

TENANTS' AND LEASEHOLDERS' CONSULTATIVE FORUM

26 FEBRUARY 2009

Chairman: * Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane
 Councillors: * Bob Currie * Ashok Kulkarni (2)
 David Gawn

* Denotes Member present
 (2) Denotes category of Reserve Member

Representatives from the following associations were in attendance:

- Antoney's Close Tenants' and Residents' Association
- Berridge Estate Tenants' and Residents' Association
- Eastcote Lane Tenants' and Residents' Association
- Grove Estate Tenants' and Residents' Association
- Harrow Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Association
- Leaseholders Support Group
- Pinner Hill Tenants' and Residents' Association
- Weald Tenants' and Residents' Association

In total, 12 representatives attended the meeting.

PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS - NIL

PART II - MINUTES

185. **Attendance by Reserve Members:**

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

<u>Ordinary Member</u>	<u>Reserve Member</u>
Councillor Yogesh Teli	Councillor Ashok Kulkarni

186. **Declarations of Interest:**

RESOLVED: To note that the following interests were declared:

<u>Agenda Item</u>	<u>Member</u>	<u>Nature of Interest</u>
7. Quarter 3 Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Monitoring report as at 31 December 2008) Councillor Bob Currie	Councillor Bob Currie declared a personal interest on these items, in that he attended monthly meetings of Eastcote Lane Tenants' and Residents' Association. Accordingly, he remained in the room during the discussion and decision-making for these items.
8. Update on the Housing Repairs Service and External Decorations Programme		
9. Development of the Estate Services Steering Group		
10. Tenants' Satisfaction Survey 2008		

187. **Minutes:**

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 January 2009, be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

188. **Public Questions:**
The Panel received late requests to receive public questions.

RESOLVED: That (1) in accordance with Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure rules 24.1, Procedure Rule 16 be suspended to allow public questions to be received; and

(2) to note that the following public questions be received;

- 1. Questioner:** Paddy Lyne – Harrow Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Association

Asked of: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane, Chairman of the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Consultative Forum

Question: We have received a letter from the Council withdrawing officer attendance at Tenants' and Residents' Associations (TRA) meetings. Is HFTRA considered to be a working partner or silent partner of the Council?

Answer: Officer attendance at meetings has been withdrawn as the Council does not have the funds and resources to support officers attending all TRA meetings outside of office hours. We have advised the TRAs that officers would attend AGM meetings if invited.
- 2. Questioner:** Paul Gracie - Antoneys Close Tenants' and Residents' Association

Asked of: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane, Chairman of the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Consultative Forum

Question: Why are items suggested by TRA representatives to be discussed at the TLCF meeting not included on the agenda?

Answer: Officers within the Housing department will try to resolve issues before the TLCF meeting, as the issues raised may not be within the Terms of Reference or remit of the TLCF. Officers are notified in advance to give them an opportunity to deal with issues appropriately.
- 3. Questioner:** John Ratcliff - Leaseholder Support Group

Asked of: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane, Chairman of the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Consultative Forum

Question: We are supposed to be working in partnership with the Council, however, we do not receive letters notifying us of the next meeting and the letters inviting us to suggest agenda items are not clear.

Answer: We have taken your comments on board and will try to improve the format of letters so that TRAs are not bamboozled.
- 4. Questioner:** Debbie Always - Leaseholder Support Group

Asked of: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane, Chairman of the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Consultative Forum

Question: Could the format of financial reports included in the agenda be revised to make them less confusing?

Answer: Officers try to continue with the format previously used for all reports to provide consistency. Nevertheless, we will endeavour to try and simplify reports to make them more user-friendly.

189. **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).

190. **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).

191. **INFORMATION REPORT - Quarter 3 Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Monitoring Report as at 31 December 2008:**

An officer presented a report of the Corporate Director of Finance which outlined the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) at the end of Quarter 3 on 31 December 2008 for the 2008-09 Municipal Year 9.

