



Proposal to appoint an Independent Tenant Adviser

Introduction & background

The Council is keen to work with residents to strengthen the current resident engagement arrangements and ensure they contribute to improving service delivery. In 2006 the Council is reviewing its Resident Compact and Tenancy Agreement. It also proposes to develop leaseholder involvement e.g. by setting up a leaseholder forum.

A substantial piece of work was carried out on resident empowerment as part of the Options Appraisal in 2005 with the result that Cabinet (23 June 05) approved, among other things, the establishment of a process, as set out in the Residents Charter, to establish a Tenants' Management Board, supported by an Independent Tenants' Advisor Service and other resources as necessary.

The Council recognises and commends the significant efforts made by the REWG, since then, in developing a proposal for a Tenant Management Board (TMB).

The Council wishes to build on this and sees the appointment of an ITA as an essential first step in ensuring the necessary infrastructure and capacity are in place before progressing to a TMB.

There are currently a range of representative groups (HFTRA, TRAs, REWG) and consultative frameworks, culminating in reports to TLCF (Tenants & Lessees Consultative Forum). Communication is mainly by means of a quarterly residents newsletter 'Homing In'.

There is an opportunity to review and streamline consultative arrangements, to ensure they are fit for purpose and make best use of the time and resources devoted to resident engagement.

There is also a need to continue the work carried out during the Options Appraisal to ensure that resident representatives/ groups are truly representative of the wider tenant and leaseholder community and to ensure that all resident representatives and representative groups are supported and given opportunities to engage in housing service developments.

Proposal

It is proposed to appoint an Independent Tenant Adviser (ITA) to work with resident representatives and the Council to review and strengthen current resident engagement arrangements and ensure they contribute to improving service delivery.

The ITA will be selected by resident representatives, supported by officers, from a list of companies experienced in resident empowerment. They are expected to work to a brief and specification previously agreed by the Council with resident representatives (see attached).

Resident Representatives

REWG has nominated two representatives to participate on a Panel that will undertake the selection of the ITA and, following that to participate in a steering group to oversee the work of the ITA and make recommendations to TLCF & Cabinet. They are Lee Choules & John Pollard.

HFTRA, as the resident representative body of the Council, has been asked to nominate 2 representatives to the selection/ steering group.

The resident representatives nominated by REWG and HFTRA should aim to reflect the diversity of the Council's tenant and leaseholder community in terms of gender, ethnicity, age and disability.

BRIEF AND SPECIFICATION

Objectives

Harrow's Resident Empowerment Strategy and Residents Compact reflect the Council's aims to ensure that tenants are at the heart of all decisions concerning their homes.

The Council wishes to appoint an Independent Tenant Adviser (ITA), to work with resident representatives and the Council, to review and strengthen current resident engagement arrangements and ensure they are:

- Representative of the council's tenants and lessees
- Properly constituted and demonstrate probity
- Effective in enabling residents to contribute to shaping and improving service delivery

The Council also wishes the ITA to explore with residents the option of Right to Manage to establish the feasibility and scope for this and, if appropriate, a timescale for achievement.

Duties

The duties of the ITA will include the following tasks:

To review the current structure for resident empowerment (HFTRA, TRAs, REWG) and reporting to TLCF against the objectives set out above, including looking at the constitution and membership of individual TRAs, attendance at TLCF and the relationship between REWG and HFTRA.

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.

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

To make recommendations where the current structures and methods of resident engagement need to change to meet the objectives listed above.

To carry out a detailed examination of the Right to Manage option, with residents, and make recommendations as to the feasibility and scope for this and, if appropriate, a timescale for achievement.

In order to review the current structures and methods of resident engagement it is envisaged the ITA will:

Arrange and structure meetings of representative groups to discuss the Review. Ensure that representatives from often-excluded groups are encouraged and enabled to participate.

To review the terms of reference for and to confirm the need of the Housing Improvements Options Appraisal Panel. (Housing service issues are reported to the Sustainable Development and Enterprise Sub Committee)

Agree and organise a programme of training/ capacity building for resident representatives to support and equip them to participate in the Review and ongoing resident engagement.

Represent residents, and support resident representatives, in negotiations and discussions with officers of the Council's Housing Services concerning the Review.

Publish their own independent newsletters and information leaflets for residents if appropriate, providing translations, large print or audio versions where necessary.

Work with resident representatives and Council officers during 2006/07 to prepare and carry out communications and events to promote resident engagement

Work with tenants in setting local / aspirational standards for their future housing, shaping service delivery, monitoring performance and communicating the outcomes to tenants and leaseholders

Service meetings as required.

The Independent Tenant Advisor is expected to provide comprehensive independent advice to residents at all times.