

TENANTS', LEASEHOLDERS' AND RESIDENTS' CONSULTATIVE FORUM MINUTES

26 JUNE 2013

Chairman: * Councillor Mrs Camilla Bath

Councillors: * Bob Currie * Victoria Silver (1)
* Joyce Nickolay

In attendance: Nizam Ismail Minute 195-208
(Councillors)

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

Representatives from the following Associations were in Attendance

Churchill Place Tenants' and Residents' Association
Eastcote Lane Tenants' and Residents' Association
Grange Farm Tenants' and Residents' Association
Harrow Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations
Kenmore Park Tenants' and Residents' Association
Little Stanmore Tenants' and Residents' Association
Milmans Close Tenants' and Residents' Association
Weald Village Tenants' and Residents' Association

195. Attendance by Reserve Members

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

Ordinary Member

Reserve Member

Councillor Kairul Kareema Marikar

Councillor Victoria Silver

196. Declarations of Interest

Agenda Items 7 – Tenants and Leaseholders Satisfaction Survey, 8 – Housing Contractors, 9 – Head of Asset Management’s Report, 10 – Resident Services Manager’s Report and Feedback from other Council Led Resident Involvement Activities and 11 – Resident Services Manager’s Report on the Pilot Citizens Advice Bureau Home Project – Phase 1

Councillor Bob Currie 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.

Agenda Item 11 – Resident Services Manager’s Report on the Pilot Citizens Advice Bureau Home Project – Phase 1

Councillor Victoria Silver declared a non pecuniary interest in the above item in that she was a Council representative on the Harrow Citizens’ Advice Bureau (CAB). She would remain in the room whilst this matter was considered.

197. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 April 2013 be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

198. Public Questions, Petitions and Deputations

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

RESOLVED ITEMS

199. Appointment of Vice-Chairman

RESOLVED: That Councillor Bob Currie be appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Forum for the Municipal Year 2013/14.

200. Tenants and Leaseholders Satisfaction Survey

An officer introduced Peter Davies, the Associate Account Director of BMG. The officer advised that the results of the survey were positive and the outcomes would be used to develop future plans.

Peter Davies outlined the methodology and main outcomes of the survey and made comments which included the following:

- different versions of the survey had been sent to general tenants, leaseholders and those living in sheltered accommodation. A reminder had been sent to sheltered tenants and leaseholders where they had not responded;
- repairs and maintenance were the most important attributes for respondents from all 3 categories;
- sheltered housing tenants were the most satisfied of the 3 categories with a satisfaction level of 84%. Overall 71% of all tenants surveyed were satisfied;
- generally tenants were more satisfied than leaseholders with the information provided by the housing department. 91% of tenants compared with 76% of leaseholders felt that Homing In was good at keeping them informed;
- only 30% of leaseholders were satisfied that the Housing service listened and then acted upon their comments and 28% were dissatisfied with this aspect. 51% of tenants were satisfied that their comments were listened to and acted upon;
- 71% of tenants were satisfied with the quality of their home and there was a variation in the level of satisfaction across different age groups. Only 52% of respondents under 45 years of age were satisfied compared to 84% of respondents over the age of 65;
- the vast majority of sheltered tenants had responded positively regarding their home and neighbourhood. The lowest satisfaction percentage was 77% satisfaction with the promotion of social activities. This was a common trend across surveys of this type in other areas;
- 72% of tenants were satisfied that their rent represented value for money and 11% were dissatisfied. The survey results from 2010 had shown that only 9% were dissatisfied;
- 81% of residents in sheltered accommodation were satisfied that their service charge reflected value for money;
- 61% of tenants were satisfied with how the Housing service dealt with anti-social behaviour compared with 32% of leaseholders;
- only 35% of leaseholders were satisfied with the final outcome of their contact with housing officers compared to 57% of tenants. Overall 50% of leaseholders were dissatisfied;
- in relation to repairs and maintenance, 43% of leaseholders were dissatisfied and 26% were satisfied while 67% of tenants were satisfied and 22% were dissatisfied.

Members of the Forum made a number of comments to which the officers and the representative from BMG research responded as follows:

- the survey results had been divided into 3 geographical areas; East, Central and West. It would be possible to break the data down into smaller areas, such as wards, but there would be a need to establish a minimum level of responses to ensure statistical validity;
- it was possible to provide information at the postcode level but the confidence level in the results would vary;
- the results in relation to repairs and maintenance were for both the previous and current contractors as the survey had been sent out in October 2012 and the new contractors had been appointed in July 2012.