The officer reported that:

- the key variation on the HRA expenditure was the significant overspend on the repairs budget as previously reported;
- variations in income and expenditure had increased the provisional forecast outturn as at 31 December 2008, for the HRA in-year deficit by £504,000 to £1,295,000;
- variations across a range of budget heads in day to day expenditure, such as, an underspend in employee costs had resulted in a lower level of expenditure;
- it had been anticipated that the budgeted amount for electricity and gas costs for facilities would increase by 35% and 55% respectively for the period between November 2008 and March 2009;
- the HRA budget approved by Cabinet on 12 February 2009 included provisions to review utility charges during 2009-10;
- any variations in these charges would be identified to ensure that utility costs were fully recovered during 2009/10 and 2011/12;
- an underspend in the general contingency budget of £57,000 had been reported;
- the reduction in a lower number of Council house sales and variations in interest rates had contributed to increased charges for capital in the current financial year;
- the bad debt provision had increased to £200,000 as a result of an increase in rent and service charge arrears and anticipated agreed write offs;
- a reduction in the HRA subsidy payable to Central Government, when compared with the approved budget for 2008/09 of £331,000;
- increased rental income from dwellings and non-dwellings of £58,000, reflected in part the renegotiation of commercial leases; and
- variations in the HRA account resulted in a shortfall of £740,000 on the assumed balance in the HRA business plan of £5,685,000 to be carried forward at the end of 2008/09.

In response to questions by Tenants' and Leaseholder representatives, the officer advised that:

- they would investigate the number of agency staff employed by the housing department;
- discrepancies within the billing system would be addressed to maximise the rental income to the service;
- charges to Tenants' and Leaseholders' were calculated in accordance with the recorded expenditure for housing stock in the ledger accounts;

- the amount of service charges to leaseholders was based on the apportioned cost associated for an individual property;
- tenants' service charges were limited by a Government formula.

RESOLVED: That the HRA position at the end of the third quarter 2008-09 be noted.

192. **INFORMATION REPORT - Update on the Housing Repairs Service and External Decorations Programme:**

An officer presented an information report that updated the Forum on the progress made in managing the reported budgetary overspend for the housing repairs service and delivery of the external decorations programme.

The officer reported on the Housing responsive repairs budget and advised that:

- £1,240,000 would have been the potential overspend in the repairs budget for 2008/09 financial year had cost control measures not been implemented, including the suspension of non urgent K4 repairs;
- the projected overspend in the housing repairs budget for quarter 2 reported at the TLCF meeting on 6 January 2009 was £650,000;
- the quarter 3 position for the budget as reported elsewhere in the agenda anticipated an overall increased overspend of £98,000 on the quarter 2 position reported at the TLCF meeting on 6 January 2009;
- the repairs budget for 2008/09 financial year would experience an overall outturn variation of £748,000;
- 71 out of 321 non urgent repairs reported by residents had been completed since the introduction of enhanced cost control measures;
- the remaining non-urgent repairs and would be reassessed in 2009-10 for possible implementation subject to budgetary considerations;
- the cost of repairing a void property had stabilised over the last four months. It had experienced a reduction in the average spend per empty property from £2419 to £1680;
- expenditure on void properties had reduced by £3,000 compared with the quarter 2 forecast outturn;
- in the four months since the measures had been introduced, revenue repair unit costs had reduced from an average cost per repair of £148 to £96;
- as a result of the adverse weather conditions, the volume of unreported urgent repairs had increased by 20% within the last four months, from 283 jobs per week to an average of 338 per week;
- the weather conditions had increased the projected outturn/spend on landlord repairs, cyclical maintenance and voids from the quarter 2 forecast of £3,915,000 to £4,039,000;
- the performance of repairs in 2008-09 had been unaffected by the budgetary control measures introduced.

The officer also provided an update on the external decorations programme and advised the Forum that:

- the budget for the programme of external redecorations for 2008/09 had been allocated out of the housing repairs revenue budget;
- the 2008/09 external redecorations programme had been conducted in two phases;
- the first phase of external decorations to the Kingsfield Estate had been completed at a cost of £123,000;
- Phase 2 of the programme was scheduled to commence in April 2009 for a two month period following the expiration of the statutory consultation period;

- Property services and Housing services would review internal processes to ensure that the external decorations programme was completed on time;
- the repairs position contributed towards the increased overspend of £125,000 projected for quarter 3 of the HRA and would reduce the balance to be carried forward in 2009/10 and the longer term viability of the HRA.

