

TENANTS' AND LEASEHOLDERS' CONSULTATIVE FORUM MINUTES

24 FEBRUARY 2011

Chairman: * Councillor Bob Currie

Councillors: * Mano Dharmarajah * Simon Williams
* Barry Macleod-Cullinane

* Denotes Member present

Representatives from the following Associations were in attendance:

Antoney's Close Tenants' and Residents' Association
Brookside Close Tenants' and Residents' Association
Churchill Place Tenants' and Residents' Association
Eastcote Lane Tenants' and Residents' Association
Elmgrove Tenants' and Residents' Association
Harrow Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations
Harrow Weald Tenants' and Residents' Association
Leaseholder Support Group
Little Stanmore Tenants' and Residents' Association

31. Attendance by Reserve Members

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

32. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that the following interests were declared:

Agenda Items: 7. Information Report - Resident Services Managers Report, 8. Information Report - Asset Management Progress Report, 9. Information Report - Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Forecast Outturn 2010-11, 10. Information Report - Results of the Residents Satisfaction Survey and

Housing Staff Survey 2010, 11. Information Report - Feedback from other council led Resident Involvement Activities

Councillor Macleod-Cullinane declared a personal interest in the above items in that he was Portfolio Holder for Housing under the previous administration and had substantial involvement in the creation of the Housing Ambition Plan. He would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

33. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 January 2011, be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

34. Public Questions, Petitions and Deputations

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were put, or petitions or deputations received at this meeting.

RESOLVED ITEMS

35. INFORMATION REPORT - Resident Services Managers Report

An officer introduced a report which highlighted a range of items.

The officer advised that:

- the Council's Credit Union agreement with M4Money was launched in 2010. Community groups interested in the Credit Union were invited to contact the officer for more information;
- the Estates in Bloom initiative would continue for an additional year. Its success would be monitored and reviewed in 2012. TRA representatives added that those expecting flowers for planting on estates would receive more than twenty-four hours delivery notice;
- £71,000 of electricity credits had been received in relation to the refund of electricity charges;
- a written independent legal response was being sought in relation to the possibility of charging freeholders for services received. Officers would report back to the Forum once the response had been received;
- the Council was required to create a minimum of three local offers to engage with more residents in an effective way, in accordance with the requirements of TSA (Tenant Services Authority). Provisional suggestions for these offers, resulting from a joint training day for staff and residents on 25 January, were:
 - (i) to develop a handy person service;
 - (ii) offer a form of quality guarantee;
 - (iii) develop a neighbour agreement;
 - (iv) enhance the caretaking service;

- (v) develop a Consultation Charter.

TRA representatives were requested to contact the officer with any further suggestions.

In response to questions, officers advised that:

- caretakers were responsible for cleaning communal areas such as stairways and entrances. A review of the standard of work being conducted by caretakers was in progress;
- the specific criteria for the handy person service would need to be investigated. It was currently one suggestion for a local offer;
- devising a Consultation Charter would create a strategy for a minimum standard for all types of consultation methods. The Consultation Charter differed from the Tenants Charter initiative which had been highlighted as a priority action by Cabinet.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

36. INFORMATION REPORT - Asset Management Progress Report

An officer introduced a report which provided a position statement on the progress made in housing Asset Management, including responsive maintenance and planned investment.

The officer advised that:

- it was hoped that the restructure of the Asset Management team would be completed by May 2011;
- asbestos surveys and the removal of rubbish contributed to high void property costs;
- the major works and responsive repairs contracts with Kier were due to expire in July 2011 and July 2012 respectively;
- initiating short term contracts would be considered for works during 2011/12. Running concurrently with existing measures, short term contracts would prevent any premature commitment to lengthy agreements;
- various means of consultation would be used to engage residents in the implementation of new or renewed contracts. These included focus groups, telephone surveys and estate meetings;
- to identify appropriate contracts, the tendering process would need to begin as soon as possible. The tendering process would be fair and transparent.

Members were pleased that there had been a reduction in terms of the average cost per void. A Member expressed the view that the failure to fully utilise the budget for the Capital Works Programme needed addressing.

