

TENANTS', LEASEHOLDERS' AND RESIDENTS' CONSULTATIVE FORUM MINUTES

24 APRIL 2013

Chairman: * Councillor Bob Currie

Councillors: * Mrs Camilla Bath * Susan Hall (1)
* Mano Dharmarajah

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

Representatives from the following Associations were in attendance

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

A resident from the Honeybun Estate was also in attendance

184. Attendance by Reserve Members

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

Ordinary Member

Councillor Kam Chana

Reserve Member

Councillor Susan Hall

185. Declarations of Interest

Agenda Items 7 – Head of Asset Management’s Report, 8 – Resident Services Manager’s Report and Feedback from Other Council Led Resident Involvement Activities and 9 – Information Report – Asset Management Strategy Consultation

Councillor Mano Dharmarajah 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 7 – 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 the London Fire Brigade. She would remain in the room whilst this matter was considered and voted upon.

Agenda Item 8 - Resident Services Manager’s Report and Feedback from Other Council Led Resident Involvement Activities

Paddy Lynne declared that she was the Vice-Chair of the Citizens Advice Bureau.

186. Minutes

The Divisional Director of Housing thanked the Forum Members for the card and their kind wishes.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 27 February 2013 be taken as read and signed as a correct record subject to the correction of a typographical error in the first line of page 2 to read ‘Milmans Close’, not ‘Milan Close’.

187. Public Questions, Petitions and Deputations

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

RESOLVED ITEMS

188. Head of Asset Management’s Report

An officer introduced the report which set out a range of information and discussion items for the Forum’s attention. The officer made comments including the following:

- a partnership meeting with London Fire Brigade (LFB) took place on 19 April 2013 and good progress was being made. The Housing Department was working with other council departments to help address fire safety concerns. It had been agreed that the LFB definition of vulnerable would be adopted and used to identify individuals who could be subject to a fire risk;
- training sessions on fire safety and how to identify those individuals at risk of a fire were being considered for all officers who visited and entered resident's properties. It had been suggested that Tenants' and Residents' Association representatives may benefit from similar training;
- a single referral process for those at risk of a fire was being developed;
- there was increasing support for the retrospective installation of sprinklers in properties. A joint assessment with the LFB was taking place of sheltered accommodation buildings and it was anticipated that one or two pilot installations of sprinklers would take place;
- fire safety guidance would be issued for particular premises;
- it was anticipated that Quality Heating would start receiving tenant calls directly in June 2013 and this would be publicised in due course;
- the process for recharges for voids commenced on 1 January 2013 and £20,000 had been raised from 1 January 2013 to 12 March 2013. A further report would be submitted to a future meeting;
- it had been planned to commence recharges for responsive repairs from 1 April 2013 but this was being deferred until the launch of the new tenancy agreements in July 2013;
- the 2013/14 capital programme had launched on 23 April 2013 and an event had been held at Churchill Place which included a display of the new kitchens, boilers and bathrooms;
- customer journey mapping would be introduced for major works programmes to help evaluate satisfaction levels. The evaluation would be ongoing throughout the works and be used to identify areas where improvements could be made. The Grange Farm Estate Programme would be a pilot;
- works for the external decoration programme for houses had been procured. Ideas for a new name for the external decoration programme were sought as it was felt that the current title did not reflect all the elements included in the programme;

- the concerns about the contractors from Linbrook and Quality Heating failing to show ID badges had been raised and residents were requested to report any further examples. The four contractors would be attending the meeting on 26 June;
- work was ongoing on the Green Deal and it was hoped that funding could be secured to carry out energy efficiency improvements;
- the Value for Money Sub Group had met on 19 March 2013 and considered items including the Housing Liability Claims and the Asset Management Strategy.

A Member of the Forum commented that the work being undertaken to address fire safety concerns was excellent and that in the last ten years there had been a 50% reduction in the number of fires. The London Fire Emergency Planning Authority Borough Commander was impressed with the work being undertaken. The officers should be thanked for their work on this matter.

Members of the Forum asked a number of questions to which the officer responded as follows:

- the assessment and pilot sprinkler installation was for sheltered accommodation. Other work was being undertaken to identify any individual cases involving vulnerable people. To date, no high risk individuals had been identified within the borough's Council resident's;
- at present, there were not any sprinklers in the Council's housing stock. Previously, sprinklers had been a high profile concern but this view was changing and the technology available was improving;
- it was hoped that community centres would be included on the list for the retrospective installation of sprinklers, but homes would be the first priority;
- various works on the external decorations programme, including those for Hamilton Crescent, had been procured recently and residents would be notified of the dates when the programme was finalised;
- the scheme regarding fuel bills had been organised by London Councils and the concerns about the closing date would be reported back. It was understood that the closing date was Thursday, 18 April 2013 in the evening.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

