



EDINBURGH TENANTS FEDERATION

Edinburgh's Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations

Progress Report

January 2008 to March 2008

Introduction

This is the third quarterly progress report on the work plan agreed by our members at the Federation's AGM in June 2007, and reports on the Federation's work between January and March 2008.

Our priorities for the year 2007/08 were spelt out in our Work Plan and are laid out here. This report follows the priorities outlined in the Work Plan.

- 1) to continue ongoing work
- 2) (a) to adapt to the new political administrations
(b) to expand the Federation's Executive Committee
(c) to work with Registered Social Landlords and their tenants
- 3) to promote the Federation and its activities more widely
- 4) (a) to continue to explore new methods of tenant participation, beginning with Tenant Led Inspections
(b) to develop Housing Area Boards and help them to engage with Neighbourhood Partnerships
(c) to work on improving tenant representation in terms of both equalities and areas of the city
- 5) (a) to secure more resources for the Federation to help us carry out our work
(b) to increase the contact that the Executive Committee has with our members
(c) to develop a rolling programme of activities for the Federation.

Report

1. Continuing ongoing work

In our last report we explained how our joint working with the Council had been increasing. This has continued into this quarter, with new work coming on-stream alongside work continuing from the previous quarter. In addition to major pieces of joint work outlined later in this section, we have continued to be involved with the Tenant Participation Working Group, the Multi Storey Working Group and the rent charge review.

We have also been asked to participate in a new group – the Estates and Tenancy Management Improvement Forum – which is currently looking at how Neighbourhood Improvement Projects should be selected and managed.

Additionally, we have contributed to a Chartermark assessment for Edinburgh Building Services and the launch of the Council's Tenant Participation Strategy. Having commented on their draft Tenant Participation Strategy we have continued work with our housing association colleagues at Dunedin Canmore through their involvement in the pilot Tenant Led Inspection outlined later.

Repairs

The Repairs Strategy Group met twice - in January and March and discussed the repairs action plan, EBS complaints handling, pre-chargeable repairs, planned preventative maintenance, the capital programme and the repairs budget. There have also been two meetings with officers between meetings of the Repairs Strategy Group in order to progress issues of concern.

Tenant reps had a meeting with Jim Davidson, head of Housing Property Services and his team in February. These meetings will now be happening on a quarterly basis. At this meeting reps were shown the new specifications for the kitchen and bathroom programme and visited two properties that have been modernised using the new specifications. The new specifications have come about as a result of the recommendations from the SHQS conference last September, where tenants said that the kitchens and bathrooms budget should be reduced from an average of £9000 per house to an average of £6000 per house.

Following November's successful study visit to Repairs Direct and EBS, the Federation's Repairs Group and Edinburgh Building Services have organised a study visit to look at the empty homes process. This will take place on Thursday 17th April.

There has been a further meeting of the Federation's Repairs Group to co-ordinate these activities.

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.

There has been one meeting of the Multi-Storey Working Group during the last three months. A Multi-Storey Owners' sub-group has also been established and is now being supported by Housing Property Services.

Our Convenor has continued to try to promote joined up thinking and services for tenants with mental health problems, and to this end a project group has been set up, led by Jim Davidson, lead officer on the Multi-Storey Working Group, to try and coordinate the different parts of the Housing service.

There has been one meeting of the Waste Management project group, though another is scheduled for later in April. This project is looking at how to encourage residents in multi-storeys to put less rubbish down their chutes and to recycle more of their waste.

Stair Cleaning

The contract monitoring meetings continue to take place quarterly, though communication needs to be improved so that reps always receive prior notification. January's meeting had to be reconvened as reps had not been informed of the meeting in advance! Reps have raised the topic of setting up a meeting with officers, reps and elected politicians to take a more strategic view of the service, but no action has yet been taken.

Investment and Regeneration

We have had another of our bi-monthly meetings with representatives of the Strategy and Investment Section to discuss and co-ordinate approaches to the housing investment crisis in

Edinburgh and to the housing regeneration areas. Prior to the meeting we had updated each other on our responses to the Firm Foundations consultation on the future of Scotland's housing.

The outcome of the selection of the housing association preferred partners for the development of new affordable housing for rent was confirmed. Two Executive Committee members had participated in this process. The housing associations selected are Port of Leith, Places for People and the Rowan Group. We agreed on our opposition to the Scottish Government's proposal that there should be only one developer for an area, alongside a proposed reduction in the subsidy for building affordable accommodation for rent. We received an update on the investment of the £36 million allocated to Edinburgh for development in 2007/08 and confirmation that we are on course to achieve the target of 600 new affordable homes for rent.

Finally, we had an update on developments in the housing regeneration areas. We continued our discussion on the need for consistency in the approach to setting up Steering Groups and Development Option Groups, the mechanisms for local involvement in the regeneration process. The development of Neighbourhood Partnerships means that it is critical that we look again at how local groups can be involved, and establish a shared understanding and agreement that ensures those directly affected play a central role in the management and planning processes.

