

TENANTS AND LEASEHOLDERS PANEL
Notes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 11 October 2011 in the in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon.

Present: Liz Reeves (Chair), Michael Hewlett (Vice-Chair), Marion Burchell, Mark Burrell, Janet Callingham, Peter Cooper, Bob Dean, Howard Devereux, Sylvia Fletcher, James Fraser, Margaret Jones, Jim Mansell, Peter Mason, Lawrance McDowall, David Palmer, Julian Paine, Guy Pile Grey, John Piper, Steve Pollard, Marilyn Smithies, Maureen Symes, Laurence Taylor, Bob Varney, Kim Wakely and Eric Webb

Councillors: Alison Butler, Sean Fitzsimons, Tony Harris, Michael Neal and Dudley Mead (Deputy Leader (Statutory) and Cabinet Member for Housing, Finance and Asset Management)

Observers: Dave Sutherland (Director of Housing Management Services), Sian Foley (Head of Safe & Sustainable Communities), Tim Nash, Judy Pevan (Stock Investment Manager), Chris Stock (Interim Head of Performance & Quality Assurance), Nigel Sutton (Special Project Manager), Elaine Wadsworth (Head of Housing Strategy, Commissioning & Standards)
Tenants: Riki Clarke

Note taker: Margot Rohan (Senior Members' Services Manager)

Declarations of Interest : None

1. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Jean Dunstan, Paul Phillips, Jamil Tarik, Colin Wood and Peter Brown (Director of Housing Needs & Renewal).
Cllr Sean Fitzsimons sent apologies for late arrival.

3. Notes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 4 July 2011

The Notes of the meeting held on Tuesday 4 July 2011 were agreed as a true record of the proceedings.

4. Matters Arising

None,

5. Social housing reform/self financing

Elaine Wadsworth (Head of Housing Strategy, Commissioning & Standards) gave a presentation (attached – can be viewed on the website:

www.croydon.gov.uk/democracy/dande/minutes/tlpanel/tlp11/111011a)

- Changes to:
 - Social housing regulation

- How new homes are funded?
- How social housing is allocated?
- Tenure and mobility
- Housing benefit
- People who claim housing benefit may not be able to get all their rent paid. Difficult to accurately assess the impact at this stage, but likely to lead to some homelessness and to migration of households from central London, where rents expensive, to lower cost areas such as Croydon.
- Benefit caps will relate to the market rents in the area and to household circumstances. From 2013, when universal credit is introduced, the maximum household benefit per year will be £26,000
- Government grant for building new social homes has been reduced; housing associations will in future charge higher rents (affordable rents) to meet the shortfall. The council will continue to work closely with housing associations to ensure they find Croydon an attractive borough to build in.
- Government giving local authorities more power in deciding who goes on housing register
- Social landlords will be able to rehouse people on flexible (fixed-term) tenancies in future, the aim being to increase turnover and help more people, and to use social housing to help people to get on their feet before moving into the private sector
- Housing revenue account - taking on a debt under new system so do not have to make annual payments into the national subsidy system
- Consultation:
 - Housing Strategy 28 November Stakeholder Conference
 - Shadow Health & Wellbeing Board in December
 - Allocation Policy – workshop and focus groups
 - Strategic Tenancy Policy – Tenant Conference March 2012
 - HRA & Rent-setting – TLP in February

The following issues were raised:

- New housing policy – people who make themselves deliberately homeless – will they be counted?

Elaine Wadsworth: Policy unlikely to change, so they would not be rehoused. People will be persuaded to stay where they are and wait until housing available.

- What is actual number on housing list?

Elaine Wadsworth: Nearly 10,000, after taking off the bottom band. When we carry out consultation, we will be asking whether we should be realistic and not register applicants with no chance of rehousing.

- Central Government has taken no account of increased unemployment and cuts in public service so is government being realistic in expecting landlords to cut their rents?
- What about disabled etc who cannot pay their way?

Elaine Wadsworth: There may be some protection for certain groups. Do not know full implications yet. The benefit restrictions relating to under-occupation will not affect older people. Single room rate restrictions will not apply to some vulnerable people.