In response to questions raised by the Forum, the officer advised that:

- the register of reported non-urgent repairs was reviewed by surveyors who provide a professional view on the works that required completion;
- the deferral of non-urgent repairs was essential to minimise the overspend in the repairs budget;
- the Council had a duty to ensure that the overall external decorations programme and the available budget was considered;
- the measures implemented to reduce the pressure placed on the budget by responsive repairs had resulted in essential works being completed as a priority within available budgets;
- officers would advise TRA's when a revised Tenants Handbook will be distributed to Tenants.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

193. **INFORMATION REPORT - Development of the Estate Services Steering Group:**
The Forum received an information report that provided an update on the progress made in establishing an Estate Services Steering Group which would work with Housing Services to improve estate services provisions.

An officer reported that the 11 residents' who had expressed an interest in contributing to the Steering Group during the consultation process had been invited to a Steering Group meeting on 24 February 2009. She added that attendees at the meeting had discussed the Terms of Reference of the Steering Group and its long term plan to improve estate services.

In response to comments by Tenants' and Leaseholders' representatives on the Forum, the officer advised that another meeting of the Steering Group had been scheduled for 31 March 2009 at 7.00 pm in Committee Rooms 1 and 2.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

194. **INFORMATION REPORT - Tenants' Satisfaction Survey 2008:**
A representative of Bostock Marketing Group (BMG) Research provided the Forum with a presentation on the results of the Tenants' Satisfaction (STATUS) Survey and the associated improvement plan reported in the agenda. The representative advised that:

- the survey had been distributed to 2,250 general needs and sheltered tenants of which 849 responses were received;
- 65% of respondents were satisfied with the services provided by Harrow Council;
- 72% and 67% of respondents were satisfied with the overall quality and general condition of their of their allocated property respectively;
- 73% of respondents were satisfied with the condition of their local neighbourhood;
- car parking and rubbish or litter were identified as the key areas affecting their neighbourhood that should be addressed;
- 69% of respondents' who had contacted the Council in the last 12 months had given repairs as their reason for contact;
- 83% of general needs respondents' who had answered the question on repairs to their property were satisfied with the attitude of workers employed to complete repairs.

In response to comments received from Tenants' and Leaseholders' representatives, officers confirmed that:

- the Tenants' satisfaction survey had been conducted every 2 years;
- the suspension of the non-urgent repairs had occurred whilst the survey was considered by tenants;
- results of the Leaseholders' Satisfaction Survey, that had been conducted at the same time as the tenants' survey would be presented at the next TLCF meeting;
- results of the survey contributed to the National Performance Indicator (NI160) which measured tenant satisfaction;
- they would investigate whether a summary of the findings of the leaseholder survey could be included in the "Homing In" magazine;
- officers would circulate a full copy of the Tenants' satisfaction Survey to the Chairman of HFTRa before the next meeting of the TLCF.

In response to comments from TRA representatives expressing their concerns on the amount of rent charged by Harrow Council, the Chairman confirmed that 30% of rent charges received was collected by Central government to support communities outside of the borough. He added that Harrow residents were unfairly disadvantaged, as they were not currently receiving the full benefit of the rent payments made to Housing services. He further stated that he had approached Central government on a number of occasions to address this issue. A Member of the Forum endorsed his support of the Chairman's intention to retain rental income for the benefit of Harrow Council residents.

The Chairman and the Forum thanked the representative for his presentation.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

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

The following item was suggested as an agenda item for the next meeting of the TLCF:

- Feedback from the HFTRA on Training.

RESOLVED: That the suggested item be noted.

196. **Date of Next Meeting:**

RESOLVED: To note that the date of the next meeting of the Forum would be held on Tuesday 21 July 2009 at 7.30 pm.

(Note: The meeting having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 10.12 pm)

(Signed) COUNCILLOR BARRY MACLEOD-CULLINANE
Chairman