

TENANTS' AND LEASEHOLDERS' CONSULTATIVE FORUM

13 MARCH 2003

Chair: * Councillor Currie
Councillors: * Marilyn Ashton * Knowles
* Burchell

[Note: Councillor Margaret Davine also attended this meeting in a participating role].

* Denotes Member present

Tenant and Leaseholder Representatives

Representatives from the following Associations were in attendance:

Alexandra Avenue Tenants' and Residents' Association
Antoney's Close Tenants' and Residents' Association
Brookside Close Tenants' and Residents' Association
Cottesmore Tenants' and Residents' Association
Harrow Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations
Honeybun Community Association
Eastcote Lane Tenants' and Residents' Association
Harrow Miscellaneous Properties Tenants' and Residents' Association
Pinner Hill Tenants' and Residents' Association
Woodlands Community Association

(In total, 20 tenants/representatives attended)

PART I – RECOMMENDATIONS**RECOMMENDATION 1 (To Cabinet): Three Year Stock Investment Forward Programme**

The Forum received a report in the name of the Head of Housing and Environmental Health Services, to enable the Forum to comment on progress of the 2002/2003 stock investment programme and that proposed for 2003/04 and 2004/05.

Officers noted that good progress had been made in 2002/03, with the exception of the Mill Farm window replacement scheme, which was subject to investigation and further consultation with residents as additional work had been identified. Some schemes, identified from the draft 2003/04 programme approved in January 2002, had already been worked up in advance and would be committed to early in 2003/04 subject to Cabinet approval.

Funding for 2003/04 had been confirmed at this time as £5,533,340. Priorities had been determined from the 1997 stock condition survey. A two-year programme had been produced on the basis that a new stock condition survey was in the process of being completed and priorities arising from the survey would be examined with tenants.

The Chair asked for clarification of the consequences for the programme should the stock condition survey identify repairs that needed to be considered as urgent, and whether this would cause other projects to be delayed. Officers responded that the programme was based on the best knowledge available, and that it was possible that some changes could occur in the light of the new survey, although this would be more likely to impact upon the programme for 2004/05 and would follow from a full discussion with residents on how the programme should look in the future.

The new stock condition survey had examined the basic elements of a large sample of properties to give a picture of investment needs over a thirty-year period, with emphasis on the next ten years, and with the aim of bringing all properties up to the Decent Homes Standard by 2010.

Officers clarified that budget estimates within the stock investment programme were updated each year to account for inflation.

A representative from Woodlands Community Association queried the budget for tenant/management initiatives. The officer confirmed that in previous years the budget had been £100,000 but that in light of the requests received the budget had been

increased in 2002/03 to £250,000. This budget was additional to the Minor Works Estates Improvement budget.

A Member requested that detailed consultation of residents take place where the programme involved two projects on the same estate in a two-year period, to identify whether tenants would prefer work to be combined or spread over the period.

A Member asked for clarification regarding savings of £312,200 carried forward from 2002/03 to the 2003/04 proposed programme. Officers informed the meeting that savings arose when contracts cost less than the estimated cost of the project in the budget, and that savings were reinvested.

Members and residents discussed the report and a number of points were raised in relation to specific estates.

Officers clarified for representatives from Antoney's Close TRA that the window replacement work to be carried out on Antoney's Close related to the programme for 2002/03, which was already agreed and was due to start shortly.

Representatives enquired as to why properties entitled Brent Transfer were included in the programme. Members and officers clarified that the Council acquired the properties approximately ten years ago as a result of a borough boundary change.

In response to a number of queries from the Cottesmore TRA, officers confirmed that double-glazing would be installed under the window replacement programme and agreed to liaise with the TRA directly on concerns raised regarding means of escape from the flats. The officer advised that flooring work included in the programme reflected requests put forward by the TRAs themselves. Work taking place on down pipes on the Cottesmore estate was holding up work that was due to take place on flooring and officers would follow the matter up.

The Chair asked that the window replacement programme be carried out in the summer months to avoid inconvenience to residents. The officer confirmed this was the intention but that if contractors were delayed, work might have to be carried out in the following year.

A representative from the Harrow Miscellaneous Properties Tenants' and Residents' Association enquired as to when work on windows in the miscellaneous properties would begin. Officers advised that this was proposed for the 2004/5 programme, subject to the outcome of the stock condition survey. The proposals for window and roofing work to the miscellaneous properties scheduled for 2004/05 would be subject to consultation with residents.