- Under-occupancy – will they be offered alternative accommodation? What about those who lose their jobs and fall into benefits and then cannot afford rent for their home in which they have been a long time?

Elaine Wadsworth: Anyone over 60 will not be affected. Those in work may have benefits cut and may not be able to afford larger homes – no different from those in the private sector.

- With a sudden rush of people buying properties, there will be even less council stock.

Cllr Dudley Mead: The council now builds housing itself and, since this new programme began, we have built over 100 new homes with a further 41 completions next year. The programme includes bungalows which are used to attract under-occupiers to downsize. There has to be a balance with 9,000 people on waiting list and many overcrowded families; we have to encourage people to move from larger properties but we are not going to push people out of their homes.

6. **Balcony standards**

Nigel Sutton (Special Project Manager) summarised the report:

- To get best enjoyment out of housing without causing danger to others
- Consulted with London Fire Brigade
- Tried not to be over restrictive
- Hope to improve safety and appearance on estates
- Dos and don'ts listed in report
- If code accepted will publicise it
- Photos of appropriate and inappropriate use of balconies can be viewed here: www.croydon.gov.uk/democracy/dande/minutes/tlpanel/tlp11/111011a

The following issues were raised:

- Objection to sheets and duvets dangling over balconies
- Some balconies had glass put round and people hang washing out on coathangers with washing blowing all over the place

Nigel Sutton: Code covers this – washing must be within confines of balconies

- If chairs stacked but light, can get blown over the top in a wind – dangerous.
- What about balconies accessible from outside flats?

Nigel Sutton: Code is to address issue of private balconies where people use to store items which can cause fire hazard.

- Bird feeders – are they acceptable?

Nigel Sutton: Trying to discourage people from feeding pigeons.

- Satellite dishes – if come above level?

Nigel Sutton: This has not been covered. Should be part of tenancy agreement.

- Who will be responsible for policing it and what will happen to those who break the code?

Nigel Sutton: Tenancy officers and Tenancy Audit Team will police. If someone fails to comply and seriously breaches tenancy conditions, then the council can apply to courts for repossession.

- What about people without balconies hanging things out of windows.

Nigel Sutton: Tenancy conditions do cover areas about drying clothes. If causing a hazard or nuisance then they will be investigated.

- Loud music

Nigel Sutton: Could be added as example but covered under tenancy agreements.

- Number of flowerbeds on estates and residents dry washing on airers stuck in flowerbeds.

Nigel Sutton: That is covered in conditions of tenancy. We will investigate.

The Panel agreed code was acceptable.

7. **Update on decent homes**

Judy Pevan (Stock Investment Manager) summarised the report:

- As of 31 March Standard was met
- Continuing to deliver kitchen and bathroom programme
- Focusing this year on 1000 houses for external decorations

8. **Update on Energy and environmental sustainability strategy action plan**

Judy Pevan (Stock Investment Manager) gave a brief summary of the salient points:

- State of the Environment Report 2010 – commitment to reduce carbon emissions – report can be viewed on the website:
www.croydon.gov.uk/contents/departments/environment/pdf/sereport.pdf
- Continuing to improve overall SAP (Standard Assessment Procedure) rating
- Key achievements – funding and new initiatives

9. **Resident youth provision panel**

Sian Foley (Service Development Manager) gave a verbal report:

- 19 September meeting to look at relationship between new locality groups and resident panel structures
- Keen to get representation from local community - Cllrs, voluntary groups etc
- Discussion on how to link to current panel structure
- Proposal agreed at meeting – 2 resident panel reps and one officer attending each of 5 locality groups to share information and identify gaps
- 10 residents and 10 young people to come together as group
- Youth Provision budget £125,000
- Group will review needs and identify gaps in services and feedback
- Recommendations by Youth Provision panel for sign off by Dave Sutherland
- Further discussions at one of future Intergenerational Steering Group meetings
- 27 October meeting for Youth Provision Panel – to decide how residents and young people will be selected

- How long does it take to implement any suggestions which go through committee?

