

REPORT FOR: **CABINET**

Date of Meeting:	8 September 2011
Subject:	Residents' Engagement Strategy and Review of the Tenants and Leaseholder Consultative Forum
Key Decision:	Yes
Responsible Officer:	Lynne Pennington, Divisional Director of Housing
Portfolio Holder:	Cllr Bob Currie, Portfolio Holder for Housing
Exempt:	No
Decision subject to Call-in:	Yes
Enclosures:	Appendix 1 New Terms of Reference Appendix 2 Existing Terms of Reference Appendix 3 Proposed changes to Executive Procedure Rules

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report sets out the plans to improve resident engagement in housing services, including a proposal to amend the existing Tenant & Leaseholders Consultative Forum ("TLCF") to meet increased expectations of tenants, leaseholders and other residents.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is requested to:

1. Endorse the proposed work on resident engagement set out in this report;
2. Agree the amended terms of reference and new name for TLCF (Appendix 1) and report to full Council.
3. Recommend to full Council changes to the Executive Procedure Rules set out in Appendix 3 to take account of the new terms of reference for TLCF.

Reason: To enable TLCF to meet the increased expectations of tenants, leaseholders and other residents to be involved in all housing issues and to ensure that the Council involves and empowers residents to influence housing decisions that impact on them.

1. Introduction

1.1 This year's Priority Action is to improve tenant engagement in the decisions that influence their lives and specifically to increase the number of volunteers actively engaged in developing the housing service by 100.

1.2 The TLCF is a significant contributor to the Council's ambition to unite and involve communities. However, the forum needs to be more accessible and representative and increase the breadth of opportunity for meaningful resident engagement. One of the Council's corporate priorities is to have united and involved communities and for the Council to listen and lead. The work of the TLCF, Harrow Federation of Tenant and Resident Associations (HFTRA) and individual tenant and resident associations ("TRAs") are key to meeting this priority in relation to housing services.

1.3 The TLCF is a consultative forum that feeds into Cabinet and the Portfolio Holder which is where decisions are made. The proposals in this report do not change the nature of the decision making process; they are designed to make the existing consultative forum more accessible and hopefully more attractive to local people to engage with.

2. Options considered

2.1 The option of keeping TLCF as is and using the flexibilities already available to it was considered but thought it would still leave TLCF too restricted to deliver the genuine engagement that it seeks to achieve.

2.2 The Council could continue to engage with residents via the existing groups under the current terms of reference, however the relationship between those groups has changed as a result of changing roles. The existing constitutions of HFTRA and TRAs and communication channels between the groups do not contribute to the expectations of the housing regulator or the new Localism agenda.

3. Background to proposals for TLCF

3.1. What is good about TLCF?

- TLCF provides a regular and structured forum for tenants and leaseholders to discuss issues relating to council housing and council estates.
- There is consistent attendance and participants value the opportunity to discuss important housing matters
- It is part of the Council's overall decision making process and as such provides a platform for the voices of tenants and leaseholders to be heard.
- It provides a regular opportunity for elected members and tenants and leaseholders to meet.
- It is one of the vehicles used to deliver the Council's desire to involve residents
- There is always plenty to discuss and the vast majority of meetings are informative and good humoured

3.2. What has TLCF achieved?

- TLCF has helped to develop trust between the Council, tenants and leaseholders
- It has provided an additional opportunity for freeholders and other residents (e.g. RSL tenants) to have their voices heard
- It has provided a forum to debate housing finance issues (e.g. rents and HRA reform); housing investment (e.g. capital programme) and housing policy (e.g. coalition consultation papers regarding housing changes) issues before formal decisions are then taken to Cabinet.
- It has provided a platform for tenants and leaseholders to challenge the Council (e.g. electricity and other leaseholder charges)
- It has provided an opportunity to celebrate what has gone well (e.g. Housing Ambition Plan and increased levels of tenant, leaseholder and staff satisfaction).

