

**TENANTS' AND LEASEHOLDERS' PANEL**  
**2 October 2012**

**Lead Officer:** Executive director of adult services, health and housing

**Wards:** All

**Agenda Item:** 10

**Subject: -** Piloting Housing Question Time Sessions

---

**1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1.1 The Panel is asked to comment on a proposal to deliver two pilot question time sessions and, if these are successful, role these out across the borough in the New Year.

**2. SUMMARY**

- 2.1 This report provides details of how two pilot question time sessions focusing on housing issues which will be formatted.

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 This Panel received a report in July 2012 setting out revisions to the resident involvement framework. One of the proposals was to pilot the introduction of housing question time events run along similar lines to the successful Council Question Time events attended by the Chief Executive and leading councillors.
- 3.2 The purpose of question times is to provide an alternative method for residents to engage with the decision makers in the housing service. Such a format may prove more attractive to range of residents who fail to engage in our existing framework.
- 3.3 The details below have been developed together with the Resident Involvement Group.

**4. THE DETAIL**

**4.1 General Format**

The key element of these events is the use of a panel of senior officers and a leading councillor, to provide responses to open questions from the audience.

It is proposed that the panel would normally be made up of:

- Dave Sutherland, managing director of Croydon landlord services
- Peter Brown, director of housing needs and strategy,
- Councillor Dudley Mead or Michael Neal

and other relevant directors / senior managers would be invited to respond to particular issues where relevant.

- 4.2 Another key element is the absence of a formal agenda – the events will comprise of 2 sections: the surgery and the question time session itself. One of the events for the pilot of this initiative would take place in a central Croydon location such as the Town Hall and the other in an accessible location on one of the larger estates. Longheath Gardens has been chosen.
- 4.3 For the purpose of the pilot, one would be held in the evening and the other during the afternoon. Should it be agreed to proceed with this type of event over the longer term, it is suggested that the team would arrange 4 or 5 events per year, in different locations, as far as practicable.
- 4.4 The events would open at 2pm or 7pm with an informal, surgery type opportunity for residents wishing to report personal issues or discuss matters that would not be appropriate for an open forum. For this service, managers from the key service areas, or possibly customer services staff, would attend and sit at marked tables (with the officers name and the service area) where residents could also sit and report their issues. Tea, coffee, cold soft drinks and biscuits would be available for attendees.
- 4.5 The formal part of the event will be the question time session which would begin at 2.30pm or 7.30pm and last for 90 minutes. This part of the event would be chaired by a resident. The individual must be able to control a public meeting and ensure order in a firm but polite manner. In particular they must be prepared to keep the session on track and ask people to remain brief etc. The Chair must also make it clear that the meeting should not become politically motivated and will make reference to the rules for meetings and cover housekeeping etc. prior to opening the session.
- 4.6 Residents will be able to submit questions in advance. This will provide an opportunity for officers to research answers in advance of the evening. If time permits questions will be taken from the open audience. If panel members are unable to answer these questions responses will be sent to the questioner within 7 working days. If there is not sufficient time for all questions to be asked question cards will be available. These will be collected at the end of the event and responded to within 7 working days.

4.7. **What could be discussed in the open session?**

Since these events are run and operated by the council's housing service, it will be made clear on any publicity or promotional work that the sessions are available for people to ask questions related to all areas of that service. This would include

Housing management – tenancy, neighbourhood services, income etc.  
Needs and resources – allocations, adaptations to council homes etc.

Residents in attendance will be invited to ask questions and members of the panel will provide response(s) as they see fit.

- 4.8 Attendees will have three opportunities to put questions which they can use to suit their own needs.
- Writing a question in advance of the session – this may suit those who do not feel confident at speaking publicly.
  - Raising a direct question during the session.
  - Using a pro forma to ask questions or raise an issue in written form after the meeting.

#### 4.9 **Publicity**

A name must be agreed for these sessions. As requested by the Resident Involvement Group, unlike the Council question time events, these sessions will not be led by councilors. Tenants have stressed that they wish senior officers to make up the majority of the membership of the panel together with either the cabinet member for housing or their deputy.

- 4.10 In the circumstances we can not call the events housing question times as they could easily be confused with the general council question time events. The following suggestions have been made and the panel is asked to comment on these:
- A Question of Housing
  - Your Housing, Your Questions
  - Your Housing, Any Questions?
  - Your Housing Questions
- 4.11 It is important that the name reflects the purpose and audience for the sessions. The name and any advertising must make it very clear that this is a question time style event for Croydon council tenants and leaseholders and any other residents affected by the councils housing service or provision.
- 4.12 Two weeks before each event, officers from the resident involvement team will go to the relevant areas to distribute leaflets advertising the event and find out peoples views and issues. This will provide useful information about the current issues in the local areas which can then be passed on to give the panel members an idea of the questions they are likely to be asked.
- 4.13 It is also expected that details of the events will be promoted via the web pages, emails and free local press. Such advertising will promote both the current and next planned meetings.
- 4.14 Access to these events will not be restricted by where people live, although discussions will focus on common issues as dictated by the people who attend. Thus an event held in Shrublands will inevitably focus on issues from that area. However any resident from a Croydon estate or property is welcome to attend an event, regardless of the venue. This will enable residents who may be unavailable for the meeting in their own area to attend and raise questions at a meeting on a more convenient date.

#### **4.15 Monitoring and follow up**

Simple feedback forms will be developed and all attendees will be asked to complete forms before leaving in order to monitor satisfaction with the events.

4.16 Minutes will not be kept but an action record will be maintained for each event and this will be published on the website and sent to all those who registered for that particular event. This will simply show the question / issue, what was agreed as an outcome or answer and who is responsible for completing the action where relevant. Officers from the resident involvement team will monitor and chase actions.

4.17 Residents will be able to register for an event in advance but will be able to show up on the day if they have not registered in advance. They will be asked for their details which will be recorded in order to keep them informed and will also enable the team to build up a database of residents who are interested in attending sessions.

4.18 Information on outcomes or updates on actions / issues raised will be made available on the website and sent to those who have registered and those who are on email.

#### **4.19 Other ideas and developments**

With the shift away from formal meetings and peoples' increased interest in social networking it is possible that some questions may be submitted in advance, via Twitter or on Facebook. Such questions could be aired during The meeting and notes of the response sent back to the individual.

4.20 The resident involvement team will speak to colleagues in other areas to consider the value of making some form of 'question time' opportunity available to young people. The expectation is that the events would be run in much the same way but perhaps focus on a different set of service areas.

### **5. THE PILOTS**

5.1 It has been agreed that the first pilot will take place at Longheath Gardens on Wednesday 7 November 2012 at 7pm followed by the second at the Town Hall on Tuesday 27 November at 2pm. These meetings will be chaired by Marilyn Smithies and Michael Hewlett respectively.

---

Report Author: Chris Stock, Resident Involvement & Scrutiny Manager, Ext. 62864

Contact Person: As above