserve Members

RESOLVED: To note the attendance of the following duly constituted Reserve Members:

Ordinary Member

Reserve Member

Councillor Mano Dharmarajah

Councillor Ben Wealthy

98. Declarations of Interest

Agenda Item 7 – INFORMATION REPORT – Resident Services Update and Feedback from Resident Involvement Activities; Agenda Item 8 – INFORMATION REPORT – Asset Management Update; Agenda Item 9 – INFORMATION REPORT – Housing Revenue Account Reform – Update; Agenda Item 10 – INFORMATION REPORT – Housing Changes Update

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

99. Minutes

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the minutes of the meeting held on 11 January 2012 be taken as read and signed as a correct record;
- (2) the minutes of the special meeting held on 30 January 2012 be taken as read and signed as a correct record subject to the inclusion of:

'The Chair of the Harrow Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations thanked the presenting officer for the detailed information shared with the Forum' under Minute 96.

100. Public Questions, Petitions and Deputations

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were put, or petitions or deputations received at this meeting.

RESOLVED ITEMS

101. INFORMATION REPORT - Resident Services Update and Feedback from Resident Involvement Activities

An officer introduced a report which updated the Forum on a wide range of Council led resident involvement activities. The officer advised that:

- service charge arrears continued to reduce. Work was continuing to improve the accuracy of service charging billing;

- Harrow was due to host a meeting with the West London Housing Directors Group on 6 March 2012, to explore opportunities for achieving efficiencies in relation to Leasehold Services and joint working between West London Boroughs. A report would be presented to a future meeting of the Forum if any ideas were taken forward;
- the Council's views had been submitted in response to the Right to Buy consultation. If residents expressed an interest in buying a Council owned property, officers endeavoured to hold meet with interested parties to explain the process;
- there were currently 25 live cases of tenancy fraud being investigated. The rate of tenancy audits was being increased to address the issue;
- the good level of performance in relation to rental income collection has been sustained, with 98.53% of rents being collected against a year end target of 98.50%;
- a Financial Inclusion event was scheduled to take place on 18 April 2012 at Cedars Manor School. Partners including the Citizens Advice Bureau, Money Advice and Credit Union would also be attending to offer tenants advice on finance related matters;
- the controlled parking scheme was nearing completion for the estates which voted in favour. It was anticipated the scheme would come into effect by May 2012;
- communication between Housing and Grounds Maintenance was improving, with officers from the Grounds Maintenance team now attending estate inspections;
- consultation for sheltered housing modernisation closed on 5 March 2012. It was anticipated that the final proposals would be implemented by summer 2012;
- an action plan had been agreed as a result of the review conducted by the Housing Quality Network. The plan included improving involvement opportunities and generating new opportunities for resident involvement;
- further information on the development of Tenant Scrutiny would be circulated to Members, tenants, leaseholders and residents over the forthcoming weeks. The Forum would also receive a report at a future meeting;
- issues raised by the Harrow Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations (HFTRA) Scrutiny and Challenge Panel included issuing progress reports on Housing Needs, developing a more robust approach to tackling under-occupation and the development of the

Tenants' Handbook. The Divisional Director of Housing Services assured the Forum that all matters raised would be thoroughly investigated.

In response to questions, officers advised that:

- the Editorial Board would advertise meetings in appropriate venues, excluding estates where requested;
- it was not anticipated that TRA Representatives would be invited to attend the initial meeting with the West London Housing Directors. The Forum would be kept informed of any outcomes of the discussion;
- procedural issues prevented information being communicated between the Public Realm Department and Housing Services in relation to tree pruning. This area was being addressed;
- proposals to convert estate car parks to fee based car parks had not been finalised but only applied to the underground car park at Churchill Place and the car park adjacent to Northolt Road community centre. Adequate car spaces would be available at the Churchill Place Estate once the underground car park at had been opened. It was believed that the relevant Ward Councillors had been informed;
- plans to extend a particular property on Woodlands Close had stalled. Authority to commence work had recently been granted. Work was due to start soon;
- TRA Representatives were encouraged to follow the advice of the police in relation to empty properties;
- the Financial Inclusion event on 18 April 2012 could only be included in the Homing In publication once it had been considered as part of the planning process by the Housing Editorial Board;
- having a good financial history of making payments was taken into account when investigating arrears. Officers endeavoured to meet with individuals prior to instigating any court action. Work was being done to ensure closer working relationships at a corporate level in relation to arrears;
- it was noted that colleagues from Access Harrow had been invited to attend the next HFTRA meeting on 22 March 2012.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

