

TENANTS', LEASEHOLDERS' AND RESIDENTS' CONSULTATIVE FORUM MINUTES

19 DECEMBER 2012

Chairman: * Councillor Bob Currie

Councillors: * Mrs Camilla Bath * Ben Wealthy (2)
* Susan Hall (1)

* Denotes Member present

(1) and (2) Denote category of Reserve Members

Representatives From the Following Associations Were in Attendance

Brookside Close Tenants' and Residents' Association
Churchill Place Tenants' and Residents' Association
Eastcote Lane Tenants' and Residents' Association
Grange Farm Tenants' and Residents' Association
Harrow Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations
Harrow Weald Tenants' and Residents' Association
Kenmore Park Tenants' and Residents' Association
Little Stanmore Tenants' and Residents' Association
Weald Village Tenants' and Residents' Association
Woodlands Tenants' and Residents' Association

Residents from Wesley Close and Horn Buckle Close were also in attendance.

155. Welcome

The Chairman welcomed the representatives of the Tenants', Leaseholders' and Residents' Associations to the meeting.

The Chairman requested that it was minuted that there were no Leaseholder representatives in attendance at the meeting.

RESOLVED: That all representatives in attendance be allowed to speak on all agenda items during the meeting.

156. Attendance by Reserve Members

RESOLVED: To note the attendance at this meeting of the following duly appointed Reserve Members:-

Ordinary Member

Councillor Kam Chana
Councillor Mano Dharmarajah

Reserve Member

Councillor Susan Hall
Councillor Ben Wealthy

157. Declarations of Interest

Agenda Item 7 – Resident Services Manager's Report and Feedback from other Council Led Resident Involvement Activities, Agenda Item 8 – Report Back from Housing Finance Workshop (26 November 2012), Agenda Item 9 – Housing Complaints Handling, Agenda Item 10 – Head of Asset Management's Report and Agenda Item 11 – Consultation on the 2013/14 Housing Capital Programme

Councillor Bob Currie declared a non pecuniary interest in the above items in that he attended monthly meetings of the Eastcote Lane Tenants' and Residents' Association. He would remain in the room whilst these matters were considered and voted upon.

Agenda Item 10 - Head of Asset Management's Report

Councillor Susan Hall declared a non pecuniary interest in the above item in that she was on the board of London Fire Brigade. She would remain the room whilst this matter was considered and voted upon.

158. Minutes

The Forum agreed to consider the minutes of the special meeting held on 4 December 2012 as an urgent item for the reasons set out in the supplemental agenda.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 31 October 2012 and of the special meeting held on 4 December 2012 be taken as read and signed as correct records.

159. Public Questions, Petitions and Deputations

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

RESOLVED ITEMS

160. Resident Services Manager's Report and feedback from other Council led Resident Involvement Activities

An officer introduced the report which set out a range of information and provided feedback on various Council led service specific and service wide resident involvement activities. The officer reported the following points:

- there had been an increase in the number of Right to Buy enquiries and applications. Since 1 April 2012, 42 applications had been received and 9 properties had been sold. There were 10 additional applications which were likely to be completed by the end of 2013;
- further consideration would need to be given to the long term and financial implications of the increase in applications for Right to Buy;
- an electronic consultation forum for leaseholders was being developed to obtain feedback on policies, provide updates on legislative changes and report on imminent major works;
- the rent arrears as of 9 December 2012 were £57 off the lowest recorded amount. There was usually a seasonal increase in rent arrears over the Christmas period and this may have an impact on figures;
- work was continuing regarding the impact of welfare reform. The Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB) project about Welfare Reform Awareness had involved 248 tenants. Leaseholders would be contacted next;
- each Housing Officer had been asked to identify and target ten gardens in their area which were poorly maintained and had bulky items in them. Three gardens had been cleared to date;
- good progress had been made in relation to tenancy fraud and the number of tenancies terminated was increasing. In recent cases, the tenancies had been terminated without the need for court action;
- the Channel 4 news item on tenancy fraud had not been shown but the preparatory work had helped to raise the profile of the issue;
- fewer complaints had been received in the first two months of quarter 3 as compared to quarter 2;