A Member of the Forum commented that if survey results could be provided for geographical areas then officers would know where to target improvements.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

201. Housing Contractors

An officer introduced the following representatives from the housing contractors: John Pitts, Operations Director, Linbrooks; David Spooner, Supervisor, Linbrooks; Michael McCraith, Operations Director, Slade; Dermot Loughnane, Operations Manager, Slade and Don Lunan, Managing Director, Quality Heating. The officer advised that a representative from each of the contractors would make a short presentation.

John Pitts, Operations Director, Linbrooks made the following comments:

- Linbrooks had commenced the contract with the Council on 1 July 2013 and one of the main considerations had been collaboration and joint planning;
- good relationships had been established with housing officers and this had helped to ensure a smooth transition period;
- Linbrooks had adopted a common sense approach which included being proactive and reactive;
- investment had been made in the local community as local suppliers were used, an administration apprentice was being recruited and a branch office had been opened at the Travis Perkins site;
- there had been staff transfer issues initially and this had impacted on service delivery;

- the current feedback on the service was positive, all key performance indicators (KPIs) had been exceeded and there had been few recalls;
- the focus was on swift repairs for the customer and consideration was being given to a single dedicated phone line for the relevant Harrow Council tenants.

Dermot Loughnane, the Operations Manager for Slade made the following comments:

- Slade were a family run local business which had been based in Harrow over 30 years. 70% of its staff lived in Harrow;
- an apprentice had been taken on from the Harrow Skills Centre. A good relationship had been built with the Skills Centre and with the Harrow Construction Employment Advisor;
- there had been joint working to support the Harrow Food Bank and Slade supported local community events such as Under One Sky;
- a joint approach to mobilisation had been adopted to help ensure a smooth transition;
- monthly meetings were held with housing officers and TRA representatives to gain feedback and to understand resident needs;
- there had been some staff transfer and IT system issues but these had now been resolved;
- all the satisfaction KPIs were good and the results from the next tenants and leaseholders satisfaction survey would be of interest;
- a good service was being delivered by Slade and it was hoped that it was an improved service. Further improvements and enhancements to the service were being planned.

Don Lunan, the Managing Director of Quality Heating made the following comments:

- since 5 June 2013 Quality Heating had been receiving calls directly from tenants. To date there had been 109 calls which was average of 5.2 jobs per day;
- the advantages of direct calls included tenants receiving a faster seamless service, tenants being able to make contact by phone, text and email and tenants being able to build a relationship with Quality Heating;
- progress and performance were monitored through monthly appraisal meetings with housing officers.

The Chairman suggested that it would be beneficial for the contractors to be invited to attend the Forum on an annual basis.

A Member of the Forum commented that there had been a noticeable reduction in the number of tenant complaints since the new contractors had taken over.

A Forum Member asked about apprentices and the representatives of the contractors responded as follows:

- Linbrooks were recruiting an administration apprentice. It was hoped that a trade apprentice would be taken on but this had been delayed by the initial staff transfer issues;
- Slade currently had one apprentice who was due to complete their apprenticeship this year and had been given a permanent position. A new plumbing apprentice from Harrow Skills Centre would be starting in September and their apprenticeship would last 3 years;
- Quality Heating did not currently have any apprentices in Harrow but they did for other contracts. It was anticipated that an apprentice would be taken on in the next few months as larger projects developed.

A Forum Member commented that the targets for apprentices initially had been for 2 or 3 to be recruited in the first six months of the contract but that any progress was welcomed.

In response to a Member's question, an officer explained that Quality Heating was the easiest contractor to set up a direct phone line with because the diagnosis scope was small. It would be harder to establish a direct phone line for maintenance because of the variety of repairs and issues. Consideration would be given to a direct dial number for certain trades.

A Member raised the issue of service monitoring and commented that Members should receive copies of the contractor performance charts. An officer agreed to provide this information to Members.

RESOLVED: That the verbal updates be noted.

