

TENANTS', LEASEHOLDERS' AND RESIDENTS' CONSULTATIVE FORUM MINUTES

7 OCTOBER 2014

Chairman: * Councillor Glen Hearnden

Councillors: * Mrs Camilla Bath * Manjibhai Kara
† Ms Pamela Fitzpatrick * Niraj Dattani (1)

* Denotes Member present
(1) Denotes category of Reserve Member
† Denotes apologies received

Representatives from the following Tenants' and Residents' Associations were in attendance:

- Brookside Close Tenants' and Residents' Association
- Eastcote Lane Tenants' and Residents' Association
- Harrow Sheltered Residents' Association
- Harrow Weald Tenants' and Residents' Association
- Honeybun Tenants' and Residents' Association
- Little Stanmore Tenants' and Residents' Association
- Millman Close (Estate Representative)
- Northolt Road Tenants' and Residents' Association
- Pinner Hill Community Tenants' and Residents' Association
- Weald Village Tenants' and Residents' Association

12. Attendance by Reserve Members

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

Ordinary Member

Reserve Member

Councillor Ms Pamela Fitzpatrick

Councillor Niraj Dattani

13. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that no interests were declared.

14. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of 2 July 2014 be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

15. Public Questions, Petitions and Deputations

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

RESOLVED ITEMS

16. Joint Report - Head of Asset Management / Head of Resident Services

Officers presented the Joint Report of the Divisional Director of Housing Services. The report included the following:

- the Responsive Repairs Service was fully compliant with requirements and performance had been good;
- Asset Management had been taking a proactive role, and following up with randomly selected jobs to ensure work had been carried out;
- there had been a review of how customer satisfaction data was collected, and residents had visited the offices of the contractors used by Harrow Council;
- there had been a large annual audit, then a smaller audit at the end of August;
- improvement works at Burnt Oak Broadway had started;
- the possibility of using garages for storage had been explored, and a further report would be given at the Garage Strategy Steering Group;
- the next Better Homes Standard meeting would be held on 15 November 2014, and the launch of the new standards would take place in April 2015;

- the Value for Money Group would continue to meet, and at the last meeting it had been reported that Housing Liability Claims had decreased in August 2014;
- the restructure of the Tenancy Management Team was now complete, and Housing Officers had attended a workshop to look at different ways of working;
- rent arrears collection had been sustained well;
- a new Anti-Social Behaviour Act would be launched in October, and Housing Services were working with the Corporate Anti-Social Behaviour team;
- there had been problems with covering absences among the Caretakers, but 2 new apprentices had also been appointed;
- the Estates in Bloom judging and awards ceremony had taken place in August 2014;
- the total amount invoiced to leaseholders was just over £455,000 and repayment plans were being arranged;
- there had been a Honeybun Estate Action event on 3 – 4 October 2014, and this had been a huge success.

A Honeybun Estate Representative gave a presentation about what the Estate Action event had entailed:

- the Honeybun Tenants' and Residents' Association had worked hard to tackle flytipping on and around the estate;
- a Project Manager was in attendance to liaise with residents about their concerns;
- a gate had been erected, which had helped to curb anti-social behaviour around a playground, new rose bushes had been planted, bins had been painted and broken items in a play area had been cleared;
- this event had instilled a sense of partnership and community around the estate, and the volunteers and council staff had worked incredibly hard.

After taking questions from Members of the Forum, an Officer commented that:

- residents could contact the Resident Involvement Team to be put in touch with Tenants' and Residents' Associations who had successfully run events like the one on Honeybun Estate;

- meetings of Tenants' and Residents' Associations should generally be open to residents, although residents may have to leave for individual items discussed at the meetings if the items were confidential.

The Chair expressed his wish to have a Tenants' and Residents' Association in every area, so residents would feel like it was straightforward to organise such an event to address concerns in their area.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

17. Options for Rent Setting

An Officer presented the report of the Divisional Director of Housing Services, which included the following:

- the government had exercised control over Rent Setting, and had confirmed that rent convergence would no longer be possible;
- rents increases were now capped based on the Consumer Prices Index plus 1%, rather than the Retail Prices Index plus 0.5%;
- additional resources in the Housing Revenue Account could be used in the development of new housing;
- it may be beneficial to carry on with the existing plan to minimise turmoil to residents, as drastic changes to welfare benefits had been imposed by the government.

