



EDINBURGH TENANTS FEDERATION

Edinburgh's Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations

Progress Report

October 2008 to December 2008

Introduction

This is the second quarterly progress report on the work plan agreed by our members at the Federation's AGM in June 2008, and reports on the Federation's work between October and December 2008.

Our priorities for the year 2008/09 were spelt out in our Work Plan and are laid out here. This report follows the priorities outlined in the Work Plan.

- a) To involve and engage more fully with our members
- b) To continue and develop ongoing work
- c) To expand the membership of the Executive Committee
- d) To expand our links and work with other organisations.

Report

Involving and engaging more fully with our members

At the end of December our membership stood at 49, a new group having joined us since the summer. In addition we have 27 associate members made up of 13 individuals and 14 organisations.

Regular, timely two-way information is important in building a solid and positive relationship with the membership in any membership-based organisation, and the Federation's Information and Publicity sub-committee continues to take the lead on much of the activity aimed at keeping our members informed of our work, for instance through Federation Matters, Tenants Voice and the website. Additionally, over this period members have been sent updated information packs to help them in their work.

Sharing information and ideas is very important and plans have been put in place to encourage our members to have more of a say and to swap experiences informally at Federation events. To this end we have started serving tea and coffee at the end of our quarterly Federation Meetings rather than at the beginning, to encourage people to mingle and chat. The Quiz Night on 21st November was very successful and we are now preparing for the Federation Meeting and Burns Supper on 28th January.

In the workplan it was agreed to hold a Tenant Activist Day. A planning group was set up to organise this but sadly has concluded that such an event is not viable at the current time and that this event will not be going ahead. After much deliberation it has been agreed that there are more effective and targeted ways of using our resources to reach and encourage a wider range of tenants to become involved in improving their communities.

We continue to offer help and support to member groups. We have continued our work with the tenants and residents groups in Gracemount and North Sighthill on the regeneration of the areas. A steering group in Coatfield Lane and Giles Street has been set up and it is hoped a new group will be established there soon. Ongoing support is being provided to the Laichfield and Chesser Loan sheltered housing group. Support is also being provided to a Registered Tenant

Organisation in a sheltered complex facing particular difficulties. Finally a joint working group with the Council is being set up to plan a city wide event for tenants in sheltered housing seeking to get involved with their landlord.

Continuing and developing ongoing work

Repairs

The Repairs Strategy Group met in November and discussed Edinburgh Building Service's performance, the capital programme, gas servicing and the repairs budget. There has also been a meeting with EBS to staff progress issues of concern. In addition, the Convenor and Vice Convenor participated in the Edinburgh Building Services awards ceremony in November.

Federation representatives had their quarterly meeting with Housing Property Services in November to review progress on the capital programme and discuss gas servicing issues which has been a major source of dissatisfaction and concern amongst tenants.

The Federation's Repairs Group meets quarterly to co-ordinate all these activities, though its December meeting had to be postponed till the New Year because of ill health.

High Flats

The Federation's High Flats Group continues to meet regularly to discuss issues of interest or concern to residents in the multi-storeys and attracts a wide variety of guest speakers.

There has been one meeting of the Multi-Storey Working Group during the last three months, which received reports on EBS performance, the capital programme and lift maintenance.

The Caretaking Service Improvement Forum has not met in this period. The Waste Management project group has met with Hailesland Park Neighbourhood Council to discuss their recycling needs, and is looking to start to roll out its work citywide by introducing a pilot at one of the South Edinburgh blocks.

Stair Cleaning

The contract monitoring meetings continue to take place quarterly and problems raised between meetings are investigated and acted upon. Representatives continue to press for a meeting of a wider steering group to enable officers, elected politicians and tenants to discuss strategic issues for which this monitoring group is not an appropriate forum. As yet no action has been taken by Council officers.

Investment and Regeneration

There have been five meetings of the Investment & Regeneration Group. This is where we learn about, monitor and contribute to the development of the programme to build council houses in Edinburgh. The workload has been extensive. We receive regular updates on progress on all aspects of the project as it develops, including proposals to bid for a share of the £25m allocated by the Scottish government to encourage the building of council houses. We have commented on the brief for the consultants who will carry out the master planning in the three regeneration areas from April 2009. The jointly developed Regeneration Good Practice Guidelines on tenant participation in regeneration areas were finalised and subsequently endorsed by the Tenant Participation Working Group. We have had an update and discussion on the 2009 - 2014 Strategic Housing Investment Plan. There have been discussions on the possibility of building houses for mid market rents and other proposals to deal with the impact of the credit crunch. Finally we had an initial meeting with the consultants working on the options and business plan and received an overview of the key aspects of their work and progress to date. We will meet with them again early in the New Year when we expect to get access to the detail of a proposed business case.

