

TENANTS', LEASEHOLDERS' AND RESIDENTS' CONSULTATIVE FORUM MINUTES

2 FEBRUARY 2016

Chair: * Councillor Glen Hearnden

Councillors: * Mrs Camilla Bath * Manjibhai Kara
* Ms Pamela Fitzpatrick

* Denotes Member present

78. Attendance by Reserve Members

RESOLVED: To note that there were no Reserve Members in attendance.

79. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that there were no declarations of interests made by Members.

80. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 October 2015, be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

81. Public Questions, Petitions and Deputations

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

82. Introduction to the Local Residents' Association

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

- the Association was responsible for Pinner Hill Hall where a number of activities were run including Bingo, a Youth club and toddler group;
- the Association ran a successful estates in bloom event;
- the Association were always looking for more volunteers to assist with its work.

RESOLVED: That the verbal report be noted.

83. Community Food Gardens - What's Happening in Tower Hamlets

An officer from the London Borough of Tower Hamlets addressed the Forum in relation to Community Food Gardens. The officer explained that he would be addressing the Forum on the implementation of a Community Food Garden in Tower Hamlets and how they had engaged with residents to achieve this.

The officer made the following points:

- the London Borough of Tower Hamlets had won a housing award for its work on Community Food Gardens;
- there were currently 23 Community Food Gardens in Tower Hamlets and 6 were in the pipeline;
- Community Gardens were usually based in the communal areas within an estate;
- local Housing officers had assisted in setting up the Community Food Gardens within estates;
- Community Food Gardens provided jobs and in certain cases was also able to attract funding;
- Community Food Gardens had a range of benefits other than just providing a source of fruit and vegetables. It developed community cohesion and allowed residents to be at the heart of delivering a service. It had also reduced the level of Anti-Social Behaviour in estates;
- training was provided by the Housing service to residents;
- as a result of Community Food Gardens, there had been an increase in satisfaction rates across estates.

During the discussion on this item a number of questions were raised by members of the Forum and responded to as follows:

- every estate was different and had to be assessed as to whether they could accommodate a Community Food Garden;
- within the London Borough of Tower Hamlets there had been some funding provided by the Council for Community Food Gardens.

The Chair commented that it was hoped that this Council's regeneration programme would allow Community Food Gardens to be looked into for the future.

RESOLVED: That the presentation be noted.

84. Your views on Getting Involved - Harrow Estates Gardening

An officer introduced the item and explained that Harrow Estates in Bloom was a successful event across Harrow. However it required further input ideas etc. and there could even be scope to link in this event to Community Food Gardens for instance.

Residents then took part in a short consultative exercise on this topic.

RESOLVED: That the verbal update be noted.

RECOMMENDED ITEMS

85. Housing Budget Changes - Impact for Residents

The Forum received a presentation from the Housing Finance Business Partner on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and the draft budget which would be presented for decision by the Council in February 2016.

The officer made the following points:

- the Government require the Council to maintain an HRA as a means of accounting for all income and expenditure relating to the Council's Housing stock. It is a self contained and ring-fenced account;
- at the moment the Council has a balanced HRA. This means that the income received into the HRA is equal to the expenditure made from the account;
- the Council had set a business plan for the HRA in July 2015 with ambitious targets and objectives. However last summer the Government had introduced a number of policy changes which significantly impacted upon the HRA;