Following the above discussions, Members and representatives agreed to note the report and requested that Cabinet consider their comments.

Resolved to RECOMMEND:

That Cabinet considers the comments of the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Consultative Forum on the proposed stock investment programme for 2003/04 and 2004/05 as set out above.

REASON: To ensure that Cabinet takes the views of the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Consultative Forum into account when considering the Three Year Stock Investment Forward Programme.

RECOMMENDATION 2 (To Portfolio Holder): Locata Scheme Update

The Forum received a report in the name of the Head of Housing and Environmental Health Services, which gave an update on the Locata Scheme.

Legislation required authorities to have an allocations scheme for determining priorities and the procedures to be followed in allocating housing accommodation. Under the Homelessness Act 2002, which came into force on 31 January 2003, authorities were prevented from having residential restrictions on access to the Housing register. The Locata scheme had been designed to give a lower priority to out of borough applicants, whilst respecting the need to give preference to certain categories of applicant. The Portfolio Holder would be requested to approve this aspect of the scheme to finalise the policy document.

Under the new scheme all vacant properties were advertised in a free newspaper called Locata Home. Households that were registered with one of the partners could make bids for the properties they were interested in by sending in a coupon to the Central Lettings Agency to register their interest.

The Forum was invited to comment on the proposals. Officers clarified that all on the housing register had access to the user guide, which explained the Locata scheme. Only those with priority A or B (Emergency or High Priority) would receive the newspaper, Locata Home, by post. Those categorised as C or D (Reasonable Preference or All Other Applicants) had to collect copies or pay a charge of £7.50 for the newspaper to be delivered for six months. The information was also available on the Internet and from local libraries.

A representative of ELTRA asked whether the secretaries of the TRAs could be added to the distribution list. Officers responded that this could be arranged. A Member, a Hatch End Ward Councillor, asked for a more accurate address for Hatch End library to be included on the newspaper.

A representative of Pinner Hill TRA asked whether a large family on an estate would have priority for a larger property on the same estate. Officers said that tenants were banded according to need. A family who was overcrowded would be categorised as Band C but would have to bid against everyone else in that Band and would not have a priority case for a property on the same estate. A family who was not overcrowded would still be able to register but would have a lower priority. The scheme aimed to ensure that those with the highest priority were housed first.

The Chair asked for an update on those who had lost their homes in Strongbridge Close as a result of the fire. Officers advised that the majority had been housed under temporary assured shorthold tenancies, some had made their own arrangements and a few were in bed and breakfast accommodation. The Metropolitan Housing Trust had been requested to re-house its own tenants. Within the Locata scheme, those whose homes had been completely destroyed had been given a high priority. Some had been able to move back to the estate.

Officers felt that the advantage of the scheme was that there was no queue; within a band those who had been on the list longest would be housed first. There were very few Band A clients. A representative of Cottesmore TRA enquired as to the estimated relocation time, but officers responded that the scheme had not been running long enough for accurate information to be provided. Officers informed the meeting that a newsletter would be set up in the new financial year and that such information could be included. A Member suggested that a newsletter might be a costly option, but officers advised that such a newsletter would be a non-glossy leaflet available in the housing reception.

RESOLVED: (1) That the report and the content of the draft report to the Portfolio Holder be noted;

(2) that the Portfolio Holder be requested to consider the comments of Tenants' and Leaseholders' Consultative Forum alongside the report.

REASON: To ensure that Tenants' and Leaseholders' Consultative Forum are involved in the decision-making regarding Locata.

PART II – MINUTES

57. **Attendance by Reserve Members:** **RESOLVED:** To note that there were no Reserve Members in attendance at the meeting.
58. **Apologies for Absence from Tenants'/Leaseholders' Representatives:** **RESOLVED:** To note that no apologies for absence were received from Tenants' Leaseholders' Representatives; apologies had been received from the Head of Housing and Environmental Health Services.
59. **Declarations of Interest:** Councillor Currie declared that his household was a member of ELTRA and that he was acting as chair of ELTRA on a temporary basis; as such he had a personal interest in relation to item 11 on the agenda (see Minute 66). He also declared that he was a founder member of HFTRA.

RESOLVED: To note the declarations of interest made by the Chair with regards to the business at this meeting, and that the Chair participated in the discussions and decisions thereon.

