

**TENANTS' AND LEASEHOLDERS'
CONSULTATIVE FORUM****9 JANUARY 2008**

Chairman: * Councillor Mrs Camilla Bath

Councillors: * Don Billson * Phillip O'Dell
* Bob Currie

* Denotes Member present

[Note: Councillor Susan Hall also attended this meeting to speak on the item indicated at Minute 117 below.]

Tenants' and Leaseholders' Representatives

Representatives from the following Associations were in attendance:-

Antoney's Close Tenants' and Residents' Association
Berridge Estate Tenants' and Residents' Association
Brookside Close Tenants' and Residents' Association
Cottesmore Tenants' and Residents' Association
Leaseholders Support Group
Pinner Hill Tenants' and Residents' Association
Weald Tenants' and Residents' Association
Weald Village Community Association.

In total 13 Tenants/Representatives attended.

PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS**RECOMMENDATION 1 - Draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget 2008-09 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2008-09 to 2010-11**

An officer presented the report of the Corporate Director (Finance) which set out the draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget 2008-09 and the Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2008-09 to 2010-11. The Forum was asked to agree the draft HRA for 2008-09 to 2010-11 and recommend the three-year financial strategy to Cabinet.

The officer explained that the financial strategy was consistent with the Council's overall financial strategy and the HRA thirty-year business plan. The officer stated that the report was in draft form and that there was a deficit on the HRA for 2008/09. The officer also stated that:

- the key area of income was rent;
- the report proposed a 5.66% rent increase in line with Government guidance;
- the Government no longer limited Local Authorities to a maximum 5% rent increase;
- the average rent increase would be £4.37 per week;
- £22 million was expected in rental income, taking into account voids and Right to Buy Sales;
- the Council had separated service charges from dwelling rent;
- the service charge for tenants was recommended to increase by 3.5% in 2008-09 resulting in an average service charge of £4.13 per week per tenant;
- facility charge increases were necessary due to increased energy costs.

In response to questions by a Member, the officer confirmed that:

- the projected five Right to Buy Sales in 2008 was a prudent estimate;
- the final HRA subsidy determinations would not be known until mid January 2008;

- with regard to 'recharge to other services', the amount represented grant income from Supporting People.

One Tenant Representative voiced concern in relation to the proposed increase in rent as she felt that estates were not being properly maintained and that the repair service was inadequate. The representative stated that increases in rent put particular pressure on the elderly.

A Member questioned why service charges were necessary when tenants paid Council tax. It was confirmed by an officer that service charges related to items not covered by Council tax.

In response to further questions by members of the Forum, officers confirmed that:

- the rent charged for garages was lower than commercial rents;
- garages were commercial properties and therefore the garage portfolio needed to be managed in line with commercial practice;
- those who were not Council tenants were required to pay VAT when renting a garage;
- garages used for commercial use were not subject to extra rent, but the Housing Services department was open to suggestions as to how a 'two tier' rent system would work;
- council houses, to an extent, could be used for business purposes;
- tenants should be referring issues of anti-social behaviour to their respective Housing Officer.

In response to a query raised by a Member, an officer agreed to look into the possibility of training for tenants on rent setting and rent convergence.

RESOLVED to Recommend: (to Cabinet)

That Cabinet be recommended to agree the draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for 2008-09 to 2010-11 and three-year financial strategy.

[REASON: To make an annual recommendation to Cabinet with respect to the HRA].

PART II - MINUTES

109. **Attendance by Reserve Members:**

RESOLVED: To note that there were no Reserve Members in attendance at this meeting.

110. **Declarations of Interest:**

RESOLVED: To note that the following interest was declared:

- (i) Councillor Bob Currie declared a personal interest in that he attended monthly meetings of the Brookside Close Tenants' and Residents' Association and Eastcote Lane Tenants' and Residents' Association. Accordingly, he would remain in the room during the discussion and decision-making for all items.

111. **Arrangement of Agenda:**

RESOLVED: That (1) all items be considered with the press and public present;

(2) agenda item 13: Addressing Tenants Worklessness – Funding Proposal - be considered before agenda item 11: Suggestions for agenda items for the next meeting.

112. **Minutes:**

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on the 29 October 2007 be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

113. **Public Questions:**

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were received at this meeting under the provisions of Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure Rule 16 (Part 4E of the Constitution).

114. **Petitions:**

RESOLVED: To note that no petitions had been received.

115. **Deputations:**

RESOLVED: To note that no deputations were received at this meeting under the provisions of Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure Rule 15 (Part 4E of the Constitution).

