



EDINBURGH TENANTS FEDERATION

Edinburgh's Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations

Progress Report

January 2007 to March 2007

Introduction

This is the third quarterly progress report on the work plan agreed by our members at the Federation's AGM in June 2006, and reports on the Federation's work between January and March 2007. This report follows the structure outlined in the Work Plan.

Building Relationships

Housing and Regeneration

Following an initial meeting in December 2006, the Convenor and Vice-Convenor are now meeting with Housing Development on a monthly basis. The purpose of these meetings is to inform and consult with ETF on the long-term investment strategy, delivery of the Scottish Housing Quality Standard and the approach being adopted in the five housing regeneration areas. To date we have concentrated on the latter.

Our new Outreach Worker, Marc Headley, took up post on 19 February. Following a year of intermittent support, we are once again able to provide consistent dedicated support to the North Sighthill Residents Association. This has enabled them to take on the responsibility of representing the residents' interests within the local Steering Group which is overseeing the demolition and re-housing in their area, and to develop their relationship with the council and other agency representatives. They have also been planning a public meeting both to inform residents about developments and to increase the size and strength of the committee.

In March 2007 representatives of the Executive Committee met with David Lyons, newly appointed Strategic Support Unit Manager. This was to talk specifically about his new role which will now take responsibility for tenant participation and policy and performance issues, for him to learn about the Federation's priorities, and to begin to build a working relationship.

Membership

We currently have 56 full members and 31 associate members.

One of the Federation's key priorities is to help and support tenants' and residents' groups and to help establish new groups when asked. Since January we have worked with nine groups, either by helping them get established, offering advice, attending meetings or providing practical support, for instance producing leaflets and filling in grant applications.

Policy & Practice

Stair Cleaning

We were asked to be involved in a working group looking at the redesign of the Stair Cleaning service and the awarding of new contracts for the service beginning in April 2007. In January we met to go through the tenders that had been submitted by shortlisted contractors, and awarded contracts to two – Tartan and ISS. The next step was for the Council to sign off the contracts. We learned that there was a delay in this happening which threatened to delay the start of the new service. We were concerned about this and wrote to Councillor Gilmore asking whether there was anything that could be done to ensure that the Council's sign-off could happen more quickly. This triggered the necessary response and as a result the new service went 'live' on 2nd April. In the run-up to the service going live we were involved in putting together an information leaflet for all tenants and residents receiving the service so that they would know what to expect. We were also involved in briefing the contractors just before the new service started.

We will continue to be involved in monitoring the contracts, though we hope that in time this will be something that Housing Area Boards take more control over. We hope that our involvement in this work will help ensure that we get a properly delivered service.

Tenant Participation

We have been involved in helping to put together the Council's new Tenant Participation Strategy which will replace the existing Strategy which comes to an end this summer. Having helped to draft a headline strategy over the winter, we then helped to organise and facilitate a consultation event for Registered Tenants Organisations at the Thistle Hotel at the end of March. This event aimed to invite RTOs to help put together the new Strategy's implementation plan, and we will be working with the Council to ensure all the suggestions received are included in the plan, and then to organise an event at which the new Tenant Participation Strategy can be launched.

Repairs

We have continued to lobby for the reinstatement of the Repairs Review Group, which hasn't met since Housing became part of Services for Communities and everyone has been trying to find their way within the new department. The meeting that Cathy King proposed to hold in January has still not materialised, in large part because the relevant personnel within Housing and Regeneration have not yet been appointed (all part of the shake-up within Services for Communities). Repairs were an issue of mutual concern discussed at the meeting with David Lyons, who also supports the idea of a strategic repairs group that involves the Federation, and we will continue to press for early action on this.

Housing Strategy and Investment

Reference is made above to the regular meetings with Housing Development. Linked to this we have facilitated the coming together on a regular basis of representatives from the housing regeneration areas. The purpose is to share experiences and lessons as preparations are made in the run up to demolition in an effort to develop consistency and best practice in the joint management of the demolition process. In addition, the group wrote to the Communities Minister pressing the case for investment in the housing regeneration areas so that the original plan of involving the existing community in planning and building the new community could be retained. This was done in the context of the overall housing crisis in Edinburgh and the need for major investment in building affordable rented homes.

Tackling the politicians

As reported in our previous progress report, we proposed to lobby the politicians during the run-up to the elections in May. To this end we invited the political parties to write about their social housing policies in Tenants Voice, timed to go out in April in order to be fresh in people's minds before the election. Four parties took up the invitation and Tenants Voice will be hitting doormats shortly.

In March we organised a hustings meeting at Augustine's Church and publicised it widely. As we'd not organised such an event before we had no idea what kind of audience to expect. Over 60 people turned up to hear and to question politicians from all parties. The meeting was chaired by Graham Stewart of Talk 107FM and the feedback we had on the night was good, even though no assurances were given or political bombshells dropped!

As reported above, the group of representatives from the housing regeneration areas has written to the Communities Minister and to local MSPs pressing the case for investment in the housing regeneration areas so that the original plan of involving the existing community in planning and building the new communities can be retained.

New ways to involve, consult & communicate with members

We have continued to send out Federation Matters every month and a new issue of Tenants Voice will be published in April in the run-up to the May elections.

The Information and Publicity sub-group continues to work on developing a website, though this was delayed by the preparations for the hustings meeting we held in March. We still plan to launch a website in the near future, and following that we will update and execute a media strategy to raise the profile of the Federation and its work.

The last Federation Meeting in January was combined with a Burns Supper and we enjoyed live entertainment which was extremely well received.

As reported above, in March we organised a hustings meeting to enable members and other interested individuals to quiz politicians on the subject of social housing. This was the first time we had organised such an event and those that attended seemed to appreciate it.

Equalities

The proposed new Equalities policy for the Federation will be presented for discussion and endorsement at the Federation Meeting in May.

We continue to work with a very small core group of young tenants making a film giving a young person's guide to getting a home in Edinburgh. The project continues to fall behind schedule because we can only work at the pace that the participants agree to, and personal circumstances have made it difficult for some of the group to participate over the past couple of months. The film is very nearly finished and we look forward to being able to show it soon. However, the problems faced over the past few months have further highlighted the problems involved in sustaining such a small core group and we will need to look at whether it's viable to continue this work once the film is complete.

Resources

We continue to work to the Council's Service Level Agreement, and are now coming to the end of our second year of funding. We have negotiated a new Service Level Agreement that will take effect for three years from April 2007, and we have a commitment from the Council to help us look for more suitable premises.

As reported above, we have recruited Marc Headley as our new Outreach Worker, enabling us to carry through our commitment to support resident organisation and participation in the regeneration areas and in particular North Sighthill.

Evaluation and Monitoring

This is the third quarterly report of our activities since the Federation's Annual General Meeting in June 2006. It will be discussed at our quarterly Federation meeting in May and then circulated to our members and funders, the CEC/ETF Liaison Group and the Tenant Participation Working Group.

In January we sent out surveys to all member groups and individuals who attended Federation events over the past year in order to measure opinions of the work we have done and to gather ideas for future priorities. We are grateful to those groups and individuals that took the time to respond. While the response we received was positive, we did not get as many responses as we would have liked. The results of our survey work will be presented at the Federation Meeting in May and will be used to measure our performance against the Council's Service Level Agreement.

Reviews 2006 – 07

In September 2006 the Executive Committee set up three temporary working groups to look at different aspects of the Federation's internal processes. The three working groups completed their work by the time of the last progress report.

The Executive Committee's Code of Conduct has been reviewed and was endorsed by the membership at our Federation Meeting in January 2007.

A paper clarifying sub-committee powers and responsibilities will be brought to the May 2007 Federation Meeting.

The Federation's internal policies and procedures have been reviewed and, in several cases, new policies have been drafted. These will be brought to the May 2007 Federation Meeting for endorsement or for information.

This work forms part of a larger review of the constitution that is ongoing. Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations Council is helping to review the constitution and any proposed constitutional changes will be submitted for decision by the membership at a Special General Meeting called for that purpose.

Future Projects

We hope that our website will go 'live' before the Annual General Meeting.

Tenant Led Inspections

We are always keen to explore new avenues for tenant participation. Having learned about tenant led inspections from tenant reps in West Lothian we have been testing out the notion via articles in Tenants Voice and a discussion at January's Federation Meeting. The next step is to organise a meeting of those that are interested in learning more, which will probably take place towards the end of May. We are also keen to organise a trip to meet colleagues in West Lothian who are already involved in tenant-led inspections.

Training

We are holding our annual training for treasurers on 21st April and are looking to our survey results to see what other topics members would like training in. We are also looking at the possibility of having a Tenant Activity Day, and there seems to be widespread support for this. The delay in organisation is mainly down to problems in finding a suitable venue, but we hope to resolve this shortly. As we see it, a Tenant Activity Day would offer a variety of taster sessions as well as the opportunity for tenant activists to share their own experiences.

As always we like to hear from our members and tenant activists about any projects that they'd like us to consider developing. There is always an opportunity for discussion at Federation Meetings and we're happy to be contacted in the office between meetings.

April 2007