60. **Arrangement of the Agenda: RESOLVED:** That all items be considered with the press and public present.
61. **Minutes: RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 January 2003, having been circulated, be taken as read, noted and signed as a correct record subject to the following amendments:
- Minute 43: Apologies for absence form Tenants'/Leaseholders' Representatives: Amend first paragraph to read:

“To note that apologies for absence had been received from... Gwynne Jenkins of Thomas Hewlett Community, Tenants and Residents Association.”
 - Minute 52: Housing Services Best Value Review – Your Home, Your Needs – Progress Report: For clarification to amend second paragraph to read:

“The review was important because the Landlord Services arm of the Housing Services division would need to receive a two-star rating from the Housing Inspectorate if the Council was to have the ability to borrow additional funds, should the Council set up an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO).”
62. **Matters Arising from the Last Meeting:** The Forum received a report from the Head of Housing and Environmental Health Services which provided progress on issues raised at the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Consultative Forum meeting held on 9 January 2003 that were not covered elsewhere in the agenda.
- Recommendation 1 (paragraph a): Time Taken to Process Housing Benefit Claims: A computer link from the housing office into the housing benefit system was about to be installed. This would enable housing staff to look at individual claims, identify their status, and the information required to complete the assessment of the claim. Staff would then be able to liaise directly with the tenant. Regular liaison meetings were taking place at senior management level. The average time for assessing a claim was 80 days (against a government target of fourteen days).

A verbal report was made to the meeting on the current position. As at 10 March 2003, there were 244 new claims outstanding, of which 87 were assigned and 157 unassigned. There were 470 renewal claims, of which 133 were assigned and 337 unassigned. The officer explained that the renewal claims might still be in payment. At the request of the Chair, an officer from Housing Benefits would attend the next meeting to report on this item.
 - Recommendation 1 (paragraph c): Garage Rents: A representative of Brookside Close TRA requested an update. Officers advised that a review of garage stock was underway, which included a survey of some of the sites where redevelopment was being considered. A license agreement, to crack down on the anti-social use of garages was being drafted. The number of void garages was falling and methods of promoting the garages were being discussed. The review was due to be completed in the next three months and officers would report to the next meeting of the Forum.
 - Recommendation 1 (paragraph d): Provision for Bad Debt within Housing Revenue Account: In a verbal update to the report, officers advised that bad debt provision was £40,450 at 2001/02 and £74,299 in 2002/03 to date. Officers expected more to be written off by the year-end. Debt was only written off when it was considered no longer recoverable.
 - Recommendation 1 (paragraph e): Representatives were pleased to note that Cabinet had considered their comments, as set out in the recommendation.
 - Minute 47: A Need to Change the Criteria for Showers for the Over 60s: The Portfolio Holder for Social Services was present at the meeting to provide an update. A pilot study had taken place to determine the best means of providing people with information about services available to enable them to ask for help when it was needed. The study found that visits were more effective than leaflets.

Approaches in other boroughs were being examined. All eligibility criteria were currently being reviewed as part of the Fair Access to Care Services. In Harrow, criteria for showers were severe. As the service faced resource constraints, the focus was on providing assistance with washing rather than installing showers. The Portfolio Holder advised that it was not necessary to be a disabled person to receive assistance, but that assistance would not necessarily be in the form of a shower installation. It was recognised that walk-in or sit-in showers helped individuals to

maintain independence, but that they were expensive. The Portfolio Holder pointed out that Harrow's bathing service was not fully subscribed.

- Minute 50: Housing Estate Redecoration Programme: A representative of Pinner Hill TRA and HFTRA asked why painting had been taking place during winter. Officers advised that work had taken place on the Cottessmore estate outside of the agreed period only after the surveyor had agreed that weather conditions were suitable and the TRA had been consulted.

A Member said that tenants would be inconvenienced if work took place in winter when the weather was too cold for windows to be left open for long periods and said that such factors should be taken into consideration. Officers advised that the agreement reached regarding avoiding outside work in winter was still being upheld, but that in this instance it would have proved more costly to close down the contract. The Member said that Ward Councillors and the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Development and Housing should be informed if work was to take place outside of the agreed period. After discussion of problems on individual estates, the Tenant Services Manager clarified that housing management oversaw the redecoration contracts rather than supervising the work on a day-to-day basis, but added that she was shocked to hear that work had been taking place outside the agreed period to the extent outlined by the meeting. The officer said that she would investigate the matter further and a report would be made to the next meeting.

The Chair reminded the Forum that matters relating to individual estates should be submitted as agenda items rather than raised when the Forum was considering the matters arising report.