- firstly the Government had proposed a reduction in the existing benefit cap. This would mean that those residents on benefits could have less money to pay their rents;
- secondly the Government also proposed to introduce universal credit. This meant that all benefits would be combined as one payment meaning that it could be more difficult for the Council to collect rent and it was anticipated that the number of residents in arrears would increase;
- the right to buy (RTB) properties by residents was proposed to be extended to housing associations, which could mean that there would potentially be less affordable housing on the market. In addition to this the Council would be required to sell off any high value void housing stock, with the proceeds used to fund the RTB extension;
- the Government had also proposed a 'Pay to Stay' scheme. This meant that if a tenant's income reached a certain level, they may be required to pay more rent. Affordability would be an issue and those who were earning more may wish to buy the property outright rather than paying any further increases in rent;
- lastly the Government wished to impose a 1% reduction in the amount of rent paid. However the benefits of this reduction would only be received by about 30% of tenants as the remaining residents would have been impacted by the reduction in the level of benefits;
- the proposed 1% reduction in the rent paid by tenants would cost the HRA approximately £10 million over 4 years and approximately £140 million over the 30-year lifetime of the HRA business plan;
- the proposed budget for the Council had assumed this 1% reduction in rents being implemented;
- all capitals budgets had been frozen as a result of the new proposals;
- there was currently no assumption in the draft budget for a reduction in services. It was believed that efficiencies could be achieved to contribute to the savings required for the next financial year. However this was not sustainable for the long term and choices about what services could be delivered had to be made;
- there were currently no definite proposals regarding which services to reduce and the input of the Forum would be essential in determining priorities;
- a set of alternative ideas for savings proposals was presented. These were intended to be for discussion purposes and would form the basis of the group session following the presentation. It was stressed that these were not proposals but simply ideas to start thinking about what choices should be made;

- the Council was currently lobbying the Government for an exemption from the requirement to reduce rents by 1%. The Council were attempting to demonstrate that ultimately this would not be in the interests of tenants;
- it was important to bear in mind that only 50% of expenditure under the HRA was directly controlled by the Housing Department, which meant that it was more difficult to deliver the required level of savings.

At the conclusion of the presentation, the Forum held a group session where their thoughts and ideas were provided to officers for consideration for the future.

RESOLVED: That the presentation be noted and the comments referred to Cabinet.

RESOLVED ITEMS

86. Mill Farm Regeneration - Now Complete

The Forum received a report on the Mill Farm Regeneration and the progress made to date.

An officer introduced the item and made the following points:

- the Council had rebuilt the Mill Farm area in partnership with Catalyst Housing Group, a Housing Association;
- all work on the regeneration had taken place over 5 years;
- the housing stock consisted of a variety of different properties;
- the regeneration had provided a number of employment opportunities and helped people get into work;
- the next regeneration programme which had been proposed related to Grange Farm Close in South Harrow.

During the discussion on this item a number of questions were raised by members of the Forum and responded to as follows:

- the Council were always looking for opportunities and areas to build new houses on. If any member of the Forum knew of any suitable locations they were encouraged to let housing officers know;
- complaints regarding lights not being fixed on Mill Farm would be investigated.

RESOLVED: That the item be noted.

87. Leasehold Services - What we do

An officer introduced the item and made the following points:

- the Leasehold team within the Council were responsible for managing leases between the Council and owners of properties who were the leaseholder;
- the Leasehold team dealt with all issues relevant to the lease;
- whenever major works had to be carried out, the Council had to consult with leaseholders;
- the Council provided building insurance to Leaseholders;
- the Leasehold team dealt with all Right to Buy applications from leaseholders;
- the Council were keen to involve leaseholders in its future plans by organising engagement events etc.

RESOLVED: That the item be noted.

88. Residents Help Choose the New Repair Contractors

An officer introduced the item and explained that Cabinet had agreed to award its repair contract to a certain company. The officer said that this conclusion had been reached after a long procurement exercise.

The officer made the following points:

- there had been a lot of resident involvement in the procurement process and had been invited in assessing those service providers who has submitted applications;
- residents had been asked what provisions they would like to have been included in contracts which had been considered;
- residents involved in this process had been trained over a period of 2 days and had conducted a number of training exercises;
- as a result of the resident involvement the Council were confirmed that it had made the correct decision on the repair contractor.

RESOLVED: That the item be noted.

89. Suggestions for agenda items for next meeting

The Chair stated that if there were any ideas for future items for Forum meetings, then these should be advised to officers.

90. Date of Next Meeting

The Chair stated that the date of the next Forum meeting would be communicated to all relevant parties.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.02 pm, closed at 9.02 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR GLEN HEARNDEN
Chair