

CABINET

10 MAY 2011

REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING

Title: Housing Resident Involvement and Empowerment	For Decision
<p>Summary:</p> <p>The Tenant Services Authority (TSA) introduced a new regulatory framework which came into effect on 1 April 2010. The framework includes six separate standards of which local authorities must comply with five in order to remain a registered provider of Social Housing. The Tenant Involvement & Empowerment Standard is one of these.¹ Current arrangements fall short of meeting this requirement primarily because there is no borough mechanism in place for tenants to exercise influence over their landlord's strategic priorities.</p> <p>The standards also specify that registered providers must establish locally consulted standards in those service areas. Following consultation we committed to our intention to offer a new local standard for tenant and resident involvement. This was reported to the TSA and also published in our Annual Report to Tenants 2010.</p> <p>The proposed involvement framework represents the delivery of this new local standard and meets the TSA overall requirements. It has been widely consulted on and agreed with tenants.</p> <p>There are two key aspects of the proposed new approach:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Localised activity which is led by the community but supported by Council officers (meeting TSA requirement 2.1a). These activities would follow natural neighbourhoods focussing on the needs of the area. This approach is being refined and tested via the Housing and Neighbourhood Locality pilots the outcomes of which will be reported to Cabinet in summer 2011.2. Two Housing Forums one focussing on the Barking area and the other on Dagenham will be established. These forums would focus on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan and Housing Asset Management strategy. They would also offer the opportunity for residents to discuss the housing related issues that matter most to them in their part of the borough, such as anti-social behaviour, and will include a surgery with relevant officer attendance for dealing with casework issues. The Forums will provide a link to the work of other local initiatives such as Streetbase, Family First and Safer Neighbourhood Panels. Nominated members of the two Forums would come together periodically to discuss Borough-wide policies. They would also initiate specific 'working parties' on identified service themes that have been highlighted as in need of improvement. <p>The comments and views from the forums will feed . via the Cabinet Member for Housing to Cabinet. in the form of an annual report</p>	

¹ Regulatory framework for Social Housing in England from April 2010- Tenant Involvement & Empowerment Standard - Specific Requirements – 2.1

It is now widely recognised that strong communities with active participants demonstrate lower levels of crime through informal social monitoring and control². The new housing involvement framework works closely with Safer Neighbourhood teams at a local level. The new framework is designed to promote new and improved opportunities for our housing residents to participate in activities that generate pride and ownership for the area where they live.

It is intended that the proposed arrangements will enhance real localism and should contribute to the development of community capacity and empowerment at a time when, for Housing, a new era is about to unfold in terms of Council housing self financing and potential emergence of vehicles for the local ownership of new social, affordable and other housing tenures.

Wards Affected: All

Recommendation(s)

The Cabinet is recommended to:

- (i) Agree to the implementation of the new Housing Resident Involvement and Empowerment model as detailed in this report;
- (ii) Note that the Assembly will be asked to approve the appropriate changes to the Council Constitution.

Reason(s)

To assist the Council in achieving its Community Priority “Fair and Respectful” and enhance community involvement in the way that the Council delivers its housing services. Supporting the corporate themes of ‘Better Together’: ‘people who get involved - and feel included - in the decisions that affect them and ‘Better Home’: ‘Improved estates and homes that people choose to live in’.

Comments of the Chief Financial Officer

The savings identified in the report below include the deletion of a vacant CHP Support Officer post. This saving has already been taken account of in the HRA 2011/12 budget setting report agreed by Cabinet on 15 February 2011.

If the CHP Support Officer post is therefore excluded from the figures below there will actually be an incremental cost to the HRA of £1,440 to implement this proposal.

Comments of the Solicitor to the Council

The report sets out improved arrangements for community consultation and involvement of the community in the light of the localism agenda and Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 (Registration of Local Authorities) Order 2010 for the reasons given in the report. The council's constitution will need amending to reflect the new arrangements.

² The benefits of community engagement, The Home Office

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1. Background

- 1.1 New regulations came into force in April 2010³ putting increased emphasis on providing all tenants with the opportunity to influence the way in which their homes are managed. All registered social housing providers must have a borough-wide arrangement that facilitates tenants influence over strategic priorities. These new regulations also require landlords to work with tenants to develop a set of locally agreed standards, called 'local offers'. Tenants have agreed that one of the 'local offers' in this borough would be the revision of tenant involvement mechanisms and this intention has been reported to the TSA and published in our 2010 Annual Report.
- 1.2 The 2009 Status Survey carried out by the Council showed that the majority of tenants thought we were doing a good job of keeping them informed (73%). However, tenants were less satisfied that we take their views into account (62%).
- 1.3 The current involvement framework centres around the Community Housing Partnerships (CHPs). Analysis of recent attendance shows that the majority of attendees (72%) are from the over 60 age group. It also shows that Councillors and officers generally out number residents attending. As a consequence the majority of our involvement resources are directed at activity which does not appear to be relevant to a large proportion of the housing resident community nor provide a method of influence over the strategic issues. The proposals in this report seek to address this by putting in place structures that residents can choose to engage in at different levels and in different ways.