Sian Foley: Engaging young people is often a challenge. We work closely with partners in youth service. Good meeting last night – 20 young people gave their views. We want to be sure that what we are delivering is what they want on their estates. Anybody who wants to be in the Steering Group should come along. We want a balance and try to be flexible about venues and times of meetings. Transport will be provided if difficult to get to Crystal Palace Football Club.

10. **Reorganisation of landlord services – Development of tenant working group**

Dave Sutherland (Managing Director Croydon Landlord Services) gave a verbal report:

- In process of looking at divisions in housing management service – restructuring – not too radical
- Intending to work with small group of volunteers (4-6), to get input and shape structure
- 2-3 meetings

- Volunteers: Liz Reeves, Michael Hewlett, Guy Pile-Grey, David Palmer, John Piper, Eric Webb, Peter Cooper, Jim Mansell, Marion Burchell, Steve Pollard
- New ways of working – using technology – handheld computers, working in real time in people’s homes – save money and make services more accessible
- Aim to provide services in most cost effective way

11. Feedback from External Organisations

London Tenants’ Federation (LTF) – Michael Hewlett gave feedback from latest meeting:

- Report to go out with minutes in future
- Localism Bill – holding conference Sat 26 November in Euston – 5 members from each group – FREE (Peter Cooper volunteered to attend)

Mayor’s Housing Forum – Michael Hewlett:

- No meetings – next one Friday 15 Dec

ARCH – Michael Hewlett:

- Regular meetings – next meeting Deputy Ombudsman to spell out changes in procedures of complaints
- Grant Schapps (Housing Minister) felt Ombudsman dealing with too many frivolous complaints – so adding a democratic filter

TSA Residents’ Group - Michael Hewlett:

- Social Housing and Localism Bill
- Next meeting 18 November

Croydon Voluntary Sector Alliance – Guy Pile Grey:

- Last meeting concerned with aftermath of riots
- To find out causes and put in strategies to provide support to prevent repeat
- Workshops – lot of good ideas
- Croydon Xpress – very good presentation – young people doing very positive work in Croydon
- Report due out to detail findings

Croydon Congress – Marilyn Smithies:

- Next meeting 20 October

All Ages Inter-generational Conference – Sian Foley:

- Renamed ‘All Ages Event’
- Steering Group met and agreed conference start point – equal number of young people and adults
- To discuss what affects young and old
- Sessions for young people in summer
- Last night 20 young people and Marilyn Smithies attended meeting
- Comments made at conference shown to young people
- Arranging series of events for young people and adults, both separately and together – next 6 weeks
- To be advertised in Open House – flyers and posters

Resident Involvement Champions – Chris Stock:

- National network – Croydon leads London
- Meeting of officers hosted in City of London on scrutiny – good practice
- Set up network for scrutiny panels across London
- 3 people left team on secondment – Verna Francis has been replaced by Liz Collins; Ciara Goodwin, on secondment for a year has been replaced by Gemma Smith starting in couple of weeks; Sheila Thomas now in team

12. Any Other Business

- Letter regarding visitors' parking permits – following Traffic Management Cabinet Committee (TMCC) meeting, agreed changes to be made – decided Council to adopt scratch card system. Till now estates able to buy business permit for £10pa. New system £12 for a book with only 5 permits. Outrageous increase. Tenants were not consulted. Who made the decision?

Dave Sutherland: The decision was taken at TMCC. Residents' permit up to £25 but residents will only be charged £10. Will be happy to bring report to next meeting and get someone from service to explain.

Cllr Alison Butler: Anyone concerned should take issue up with local councillors.

Michael Hewlett: Use the complaints procedure.

Cllr Michael Neal: I will pass on comments to relevant councillors and get feedback for the next meeting.

- Shadow Healthwatch want feedback – pass any concerns to Guy Pile-Grey.

13. Dates of Future Meetings – all in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Croydon

- 1 February 2012
- 2 April 2012

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8.34pm