Regeneration Areas

We have continued to support the North Sighthill Residents Association to represent the interests of the residents in the joint Steering Group responsible for co-ordinating and managing the demolition process in the area. This group is now known as the 'North Sighthill Liaison Group'. Further to this a Development Options Group is being developed. This group will look at the master planning of North Sighthill and will produce reports that will be fed into the South West Neighbourhood Partnership.

North Sighthill Residents Association recently braved the cold to talk to the residents about how they felt the re-housing process is going and to gather any questions or concerns that could be passed onto City of Edinburgh Council. The next major piece of work is the Annual General Meeting. As members are re-housed - sometimes out-with the North Sighthill area - it is increasingly important that more residents join the residents association

We have also continued to support two of the regeneration areas to get together and share experiences. North Sighthill Residents Association and Gracemount Court and Cottages Residents Association held a joint meeting in January to discuss the progress in their areas and to share ideas. This meeting proved to be a success as North Sighthill were able to share their experiences of being involved in a steering group. Gracemount Court and Cottages Residents Association realised that many of the issues dealt with through a steering group have been covered through its regular committee meetings, (largely due to the housing and regeneration manager attending these meetings) and have opted to now set up a Development Options Group

Rent Setting

We have continued to meet with the Council on proposals for a new rent setting scheme. With more than 2,000 different rent levels at present, we have always been keen to see this replaced with something that is simple, fair and easy to explain: everything that the current system is not. Early in January we reached agreement on a set of proposals that would result in only 9 different rent levels with differences based simply on property size and whether it is a flat or a house. The difficult issue which we finally resolved was on the nature of the transition scheme to ensure that there was a satisfactory means of cushioning the impact on the minority who will face a rent increase and who are not eligible for housing benefit.

Subsequently we have been involved in developing a full consultation process with tenants on the proposals; designing the information sent to tenants in March asking for their views; ensuring that the proposals are outlined simply and clearly; and planning the conference that will conclude the consultation prior to the Council considering all responses to the proposal and deciding whether to proceed and on what basis.

Estates and Tenancy Management

The Federation was invited to participate in an Estates and Tenancy Management Improvement Forum and has been sending representatives since February. The remit of this Forum is to work on projects such as updating the Tenants Handbook, developing a citywide approach to how Neighbourhood Improvement Programme money can be spent, and developing a citywide approach to regular estates inspections. As well as Federation reps, the Forum also includes some of the Senior Property Officers within the Council.

Premises

We are happy to report that there has been significant progress in this area. Returning from the Christmas break we found that Norton Park on Albion Road was advertising for a new tenant. We duly applied successfully and moved in on 19th March. Our new office is accessible, on the ground floor of a converted school which is shared with other local voluntary organisations. As well as having a lot more space to work in, we also have meeting rooms on site which should make life far easier for us in the future. Ultimately the Albion Trust, which owns and manages the building, plans to convert the next door church into a conference venue which will make organising tenants' conferences much easier – though that is still several years off.

2(a) Adapting to the new political administrations

The Federation has continued to work with the new administration in the City Chambers through both the Tenant Participation Working Group and the Multi-Storey Working Group. Our response to the Scottish Government's green paper on housing was submitted following the Federation Meeting in January. All responses are now available on the Scottish Government's website: we have been informed that twenty percent of all responses received were from tenants' groups.

A briefing session on tenant participation has been developed for councillors, but no date for this has yet been finalised.

2(b) Expanding the Executive Committee

Membership of the Executive Committee now stands at twelve, as one member was deemed to have resigned due to non-attendance. 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.

2(c) Working with Registered Social Landlords and their tenants

The Housing Association Tenants Sub Committee has continued its promotional work on the need for tenant involvement with housing association landlords. Having completed an extensive commentary on Dunedin Canmore Housing Association's draft Tenant Participation Strategy, the focus shifted to involving Dunedin Canmore in the pilot Tenant Led Inspection. The work on the latter has been intensive with the result that the broader agenda of the sub committee has

been put temporarily on hold. Members are regularly reminding the Executive Committee that the Federation must also address the concerns of housing association tenants, and this will be a major focus of the sub committee in the next quarter as all our activities are scrutinised for relevant opportunities to speak directly to their needs.

3. Promoting the Federation

We have made little progress on promotional activities during the past three months, as we have been fully committed to continuing ongoing work, preparing for a Tenant Led Inspection, and moving office.

However, moving office has given us additional opportunities to contact everyone on our mailing lists – to let them know we've moved. It has also meant we have to get our information leaflets re-printed and this is giving us an opportunity to update some of the artwork.

We continue to keep the website up to date as a means of promoting the Federation to the wider world, and have plans to develop it further over coming months. In the last three months we have started an archive page where back copies of *Tenants Voice*, *Federation Matters* and our Progress Report can be downloaded.

We have continued to send out *Federation Matters* every month, and one issue of *Tenants Voice* has been published. We are always keen to receive articles from our members – so why not let us know what your group has been doing? As well as being sent out to our members and supporters, both publications are now available for anyone to view or download from the Federation's website. We continue to look for ways of expanding our circulation amongst tenants in Housing Associations. If your landlord has a tenants' forum that we could add to our *Tenants Voice* mailing list, please let us know.

