

# TENANTS', LEASEHOLDERS' AND RESIDENTS' CONSULTATIVE FORUM MINUTES

## 10 FEBRUARY 2015

**Chair:** \* Councillor Glen Hearnden

**Councillors:** \* Mrs Camilla Bath \* Jean Lammiman (1)  
\* Ms Pamela Fitzpatrick

\* Denotes Member present

(1) Denotes category of Reserve Member

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

- Glebe Tenants' and Residents' Association
- Harrow Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations
- Harrow Sheltered Residents' Association
- Harrow Weald Tenants' and Residents' Association
- Leaseholders' Support Group

### 33. Attendance by Reserve Members

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

Ordinary Member

Councillor Manji Kara

Reserve Member

Councillor Jean Lammiman

#### **34. Declarations of Interest**

**RESOLVED:** To note that there were no Declarations of Interest from Members.

#### **35. Minutes**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meetings of 8 October 2014 and 10 December 2014 be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

#### **36. Public Questions, Petitions and Deputations**

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

### **RESOLVED ITEMS**

#### **37. Elderly or disabled? Help and Support to Keep You Warm at Home**

The Chair proposed that Item 9 on the agenda be moved to precede item 7 at the request of the presenter for Item 9. This was agreed by the Forum.

Giles Read, from Thinking Works, gave a brief presentation relating to how vulnerable residents can get help to stay warm at home.

The presentation included the following:

- residents who were 65 or older, or who suffered from a long-term disability, were eligible for a home visit that would focus on four areas – building insulation and boiler function; personal use of energy and heating; free products detailed in the leaflet such as radiator reflectors and smoke alarms; and the health of the individual;
- the scheme was funded until 31 March 2015, and was administered on a first-come, first-served basis.

After taking questions from residents, the presenter advised that:

- there was usually approximately 2 days between the initial enquiry and a home visit, and Thinking First had a team of 4 people conducting the visits;
- the scheme would apply to some sheltered housing units, if they were individually heated;
- a partial grant was available for wall insulation as part of the Green Deal Home Improvement Fund;
- there were no plans to continue the scheme after 31 March 2015 unless demand was sufficient.

**RESOLVED:** That the presentation be noted.

### **38. Challenges of Homelessness and Our Action Around Fraud**

An Officer presented a verbal report and presentation regarding Homelessness, which included the following:

- the Chair of the Forum had requested the item, as an unprecedented housing crisis was taking place across the UK, and particularly in London;
- there were multiple reasons why a family could become homeless, and this issue was affecting lots of families in Harrow;
- Harrow had one of the smallest housing stocks in London, and this was rapidly diminishing because of the Right To Buy scheme;
- it was harder to find alternative accommodation for families who were homeless,
- in 2010/11 there were 40 homeless families and in 2013/14 there were 180 homeless families, the figure for 2015/16 was expected to be about 300;
- there were 11 families in bed and breakfast accommodation in 2010/11, and 108 in 2013/14;
- before 2010, about half of homes were considered affordable for tenants receiving Housing Benefit, now about one in twenty homes were affordable;
- Housing Services prevented around 1300 cases of homelessness every year;
- the allocation scheme had been changed, and there was currently a wait of approximately fifteen years for council housing;
- a typical two-bedroom property in Harrow cost around £1200, and a three-bedroom property cost around £1500. This left a large shortfall between maximum Housing Benefit and the price of rents;
- if a tenant wishes to downsize or move out of the borough, they may be eligible for a grant to cover the cost of removals or redecorating their new property;
- there were also grants available for tenants who wished to move to private rental accommodation to assist with paying for a deposit;
- the Grants to Move had been revised to reflect house prices;
- Harrow Council intended to build 80 new homes across 15 sites over the next few years, and the first planning application had been made;

- Harrow Council had been working with private developers to ensure that a proportion of new homes built were affordable;
- Housing Services had performed tenancy audits to ensure that only the tenants named on the tenancy agreement were residing in the property;
- two Tenancy Fraud Officers had been appointed, and had retrieved 37 properties which had since been allocated to homeless families;
- BBC consumer rights programme “Fake Britain” had come to Harrow to feature the work carried out by Tenancy Fraud Officers;
- Housing Services wanted to encourage sustainable tenancies and provide debt management advice, and a Tenancy Welfare Housing Officer had been appointed to assist vulnerable residents.

After taking questions from residents, officers advised that:

- tenants who wanted to apply for a grant would be checked to see whether they were eligible;
- Housing Services were trying to reduce the number of families in bed and breakfast accommodation, as this was expensive for Harrow Council;
- some homes that had been vacated may have been used as temporary accommodation, and this was the reason they would not have appeared on Locata;
- if a resident wished to move to another borough, Grants to Move would be an option for them and there were also other schemes available;
- changes to tenancies would not affect the Right to Buy scheme.

After taking questions from residents, the Chair of the Forum advised that:

- population growth combined with a diminishing housing stock, cuts to benefits, and a 40% cut to Discretionary Housing Payments all contributed to the current shortage of housing;
- the biggest obstacles were a lack of funding and a shortage of land, and all council assets were being considered.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

### **39. Advice from your Fire Chief - Keeping your home safe**

The Borough Commander, presented a verbal report and presentation, which included the following:

- the fire department would fit a smoke alarm in people's homes for free;
- there had been 340 fires and 2 fatalities in Harrow in the last calendar year;
- free fire-resistant bedclothes were available for individuals who were at risk;
- 4000 fires in the UK last year were caused by candles;
- unplugging and plugging in electronic devices could cause wear on the plug, but it was important to unplug devices that did not have a standby function;
- it was important not to exceed 13 amps per socket, and not to overload sockets as this can cause overheating;
- a fire engine was present at 90% of calls within 6 minutes, and a second fire engine was present within 8 minutes;
- electric blankets should be tested every year and changed every 5 years.

**RESOLVED:** That the verbal report be noted.

**40. Suggestions for agenda items for next meeting**

**RESOLVED:** That agenda items be suggested on the feedback forms provided, and these be passed on to Democratic Services by Officers.

**41. Any Other Urgent Business**

**RESOLVED:** To note that there was no other urgent business to be discussed.

**42. Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting of Tenants' Leaseholders' and Residents' Consultative Forum is 28 April 2015.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.10 pm, closed at 9.00 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR GLEN HEARNDEN  
Chair