- Minute 51: Electrical Re-wiring: Officers felt that contractor performance had improved after the main contractor had brought in a sub-contractor to complete the contract. The project was back on schedule and due to be completed in mid-March. A representative of the Honeybun Community Association accepted that there had been an improvement since January, and that work had taken place at a quicker pace, but felt that some of the problems caused by the main contractor had not been addressed. Officers were happy to discuss any outstanding matters with the representative.
- Minute 52: Housing Services Best Value Review – Your Home, Your Needs – Progress Report: Officers advised that a meeting was being arranged which would provide tenants an overview of the review, as well as giving tenants the opportunity to comment on the range of issues identified by offices in relation to the tenant services aspect of the review.
- Minute 52: Workshop on Anti-Social Behaviour Orders and Acceptable Behaviour Contracts: The workshop was being rearranged and was to be combined with a general information session. Tenant and leaseholder representatives would be informed of the new date as soon as possible.
- Minute 53: Poor Condition of Pavements and Roadways on the Brookside Estate: The representative of Brookside Close said that he had had no contact since the last meeting. A Member apologised for his lack of contact and said that he would arrange an appointment. The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Development and Housing said that he had written to the Lead Officer of the South Harrow Pilot after the last meeting and would find out why there had been no response.

RESOLVED: That the report and verbal updates be noted.

63. **Public Questions/Petitions/Deputations:** **RESOLVED:** To note that no public questions were put or petitions or deputations received at the meeting under the provisions of Committee Procedure Rules 18, 15 and 16 respectively.
64. **The Introductory Tenancy Scheme:** The Forum received a report in the name of the Head of Housing and Environmental Health Services.

Introductory Tenancies were a discretionary tool available to local authorities, as a means to address anti-social behaviour. The report proposed that all new tenancies be introductory for the first twelve months and be converted to a secure tenancy after that period, provided that no serious breaches of the agreement had arisen.

The Forum considered the draft policy. A representative from ELTRA enquired as to whether the terms were similar to the normal tenancy agreement. Officers advised that they were, but that the authority would have greater means to enforce the terms, meaning

that it could be more effective and have a greater impact. Evidence would be required and hence the scheme would be administratively heavy for the authority, which would bear the responsibility for ensuring that sanctions were proportionate to the breach in question.

A representative from ELTRA enquired as to whether the authority would be obliged to re-house children. Officers advised that an assessment would take place prior to an eviction, although this would not necessarily mean that there was an obligation to re-house if the tenants in question were considered to be intentionally homeless.

A representative from Cottesmore TRA pointed out that tenants, particularly of different age groups, had different lifestyles that did not always sit easily together. Officers felt that these situations were not unusual, that there had to be some degree of tolerance of others, and an assessment of what was reasonable. Landlords had a duty to enforce the conditions of the tenancy and the right of individuals to quiet enjoyment of their homes.

Officers also pointed out that legal action was not always the most appropriate solution. Housing management had been approached by a company offering a mediation service in other boroughs, which was keen to operate a pilot in Harrow, and officers would report back to the next meeting.

A representative for Pinner Hill TRA asked whether the introductory period could be extended if there had been problems. The officer advised that the law did not allow the period to be extended, unless proceedings had begun. If there was a borderline case, there was the possibility that the period could be extended if an order had been obtained; the officer would examine the legal position. The representative emphasised that when consultation was sent out that it should clearly state that decent tenants had nothing to fear from the scheme.

A Member noted that the report reflected the right of tenants to a decent home and the responsibilities tenants had to others. Another Member felt that reasons for ending an introductory tenancy had to be robust, but felt that the report provided reassurance that the scheme had been carefully considered.

Members and representatives unanimously welcomed the report.

RESOLVED: (1) That the report be noted;

(2) that the unanimous support from the Forum be reflected in the officer report to Cabinet on Introductory Tenancies.

65. **Extension of the Meeting:** At 10:00 pm, during discussion of the above item, and subsequently during discussion of the matter raised by the Brookside Close Tenants' and Residents' Association, the Chair drew the attention of the meeting to the time.

RESOLVED: That the meeting be extended to 10:30 pm and 10:40 pm respectively.

