

**TENANTS' AND LEASEHOLDERS'  
CONSULTATIVE FORUM****11 NOVEMBER 2008**

Chairman: \* Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

Councillors: \* Bob Currie  
\* Phillip O'Dell (1) Yogesh Teli\* Denotes Member present  
(1) Denotes category of Reserve Member

[Note: Councillor Susan Hall also attended this meeting.]

**PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS - NIL****PART II - MINUTES**157. **Attendance by Reserve Members:****RESOLVED:** To note the attendance at this meeting of the following duly appointed Reserve Members:

<u>Ordinary Member</u>	<u>Reserve Member</u>
Councillor David Gawn	Councillor Phillip O'Dell

158. **Declarations of Interest:****RESOLVED:** To note that the following interest was declared:

Councillor Bob Currie declared a personal interest in that he attended monthly meetings of 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.

159. **Arrangement of Agenda:**

The Forum was asked to consider two items, which had been admitted late to the agenda, as follows:

<u>Agenda item</u>	<u>Special Circumstances / Grounds for Urgency</u>
17. Reference from Overview and Scrutiny Committee	This report had not been circulated with the agenda as the meeting of Overview & Scrutiny Committee had not taken place at the time of dispatch.

Following a vote, it was unanimously:

**RESOLVED:** That (1) the item be admitted late to the agenda and considered in conjunction with Item 9;

(2) all items be considered with the press and public present.

160. **Minutes:****RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting, held on 22 July 2008 be taken as read and signed as correct records.161. **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).162. **Petitions:****RESOLVED:** To note that no petitions were received at this meeting under the provisions of the Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure Rule 14 (Part 4E of the Constitution).

163. **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).

164. **INFORMATION REPORT - Update on the Xcite Project - Outreach Work Supporting Residents of Social Housing Back into Work and Training:**

An officer presented the Forum with an update on the Xcite project previously reported on in the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Consultative Forum meeting on 9 January 2008.

The Forum was advised that funding for two years from the London Development European Social Fund and West London Working agency would be used to support 300 Harrow tenants back into work and training. The officer confirmed that three outreach officers had been employed to support participants in the project living on Cottesmore, Woodlands, Rayners Lane, Pinner Hill, Mill Farm, Stanmore Park, Weald village and Harrow Weald Estates. The officer added that Harrow Council would be responsible for managing the project and work in partnership with Tenants and Resident Associations, the Harrow Association of Somalian Voluntary Organisations (HASVO), Harrow and Stanmore Colleges and Jobcentre Plus. Specialist support would be delivered by Harrow Association of Disabled People (HAD), MIND in Harrow and One Parent Families/ Gingerbread.

During the discussion on the item, Forum members raised a number of issues, including:

- that some of the development opportunities did not address the needs of participants who already held organising and prioritising skills;
- that there could be a greater concentration on targeting youths that were currently unemployed to participate in the project;

In response to these and other questions, the officer confirmed that:

- the programme could also train participants and provide personal advice / coaching to workless adults in Harrow and would address individuals needs;
- officers continually sought to attract young people over the age of 18 years to the scheme however, it remained a voluntary participation scheme and Connexions was the key agency to support the needs of young people;
- individuals would have the opportunity to develop and refresh skills and address barriers to work;
- advisors would work from children's centres, schools and community centres;
- the Xcite project would link with other projects, including, the Childcare Affordability Project, and Parents into Employment which will provide English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

The Chairman emphasised the importance of the scheme in terms of addressing worklessness issues and agreed that a report be submitted to the next meeting providing a full update against the agreed targets identified.

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

165. **INFORMATION REPORT - Right To Manage Process Update:**

The additional late item (Reference from Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Right to Manage Process) was considered in conjunction with this item. The Chairman advised that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been asked to undertake a scrutiny investigation in respect of this issue to ensure the veracity of the process and provide surety as to the outcomes and this would report outcomes to a future meeting when complete.