202. Resident Services Manager's Report on the Pilot Citizens Advice Bureau Home Visits Project - Phase 1

An officer introduced the report which provided the Forum with the findings and recommendations and lessons learned from Phase 1 of a project undertaken by Harrow Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB) on behalf of Resident Services to visit tenants and leaseholders to establish their awareness of the implications of the forthcoming welfare reform changes and establish what sort of support and guidance they would like to be made available as a result. The officer and Jill Harrison, the Chief Executive of Harrow CAB made the following comments:

- phase 1 of the project was commissioned to help ascertain the level of work and resources required to plan and prepare for the likely impact of welfare reform on tenants and leaseholders. Some of the full details of the reforms, such as the timing of the full transition to Universal Credit, were still not known;
- the CAB were initially given information on 500 tenants and 100 leaseholders and then subsequently given a list of 346 tenants who would be affected by the bedroom tax;
- 366 tenants had completed a full survey but no leaseholders had responded;
- the pilot project had resulted in an additional 157 enquiries;
- the survey results indicated that two thirds of tenants were aware of the reforms and there was a higher than average lack of awareness of the changes in the Asian/British Asian ethnic group;
- there was no significant difference in awareness levels between the genders and those aged 16-24 were the least aware of the reforms;
- 14% of tenants wanted advice and support with budgeting. Discounts were the most popular incentive to encourage tenants to pay by direct debit;
- nearly 90% of tenants had a transactional bank account but approximately only 38% of respondents were using direct debits;
- 96% of respondents would prefer to continue to have their rent paid directly to the Council;
- a number of older people had been concerned that the welfare reforms would affect them as they had not realised that the majority of the reforms would not apply to those of a pensionable age;
- consideration should be given to offering financial capability training on an individual basis and the CAB was currently offering advice in phase 2 of the project to new council tenants;
- the CAB were willing to provide financial capability training to housing officers who had frequent dealings with tenants;
- consideration should be given to maximising the number of tenants paying by direct debit and to reporting the findings regarding the continuation of direct rent payment to the relevant authorities;
- work should be undertaken to mitigate the long term effects of the welfare reforms as changes to the arrangements would continue to be made until 2017;

- at present, phase 2 of the project had a cost of £5,000 for the quarter but had generated £14,000 in additional income for council tenants.

Members of the Forum asked a number of questions and raised various points, to which the officers and Chief Executive of CAB responded to as follows:

- 90% of tenants had access to a bank account which would allow a direct debit payment to be set up. Paying by direct debit would help to minimise the potential for rent funds being spent on other services or goods;
- there were concerns about the end of direct rent payments and the Council was looking to maximise payment opportunities for tenants. Payment by direct debit was encouraged at all available opportunities as it was the cheapest method and a third monthly payment date had been introduced;
- the lack of response from leaseholders was concerning and the incentive for participating in the survey was provision of individual advice and support by a CAB representative. It was possible that consideration would have to be given to material incentives for any future surveys;
- the CAB had not directly collaborated with other agencies as representatives had been able to provide any necessary support. If a particular welfare need was identified during the survey then the respondent was advised of any available specialist support;
- payment by direct debit would not be made compulsory and payment options would be offered;
- 700 council tenants would be affected by the benefit cap and there were approximately 11,000 individuals who had never previously had to pay council tax and would now be required to do so;
- some details of the welfare reforms were still being finalised and information would be made available when the details were known;
- the Council was making a contribution to the costs of phase 2 of the project as funds were available due to Housing Revenue Account reforms;
- 366 full surveys had been undertaken but there had been a large number of additional enquiries. Phase 2 included a tenant adviser working two days a week and during the project this adviser should be able to advise an additional 260 individuals or families.

A Member of the Forum commented that the survey was welcomed and that it was good that a proactive approach had been taken.

Another Forum Member suggested that a pilot offering financial advice and support to young people in schools could be offered.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

203. 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:

- Quality Heating had been taking calls directly from tenants since 5 June 2013 and housing officers were supporting this transfer. The call volumes would be reported to a future meeting of the Forum and a detailed plan would be developed in preparation for the winter months;
- the average void turnaround time was 11.5 days and the target was 14 days;
- a formal offer from British Gas for funding under the Green Deal to undertake energy efficiency works to reduce carbon emissions was awaited. It was anticipated that the offer would result in £6.5 million to be spent over a two year period. The benefit for tenants would be a long term reduction in fuel bills;
- the Grange Farm Estate Project was the largest single project to be delivered in 2013/14 and would include various works such as replacement of living room and bedroom bay windows and redecoration of communal areas. A pilot area would be completed by the summer to show the improvements which could be expected;
- there had been some delays with the procurement process as concerns had been raised that too few local contractors were being used;
- the Grange Farm Estate Project would be used as a pilot for a new system of customer journey mapping. It was anticipated that the mapping would be an effective way to measure levels of satisfaction with all elements of the project;
- the Value for Money Sub-Group had raised concerns regarding warranties and the information available to staff to know if works were covered by a warranty when they were processed as a responsive repair. This information was now available.