3.3. What could have gone better?

- Communication between TLCF and individual TRAs could have been better
- Communication between TRAs and individual tenants and leaseholders in respect of TLCF business could have gone better
- Occasionally meetings have been politically dominated despite best efforts
- There are very few new faces around the table

- It can be intimidating for newcomers
- There are always packed agendas and some meetings have been known to finish after 11 p.m.
- There is often insufficient time to debate thoroughly
- There is minimal time for creative thinking and new ideas
- There is insufficient representation from tenants
- The agendas are officer dominated

3.4. Why is it no longer fit for purpose?

- Tenants, leaseholders and other residents have an expectation that they will be involved in decisions affecting their lives and that they should have a role in scrutinising service performance
- The housing agenda has become more complicated and there are serious issues facing social housing that all residents want and need to be involved in
- The housing service is more open and transparent than it has ever been. This provides lots more opportunities for meaningful involvement
- The confidence of tenants, leaseholders and other residents has increased and they demand more involvement and information
- The communication gap between TLCF and TRAs is too big
- HFTRA's role as an umbrella group has grown and the relationship between TLCF and the TRAs needed to be reviewed
- There is too much business to do at TLCF and there should be a clearer mechanism for forming a sub group
- Special meetings are allowed but we know now that we need additional meetings on a regular basis to get through the business year on year.
- Late meetings curtail debate
- Tenants, leaseholders and other residents may want to present their own reports and ideas for discussion and this should be allowed subject to approval of the Chair of TLCF

3.5. What needs to change?

- The frequency of meetings needs to increase
- The duration of meetings needs to decrease
- A forward plan for the year needs to be agreed so that meetings can be better planned and residents can choose the ones they are most interested in
- Sub groups need to be formalised to enable residents to discuss more detailed and complex issues before discussion at TLCF so that they can help other residents better understand the issues
- TLCF needs to produce briefing notes after each meeting to inform TRAs
- Voting and quorum issues need to be agreed in relation to issues only affecting leaseholders or only affecting tenants eg. Rent increases
- Timing of meetings need to vary between day and evening in order to give more people the opportunity to attend

3.6. The Proposal

- Officers produce a forward plan for TLCF (based on the Housing Services operational plan HAP)
- Frequency of meeting increase from 4 to 6 and will be scheduled bi-monthly
- Alternate times between 10a.m. and 12 noon and 7p.m. to 9 p.m. and aim for two hour meetings
- As part of the forward plan identify the issues that will need sub group/working group arrangements (e.g. VFM, complaints, Asset Management etc)
- Resident Involvement Officers attend TLCF and produce post TLCF briefing notes for TRAs to be included in TRA newsletters
- Rename TLCF to reflect the fact that residents on housing estates are now represented on it. The suggested new name is Tenant, Leaseholder and Resident Consultative Forum (“TLRCF”) or alternatively Cabinet could agree to a resident competition to come up with the new name for TLCF.
- Launch a campaign to increase tenant attendance
- Advertise agendas as opportunities for tenant development as part of the tenant training programme
- Identify the issues in the forward plan that residents could lead on and help them to report these issues themselves e.g. feedback from mystery shopping.
- Clarify issues that only tenants and/or leaseholders can vote on

3.7. Associated actions necessary to make the new Proposal work

- Democratic services need to be able to service additional meetings (in the short term we have agreed to trial the new arrangements and then take stock of the resource requirement)
- HFTRA and resident involvement officers will need to agree how communication with TRAs can be improved
- Housing needs to produce a draft forward plan in accordance with HAP2
- The constitutional working group needs to consider the new terms of reference
- An operational flowchart needs to be designed to show the relationship between the Housing Policy Task Group, TLCF, HFTRA, TRAs and Housing officers
- The review of HFTRA and TRAs constitutions need to conclude and a compatibility check undertaken to ensure compatibility with the new TLCF terms of reference.

3.8. What will the new arrangements achieve

- More involvement
- Better communication
- Better use of time
- More opportunities and options for engagement
- More tenant engagement
- Better planning

- More structured agendas

4. Background to continuing resident engagement work

4.1 The Tenant Services Authority (“TSA”) are the current regulators for social housing. One of their standards for social housing providers relates to tenant involvement and empowerment. The standard requires the following:

- offering all tenants a wide range of opportunities to be involved in the management of their housing, including the ability to influence strategic priorities, the formulation of housing-related policies and the delivery of housing-related services;
- consulting with their tenants and acting reasonably in providing them with opportunities to agree local offers for service delivery;
- providing tenants with a range of opportunities to influence how providers meet all the TSA's standards and to scrutinise performance against all standards and in the development of the annual report;
- providing support to tenants to build their capacity to be more effectively involved.

