

Leicester
City Council

Wards Affected: All Wards

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board
Cabinet

11 December 2008
January 2008

Proposed changes to the Consultative Structure for Local Authority Tenants

Report of the Corporate Director for Adults & Housing

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Members approval to make changes to the formal consultative structure, to create a more inclusive involvement mechanism for Local Authority tenants and leaseholders.

2. Summary

- 2.1 Leicester City Council has a duty to consult with its tenants on a range of issues, including the annual rent increase, changes to the conditions of tenancy, as well as seeking their views on improving housing related services. This is really important, especially as the Housing Management Service aspires to provide a high quality service to its tenants and other customers.
- 2.2 Tenants have expressed concerns over the current consultative structure for a number of reasons, including the effectiveness of the Tenant Community Association and Housing Management Board (HMB)¹ meetings. Tenants feel these are too exclusive and should be opened up to more people. Tenants also feel the current structure leads to a lot of duplication, with too many local issues being raised at the HMB, while items affecting all tenants were not being addressed. Appendix 1 details the current structure chart.
- 2.3 The introduction of the Ward Committees (to be named Community Meetings) in April 2008 and the ending of the Council's contract with the Leicester Federation of Tenant and Resident Associations (LFTRA)² have also provided an opportunity to review the formal consultative structure. (The ending of the contract with the LFTRA was by mutual agreement with the committee members.

¹ Housing Management Board (HMB), is the body that can make suggestions to Cabinet on policy changes.

² The monies saved (£30,000pa) from the LFTRA will continue to be used to support tenant participation in the City.

These members are keen to update the consultative structure and to strengthen the partnership between tenants and the City Council.

- 2.4 The City Council also has 598 Leaseholders that have purchased their Council homes and have a right to be consulted and involved in activities that affect their property. Therefore, efforts need to be made to involve this group, which is also detailed in the main body of the report.
- 2.5 The report details a proposal that will make the consultative process more inclusive and will give all tenants and leaseholders an opportunity to participate in a way that suits them.
- 2.6 The formal Tenants & Residents (TARA's) groups across the City have been involved in developing the new proposed structure and support the changes. This will ensure they remain central to community engagement and will have an active role in the new Community meetings.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 Members are recommended to agree the following:
 - a) Agree the proposed changes to enhance the consultative structure for both tenants and leaseholders of Leicester City Council to commence April 2008.
 - b) To support tenants involvement in the new Community meetings to ensure they can continue to play an active role in local community engagement.
 - c) Agree on an interim basis that the tenant representatives to be co-opted onto the new Community meetings will be selected from the existing Tenants Community Associations, until the Tenant & Leaseholder forums are in place as part of the new consultative structure.

4. Report

- 4.1 Leicester City Council's current formal tenant involvement structure has largely remained unchanged for over 20 years and currently revolves around a series of hierarchical meetings, as detailed at Appendix 1.
- 4.2 This includes 19 Tenants & Residents Associations (TARA's) across the City that are formally recognised by the Authority. They are constituted groups, made up of volunteers, who receive nominal funding to engage and represent the views of the tenants who live in the local area. In reality the majority of TARA's are run by elderly white tenants, whilst they are very passionate about housing issues, they are not representative of the local community. Research shows the majority of tenants do not want to be involved with TARA's, but they do want to express their views in other ways, which will be explained later.
- 4.3 There are also 6 Tenant Community Association³ meetings, where the committee members of the TARA's can meet with the local Housing Manager, Elected Members, Police etc, to discuss issues that are affecting

³ The current tenants Community Association meetings are not connected to new proposed Ward Community meetings

tenants in the area. Generally these meetings are too exclusive and tend to be poorly supported.

4.4 The Housing Management Board (HMB), is a constituted group of tenant representatives from the TARA's and Elected Members, with the original remit of making suggestions to Cabinet on policy changes. However, over the years this group has lost its way and has failed to make any real impact in recent times.

4.5 Leicester City Council was once at the cutting edge of tenant involvement, but its consultative structure needs to change to ensure it is inclusive for all tenants and leaseholders. The purpose of tenant involvement is to engage tenants and leaseholders in helping to identify service improvements. Unfortunately, the old structure does not enable this to happen as it only involves a small number of people whose views are not representative of the wider community. The proposed structure will enable inclusive involvement of tenants in identifying service improvements. This in turn will contribute to the Council's overall customer satisfaction rating under the new Comprehensive Area Assessment.

5. Summary of proposed changes - see Appendix 2 for structural chart

5.1 **A Tenants' & Leaseholders' Performance Panel** will replace the Housing Management Board (HMB) and will be a constituted group. There will be 22 Tenant representatives nominated from each of the 22 new Ward Community meetings, 6 Elected Members, (including the Lead Cabinet Member for Housing who will be the Chair), one Leaseholder and possibility 3 independent members (still to be determined) making up the board, who will have voting rights. Officers will be in attendance to present information and provide support, but will not have voting rights.