2. Review of Current Arrangements

- 2.1 The tenants and residents who are currently working with the Council under the existing framework, either as part of CHPs, Tenant and Resident Associations or in focus groups, were invited to attend workshops in the summer of 2010. At these workshops groups discussed the positives and negatives of the current activities and put forward priorities for future arrangements.
- 2.2 The key themes emerging from these workshops were:
- A more centralised approach to resident/tenant groups is needed, to make it easier to monitor the flow of issues.
 - Some of the current groups no longer have a clear role

³ Statutory Instrument 2010 No 844 - Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 (Registration of Local Authorities) Order 2010

- There needs to be a way of combining local issues with the wider issues affecting the whole of the borough
- Many would like to be involved in more specific working groups on issues such as the selection of contractors, antisocial behaviour, repairs and rent setting
- The idea of estate based groups was popular with many expressing a wish to get more involved in issues such as local estate inspections
- It was agreed that there needed to be a more consistent two way flow of information between resident groups and the council.
- Feedback and communication in general needs improving
- Front line officers needed to be involved in the meetings and activities as they were best placed to provide feedback on customer issues and concerns.
- There should be other ways to be involved – not just meetings, especially for young people
- More support needed for growth of local Tenant and Resident Associations
- Any changes need to be cost effective, achieve specific outcomes and be well publicised.

3. Proposal for New Framework

- 3.1 The proposed framework has been considered alongside the development of the new corporate Community Engagement and Empowerment Strategy for 2011-13. It is designed to deepen our relationship with the public and empower our local communities.
- 3.2 Housing is a key local priority and the new structure seeks to ensure that tenants are given the opportunity to not only shape and influence their services, but to be involved at a local level. The framework offers a range of activities from researching people's views to encouraging and supporting active participation in decision making. Connections between housing services and other related services will be facilitated, helping to deliver a joined-up approach for residents.

4. Housing Forums - Terms of Reference

- 4.1 It is proposed that the six CHPs are replaced with two Housing Forums. These would influence:-
- Development of the Council's Housing Strategy,
 - Housing Allocations Policy review,
 - Housing policies and service levels
 - Development and monitoring of the HRA Business Plan
 - Housing Asset Management Strategy (HAMS)
- 4.2 The recommendations of the Forums will be considered as part of the delivery of the HRA Business Plan and Housing Strategy.
- 4.3 The proposal is that the Forums would be formally constituted and be shaped to mirror the boards of independent housing organisations and thus provide a community vehicle to progress the housing agenda.
- 4.4 Best practice dictates that the forums should have a tenant majority, each comprising the following core members:

- 2 Tenant representatives via the Tenants Federation
 - 1 Leaseholder via the Leasehold Forum
 - 7 Active tenant representatives of local organisations not necessarily members of the Tenant Federation
- plus one Councillor from each Ward within the Forum area (these appointments will be determined by Assembly)

- 4.5 Each of the two Housing Forums would meet three times a year and the meetings would be open to members of the public, offering the opportunity for all residents and all Councillors to discuss the housing related issues that matter most to them in their part of the Borough.
- 4.6 The Forums would include a one hour surgery with relevant officer attendance for dealing with casework issues and the agendas would be informed by the local activity in the corresponding areas. The Forums would also provide a link to the work of other local initiatives such as Streetbase, Family First and Safer Neighbourhood Panels.
- 4.7 The core members of the two forums would also come together annually to consider borough-wide housing policies / strategies. The comments and views from the forums will feed via the Cabinet Member for Housing to Cabinet in the form of an annual report.
- 4.8 The new framework also supports the implementation of a number of specific focussed task and finish groups to work on identified service themes in line with the areas that our housing residents decide need improvement. For example these could be Housing repairs, anti-social behaviour or other issues of concern to residents. The findings of these service improvement groups would be reported to the Housing Forums. These time limited groups would provide an opportunity to work with interested residents identified in the other localised activity. Meetings to take place over agreed short periods as required for the complexity of the task.

5. Local level Activity

- 5.1 Localised activity will be led by the community but supported by Council officers (meeting TSA requirement 2.1a). Learning has told us that meetings focussing on a particular focussed area or issue achieve a better level of involvement that a one size fits all approach. These activities would follow natural neighbourhoods and focus on the needs of the area. This approach is being refined and tested via the Housing and Neighbourhood Locality pilots and the outcomes will be reported to Cabinet in summer 2011.
- 5.2 There would be a two way reporting process to the Housing Forums taking the form of updates to and from Tenant and Resident Associations, estate inspections and other local organised activities.
- 5.3 Overall it is intended that these proposed arrangements will help deliver real localism and should expand the capacity of local people to take on a more active role in housing related issues. This is of particular importance as we achieve more certainty over the longer term future of council housing in the Borough as a result of

the self financing arrangements being introduced in April 2012 (on passage of the Localism Bill).