Due to illness and bad weather there has only been one meeting of the ETF Investment & Regeneration Working Group during this period. The Working Group provides guidance and accountability for the ETF representatives working with the Council at the strategic level, and support to the tenant representatives involved in the regeneration areas. Alongside updates on the overall project to build council houses, the group has focused on the establishment of Development Groups in the regeneration areas and received an initial briefing on what master planning will involve. The group also continued the discussion on proposals to build houses for mid market rents initiated at the Executive Committee and developed at the Federation meeting in October, further elaborating on tenants concerns and the conditions they would seek to attach.

Regeneration Areas

North Sighthill and Gracemount Development Groups had their first meetings in December 2008. The meetings concentrated on the purpose, role and membership of the groups. Discussions also took place around the frequency of meetings and how to keep members informed between meetings. The groups will meet in the New Year to discuss the Council's application for funding. Representatives from these areas are continuing to meet with the Investment and Regeneration Working Group.

Estates and Tenancy Management

The Estates and Tenancy Management Improvement Forum met in October. The Forum continues to develop a citywide approach on Neighbourhood Improvement Programme projects, and it has also developed guidelines for a citywide approach to regular estates inspections and a database for ensuring that information gathered from inspections is passed onto the relevant officers for action. Draft policies on how to deal appropriately with vacant houses that have been left in a mess or occupied houses that have become unhygienic have been consulted on through the Forum. Progress on all this work is on-going.

Liaison Group

The joint ETF/Council Liaison Group, which, on behalf of the Council's Tenant Participation Working Group, has responsibility for the detailed monitoring and planning of tenant participation with the Council, has tackled an extensive programme of work during this period. A briefing on tenant participation for Services for Communities staff was finalised and delivered. The first part of the session focused on tenant participation and the role of ETF at a strategic level. In the second part we concentrated on how to develop and improve on work with Registered Tenants Organisations at a local level and this suggested a process that could be helpfully repeated in each Neighbourhood Management area.

A Forward Planning event was organised and held. This is an annual event with the Council to review the previous year's consultation exercises, share priorities for future joint work and agree a consultation plan for the coming year. Prior to the event we gathered the views of Registered Tenants Organisations on what they considered to be the critical service areas. Early in the New Year the Group will finalise the priority service areas for review, development and consultation in 2009.

Linked to the work on Forward Planning there have been discussions on how best to involve ETF and Registered Tenants Organisations in the process leading up to the Scottish Housing Regulator's inspection of the housing and property management service due in 2009. The Executive Committee established a short-life working group to guide and prepare ETF's contributions to the Forward Planning and the inspection, including the planning for a joint event in the spring to involve Registered Tenant Organisation's in the inspection process. This event will also include an annual review of the Tenant Participation Strategy for which initial arrangements have been made.

An immediate outcome of the Forward Planning event has been a meeting with the Community Safety Manager as concerns about the implementation of the Antisocial Behaviour Strategy were raised by many of our members. We were informed of a range of major changes to how antisocial behaviour is tackled that have been introduced recently which reassured us that tenants concerns are being addressed. In the New Year we will meet with the person responsible for the customer satisfaction surveys to monitor the feedback, gain an insight into what is being learnt and how that is influencing improvements to the services provided.

Working with Registered Social Landlords and their tenants

The Federation's Housing Association Tenants Sub Committee continues to expand, having recruited another new member. The sub committee has continued its promotional work on the need for tenant involvement with housing association landlords.

Completion of the Tenant Led Inspection of Dunedin Canmore Housing Association's repairs reporting procedures completes a year of work with Dunedin Canmore Housing Association which also included comment on its draft Tenant Participation Strategy and the provision of training to a residents group. The sub committee held discussions with Dunedin Canmore in December, to begin establishing a more formal relationship. There are a number of pieces of work that Dunedin Canmore would like ETF to do for them. A formal proposal is expected in February 2009.

Tenant Led Inspections

This quarter saw us completing our pilot inspections with the publication by both landlords of their action plans. Both teams of inspectors met with the respective landlords to discuss their findings and recommendations for improvement, after which the landlords produced their action plans outlining how the recommendations will be taken forward. Both the inspectors' reports and the action plans are available on the Federation's website and from the Federation office.

These were pilot inspections and over the past quarter the Tenant Led Inspections Group has met to consider the lessons that have been learnt by both tenants and landlords and how to progress tenant led inspections in Edinburgh. A case study is being drafted, and discussions are already taking place about the subject of a future inspection, recruitment and training of more tenant inspectors. Both the council and Dunedin Canmore Housing Association are keen to see more inspections carried out, and towards the end of December we also had an enquiry from Viewpoint Housing Association. A preliminary meeting has been organised for January to see whether there is scope to trial tenant led inspections there as well.

Finally, in November some of the tenant inspectors gave a presentation sharing their experience of tenant led inspections at a workshop in Falkirk run by the Tenants Information Service. Their aim was to inspire tenants from other parts of Scotland to try out tenant led inspections in their own areas.

Tenants and Mental Health

Executive Committee representatives have continued to pursue our objective of ensuring more joined up working and co-ordination in the cross service support for vulnerable tenants experiencing mental health problems. Over the past few months the focus has been on making sure that frontline staff, such as concierge staff in the high rises, can access suicide awareness training, with the upshot being that the first staff will be receiving training in February 2009, alongside representatives from the Federation's Executive Committee. The style of the training is that those who attend the courses will be able to then train their colleagues, and thus it is hoped that all concierge staff will receive this training fairly rapidly. We would also like to see other front line staff – those who come into closest contact with tenants – receiving this training

and support, and continue to press for this. Representatives also attended the Choose Life conference and the review of the mental health action plan.

Housing Area Boards

There has not been a city wide meeting of tenant representatives to Housing Area Boards in this quarter. Instead we have concentrated in supporting tenant representatives in the South West area tackle the deterioration in community engagement and tenant participation in that area. This followed concerns being raised at a meeting of the Tenant Participation Working Group in August 2008. Following discussion with senior management and Councillors a joint session facilitated by a consultant was held in December. The event focused positively on what are the key ingredients of successful participation and used these to form commitments on how to move forward together in developing productive participation arrangements. Like the tenant participation briefing, this experience also suggested the value of joint officer / tenant representative events at a local level to review progress on tenant participation and to agree improvements.

Expanding the membership of the Executive Committee

Membership of the Executive Committee still stands at twelve and although we have made approaches to a few individuals who we would be interested in co-opting, to date they have resisted us! We have scope to co-opt new members to the Executive Committee. Anyone interested in broadening their experience of working on housing issues and who would like to help develop the Federation's services to tenants should get in touch with the Federation office.

Expanding our links and work with other organisations

The Federation circulates copies of Tenants Voice and the Annual Report to a number of voluntary organisations in Edinburgh on a regular basis, as well as to its fellow tenants at Norton Park.

In October members of our Executive Committee welcomed a delegation of tenants from Sweden that was visiting Edinburgh as part of a study trip organised by the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS). At a breakfast reception at the City Chambers, Convenor Betty Stevenson welcomed the visitors in Swedish before we spent a day showing them around various housing estates in Edinburgh and learning from each other.

Later in October Executive Committee members braved the wind and rain to run an information stall at Kirkgate shopping centre as part of the Leith Community Fair. They handed out leaflets and pens and chatted to shoppers.

Representatives from the Federation attended the AGM of Edinburgh and Lothians Race Equality Council and a reception to celebrate Shelter's 40th anniversary.

Our workers continue to maintain links with other organisations through their involvement in the quarterly meetings of the regional Tenant Participation Workers Forum.

Evaluation and Monitoring

This is the second quarterly report of our activities since the Federation's Annual General Meeting in June 2008. It will be discussed at our quarterly Federation meeting in January and then circulated to our members and funders, the CEC/ETF Liaison Group and the Tenant Participation Working Group.

Future Projects

The Repairs Group are looking into the possibility of meeting with Dundee Tenants' Federation sometime in the new year, and a visit from Newcastle Tenants' Federation is currently being organised.

We will continue to work to the priorities set out in the Work Plan.

January 2009