116. **Draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget 2008-09 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2008-09 to 2010-11:**
(See Recommendation 1)117. **Decent Homes Delivery:**

An officer presented a report of the Divisional Director (Housing), which set out the progress made against the Decent Homes Programme.

An officer explained that 2007 had been a difficult year for delivering the Housing Capital Programme. The officer noted that Harrow needed to reach Decent Homes standard by 2010.

In response to questions by Members of the Forum, officers and representatives from Kier explained that:-

- Harrow's Decent Home Standard was higher than the one set by the Government;
- the delivery of the Decent Homes Programme had been inadequate and both Kier and the Council were aware of what needed to be done to improve the situation;
- Apollo were performing no new works but were required under contract to repair faults to the work they had already completed;
- an annual comprehensive monitoring schedule was in place to ensure gas safety checks were undertaken. Strict procedures were in place and were implemented;
- there were difficulties with gaining entry to some properties, which needed to be brought up to the Decent Home Standard. A protocol for handling these issues was in place;
- 48 properties, which were being improved under the Decent Homes Standard required aids and adaptations. This work would be delivered from the Housing Capital programme;
- communication between Tenants and Kier needed to be improved;
- Kier were willing to work with local Tenants' and Residents' Associations;
- Kier had procedures in place for ensuring that staff had the proper identification;
- all staff employed by Kier were able to communicate effectively;
- it was the responsibility of Leaseholders to ensure that wiring in their property was up to the required standard;
- the work which Apollo needed to complete was 'snagging' work of a minor nature;
- Kier would consider re-imbursing tenants when appointments were not honoured.

Members of the Forum expressed concern over the issue of gas safety checks. One Member noted his concern over the issue and asked for a progress report to be submitted to the next meeting of the Forum.

The Chairman asked an officer to provide her with two lists: one list detailing properties, which needed to be completed by Apollo and a 'snagging' list. The Chairman also noted her concern over the 'cold-calling' of residents and asked that Members be kept informed of the literature Kier were sending out to residents. The Chairman noted her concern that residents were finding it difficult to contact representatives from Kier.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment Services explained that Kier were introducing a new Director and management team in order to improve the delivery of the Decent Homes Programme. She noted that improvements needed to be made in the delivery of the Decent Homes Programme.

One Member asked to be given further information regarding tenants who refused access to their property when it required work to bring it up to the Decent Homes Standard.

RESOLVED: That (1) the progress being made on delivering the Decent Homes programme be noted;

(2) the proposal that properties excluded from the Decent Homes programme are undertaken as void works or deferred to a later programme be noted;

(3) the recommendation that past promises made to tenants to provide aids and adaptations, as part of the Decent Homes works, will be honoured, be noted.

REASON: To ensure the Decent Homes Programme is flexible enough to enable delivery within the Government's timescales.

118. **Ground Maintenance:**

The officer who was due to present the oral report was not present.

RESOLVED: That a written report of the Divisional Director (Housing) on Ground Maintenance be circulated to Members of the Forum as soon as possible.

119. **Addressing Tenants Worklessness -funding proposal:**

An officer introduced the report which, outlined Harrow Council's proposed funding application to the London Development Agency in the current European Social Fund round and addressed worklessness issues of tenants in Council and Registered Social Landlords' (Housing Association) properties.

The officer stated that the report highlighted the fact that, nationally, there were high levels of worklessness in Social Housing. As a result, the Council were looking for extra support. Harrow were to make a funding application but it was explained that the scheme was very competitive.

In response to a question by a Member, the officer replied that whilst Harrow Council would manage the scheme, they would work with other organisations, including specialist agencies.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

120. **Suggestions for agenda items for next meeting:**

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

- A report on the relationship between Tenants' and Residents' Associations and Kier;
- an update on the delivery of the Decent Homes Scheme;
- update on gas safety checks;
- estate cleanliness;
- update on Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs) and the Right to Manage;

- estate inspections.

RESOLVED: That the above be noted.

121. **Any Other Urgent Business:**

Report into HFTRA

A Member asked for access to a confidential report relating to a formal complaint by a Member of the Public that had made reference to officers of Harrow Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Association (HFTRA). The Member stated that he had raised this issue at the last meeting but it had not been minuted. The Member was referred to the Divisional Director (Housing) for the information he required.

122. **Extension and Termination of the meeting:**

In accordance with the Advisory and Consultative Procedure Rule 13 (Part 4E of the Constitution) it was:

RESOLVED: At (1) 9.58 pm to continue until 10.30 pm;

(2) 10.29 pm to continue until 10.34 pm.

(Note: The meeting having commenced at 7.45 pm at the rising of the extraordinary meeting, closed at 10.32 pm)

(Signed) COUNCILLOR CAMILLA BATH
Chairman