In response to questions, officers advised that:

- flyers were sent to tenants together with information regarding the proposed rent increase;
- a change in regulations meant more extensive levels of assessment were required when surveying properties for asbestos. The void maintenance turnaround time was currently 9.25 days against the target set with Kier of 10 days;
- re-charging out going tenants to mitigate overspend in relation to void properties would be considered;
- maximising measures of promoting fuel efficiency were being examined. Lessons were being learned from the energy efficiency pilot being conducted on a property with the borough;
- the target for completing necessary work and re-letting void properties was twenty five days;
- The cross wall construction of the Francis Road estate was not traditional. As a result, the necessary maintenance work was more involved than solely replacing windows. It was hoped work could conclude by December 2011, subject to a costing exercise and the availability of funds. Officers would investigate all options fully, including the cost of demolishing the estate to ascertain whether this would prove to be a more financially viable option.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the report be noted;
- (2) the cost of demolishing the Francis Road Estate be investigated to draw comparisons between the cost of the construction currently being proposed.

37. INFORMATION REPORT - Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Forecast Outturn 2010-11

An officer introduced a report which provided a projected outturn for the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the financial year 2010/11 at the close of December 2010.

The officer advised that:

- at 1 April 2010 there were 5,058 dwellings and 1,170 leaseholders;
- there were reserves of £4.784 million. This equated to approximately £945 per dwelling;

- the average weekly rent was £86.60 and the average weekly service charge was £4.77, totalling £91.37 per week;
- budgeted spend was greater than income by £0.677 million;
- revenue balances were anticipated to reduce from £4.784 million to £3.503 million at the end of the 2010/11 financial year.

In response to questions, officers advised that:

- the overall figures for Ground Maintenance were being calculated and would be reported to a future meeting of the Forum;
- work was being conducted to maximise the success of the programme within a set timeframe. The 2010/11 programme differed to that of the previous year in that officers had taken the conscious decision to stop aspects of work rather than targets not being met;
- the extent of external decorations conducted would be reviewed to ascertain what progress had been made;
- with the proposed rent increase, the HRA balances were expected to increase with in line with previous years;
- comparisons with neighbouring boroughs and Registered Social Landlords (RSL) would be made to increase value for money and reduce overheads;
- a breakdown be provided to the Chairman of the 'other Housing related services' totalling approximately £0.19p of each £1.00 received from rents;

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the report be noted;
- (2) the extent of external decorations be reviewed;
- (3) comparisons be drawn from neighbouring boroughs and RSL in order to increase value for money and reduce overheads.

38. INFORMATION REPORT - Results of the Residents Satisfaction Survey and Housing Staff Satisfaction Survey 2010

An officer introduced a report which provided an overview of the results from the 2010 Residents' Satisfaction Survey and the Housing Staff Satisfaction Survey.

The officer advised that:

- 1,500 questionnaires had been mailed out to all sheltered tenants and leaseholders in the borough;

- the response rates on the surveys was positive and the level of satisfaction was good overall in comparison to figures from 2008.

TRA representatives congratulated housing officers on their work conducted over the last year. This was reflected in a recent article in a local newspaper.

In response to questions, officers advised that suggestions regarding future satisfaction surveys would be taken on board.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

39. INFORMATION REPORT - Feedback from other Council led Resident Involvement Activities

An officer introduced a report which provided feedback on a range of service wide resident involvement activities and the outcomes of resident involvement.

The officer advised that:

- the main area for improvement in relation to Resident Involvement was to demonstrate outcomes. A table outlining the actions that had been implemented now included a comments column for residents and TLCF Members to feed into;
- the Anti-Social Behavioural Group and the Income Management Focus Group had merged and were currently holding discussions on setting service standards.

In response to questions, officers advised that:

- the Asset Management Group membership consisted of TRA representatives, employees of the Kier Group and officers from the Asset Management Team. The Chairman would be informed of future meeting dates;
- work around estate inspections was being progressed.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

40. Suggestions for agenda items for next meeting

RESOLVED: To note that no items were suggested.

41. Any Other Urgent Business

Replacement Windows at Bucknell House:

A Leaseholder Support Group representative advised that a proposed solution to the issue surrounding replacement windows at a particular property in Bucknell House had not been fulfilled. The Divisional Director of Housing Services advised that she would personally address this issue and seek the most suitable resolution for all parties.

RESOLVED: That the item be noted.

42. Date of Next Meeting

RESOLVED: To note that the Forum was next due to meet on 19 July 2011.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.35 pm, closed at 10.15 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR BOB CURRIE
Chairman