

Committee:	Tenant and Leaseholders Consultative Forum
Date:	29 October 2007
Subject:	INFORMATION REPORT – Progress report on the work of the Independent Tenant Advisor and presentation of their report
Responsible Officer:	Gwyneth Allen – Divisional Director Adult and Housing Services
Portfolio Holder:	Cllr Camilla Bath – Portfolio Holder for Housing
Exempt:	No
Enclosures:	

## Section 1 – Summary

In December 2006 First Call were appointed as Independent Tenant Advisor. This report outlines the work that has been undertaken by First Call and the further actions that are planned following the publication of the final report.

This report also gives information on the Right to Manage consultation that is currently taking place.

**FOR INFORMATION**

## **Section 2 – Report**

### **2.1 Background**

In October 2006 the Housing Service decided that it needed to undertake a fundamental review of its tenant consultation structures to ensure that tenant bodies are representative and fit for purpose, a decision was taken to commission the services of an Independent Tenant Advisor (ITA) to carry out in this work.

2.2 The Housing Service wishes to work with tenants and leaseholders to strengthen the current engagement arrangements and ensure that tenants are given the opportunity to influence and improve service delivery.

2.3 In 2006 a new Tenant Compact was signed and leaseholder involvement was achieved by setting up the leaseholder support group.

2.4 The ITA was selected by resident representatives, supported by officers, from a list of accredited companies experienced in resident empowerment. A brief was agreed by officers and resident representatives (see appendix 1).

The duties of the ITA brief were as listed below:

1. To review the current structure for resident empowerment (HFTRA, TRAs, REWG) and reporting to TLCF, including looking at the constitution and membership of individual TRAs, attendance at TLCF and the relationship between REWG and HFTRA.
2. To review the funding of resident representatives/ groups, and the use of Council funds, to ensure probity and proper recording and reporting systems in line with the Council's financial regulations.
3. To develop a communications strategy to meet the needs of the resident engagement framework, including reviewing the current Tenant's newsletter 'Homing In' and the annual Resident's Open Day event.
4. To make recommendations where the current structures and methods of resident engagement need to change to meet the objectives listed above.

In order to review the current structures and methods of resident engagement the ITA undertook the following tasks:

5. Arranged and structured meetings of representative groups to discuss the review. Ensured that representatives from often-excluded groups are encouraged and enabled to participate.
6. Agreed and organised a programme of training/ capacity building for resident representatives to support and equip them to participate in the review and ongoing resident engagement.

7. Represented residents, and supported resident representatives, in negotiations and discussions with officers of the Council's Housing Services concerning the review.
8. Published independent newsletters and information leaflets for residents, providing translations, large print or audio versions where necessary.
9. Worked with resident representatives and Council officers during 2006/07 to prepare and carry out communication and events to promote resident engagement.
10. Worked with tenants in setting local / aspirational standards for future housing, shaping service delivery, monitoring performance and communicating the outcomes to tenants and leaseholders.

### **3. Work of the Independent Tenant Advisor**

- 3.1 In December 2006 First Call was appointed Independent Tenants' Advisor. This appointment offered continuity following the work undertaken by First Call during the Housing Stock Options Appraisal concluded in January 2005 .
- 3.2 First Call has stated that the overall plan for resident participation (as set out in the Tenant and Leaseholder Compact) is sensible and fit for purpose. Throughout the report, improvements have been suggested for, Tenant and Leaseholder Consultative Forum (TLCF), the Harrow Federation of Tenants and Residents Associations (HFTRA) and individual residents groups to ensure those groups become more effective. The recommendations should be seen as ways of improving the existing structures for participation.
- 3.3 The attached report sets out First Call's findings (see appendix 2). Key points and recommendations are summarised on pages 3 – 10 and discussed in the main report. Attached to the report is a draft action plan (see appendix 3).
- 3.4 A half-day workshop has been organised for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Nov, with TLCF and tenants who have expressed an interest, where a facilitated discussion of the report findings will take place and the action plan will be finalised. Work will then commence during December to support tenants to deliver actions contained in the plan.
- 3.5 Following the half-day workshop regular reports on progress against the action plan will be provided to TLCF.

### **4. Right to Manage**

- 4.1 Cabinet agreed on the 23 June 2005, following conclusion of the Housing Stock Options Appraisal to investigate, the potential for establishing a Tenants' Management Board (TMB), supported by an Independent Tenants' Advisor Service and other resources as necessary.
- 4.2 First Call secured funding from the Housing Corporation to undertake this work during March 2007.
- 4.3 During the summer of 2007 First Call has been working with tenants and leaseholders to gauge the level of interest in a Tenant Management Organisation (TMO) manage the council's housing stock.
- 4.4 To date, residents who have responded to the survey have supported more investigation into the setting up of a TMO. The next stage of the process is to form a Residents Steering Group to explore the options in more detail. A briefing session has been organised for the 8<sup>th</sup> Oct 2007 when First Call will explain the Right To Manage legislation, outline the role of the Residents' Steering Group and the next steps to take to develop Tenant Management. HFTRA will be represented at the panel to ensure that they are kept informed at all stages of the process.

## **Section 3 – Further Information**

## **Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers**

Contact: Carol Yarde – Service Development Manager, Housing Services

Background Papers: