

TENANTS', LEASEHOLDERS' AND RESIDENTS' CONSULTATIVE FORUM MINUTES

11 JANUARY 2012

Chairman: * Councillor Bob Currie

Councillors: * Mrs Camilla Bath * Mano Dharmarajah
* Kam Chana

In attendance: * Kairul Marikar Minute 83, 84 and 85
(Councillors)

* Denotes Member present

Minute's Silence

The Forum observed a minutes silence in the memory of Mrs Lana Wilson of the Churchill Place Tenants and Residents Association, who passed away recently.

Representatives from the following Associations were in attendance:

Antoney's Close Tenants' and Residents' Association
Eastcote Lane Tenants' and Residents' Association
Elmgrove Tenants' and Residents' Association
Glebe Estate Tenants' and Residents' Association
Harrow Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations
Harrow Weald Tenants' and Residents' Association
Kenmore Park Tenants' and Residents' Association
Leaseholder Support Group
Weald Village Tenants' and Residents' Association
Woodlands Community Association

79. Attendance by Reserve Members

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

80. Declarations of Interest

Agenda Item 7: INFORMATION REPORT - Asset Management Update;
Agenda Item 8: INFORMATION REPORT - Designation of Vacant One Bed Flats for Over 50s;
Agenda Item 9: INFORMATION REPORT - Resident Services Manager's Report;
Agenda Item 10: INFORMATION REPORT - Feedback from other Council led Resident Involvement Activities;
Agenda Item 11: INFORMATION REPORT - Housing Changes Review

Councillor Bob Currie and Councillor Mano Dharmarajah declared personal interests on the above items in that they both attended monthly meetings of the Eastcote Lane Tenants' and Residents' Associations. They would remain in the room whilst the matters were considered and voted upon.

Councillor Kairul Marikar declared a personal interest on the above items in that she was a tenant living in the borough. She would remain in the room whilst the matters were considered and voted upon.

81. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 8 November 2011 be taken as read and signed as a correct record subject to representatives of Kenmore Park Tenants' and Residents' Association being marked as present.

82. Public Questions, Petitions and Deputations

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

RESOLVED ITEMS

83. INFORMATION REPORT - Asset Management Update

An officer introduced a report which updated the Forum on progress made in the Asset Management Team, to review current performance and consider a proposed Repairs Charter. The officer advised that:

- procurement for the new repairs and maintenance service was progressing, with 12 contractors being invited to tender. The deadline for all contractors to submit tenders was 27 January 2012;
- assessments for the recruitment of approximately eight new roles within the Asset Management Team commenced on 5 January 2012. The increase in workforce would assist with implementation of the smaller contracts for the repairs and maintenance service;

- a draft Repairs Charter had been compiled. Representatives of the Tenant and Resident Associations were asked to consider the draft Charter and feed back their views to the Asset Management Team.

In response to questions by Members and Tenant and Resident Association representatives, officers advised that:

- approximately 200 void properties had been recorded since 1 April 2011. The Policy on how to address void properties was agreed in November 2011;
- tenancy agreements included provision to inform tenants of their obligations under the agreement. Housing and Asset Management Teams would continue to work closer together to share information and help tackle issues at an earlier stage. Problems highlighted under tenancy audits were also being identified sooner. The implementation of a Re-Charge Policy would also grant officers a greater tool in helping to address tenants who vacate their property. Improvements were also being made in obtaining rent arrears;
- where four weeks notice was provided by the tenant of their intention to leave, a visit to the property would be made officers to highlight areas that needed addressing prior to their departure;
- the possibility of including a flow-diagram to help illustrate typical repair processes would be considered once the new repairs and maintenance contractors had been appointed;
- the Repairs Charter would take account of sectors of the community who had mobility needs or learning difficulties, for example, to ascertain vulnerable residents. The Charter would be amended to take account of specific fittings such as tube lighting which vulnerable residents were finding problematic. The maintenance of battery operated smoke alarms were the responsibility of the occupier, the Council would maintain hard-wired smoke alarms. The Charter would be compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act;
- it was hoped that an independent satisfaction survey would be conducted once the repairs and maintenance contractors were in place. Individual surveys would not be circulated due to the high cost this would incur;
- a question raised on behalf of a TRA representative who was unable to attend would be responded to outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

84. INFORMATION REPORT - Designation of Vacant One Bed Flats for Over 50s

An officer introduced a report which sought the Forum's view on the proposal that, in the forthcoming new housing allocation scheme, the Council should cease the practice of designating one bedroom flats in some Council blocks solely for people aged over 50. Members of the Forum responded that:

- a flexible model which promoted a mixture of residents would seem most fair, so as not to segregate certain sectors of the community;
- properties could be allocated based upon strict conditions, citing eviction upon the inhabitant's first offence;
- the difference in lifestyles could lead to problems.