Members of the Forum raised a number of points and asked questions to which the officers responded as follows:

- officers would visit properties where problems with doors and locks had been raised. It was possible that some of the reported problems would still be under guarantee and this would be investigated;

- the void target turnaround time of 14 days was calculated from the date the key to the property was given to the contractor to the date the property was available to Resident Services. There was a void policy which specified the standard the property should be at before it was made available to a new tenant, which included that the property should be fit for habitation and in a reasonable state of decoration;
- the void turnaround time of 14 calendar days had been agreed and included the initial survey;
- it was accepted that additional work on void properties and the turnaround time was required. The average time for a re-letting of a void property, excluding those properties which were classified as long term voids, was 23.5 days. A full report on voids would be submitted to a future meeting of the Forum;
- where possible communal areas for residents were included in new developments. The Grange Farm Estate Project was an upgrade of the current facilities and building fabric and therefore it would be difficult to introduce new facilities there. There were resources to allow for facilities to be upgraded rather than enhanced. The new programme could be amended to include enhancements but there would be no income return on these;
- enquires would be made into the temporary facilities available at Grange Farm Estate and reported back.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

204. 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 monitoring of the implications of the welfare reforms and housing officers were working with colleagues to monitor the impact of the reforms on the Council's debt. There had been joint working to develop a corporate vulnerability criteria;
- approximately 160 people had attended a recent mutual exchange event and as a result 30 possible cases were being developed. It was anticipated that there would be some mutual exchanges in the immediate future;
- ongoing work to address fraud issues was progressing and two cases of sub-letting had been identified in the last two days. Two new

Housing Investigation Officers were being recruited using the Government tenancy fraud funding;

- 10% of tenants had responded to the Tenancy Agreement Review Consultation and the two main issues arising from the Review were parking and ownership and management of dogs. Crystal Mark Accreditation was being sought for the new tenancy agreements;
- housing officers would be sharing a stall at 'Under One Sky' with colleagues from the Community, Health and Wellbeing Directorate;
- the Estates in Bloom competition was being organised by the Resident Involvement Team and 5 associations and 10 sheltered blocks would be participating. The shortlisting would take place in late July and the final judging would be in early August;
- the committee members of the Leaseholder Support Group had been reappointed and officers would be supporting the group in reviewing its constitution;
- the tenant scrutiny panel had completed its review into six weekly reviews and the recommendations had been welcomed. It was suggested that the Chair of the Panel be invited to the next Forum meeting;
- consideration was being given to the future of the Harrow Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations (HFTRA) Scrutiny and Challenge Panel.

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

- evictions were a final measure and the Council evicted very few people;
- the level of interest in and attendance at the mutual exchange event was pleasing and it was possible that the welfare reforms had been a factor in this;
- future regular mutual exchange events were being planned and consideration was being given to incentives for mutual exchanges;
- resident involvement was a key priority for Housing officers and it was important to acknowledge the various different ways for residents to be involved. The post of Resident Team Leader was being made permanent and there would also be two additional staff who would work on resident involvement. The work would include considering suitable training opportunities for tenants;
- buildings insurance for blocks of flats was procured corporately and then charged to leaseholders. Home insurance was the responsibility

of individual tenants. The Council did not provide tenancy insurance because the premiums would outweigh any risk.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

205. Suggestions for agenda items for next meeting

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

- Report on rent arrears
- Report on the Future Affordable Housing Programme
- Report on Grants for Moves
- Report from the Chair of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel – Six weekly visits
- Update on Churchill Place Car Park .

206. Any Other Urgent Business

Churchill Place Car Park

A Member of the Forum requested an update on Churchill Place Car Park and it was agreed that the item would be considered at the next meeting.

207. Date of Next Meeting

Thursday 24 October 2013 – 2.00 pm.

208. Termination of Meeting

In accordance with the provisions of Committee Procedure Rule 14 (Part 4B of the Constitution) it was

RESOLVED: At 9.55 pm to continue until 10.10 pm.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 10.07 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR MRS CAMILLA BATH
Chairman