- it was anticipated that the outcomes of the Sheltered Housing Review would be implemented with effect from March 2013;
- an appointment had been made to the post of Resident Involvement Team Leader and the new post holder, Peter Biggs, had indicated that he would attend a future meeting of the Forum;
- the Estates Services Steering Group (ESSG) had met on 28 November 2012 and considered issues such as estate inspections, waste and recycling and community halls;
- the feedback on the new way of working for caretakers had been positive;
- the ESSG had indicated that the membership of the group should be broadened to include officers from other sections and directorates;
- the Value for Money Group had met on 20 November 2012 and received a presentation from the Head of Customer Services and Access Harrow. It was anticipated that, due to the low number of attendees at the meeting, the Head of Customer Services and Access Harrow would be invited to attend a future meeting;
- the inaugural meeting Harrow Tenants' and Leaseholders' Scrutiny Panel was held on 25 October and several meetings had taken place since. It was agreed that the first area for review would be six week tenancy visits;
- the HFTRA (Harrow Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Association) Scrutiny and Challenge Panel had met on 27 November and considered issues such as rent collection, the CAB project and the caretaker pilot.

In response to a question from a Forum member, an officer advised that the Housing Officer role recently covered by the new Resident Involvement Team Leader would be under a new temporary appointment, Pamela Cain, who had commenced on 10 December 2012.

Members of the Forum made the following comments:

- the progress made regarding fraud was to be congratulated and the Council's corporate fraud team thanked for their work;
- it was possible that the time of the meetings did not facilitate the attendance of leaseholders;
- the Value for Money group meeting scheduled for 18 December had been cancelled;
- a report on the impact of the increase in Right to Buy applications should be considered by the Forum.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

161. Report back from Housing Finance Workshop (26 November 2012)

An officer introduced the report which provided feedback from the Finance workshop for tenants, leaseholders, residents and Councillors held on 26 November 2012, following a request from the Forum for training. The report set out the next steps for developing the housing business plan and enclosed a draft Housing Finance Glossary.

Officers made the following comments:

- the workshop had been attended by 20 representatives, 4 Councillors and 9 officers;
- the activities included a discussion on household budgets, a presentation on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and a group exercise which involved running a fictional housing department and setting the budget;
- the feedback had been generally good and representatives had indicated that they would like to attend future sessions;
- feedback on the glossary of housing finance terms was welcomed;
- the analysis of the feedback from the event was detailed at Appendix 2 to the report and included information on the venue and whether the session was pitched at the right level;
- suggestions for future training events would be welcomed;
- the training had been arranged to help inform the discussions at the Forum meetings prior to the Cabinet meeting in February 2013.

Members of the Forum made the following comments:

- the session was good and the level that the training was pitched at was quite good. It was pleasing that all those who attended were able to make a contribution to the discussions and exercises;
- the glossary of housing finance terms was needed;
- the representatives who had attended the session benefited by gaining a knowledge of the constraints facing the Council;
- all those who had been involved in the training should be thanked;
- similar sessions would be appreciated.

The Chairman advised that any suggestions for future training sessions should be forwarded to the housing officers.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

162. Housing Complaints Handling

An officer introduced the report which provided details on the Member Tenant Champion role developed and operated by the London Borough of Richmond. The officer made the following comments:

- the council's housing stock at Richmond had been transferred to an arms length organisation and therefore was in a different situation to Harrow. There were also a number of housing association landlords;
- the Tenant Champion worked to resolve complaints and to share information across various social landlords. The role was limited to resolving complaints which were complex, at least six months old and had completed the housing complaints process;
- the Tenant Champion had a part time support officer who dealt with case work;
- the Tenant Champion was able to make recommendations and to date had resolved 46 cases.

A Member of the Forum commented that it was interesting to see what other boroughs were doing and it was important to note that although Harrow had a small number of socially rented houses, it faced the similar issues.

Another Forum Member stated that the complaints arrangements at other boroughs were being looked in to.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

163. Head of Asset Management's Report

An officer introduced the report which updated the Forum on progress made in relation to Asset Management. The officer reported the following issues:

- the recruitment to the new Asset Management staffing structure was now complete. The Customer Experience Co-ordinator had commenced employment with the Council on 12 November 2012 and the Stock Condition Surveyor on 22 November 2012;
- the outcomes from the new appraisal panels would be reported to the Asset Management Board on 20 December 2012. It was hoped that two more residents would be recruited to the panels in future weeks to increase resident involvement;