4.2 Whilst the TSA is unlikely to continue to regulate social housing providers in the future, the requirements for resident engagement are likely to continue. In particular, the Localism Bill proposes some fundamental changes to social housing provision, including housing finance, housing mobility and tenure reform. Regulation of social housing providers is likely to move to the Homes & Communities Agency.

5. Implications of the Recommendations

5.1 The implications of the recommendations are that TLCF will be better placed to support the wider piece of work on resident engagement in the future.

5.2 An additional piece of work is required to ensure that the new TLCF arrangements are sustainable in the long term and that there is a clear relationship between TLCF, HFTRA and TRAs. This includes potential changes to the constitutions to HFTRA and TRAs. A brief for this piece of work has been agreed with HFTRA and work will take place over the next three months. The main aim of this work is to ensure that, to the best of our ability, HFTRA, TLCF and the TRAs all grow and develop at a compatible rate and in a way that is properly supported by housing officers. If this leads to changes in the roles and responsibilities of staff, there will clearly need to be proper consultation and liaison with the staff and the unions, but at this stage, the impact is considered to be minimal.

6. Legal Implications

6.1 Cabinet is able to agree changes to the terms of reference for an advisory panel. This is normally undertaken at its first meeting after Annual Council. The changes should be reported to full Council. The proposed changes also require an amendment to the Executive Procedure Rules at Part 4D of the Constitution. The changes include the ability to have co-opted full voting

members and the required quorum for meetings and decisions only involving tenants or leaseholders. Full Council approval is required for this change.

7 Financial Implications

7.1 Three quotes will be sought for the piece of work described at paragraph 5.2 which is estimated to cost in the region of £15k for 2011-12 only. These costs will be funded from existing resources, therefore no additional budget is funding is required.

8. Performance Issues

8.1 The proposals set out in the report will contribute to the achievement of this year's Priority Action, the requirements of the TSA and the proposed Localism agenda. This work should assist the department to meet and exceed its targets and build a stronger base of opportunities for future engagement.

9. Environmental Impact

9.1 The proposals will have little environmental Impact, however there will be opportunities through the engagement process and in particular through discussions around various aspects of housing related environmental issues, like housing development and investment, affordable warmth and the importance of recycling to help raise awareness.

10. Risk Management Implications

10.1 As this is an extension of current policy and practice rather than anything new, the existing risk management practices will still apply.

11. Equalities implications

11.1 An initial EQIA was undertaken. This indicated that the existing TLCF had more older people on it and it is hoped that the new proposals will encourage a more representative groups of residents. Changing the times of the meetings will make the TLCF more accessible.

11.2 The ongoing work on resident engagement will require a further EQIA to ensure the Council engages with all its tenants and leaseholders and that attendance and representation on bodies influencing housing policy reflect the make up of its tenants, leaseholders and residents.

12. Corporate Priorities

12.1 Keeping neighbourhoods clean, green and safe.

By engaging people and helping to build a sense of community and pride in local neighbourhoods

12.2 United and involved communities: A Council that listens and leads.

As set out in the introduction the whole basis of these proposals are to engage more people, listen to them, support them to challenge us and provides positive opportunities for local people to influence the services that matters to local people.

12.3 Supporting and protecting people who are most in need.

Whilst not directly contributing to this, increasing local engagement can lead to stronger communities and support for these less able within those communities.

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name: Milan Joshi	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Chief Financial Officer
Date: 10 August 2011		
Name: Sarah Wilson	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Monitoring Officer
Date: 16 August 2011		

Section 4 – Performance Officer Clearance

Name: Martin Randall	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Divisional Director Partnership, Development and Performance
Date: 10 August 2011		

Section 5 – Environmental Impact Officer Clearance

Name: John Edwards	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Divisional Director (Environmental Services)
Date: 5 August 2011		

Section 6 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact:

Maggie Challoner
Resident Services Manager
Tel: 020 8424 1473

Background Papers: New TRA constitution (draft),
New HFTRA constitution (draft) plus previous TLCF reports

**Call-In Waived by the
Chairman of Overview
and Scrutiny
Committee**

NOT APPLICABLE*

[Call-in applies]