

REPORT FOR: Tenant, Leaseholder and Resident Consultative Forum

Date of Meeting: 19 December 2012

Subject: Housing Complaints handling

Responsible Officer: Lynne Pennington
Divisional Director of Housing

Exempt: No

Enclosures: None

Section 1 – Summary

This report is to feedback on the officer visit to Richmond Council. It gives details on how the Member Tenant Champion role was developed and how it operates in the London Borough of Richmond.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Forum be invited to make comments and note the report.

Section 2 – Report

Introduction

1. The London Borough of Richmond does not own any social housing stock having carried out a Large Scale Voluntary Transfer in 2000. 23 Registered Providers (RPs) operate in Richmond of which 4 own or manage about 83% of social housing properties. The 9300 rented and 2800 leasehold or shared ownership social housing units in Richmond is slightly higher than the number of social housing units in Harrow.
2. The 'Member's Tenant Champion' (TC) role in Richmond delivers on manifesto commitments – to hear the voice of local people, particularly those living in rented accommodation and has been in place for the past 18 months. It is also regarded as ensuring better scrutiny of housing providers to raise standards and local accountability
3. Through working with Ward Members, the TC seeks to find resolutions to the more serious or long standing complaints (typically 6 months old), and does not focus on policies, procedures or processes.

Developing the Role of the Member Tenant's Champion

4. The TC role has been developed with political support from all parties and although the role is carried out by a Member, it is non-partisan and is performed in addition to other roles and duties. Cllr Blakemore once appointed as the TC held a series of briefings and engagement events with councillors across all parties to publicise, gain support to develop and refine the role. She describes her role as both a channel to 'listen' to the concerns of tenants in rented accommodation and also as a 'voice' to ensure that these concerns are heard by the local authority and the RPs.
5. At the officer level, council officers engaged with RPs on the TC role to secure their participation and engagement. This involved writing to the Chief Executives of all the RPs operating in Richmond and then followed with a series of individual meetings with senior managers and local RP officers working in Richmond. These meetings focussed on the benefits to RPs of participating in the scheme, for example, shared learning.
6. Work on developing the role took approximately 6 months and it was officially launched in 2010.

Operating the Members Tenant's Champion

7. The TC operates Borough wide and works closely with all Ward Councillors, RP officers and tenants as well as with other interested parties when investigating complaints. Only those complaints which are complex or have not been resolved within 6 months are considered by the TC. Tenants and Leaseholders must have already complained through their landlords policies.

8. In carrying out her role, the TC is supported by a part-time casework officer. A webpage established for the Tenants Champion on Richmond Council's [website](#) explains the role as well as how tenants and leaseholders can contact the TC or Ward Councillors. An online form is available to register complaints and non IT users can phone Richmond Councils' contact centre, where staff will assist in logging details.
9. The TC meets with her casework officer weekly and works through the caseload. She will speak with each new complainant and advise them of what actions she will take to help resolve their complaint. Actions on existing cases are followed up, and if necessary, meetings with the complainant and the landlord, to seek resolution are held as part of casework management.
10. Once the TC has completed her investigations, she makes recommendations to the landlord and the complainant to resolve the complaint. In 2011/12, the TC resolved 46 cases, and this is estimated to increase in the current year as awareness of the role increases. In addition, to resolving individual complaints, the TC is also able to gain a wider perspective and see if there are strategic issues that might warrant a change of approach, and is able to share best practice between RPs.
11. Finally, the TC role supports the monitoring of targets that RPs have agreed with their tenants, leaseholders and other service users through their 'local offers' as well as supporting Richmond's communities to have a stronger voice in shaping the services they receive.

Proposed next steps

The proposed next steps for housing are:

1. To consider developing the Richmond model to apply to Harrow.
2. To continue considering other models to develop a local consensus on the democratic filter

TLRCF are asked to:

1. Take note of the feedback from the visit to Richmond Council.
2. Make comments on the report.

Section 3 - Financial Implications

3.1 There are no budget implications arising from this report.

Section 4 - Corporate Priorities

4.1 The proposals in this report incorporate the corporate priority:
United and involved communities.

Name: Roger Hampson



on behalf of the
Chief Financial Officer

Date: 3 December 2012

Section 5 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact:

Nadeem Din
Strategy & Performance Manager

Tel: 020 8416 8008

Nadeem.din@harrow.gov.uk

Background Papers:

Housing complaints Handling Reports to TLRCF, 26 September 2012 & 31 October 2012