- early indications were that all four contractors were performing well, particularly in relation to value for money. Minor ongoing IT issues relating to accessing real time performance data were being addressed;
- the performance being reported for the number of appointments being made as a percentage of the number of appointments which should be offered was below target. It was believed that performance was better than was being reported due to data collection methods;
- the performance on voids was a real concern and an action plan was in place to address this;
- a telephone customer satisfaction survey had recently commenced to obtain feedback from jobs reported as completed in the last seven days;
- good progress was being made in delivering the capital programme for the current year. The current indication was that approximately £8 million would be delivered this year and any underspend would be carried forward to next year;
- there were two main reasons for the potential underspend; one was that some schemes had been delivered at a lower cost than was originally anticipated and the other was that two to three schemes would not be able to be completed;
- the first draft of the Asset Management Strategy was prepared and this would outline the priorities for investing in and improving assets. It would make reference to the HRA (Housing Revenue Account) business plan and other strategies;
- ten out of eighteen Fire Risk Assessments had been completed for the Sheltered Housing Schemes. Work was required following the inspections but this would be carried out quickly and easily;
- a programme of asbestos surveys for tenanted flats had commenced and 2,000 had been completed;
- an inspection programme for Passive Infra Red (PIR) detector testing would commence in 2013 alongside installations of hard wired smoke alarms;
- the development of a programme of cyclical works was progressing and this would help address the inconsistencies in the portable appliance testing (PAT);
- work was currently underway to ascertain the life expectancy of fire alarm panels and sensors and to develop a replacement programme for the next three years;

- at the Leaseholders' sub group there had been discussions around communications and it was agreed that it was important for communications to be improved. Consideration was being given to developing a newsletter for Ward Members. Any ideas for the newsletter would be welcomed;
- the Value for Money sub group had requested that a detailed report be submitted to a future meeting outlining where savings had been made since the appointment of the new contractors for responsive repairs and the introduction of the new procurement process for major works. The savings target for the contract with Quality Heating was anticipated to be achieved and the responsive repairs contracts were currently delivering 15% savings.

Members of the Forum raised a number of issues to which the officers responded to as follows:

- there had only been five months of financial reporting since the new contractors had been appointed but the current indication was that value for money had improved;
- consideration would be given to using Homing In and the notice boards more to publicise important information;
- some performance data was awaited but the programme of gas checks was up to date;
- the previous gas warning signs had been removed because complaints that they frightened children had been received. Consideration would be given to introducing more user friendly gas warning signs;
- the London Fire Brigade did have communications with the Housing Officers regarding issues but information had not been provided about the theft of the copper connectors for dry risers;
- progress was being made with Linbrooks and more information on the service provided was being obtained from the customer satisfaction survey. It was anticipated that with the survey and 25-30% of completed works being inspected there would be feedback from 40-50% of works;
- the IT issues would be discussed at the Asset Management Board;
- investments had been made to improve the turnaround time for adaptations and to clear the overdue works. The time taken to complete an adaptation was dependent upon what works were required. Information would be requested from Adult Services;
- the adaptations would not be completed by the responsive repairs contractor;

- a programme was being put in place to inspect fire and smoke alarms;
- the Senior Professional – Housing Management would be raising the installation of fire smoke alarms with London Fire Brigade;
- Quality Heating were more flexible with their appointments for gas checks and it was possible to have evening and weekend appointments.

A Member of the Forum commented that Quality Heating should be thanked for their recent work at Eastcote Lane.

Another Member of the Forum commented that health and safety training should be offered to Tenants' and Residents' Associations.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

164. Consultation on the 2013/14 Housing Capital Programme

The Forum agreed to consider the appendix to the report as an urgent item for the reasons set out in the supplemental agenda.

An officer introduced the report which outlined the consultation on the 2013/14 Housing Capital Programme. The officer explained that when the capital programme was approved by Cabinet it would be done so on a line by line basis. It was not possible to make any changes to the programme during the year without Cabinet approval to alter the expenditure. Consideration was being given to putting delegations in place which would give the Portfolio Holder authority to make changes to the programme once it had been approved by Cabinet.

The officer advised that draft programme was an outline and that any comments would be welcomed.

The Forum made a number of the comments to which the officer responded to as follows:

- a garage strategy group was meeting to consider garages and it was possible that works to the garages would be funded from the revenue budget, not the capital budget;
- a five year external decorating plan was being developed which would included the replacing of gutters. A detailed three year programme was nearing completion which included enveloping works so that if external works were being undertaken at a given property then that property would also be externally decorated;
- the detailed programmes would be published when a decision had been made on the HRA and a detailed capital programme was developed;

- the previous capital programmes had been developed using cloned data. The 2013/14 capital programme would be based on actual stock condition information and it was anticipated that the collection of this data would be completed by March 2013. The use of actual stock condition data would stop the unnecessary replacement of internal assets, such as baths and toilets;
- energy efficient homes was one of the six priorities in the Asset Management Strategy.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

165. Date of Next Meeting

7.30 pm on Wednesday 27 February 2013.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 2.05 pm, closed at 3.56 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR BOB CURRIE
Chairman