

TENANTS', LEASEHOLDERS' AND RESIDENTS' CONSULTATIVE FORUM MINUTES

6 OCTOBER 2015

Chair: * Councillor Glen Hearnden

Councillors: * Mrs Camilla Bath * Manjibhai Kara
* Niraj Dattani (2)

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

64. Attendance by Reserve Members

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

Ordinary Member

Councillor Pamela Fitzpatrick

Reserve Member

Councillor Niraj Dattani

65. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: That there were no Declarations of Interest made by Members.

66. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of 8 July 2015 be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

67. Public Questions, Petitions and Deputations

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

RESOLVED ITEMS

68. Updates from Local Tenants' and Residents' Associations

The Chair of Brookside Tenants' and Residents' Association gave a verbal report regarding the activities of the Association, which included the following:

- residents of Brookside Close and 458-466 Eastcote Lane were eligible to join the Association;
- the next meeting would be held on 15 October 2015 at Brookside Close Hall at 19:30;
- current activities included craft classes on Wednesdays, and future activities included yoga, Zumba classes and coffee mornings.

The Chair of Eastcote Lane Tenants' and Residents' Association gave a verbal report regarding the activities of the Association, which included the following:

- Eastcote Lane Tenants' and Residents' Association was established over forty years ago, was a founding member of Harrow Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations, and was one of the first such Associations in Harrow;
- the Secretary is available seven days a week to assist residents with their concerns;
- the Association meets every month, and the next meeting would be on 7 October 2015.

RESOLVED: That the verbal report be noted.

69. Harrow Scrutiny Panel News

The Chair of Harrow Scrutiny Panel presented a verbal report which included the following:

- the Scrutiny Panel represented council tenants and leaseholders, and their main aim was to scrutinise the Housing Services provided by Harrow Council;
- the first project of the Scrutiny Panel was in 2012, and examined the 6-week visits to Council properties by Officers to resolve any issues that had arisen since the tenant had moved in;

- the Scrutiny Panel had made eight recommendations, and the majority of these were implemented and improved outcomes for tenants and leaseholders;
- a recent project was the scrutiny of the bi-annual estate inspection process, and the Panel had made eleven recommendations regarding this that would be implemented in the next six to nine months;
- the Panel would cooperate with Harrow Council, and would take a considered and balanced view on Council procedures to provide a voice for residents;
- there were currently nine members of the Scrutiny Panel and six vacancies;
- Panel members would receive training, and the Panel had recently received good feedback from members about a residents' conference in Croydon;
- the Panel had decided to scrutinise methods of communication between Harrow Council, tenants and leaseholders, and contractors, when reporting a repair for their next review;
- a presentation from an Officer regarding Housing Repairs showed that this team receive over 20,000 emails per year, and 15,000 of these were urgent issues;
- the Panel were currently taking requests for future projects;
- there was an informal interview process for people applying to sit on the Panel.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

70. Latest Government Budget Changes - How They Will Affect You

The Housing Finance Business Partner delivered a verbal report regarding changes in the UK government's budget, which included the following:

- the Housing Revenue Account was a ring-fenced account, the income for which came from rent and service charges;
- the money in the Housing Revenue Account would be spent on housing management, repairs, mortgages, investment work and savings for future investment;
- the changes to the government's Right To Buy policy would allow housing association tenants to buy their properties, which would reduce affordable housing stock;

- the reduction in the benefit cap and introduction of Universal Credit may result in increased arrears;
- there would be a 1% reduction in rents every year for four years;
- seventy per cent of tenants were in receipt of Housing Benefit, but the remaining 30% of tenants would make an average saving of approximately £1.00 per week;
- however, this would significantly affect Harrow Council and the Housing Revenue Account and reduce the expected income coming into the account;
- this would mean that many projects would no longer be financially viable, and there would also be cuts to existing services;
- Harrow Council would need help from residents about how to make the required savings, and wanted residents to be involved in the difficult decision-making that lay ahead.

RESOLVED: That the verbal report be noted.