An officer from Adults and Housing Services outlined the history of the Right to Manage dating from the agreement by Cabinet on 23 June 2005 to undertake an investigation of the potential for establishing a Tenants Management Board (TMB) supported by an Independent Tenants Advisor Service and other resources as necessary. The officer reported that First Call had been appointed as Independent Tenant Advisors in December 2006 and successfully applied for Section 16 funding from the Housing Corporation with local authority and borough support and then outlined the progress

achieved to date. In response to a question, the Divisional Director of Housing confirmed that the bid for the Feasibility Stage had been provisionally signed off.

The Chairman then spoke, noting the concerns that had been registered at previous meetings and that all further progress concerning working with First Call or the Right to Manage Process would be placed on hold pending the outcome of the Overview and Scrutiny Investigation.

At the request of the Forum a representative of First Call was invited to speak and he agreed that his organisation would undertake no further work until the completion and consideration of the Overview and Scrutiny investigation.

During the discussion on the item, Forum members raised a number of issues, which officers responded to as follows:

- concerning communication of the decision it was anticipated that the Forum representatives would disseminate information to tenants as part of their role and an item would be included in the next newsletter;
- outlined how it was anticipated the scrutiny investigation would be undertaken and that it was intended that TRA representatives would be able to participate as part of the scrutiny investigation both as witnesses and members to any panel;
- that it was not possible to begin the process again at this stage as legislation dictated the Council must adhere to the identified procedure agreed following the appointment of an Independent Tenant Advisor;
- outlined the membership and decision making history of the former Steering Group;

The Chairman spoke on the importance of ensuring that the process going forward was correct and that he welcomed a thorough investigation of all concerns.

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

166. **INFORMATION REPORT - Quarter 1 Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Monitoring Report as at 30 June 2008:**

The Forum received an information report detailing the monitoring of the Housing Revenue Account as at 30 June 2008. Officers explained that:

- increase in Home Ownership costs – equated to additional half post within service;
- there were income variations as these were not achieving to anticipated levels in the current economic climate;
- the key variation on HRA expenditure arose from significant pressures on the repairs budget;
- it was anticipated that there would be a shortfall of £0.3M against the identified budget target;
- no further commitments were anticipated on the contingency provision.

In response to a question from a Member officers confirmed that training had been arranged to assist forum members in understanding the financial data under consideration but, that further targeted training opportunities would be arranged.

A Forum member advised that the Harrow Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations (HFTRA) had also commenced its training programme and that she would arrange for this issue to also be included within its programme of events and learning. It was agreed that such training should take place prior to the next meeting as that Forum would have to consider items relating to Quarter 2 Monitoring and the proposed 2009/10 Budget.

**RESOLVED:** That the HRA position at the end of the first quarter 2008/09 be noted.

167. **INFORMATION REPORT - Community Centres Review:**

An officer reported upon the 10 Community Centre within the ownership of the Housing Service and identified as assets to the Housing Revenue Account, noting that all were

compliant with Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) requirements. She then spoke on the responsibility of the authority to ensure that usage of these centres was achieved at a market rent basis noting that this would impact upon one full time user and three centres providing accommodation for pre-school nursery facilities.

The officer then spoke of the challenges ahead in terms of the use of the centres and that a stock condition survey had been commissioned which would enable the Housing Service to develop a planned programme of maintenance and improvements for the future. She also outlined the shortfall between expenditure as opposed to income in respect of the Centres noting that the current economic climate could create further difficulties in identifying other income opportunities.

The Forum was then informed of potential redevelopment opportunities arising from the concerns identified within the Housing Strategy in relation to increasing the supply of affordable housing; satisfying the needs of Black and Minority Ethnic residents and delivering Value for Money. These aligned with the Local Area Agreement target to deliver 200 new affordable homes. It was therefore intended that a report be submitted to a future meeting concerning the results of the Stock Condition Survey and addressing potential options for use of the Community Centres in light of this, which would include where appropriate and aligned with Council priorities potential redevelopment in terms of affordable housing and/or re-provision of a community centre.