66. **Matters Raised by the Eastcote Lane Tenants' and Residents' Association:**

- (i) **Down Pipes - Blocks 4, 6 & 28 Stuart Avenue:** The officer report outlined the approach taken to these works. The roofs were renewed in 1999-2000. The decision had been taken to replace only the gutters rather than all of the rainwater goods. The new guttering was connected to the existing down pipes. ELTRA felt that the assortment of rainwater goods detracted from the appearance of the estate, but the down pipes were in working order. The decision was taken to standardise the gutters, installing pipes that would not require repainting and that would be resistant to graffiti. ELTRA were not informed by the surveyor of the start date for the work. A written apology for the oversight was sent to ELTRA. A representative of ELTRA enquired as to the proportion of the total cost would have to be paid by leaseholders. The officer agreed to respond in writing.
- (ii) **Car Park – Hamilton Crescent:** The officer report outlined the situation. A proposal to mark out parking bays came from ELTRA and an officer discussed the issue on site with the Chair of the Association in December 2002. When the spaces were marked, in January 2003, a notice forbidding the parking of vans was marked on the car park surface. The notice was included at the request of the Chair, who advised the officer that this was a requirement of the planning permission for the creation of the parking area. The officer accepted the view of the Chair.

Following complaints from residents, officers were in the process of checking with planning officers as to the conditions attached to the original permission. No efforts would be made to enforce the restriction on vans until the position was clarified. Officers advised that the officer in question had had no reason to believe that the then Chair of ELTRA had not been representing the views of the tenants, but agreed that all schemes of this kind should in future be subject to consultation with local residents. Officers asked representatives to understand that such consultation would not be intended to undermine their representative role. The representative of ELTRA pointed out that representatives were elected to act in the interests of the tenants

- (iii) Fencing to Communal Gardens – Stuart Avenue: The item raised by the TRA related to a proposal to use the Minor Estate Improvement budget to create enclosed, communal, secure rear gardens. Officers confirmed that there had been a six-week gap between the initial discussions with the Secretary of ELTRA on the proposal and consultation letters going out to residents. This was partly due to the Christmas period but more importantly due to the fact that additional proposals were being developed for inclusion in the consultation process.

RESOLVED: That the report and verbal updates be noted.

67. **Matter Raised by the Woodlands Community Association:**

- (i) Rainwater Drainage around Block 28-33 Brockhurst Close: The TRA representative advised that the matter had been withdrawn from the agenda of the TLCF meeting held on 9 January 2003 as officers had advised that work to address the drainage problem was due to have been completed by the end of January.

The representative informed the Forum that the work had not yet been completed. Officers apologised for the delay and stated that the original letter had been sent out in good faith. Officers advised the meeting verbally that the original contractor, Clearaway Drainage Services, had priced the work on the basis of drawings, but after a site visit revised their quotation upwards. In consequence officers had been in touch with Slade London Group, who agreed to honour their original quotation. Officers advised that a site visit was due to take place the next day and that the representative of the Woodlands Community Association was welcome to attend. A Member, the Ward Councillor for the estate, said that she would like to attend the visit.

The Chair expressed concern that the original contractor, whose tender had been successful, had not undertaken the work and requested that officers take the matter up.

RESOLVED: To note that pending the site visit, orders will be placed with Slade London Group to carry out works from the responsive repairs budget to the sum of £2980 plus VAT.

68. **Matter Raised by the Brookside Close Tenants' and Residents' Association:**

- (i) Grounds Maintenance: A representative of Brookside Close, under Any Other Business, said that a number of representatives were concerned at the poor level of service that they were receiving and proposed an alternative management structure to address the problem. The representative proposed that a small team should be created for the maintenance of the estates, entirely under the control of the Housing Manager. The representative proposed that such an arrangement would provide a clear-cut management structure that would give confidence to the tenants of the borough. The representative produced the Coat of Arms and reminded the Forum that the motto on the scroll read: "the wellbeing of the people is the highest law". The representative requested that the matter be discussed at the next meeting of the Forum, to which the Forum voiced its agreement.

RESOLVED: That the grounds maintenance management structure proposed by the Brookside Close TRA be discussed at the next meeting of the Forum.

69. **Diary Dates for Representatives:** The Chair informed that a 'House Proud' launch, to be attended by Tony McNulty MP, would be taking place at the Civic Centre on Saturday 15 March 2003 to which representatives would be welcome to attend.

Officers advised that a meeting for resident representatives on the setting up of an ALMO was due to take place on 27 March 2003. Another meeting on the same matter would be arranged for Members. The meeting on grounds maintenance due to take place on that evening would be rearranged.

The Multi-Agency Forum would be meeting on 14 May 2003 to discuss the subject of racial harassment and would be targeted at tenants.

70. **Date of Next Meeting:** Thursday 3 July 2003.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7:31 pm closed at 10:37 pm)

(Signed) BOB CURRIE
Chair