5.2 The Tenants' & Leaseholders' Performance Panel will monitor the performance of the housing services and could request that a group of tenants and leaseholders investigate areas of poor performance or policy issues affecting tenants. The panel could then make recommendations to Cabinet and the Overview Scrutiny Management Board on service improvements. The panel will also look at issues that have not been resolved through normal channels.

5.3 There will be 6 **Area Tenant & Leaseholder Forums** to replace the Community Associations and these would encompass the existing Tenants & Residents Associations (TARA's). They will be open to all tenants and leaseholders and Ward Councillors who live in the defined area.

5.4 It is proposed that the local Ward Councillors would initially chair a formal meeting for 12 months, with a view to tenants representatives taking over the role once the new structure has been embedded. These meetings will be organised and supported by representatives from the Housing Management Service and the Repairs Service. These meetings could operate on a carousel basis, similar to the new Community meetings, operating between 10.00am and 7pm, with key officers being in attendance at various times throughout the day. This would provide a more flexible option for people to attend at a time that would suit them and in a less formal setting.

- 5.5 Tenants and leaseholders would be able to raise areas of concern in relation to the housing service and could act as a consultative group on local issues. The forum would agree representatives who would be co-opted onto the new Community meetings and this process would be facilitated by the Housing Management Service. There would also be a separate grants panel made up of tenants and chaired by the Lead Cabinet Member for Housing to agree priorities for spending any Housing Revenues Account monies allocated to the area.
- 5.6 A Separate **Citywide Forum** would be held for both Tenants & Leaseholders, due to the differing nature of the issues that are likely to affect each group.
- 5.7 These would meet twice yearly bringing together tenants & leaseholders respectively from across the City to discuss common issues. They will be able to listen to presentations on key improvements and changes to be made by the housing services in the future. Strategic issues identified affecting all tenants/leaseholders could be fed to the Area Tenants and Leaseholders Forum or to the Tenants and Leaseholders Performance Panel for further consideration/action.
- 5.8 **Service Improvement Panels** would be open to any interested tenant and leaseholder. They would undertake projects as identified by the Tenants' & Leaseholders' Performance Panel. Each panel would focus on an area of the housing service and investigate its effectiveness.
- 5.9 The panels would engage with other tenant engagement processes to understand how tenants and leaseholders feel about services. These panels could also work very closely with the new Elected Member Task Groups where appropriate. The new Community meetings could also recommend areas of the housing service they felt would benefit from a detailed investigation.
- 5.10 **Stay at home groups** These have been developed over the last 12 months and are aimed at providing a range of opportunities for tenants and leaseholders to get involved without having to attend formal meetings. Last year over 7000 tenants got involved in this way compared to less than 100 through formal structures.

6. Relationship with the new Ward Community Meetings

- 6.1 The new Community meetings would provide a key connection between tenants and leaseholders and the Council's political structures. Tenants would be able to nominate representatives to be co-opted onto the new Community meetings. These representatives would be able to highlight and discuss wider Council issues that affect council tenants that could not be resolved at the local level i.e. via the Tenant & Leaseholder Forums.
- 6.2 Initially the tenant representatives to be co-opted onto the new Community meetings will be selected from the existing Tenants Community Associations, until the Tenant & Leaseholder Forums are in place as part of the new consultative structure and the necessary training and capacity building has been given.

6.3 The new Community meetings could also refer matters to the Area Tenant and Leaseholder Forum, for further detailed investigation or consultation on neighbourhood housing issues. The new Community meetings could also refer issues that are of concern to all tenants to the Citywide Forum or Performance Panel.

7. Financial, Legal & Other Implications:

7.1 Financial – Graham Troup - Principal Accountant (HRA)

7.1.1 Tenant and leaseholder consultation is funded by the Housing Revenue Account, with a total budget provision of £190,000 in 2007/08. This includes funding for the LFTRA, which is now available to support other tenant participation initiatives. The proposed change to the existing consultative structure can be delivered within this existing budgetary provision.

7.1.2 In addition, the 2007/08 Housing Capital Programme contains provision of £220,000 for "Capital Receipts Initiative" schemes and £180,000 for Environment Budgets, both of which are spent in accordance with the wishes of tenants groups. These capital provisions will continue under the proposed new arrangements, subject to the availability of future finances.