After taking questions from Members of the Forum, an Officer commented that:

- local authorities could set rents up to 80% of the market rates, but could not move existing properties on to affordable rents as only housing associations had the power to do that;
- a glossary of Rent Setting terms would be circulated by Housing Services;
- it was suggested that it may be beneficial to carry on with the existing plan, to minimise turmoil to residents as drastic changes to welfare benefits had been imposed by the government, unless the views of the Forum members did not support this approach;
- basing rents on the Consumer Prices Index plus 1% was a national policy, and local authorities had the power not to increase rents.

Members of the Forum did not express any desire to move from the existing policy on Rent Setting.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

18. Homes for Harrow Update

An Officer presented the report of the Divisional Director, Housing Services, which included the following:

- there were two strands to the Homes for Harrow project: building new homes in available space, and regenerating estates;
- architects were being appointed, in order to apply for planning permission;
- concerns about traffic and anti-social behaviour were unlikely to be affected by the developments;
- existing blocks of flats on Grange Farm Estate were not well insulated, residents had asked for improvements, and it would be more cost-effective to rebuild on this site than to renovate the existing properties;
- a steering group had been set up for the Grange Farm Regeneration Project.

After taking questions from Members of the Forum, an Officer commented that:

- the buildings that were to be demolished were built in the 60s and 70s, and were no longer fit for purpose due to the quality of the build materials rather than the age;
- cost efficiency was hard to achieve, and the need for residents to have a garage to park their cars in would need to be weighed up against the wider need for housing;
- housing needed to be built in the right places, and the temporary placement of vulnerable people in bed-and-breakfast accommodation was costing more and more;
- Harrow Council was exploring the option of buying properties to use as temporary accommodation, and was looking at the model adopted by Ealing Council;
- plans for developments were available on Harrow Council's website, and a newsletter would be sent to residents with the latest information;
- the people living in the units that would be built would not impact significantly on the provision of local services, as the numbers were low in proportion to the total number of people using a GP surgery or the local police station;
- existing floor plans had been shown to residents, and similar plans for a recent redevelopment elsewhere which had been drawn up in accordance with London Space Standards;

- the new two-bedroom properties would be as large as existing properties on the estate;
- the new units would be of varying heights, depending on the slope of the land, so they would not be too intrusive to the overall landscape;
- there was a housing crisis that affected large parts of the UK, and was particularly profound in London;
- Harrow Council had not ruled out the idea of prefabricated builds, however these often cost more than traditional builds, unless sufficient scale can be achieved to reduce costs;
- the focus on building new properties would not affect maintenance services like potholes and pavement repairs.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

19. New Look Homing In Magazine

The Chair presented an oral report about the new look Homing In Magazine. Prizes were awarded to young artists who had submitted drawings, paintings and photography to an art competition. The Chair commended the talent and hard work of the young artists, and they were presented with certificates and gift vouchers.

The oral report included the following:

- the new look Homing In magazine would include features that were personal to residents, such as a photo corner, and a future feature that would detail journeys made and activities participated in by residents around Harrow;
- there would be serious messages and important information about issues such as domestic abuse, as well as information about jobs and apprenticeships.

A resident presented an oral report about her contribution to the New Look Homing In magazine, and her role on the editorial board for Homing In, which included the following:

- residents were informally consulted about the Homing In magazine, and some residents asked reported that they did not read it;
- residents wanted to see the stories that were important to them, not sensationalist items;
- Homing In magazine would feature smart ways to save money, bite-size news items, health features, and information on upcoming events.

RESOLVED: That the oral report be noted.

20. Suggestions for Agenda Items for Next Meeting

RESOLVED: To note that there were no additional agenda items suggested, but updates would be provided at the next meeting via the usual items.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.05 pm, closed at 8.55 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR GLEN HEARNDEN
Chairman