102. INFORMATION REPORT - Asset Management Update

The Forum received a report which updated it on progress made in relation to Asset Management. The officer advised that:

- the appointment of Linbrook Services Ltd and Slade (London) Ltd as contractors for the responsive repairs contract would be subject to the approval of Cabinet in March 2012;
- Human Resources had completed the job evaluations for additional roles within the Asset Management department. It was anticipated that job matching would continue through March with the new roles being established by May 2012;
- a five-year programme for external decorations would be presented to a future meeting of the Forum;
- under guidance issued by the Governments Housing Minister, a tenant cash back scheme should be considered and introduced by 1 April 2012. The report highlighted progress with a range of pilot projects currently being undertaken and a number of obstacles that had been identified. The view of the forum was not supportive of such a scheme being introduced in Harrow. The forum requested to feed back to elected representatives in any consideration of introducing any such scheme, that they would prefer to use resources to work along side the council in delivering a first class repairs service;
- the Council's Harrow House Warmers scheme was going well, with information on the scheme being distributed to the National Health Service and charities. Further information would be shared at a later meeting of the forum. A TRA Representative thanked officers for the recent installation of loft insulation at their property under the Home Warmers initiative.

In response to questions, officers advised that:

- all properties that required external decoration would be included in the five year plan that was being formulated;
- a consultant had been utilised to assess the cost for the works being conducted on the Francis Road Estate. The cost of this had been budgeted for and was not an additional expense;
- the tenant cash back scheme included specific provisions which prohibited tenants undertaking certain maintenance tasks. Further information would be provided at a future meeting of the Forum.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

103. INFORMATION REPORT - Housing Revenue Account Reform - Update

An officer introduced a report which updated the Forum on the progress made in relation to Housing Revenue Account Reform. The officer advised that:

- the settlement figure for Harrow announced by the Government was £88.461 million. The interest rate on this figure would be confirmed following settlement on 28 March 2012;
- HRA Reform would eradicate the need for Harrow to contribute approximately £7 million to Central Government annually. Taking account of the additional borrowing costs of the settlement and maintaining the HRA Capital Programme to existing levels, this would give the Council an additional £2 million per annum.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

104. INFORMATION REPORT - Housing Changes Update

An officer introduced a report which provided an update on the Housing Changes Review, as a requirement of the Localism Act. The officer advised that:

- work around realising policy priorities and considering best practice was continuing;
- once a modelling stage had been completed, a consultation phase would commence, with correspondence being circulated to Members of the Forum, and wider housing groups and individuals;
- the policies within the Harrow Housing Strategy were required to conform with the London Housing Strategy due to be issued by the Mayor of London. Due to the London Mayoral election May 2012, the timescale for the Strategy was yet to be finalised.

In response to a question, the officer advised that there was a possibility the Strategy could change should a new London Mayor be elected in May 2012.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

105. INFORMATION REPORT - Quarter 3 Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget Monitoring Report

RESOLVED: To note that this item was withdrawn from the agenda.

106. Any Other Urgent Business

Millman Close – Overhanging Trees

A TRA Representative highlighted the issue of overhanging trees on the Millman Close estate. An officer advised that a site inspection would be

conducted to assess the situation. A response would be provided at a future meeting of the Forum.

Ways of increasing resources for such maintenance were being investigated.

RESOLVED: That the item be noted.

107. Date of Next Meeting

RESOLVED: That the Forum were next due to meet on 10 May 2012.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.31 pm, closed at 9.50 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR BOB CURRIE
Chairman