71. New Housing Website - "You Said And We Did" and Consultation on New Design

The Project Manager gave a verbal update regarding the new housing website, which included the following:

- the new website would be far more personalised and localised to each user, and make information about rent and repairs accessible;
- there would be a visual diagnostic tool, which residents could use to identify what repairs were needed in their homes by clicking on images;
- other methods of communication with Harrow Council would remain open;
- local events would be publicised through the housing website, and residents would be able to RSVP online, as well as set up alerts for local events;
- voluntary groups would be able to use the website to advertise their events and communicate with residents;
- consultations and surveys would be available on the website, and there would be links to other Council services such as Council Tax and reporting fly-tipping as well as links to Tenants' and Residents' Associations' websites;

- in response to consultation, the team were currently deciding upon the best stage to have the log-in process necessary to provide personalised information to users;
- there would be a glossary of jargon used on the website, and training would be available at the Civic Centre for residents who required extra help to use the website;
- internet access was available at the Civic Centre and at local libraries in Harrow, and residents could also ask family and friends to access the website on their smartphones;
- Harrow Council will require residents to help to test the new website, individually and in groups.

Residents also took part in a short consultative exercise about the overall design of the website.

RESOLVED: That the verbal update be noted.

72. Update from Grange Farm Estate Regeneration Steering Group

The Vice-Chair of the Grange Farm Estate Regeneration Steering Group presented a verbal report which included the following:

- the Group had been assembled for the regeneration of Grange Farm Estate, and had a view to becoming a Tenants' and Residents' Association for Grange Farm Estate in the future;
- the Steering Group had a diverse membership, and anyone was welcome to attend their meetings;
- the Steering Group had appointed an independent advisor to assist them with communicating with Harrow Council;
- the Group had assisted in the appointment of an architect, Hawkins Brown, for the regeneration project, in order to secure the best outcome for residents;
- the Group's aim was to help instil a "neighbourhood" feel into the newly generated estate, and the plans included the construction of a large community centre as well as flats and houses;
- Hawkins Brown and Harrow Council had helped the Steering Group by funding trips around London and to other locations to show them different estates;
- the Group had raised issues with the Council such as parking availability and house sizes.

RESOLVED: That the verbal report be noted.

73. Winter Warmers - How to Keep Warm and Reduce Your Heating Bills

The Climate Change Officer delivered a verbal report and presentation about how residents can keep warm and reduce their bills during the winter, which included the following:

- the “Warm Homes Healthy People” initiative was funded by the Public Health Department, and aimed to support residents in keeping warm and reducing their fuel bills;
- 11% of people were affected by fuel poverty, but Harrow residents who are disabled, who are over 65, or who have long-term medical needs can request a free visit to find out how they can save money;
- radiator reflector panels and draught strips were available for residents’ homes, and advisors could refer clients for benefit entitlement checks and give advice about fuel debts;
- staff could refer residents to other services, such as the Fire Brigade in order to install smoke alarms, and could offer advice about exercise sessions and smoking cessation services;
- Thinking Works, the organisation which provided the home inspections, could also investigate whether a resident is eligible for the priority service register with utility companies;
- over 300 households had been visited last year, and forty-two benefit checks had been carried out.

RESOLVED: That the verbal report be noted.

74. Housing News

The Planned Investment Manager presented a verbal report regarding current investment projects and future plans, which included the following:

- the current investment project involved ten million pounds of major repairs work involving twenty contractors;
- new kitchens and bathrooms would be fitted in approximately 1300 properties, which meant a third of Harrow homes would be fitted with either a new kitchen, a new bathroom, or both;
- choices of wetrooms and walk-in showers were available for residents in sheltered accommodation;
- work had also been carried out in Sinclair Court and Watkins House, among others, to make homes more energy efficient, which would reduce bills and make the homes more sustainable;

- over one thousand boilers would also be replaced over the next year with more efficient “condensing” boilers, which would save the average resident around £150 per year on fuel bills;
- future plans included improving the appearance of sheltered accommodation on Northolt Road before the end of 2015;
- contractors had worked with the local community, by providing jobs and apprenticeships to local people and had sometimes carried out additional improvements to community resources free of charge;
- doors would be replaced and videophone entry systems installed in sheltered accommodation;
- the upcoming Rent Review may result in some parts of the programme being revisited.

RESOLVED: That the verbal report be noted.

75. Suggestions for agenda items for next meeting

RESOLVED: To note that there were no agenda items suggested by those present at the meeting.

76. Any Other Urgent Business

RESOLVED: That there was no other business to be discussed.

77. Date of Next Meeting

RESOLVED: The next meeting will be Tuesday 2 February 2015.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.15 pm, closed at 9.20 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR GLEN HEARNDEN
Chair