4(a) Developing new methods of tenant participation

We have continued to prepare for a pilot Tenant Led Inspection. In our last report we were waiting for agreement from the Council and Dunedin Canmore Housing Association to subject themselves to an inspection. Both landlords are now fully on board and preparations have been quite intensive during the past three months. The topic of this pilot inspection is to be repairs reporting procedures, comparing and contrasting Dunedin Canmore's and the Council's processes.

Seven tenants from across the city and a range of landlords volunteered to form the team for the pilot inspection. In the last three months the inspection team has negotiated a framework document with both landlords, and then underwent three full days of training during which time they conducted mock inspections, drafted mock reports and surveys, and practiced different inspection techniques such as interviews and mystery shopping. They have also drawn up a code of conduct which outlines the roles, responsibilities and health and safety aspects of conducting an inspection.

Following the training the team has now progressed to gathering information from each of the landlords, and briefing meetings with relevant lead managers are being organised. Once the team has received this information it will draw up an inspection plan prior to carrying out the inspection. We should have much more to report at the Annual General Meeting in June.

4(b) Developing Housing Area Boards and Neighbourhood Partnerships

In February we held the quarterly city wide meeting of tenant representatives to Housing Area Boards. Representatives provided an update on developments locally and discussed their

approach to local negotiations on the future of their local Housing Area Boards and their relationship to the new Neighbourhood Partnerships. Their feedback confirmed the on-going, uneven development of Housing Area Boards across the city, the uncertainty as to their future, and the absence of progress in developing a relationship or understanding with their respective Neighbourhood Partnerships. We informed representatives of the outcome of discussions with senior managers, where we have agreed a set of principles and guidelines that should provide a better guide to all parties in their negotiations on the purpose and make-up of Housing Area Boards and their relationship to Neighbourhood Partnerships. In those areas where tenant reps want their Housing Area Board to continue, these principles will hopefully instil confidence to negotiate with their Neighbourhood Partnerships. However, it should be noted that in some areas it is already too late as reps have lost interest and their Area Boards disbanded.

In addition, we have continued to provide support to tenant representatives at a local level. A survey of Registered Tenants Organisations in the North area in late 2007 showed there was clear support for continuing to meet to address tenant / landlord issues. A meeting was therefore organised to look at what form this might take. The outcome was agreement on the need for tenant representatives to get together regularly, possibly through a tenants forum. This is being pursued separately in both Greater Pilton and in Leith, as it was agreed that these areas in the North have distinctive interests.

We have also continued to provide support to representatives in the South West. It has been agreed that the South West Area Board will become a sub-group of the Neighbourhood Partnership, and the Area Board is in the process of establishing a working relationship with the Neighbourhood Partnership. Within the Area Board a further sub-group is being established to shape how the board will work in future.

4(c) Working on improving representation

The Executive Committee now attracts membership from throughout the city, though East Edinburgh remains unrepresented. Tenants from three of the city's Registered Social Landlords are now members of the committee.

We continue to support new and ongoing tenants' groups whenever we are asked to. We have made no progress in terms of working to encourage the involvement of young tenants or tenants from equalities groups but recognise work of this nature will require long term planning and resourcing.

5(a) Securing more resources

With the exception of securing and moving to new office accommodation, the other items in this section are low on the list of things on which we would like to make some progress, but they are generally of a long term nature.

We moved into Norton Park in March, and this was our top priority. The premises here are fully accessible, and there are meeting and interview rooms available for use when meeting in the office is not appropriate. The office is big enough that, were we ever to make the case to funders for additional staff resources to share the workload, accommodating them would not be a problem.

5(b) Increasing Executive Committee contact with members

Executive Committee members are generally happy to attend meetings and events held by Federation members, and are simply waiting for an invitation. Their contact details are

contained within the members' packs that were sent to all member groups in November, or alternatively they can be contacted via the Federation office.

5(c) Develop a programme of activities

This is a piece of work that by its very nature continues to be developed. Certain events in the Federation's calendar have become fixed by tradition.

The Burns Supper in January was enjoyed by those who attended, though sadly attendance was lower than in previous years. The finance training is scheduled for Saturday 12th April in Southside Community Centre, and the study visit to look at the Council's empty homes process takes place on Thursday 17th April. The Annual General Meeting will take place on Saturday 21st June.

An events list is included in every issue of *Federation Matters*, and is also available on the Federation's website.

Evaluation and Monitoring

This is the third quarterly report of our activities since the Federation's Annual General Meeting in June 2007. It will be discussed at our quarterly Federation meeting in April and then circulated to our members and funders, the CEC/ETF Liaison Group and the Tenant Participation Working Group.

The second quarterly report on our activities, and our response to the Firm Foundations consultation on the future of housing Scotland, were discussed and endorsed by our members at a Federation Meeting held in January. As part of the Federation's service level agreement with the Council, we are required to survey our members annually. This took place in January and February, and the results will be presented to our members at April's Federation meeting. Copies of the report can be sent to members on request and will be published on the Federation's website at www.edinburghtenants.org.uk.

Future Projects

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

Tenants Voice will be going out again in May. Any articles and photos for inclusion should be sent to the Federation office by 30th April.

April 2008