During discussion residents made the following points:

- concern that achieving market level rents could lead to unused buildings as potential users would be unable to meet costs;
- that officers contact youth services regarding the potential for further utilisation on youth related use and other budget opportunities available to be sourced for such use;
- there were no current facilities easily available for Eastcote area residents and that other opportunities for provision (such as school halls and church halls) should be considered;
- that any feasibility study in respect of the Brookside Centre should be undertaken in conjunction with the proposals for the redevelopment of the garages on that estate;
- that officers advise what the future proposals were for the previous Whitchurch Institute and old Cricket Pavilion in the Berridge Estate area which were vacant and becoming derelict.

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

168. **INFORMATION REPORT - Update on Housing Repairs Budget:**

An officer reported upon the budgetary challenges faced by the Housing repairs service and the identified measures that would be required to successfully address these. He advised that a history of a high expenditure on housing repairs had led to an increasing pressure upon the repairs budget, noting that in comparison to the size of its housing stock the service experienced a very high level of demand that was also disproportionate in respect of some service users. He added that the increase in costs had arisen as a result of several factors including where the authority had undertaken to rectify "do-it-yourself loft conversions that failed to adhere to building regulations.

Officers considered that the implementation of robust procedures around repair requests were necessary to contain the projected overspend of the repairs budget, whilst emphasising that the authority would not fail in its duty to ensure health and safety and resident security requirements were abided by. A proposed list of non-urgent repairs items was detailed whereby the authority would seek to place these in abeyance, subject to a further reassessment by Property Services. However, it was recognised that these categories of repairs would need to be considered on a case-by-case basis where residents raised concerns in relation to health, safety and security.

Officers further proposed that a recharge policy could be implemented requiring residents to pay for repairs caused following acts of negligence, accidental damage or non-reportable crime matters.

The proposals around the repairs service were anticipated to be temporary measures until the service had re-established itself and contained the high level of expenditure

currently experienced. In terms of communicating the proposals to residents this would be at point of service, via mailshot and the "Homing-In" magazine.

In response to anecdotal examples raised by the Forum officers confirmed that controls would be put in place whereby all works were scrutinised by the minor repairs team. It was emphasised that the Council would always meet those repairs which complied with its health and safety obligations. Forum members also spoke on instances where advice received at point of contact with the Council seemed to contradict with the proposals contained within the item and the Chairman asked that such instances be advised to him and he would undertake to investigate.

In response to a question from a Member it was agreed that the figures in relation to those repairs which could be impacted by being deferred be circulated to all members of the Forum.

The Chairman agreed that where a Member of the Council was particularly concerned regarding a resident repair issue they should raise this directly for further consideration with the relevant Service Manager.

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

169. **INFORMATION REPORT - Estate Services Report on Garages:**

The Forum received a report detailing an update of garages and other sites which offered opportunities for redevelopment. The report addressed the problems associated with garages disrepair, market rents and levels of voids. Officers briefly outlined details of income to the Housing Revenue Account for the previous three years, together with the number of empty garages and their current condition.

It was suggested that disused or non-viable garage sites should be considered for opportunities for future development and subject to a full consultation with residents and a list of potential sites was discussed including Holsworth Close, Hawkins Close, Charles Crescent, Farmborough Close, Apsley Close and Antoneys Close.

The Forum welcomed the report and referred to the anti-social issues which could arise in relation to disused garage areas.

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

170. **Suggestions for Agenda Items for Next Meeting:**

**RESOLVED:** That any suggestions for items be advised to the Chairman or Director of Housing Services.

171. **Date of Next Meeting:**

**RESOLVED:** To note that the next meeting would be held on 6 January 2009.

(Note: The meeting having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 10.06 pm)

(Signed) COUNCILLOR BARRY MACLEOD-CULLINANE  
Chairman