189. 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 for the Forum's attention and provided feedback to the Forum on a wide range of

Council led service specific and service wide resident involvement activities. The officer made the following points:

- there had been an increase in the number of enquiries regarding Right to Buy due to the increase in the discount to £100,000. 14 properties had been sold in the last financial year compared to 1 in the 2011/12 financial year;
- progress was being made on the development of the MyHarrow Account for leaseholders but there had been a slight delay to additional work commitments for the major supplier. It was anticipated that the account would be ready for June 2013;
- Ground Rent invoices had been sent to all leaseholders and, in addition, they had received advance notice of the legal requirement to send out Ground Rent Notifications;
- leaseholders had been billed for approximately £500,000 for contributions to the cost of completed major work schemes. Affordable payment plans were in place for a number of leaseholders;
- the rent arrears at the end of the financial year totalled £365,000 which was the lowest amount recorded. The impact of the bedroom tax would become clearer in April and this would be monitored. A third direct debit payment date of the 25 of each month would be introduced from April;
- a full summary of the Citizens Advice Bureau work on the impact of welfare reform would be presented to the Forum meeting on 26 June 2013;
- the Council had been successful in securing additional funding from the Government towards work on tenancy fraud and would be used to fund two posts. Channel 4 had approached the Council again regarding doing a feature on tenancy fraud;
- the National Mobility Scheme had been reintroduced to help those affected by the 'bedroom tax' and would assist people in housing need to move around the country. 15 authorities had committed to join the scheme;
- the 35% target for tenancy audits had been met and it was hoped that a higher percentage would be achieved in the future;
- the consultation on the new tenancy agreements was ongoing and would close on 10 May 2013. The new agreements would be launched on 1 July 2013;
- the work on the sheltered housing modernisation was on course and recruitment to all posts was now complete;

- circulation of the Customer Involvement Strategy (2013-2016) had been delayed and would be available by the end of April 2013;
- the Resident Involvement Team were working with non-constituted TRA's and meetings had been arranged to provide support;
- the Estates Steering Group (ESSG) was considering its terms of reference and the matter would be discussed at the meeting on 12 June 2013;
- the Harrow Tenants' and Leaseholders' Scrutiny Panel had received Equalities Impact Assessment training. The completion of the review in to six week tenant visits had been delayed due to the volume of the work and was likely to be available between the end of April and mid May 2013.

Members of the Forum raised various points and the officer responded as follows:

- the final version of the new tenancy agreements would be presented to the meeting in June if the Forum Members felt it would be useful;
- the consultation on the new tenancy agreements had been wide and a number of presentations had been delivered. The consultation letter had been sent to all council houses.

A Member of the Forum thanked the officers for the work on tenancy fraud and the success of the bid to Government.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

190. INFORMATION REPORT - Asset Management Strategy Consultation

An officer introduced the report which provided some basic information regarding the draft Asset Management Strategy to help facilitate discussion and to gain the input of the Forum's Members into the final version of the Strategy. The officer outlined the proposed structure for the discussion on the report which would include feedback from the Value for Money Sub Group and 2 workshops to consider the priorities.

The Forum received feedback from the Value for Money Sub Group which had considered priority six in the Asset Management Strategy which stated that value for money should be achieved in all that was done. The feedback included suggestions such as improving the condition of the community centres and gaining local input in major works.

Following the group work on the priorities for the Asset Management Strategy an officer reported the following relating to the feedback received:

- all refurbishment works should be carried out when work was undertaken on a property;

- the better homes standard should be improved;
- there should be a first class repair service;
- there should be a quick turnaround on voids;
- further work on the Green Deal;
- further work on loft conversions.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

191. Cowan Avenue Car Park

The Chairman informed the Forum that that this item had been withdrawn by the representative of the Leaseholder Support Group.

192. Suggestions for agenda items for next meeting

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

- Void properties.
- The Green Deal.
- The results of the Citizens Advice Bureau project on Welfare Reform Awareness.
- Rent Arrears.
- The works at Grange Farm Estate.
- Final version of the new tenancy agreements.

A Member of the Forum commented that Members should be informed of the details for each agenda item.

193. Any Other Urgent Business

Rent Letters

A Member of the Forum commented that rent letters had not been received until after Easter and that they were received after the first due date for rent.

An officer explained that colleagues in Housing Benefits had advised that their letters had been sent out at the same time as previous years and that there had not been any significant delay. The officer commented that rent charges were debited a week in arrears and therefore rent had not been overdue when the letters were received by tenants. The matter would be raised with colleagues again.

194. Date of Next Meeting

Special Meeting – 4 June 2013 – 2.00 pm

26 June 2013 – 7.30 pm

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 2.05 pm, closed at 4.05 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR BOB CURRIE
Chairman