6. Financial Issues

- 6.1 The financial implications associated with the proposals in this report will result in an incremental cost to the Housing Revenue Account of £1440. A CHP support officer post (S01) held vacant has been deleted and implications have been included in the Housing Revenue Account estimates agreed by Cabinet on 15 February 2011.
- 6.2 Members are also asked to note that the current rules for reimbursement for resident board member attendance at CHP meetings will not apply to the new framework. However reimbursement of actual expenses related to attending the new Housing Forums will be made to core resident members in attendance.

7. Legal Issues

- 7.1 The Council Constitution includes reference to the current CHP status, role, structure and meeting arrangements.
- 7.2 The proposals within this report will necessitate a change to the Constitution to reflect the arrangements that will apply for the new Housing Forums.

8. Other Implications

8.1 Risk Management

A review of the new framework will take place between 6 – 12 months from implementation. The new arrangements will be monitored with regard to attendance numbers, profile, cost and impact to ensure that the expected outcomes are achieved. The monitoring will be reviewed and published in Tenants and Leaseholders Annual Report. In any areas where the expected impact is not achieved then solutions would be developed with a resident panel.

8.2 Contractual Issues

Partners would be required to report on their service delivery to the Housing Forums and local activity groups.

8.3 Staffing Issues

A long standing vacancy for a CHP officer post has been deleted (see para 6.1). Other vacant posts in the team have been filled to fully support for the new framework.

8.4 Customer Impact

The current arrangements are not attracting the anticipated tenant involvement. The TSA framework introduced last year moves us towards self regulation increasing accountability to tenants and residents in terms of the management of their homes and plans for new homes in the future. It is intended that the proposed arrangements will enhance real localism and should contribute to the development

of community capacity at a time when, for Housing, a new era is about to unfold in terms of Council housing self financing.

To work effectively together with residents for the long term benefit of current and future tenants, we must ensure we are involving those with the right skills, diversity and experience. The new framework and the support behind it provide the vehicle for this and will provide the opportunities for influence on more local issues as well as the borough wide strategic and policy decisions.

Tenants expressed a strong desire for increased opportunities for involvement at a local level and the proposed new framework addresses this via estate based activity groups working closely with local TRAs and building on the strength of these existing tenant led organisations. This approach is being refined as part of the housing and neighbourhood locality pilots and the outcomes will be reported to Cabinet late summer 2011.

Local opportunities will also be reinforced by targeted activity to empower residents to come forward and enhance their local areas. This will include activity in locations where no formal groups currently exist and will support the work on local initiatives for example the Family First community outreach programme to tackle worklessness, Parents Forums, and Safer Neighbourhood Panels.

Best practice in tenant involvement recognises that not everyone wants to be involved in meetings and maintaining the participation of younger housing residents presents a particular challenge. Representatives from borough equalities forums were involved in the consultation process and links will be maintained with the equality forums, including the Youth forum, to ensure there are no barriers to the involvement groups in the new framework and the overall housing agenda.

An impact assessment has been carried out on the new arrangements. This did not identify any specific negative impact, however annual reviews of attendance statistics will be undertaken to keep abreast of the outcomes.

Marketing and communications are key to the success of the new arrangements and a communications plan is prepared to ensure that all interested parties are aware of the opportunities presented.

By providing more clarity for local people about the opportunities they have to shape services and the benefits of these, the new framework supports our corporate aim to become a borough where people get involved and feel included in the decisions that affect them.

8.5 **Crime and Disorder Issues**

It is now widely recognised that strong communities with active participants demonstrate lower levels of crime through informal social monitoring and control⁴. The new housing involvement framework works closely with Safer Neighbourhood teams at a local level. The new framework is designed to promote new and improved opportunities for our housing residents to participate in activities that generate pride and ownership for the area where they live.

⁴ The benefits of community engagement, The Home Office

9. Options appraisal

9.1 The consultation workshops with residents and the subsequent presentations to Community Housing Partnership Meetings informed the final framework put forward. At the workshops a number of different options were considered.

- Continuation of current arrangements – not viable due to lack of attendance and therefore poor value for money. They were created to align with a different landlord services structure.
- Local estate based activity and single borough wide board but no split of reporting for East and West of the borough. This was eventually rejected as the majority of residents expressed a desire to keep the accountability for the housing services separate for each side of the borough
- The framework as proposed focuses on two Housing Forums with resident majority board membership. These forums would be open meetings. By having two in place, rather than one, they will offer more opportunities for involvement of a broader spectrum of residents.

Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report:

Feedback analysis from resident workshops July 2010

Feedback analysis from resident workshops January 2011

Feedback analysis from CHP meetings January 2011

Housing Quality Network briefing – Governance

Tenant Participatory Advisory Service (TPAS) best practice

Report to CHPs July 2007 – Changes to the Constitutions of the Community Housing Partnerships

The benefits of community engagement – a review of evidence for the Home Office.

London Borough of Barking and Dagenham Annual Report to Tenants 2010

Excellence in Governance – code for members and good practice guidance –

National Housing Federation