7.2 Legal

7.2.1 Awaiting confirmation from Legal Services

Other Implications	Yes/No	Paragraph references within supporting information
Equal Opportunities Policy	Yes	5.3
Sustainable Environmental	No	
Crime & Disorder	No	
Human Rights Act	No	
Elderly/people on low income	Yes	5.3

8. Background papers - Local Government Act 1972

8.1 LCC tenant feedback information.

9. Consultations

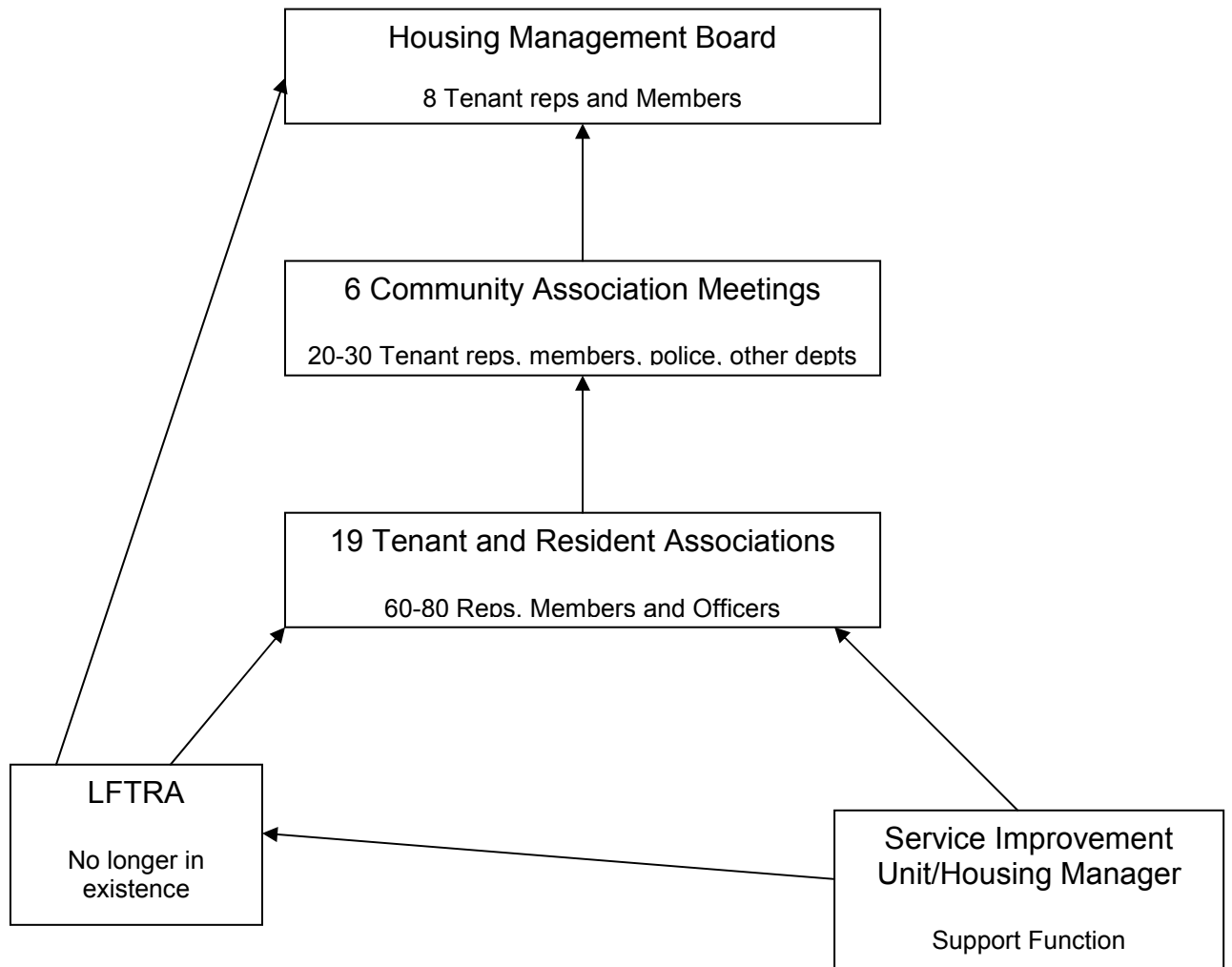
9.1 A Service Improvement Panel consisting of tenants and Leaseholders was used to identify the problems with the existing formal involvement structure. This group also helped to develop a new structure that would be inclusive for all tenants. TARA's were also asked for their views on the proposed structure and to date we have not received any concerns about the proposal. A presentation was given to the Chairpersons of the TARA's on 23rd October 2007, who were supportive of the changes and were eager to meet again to progress the matter.

9.2 Councillor Bhatti (Cabinet Lead for Housing) and Councillor Draycott (Deputy Leader & Lead for Neighbourhood Renewal) have both been consulted on the proposed changes.

10. Report Author

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Existing Consultative Structure



Proposed Consultative Structure