The officer reminded the Forum of the Council's responsibility to be fair to those who required social housing. It was not the responsibility of the community to vet the suitability of residents under the proviso of eviction if unruly. The area of ex-service personnel and the homeless would be investigated.

Designating accommodation solely for the elderly put added pressure on the remaining blocks, as it limited the properties where those under 50 could be accommodated.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

85. INFORMATION REPORT - Resident Services Manager's Report

An officer introduced a report which sets out a range of information items for the Forum to consider. It also provided feedback following discussions and questions raised at previous meetings. The officer advised that:

- 114 residents had opted for a payment plan, which enabled them to pay bills over a longer period of time;
- work was continuing to improve the annual service charging system, in particular, the information entered relating to grounds maintenance;
- more was being done to gain access to homes to tackle Social Housing Fraud. Tenancy audits and the increased visibility of officers were welcomed by tenants;
- following the initial review of resident involvement conducted by Housing Quality Network Ltd, an outcome of developing tenant scrutiny had been identified. A draft action plan on how to take this forward would be presented to a future meeting of the Forum.

In response to questions, officers advised that:

- apprentice caretakers were now working on site. Higher training would commence in February 2012. Ways of expanding the apprentice scheme were being explored;
- proposals and timescales on parking schemes would be fed back to estates once colleagues in parking enforcement had conducted the necessary site surveys. A verbal update would be provided to a future meeting of the Harrow Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Association (HFTRA);
- work was ongoing to eradicate mistakes and improve the accuracy for the billing of leaseholder service charges;
- the possibility of circulating the results of the review of resident involvement conducted by Housing Quality Network to Members of the Forum would be investigated;
- the eight houses found to have been sub-let had now been retrieved by the Council, with the responsible tenants relinquishing control prior to the matter reaching court.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

86. INFORMATION REPORT - Feedback from Other Council Led Resident Involvement Activities

The Forum received a report which provided feedback on a wide range of Council led resident involvement activities. The officer advised that:

- the Value for Money Group met in January 2012 and undertook benchmarking exercises to examine how service charges were calculated across other boroughs;
- it was proposed to hold focus groups to gauge levels of satisfaction. In depth telephone interviews were being considered as the best manner in which to conduct these satisfaction surveys;
- progress reports and issues raised went through the Council's Improvement Board. These then proceeded to Challenge Panels for further scrutiny.

In response to a question, the officer advised that:

- nominations for those volunteering for Scrutiny Panels had been noted. Once all information had been considered, residents would be notified of the Panel's composition.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

87. INFORMATION REPORT - Housing Changes Review

An officer introduced a report which provided the Forum with an update on the outcome of the Housing Changes consultation. The officer advised that:

- the Housing policy changes introduced by Government became law in November 2011;
- 66 families were in bed and breakfast accommodation whilst attempting to find housing;
- there was still a need for affordable housing in Harrow;
- private housing options were being considered to maximise the potential for accommodation options;
- all residents were encouraged to participate in helping to shape the Housing policy for Harrow.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

88. Housing Reform and Housing Revenue Account Budget Setting 2012-13 to 2016-17

RESOLVED: That the item be deferred to the Special Meeting on 30 January 2012.

89. Rent Strategy

RESOLVED: That the item be deferred to the Special Meeting on 30 January 2012.

90. Any Other Urgent Business

In accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, the following items were admitted late to the meeting. Members were requested to consider these items as a matter of urgency in the interests of security, the prevention of nuisance and financial concern.

Cowan Avenue Car Park Gate:

Residents belonging to the Leaseholders' Support Group (LSG) expressed concern over the Council's intention to remove the car park gate at the Cowan Avenue estate. The residents advised that they had previously been assured that the gate would not be removed. Officers undertook to investigate the matter.

Charges for Asbestos Survey:

LSG representatives sought clarification on the fees of between £800 and £1,200 charged for asbestos surveys. Officers advised that these charges

included overheads, such as site fees, of the contractor responsible for the work. Such fees would not be included in future contracts from July 2012.

RESOLVED: That the items be noted.

91. Date of Next Meeting

RESOLVED: To note that a Special Meeting of the Forum would take place on Monday 30 January 2012 at 2.00 pm.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.33 pm, closed at 10.35 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR BOB CURRIE
Chairman