



# EDINBURGH TENANTS FEDERATION

*Edinburgh's Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations*

## **Progress Report**

July 2008 to September 2008

### **Introduction**

This is the first 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 July and September 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 September our membership stood at 47, two of whom are new members, which means that six groups have either chosen not to renew their membership or have ceased to function. In addition we have 25 associate members made up of 13 individuals and 12 organisations.

A solid and positive working relationship with the membership is crucial for any membership-based organisation. Information is important, and the Federation has an active Information and Publicity sub-committee that takes the lead on much of this work.

Since the Annual General Meeting the sub-committee has focused on designing and producing a new banner for the Federation, and continuing to develop the Federation's website, where an archive of past publications has also been established. Mindful of members' suggestions at previous meetings to promote the Federation more widely, the Information and Publicity sub-committee has designed an advert to be included in a patients' guide being circulated throughout GPs' surgeries in Edinburgh and the Lothians. Every opportunity is taken to promote the Federation and tenant participation at conferences and similar events e.g. the recent Rowan Group's Tenants' Conference.

Engaging with our members means more than simply increasing the amount of publicity we produce, and the Executive Committee devoted an evening in September to planning how to take the work plan's priorities further. Some Executive Committee members will be making regular direct contact with member groups. Members have accepted invitations to attend groups' annual general meetings and are happy to visit groups at any time.

Sharing information and ideas is very important and plans have been put in place to encourage our members to have more of a say in and to swap experiences informally at Federation events. Dates for the Quiz and Burns Night – two of our annual social events – have been provisionally set as 21<sup>st</sup> November and 28<sup>th</sup> January respectively.

We continue to offer help and support to member groups and in the last three months support provided has included advising a tenant's group on how to deal with a local problem, photocopying newsletters and auditing accounts for a variety of groups. Support has been provided to establish new groups in South Queensferry, in Hermits and Terrars Croft and the sheltered housing complexes at Colliedene, Laichfield and Chesser Loan. ETF has met with council officers to discuss approaches to setting up new groups in the West and the back up support that could be provided by the Federation. Three prospective groups were given starter packs at the Rowan Group tenants' conference.

Currently the key focus of our training programme is the finance workshop which takes place in April. Participants from past sessions have suggested splitting the current workshop into two, with one focusing on keeping the books and the other on budgeting and filling in grant applications. We will be trialling this new approach next spring. The other new addition in terms of training will be the Tenant Activist Day that will take place in March 2009 and will offer mini-workshops and taster sessions on a range of skills and policy issues. A planning group has been established to organise this major piece of work.

Of course we continue to respond to specific training requests from our members, and our Outreach Worker ran a committee skills session for one of our member groups in August.

## ***Continuing and developing ongoing work***

### **Repairs**

The Repairs Strategy Group met in July and September and discussed Edinburgh Building Service's performance, the capital programme, gas servicing and the repairs budget. There have also been meetings with EBS staff between meetings of the Repairs Strategy Group to progress issues of concern.

Federation representatives had their quarterly meeting with Housing Property Services in September to review progress on the capital programme and discuss gas servicing issues. Following comments by our representatives we are in the process of redrafting some of the standard letters that are sent to tenants, in order that they are easier to understand.

The Federation's Repairs Group meets quarterly to co-ordinate these activities. Jim Davidson from Housing Property Services was the guest speaker at September's meeting, talking about the kitchens and bathrooms programme.

### **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 range of guest speakers. A block walkabout training day in East Edinburgh was organised in July, giving participants the chance to visit Lochend and Restalrig House and Greendykes House.

There has been one meeting of the Multi-Storey Working Group during the last three months, which received a presentation on suicide prevention as part of its work overseeing the mental health project group.

There has been one meeting of the Caretaking Service Improvement Forum, which looked at the Caretaking Service review. Meanwhile the Waste Management project group is currently evaluating the success of the recycling pilot projects that were launched at the Calders, Lochend and Restalrig House and Birnies Court earlier in the summer.

### **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**

We have had another of our bi-monthly meetings with representatives of the Council's Strategy and Investment Section to discuss and co-ordinate approaches to the housing investment crisis in Edinburgh and to the housing regeneration areas. We have also worked up and agreed a set of principles for the setting up of Development Groups in the regeneration areas. Work is at an advanced stage on producing a set of Regeneration Good Practice Guidelines for tenant participation in the regeneration process.

The principal focus during this quarter has inevitably been the Council's proposal to build council houses in three of the housing regeneration areas. On 12<sup>th</sup> August the Health, Social Care and Housing Committee agreed in principle to explore this option further and to work up a detailed business case. ETF representatives were briefed on the proposal immediately prior to the committee meeting. Subsequently we have agreed that ETF involvement in this project will be through monthly Investment and Regeneration meetings. This will provide ETF with the opportunity to monitor progress on, and to influence the development of, a preferred option and business case for building council houses, including an appropriate consultation strategy. To start the process, an ETF representative was involved in the process of selecting a lead consultant for this project where we were particularly concerned to ensure an ability to consult effectively with the local communities.

In readiness for this major piece of work to be carried out over the next six months, ETF has held its own briefing session for Executive Committee members and representatives from the regeneration areas. From this session a short life Investment & Regeneration Working Group has been formed. The purpose of the group is to provide guidance and accountability for ETF representatives involved at the strategic level, to share and co-ordinate information between the local and strategic levels, and to support and maximise the influence of the tenant representatives at both levels.

### **Regeneration Areas**

Our Outreach Worker has continued to support the North Sighthill Residents Association in its work of representing the interests of residents in the joint Council group co-ordinating and managing the regeneration process. The representatives have been involved in preparing for the establishment of a Development Group to undertake the masterplanning of the area – envisaging the new community – including the means for engaging with the wider community and reporting to the neighbourhood partnership and others. The representatives were included in the ETF briefing on the proposal to build Council homes in the area and are to be represented in the Federation's Investment & Regeneration Working Group that will be co-ordinating our input into this project. During this period, independently of ETF, the Gracemount Courts and Cottages Residents Association has reformed as the Gracemount Action Residents Association to cover a wider area. We will provide them with a briefing on the proposals for the future of the area and support for their involvement in the Development Group that will be established to undertake the masterplanning of the area.

### **Rent Setting**

The proposals for a simpler and fairer system for setting council house rents in Edinburgh, along with a transitional scheme for its introduction for existing tenants in April 2009, were formally approved by the Council on 12<sup>th</sup> August 2008. The new system will apply to new tenancies from autumn 2008. Our involvement in working up the proposals and consulting on them was

carried out in the first half of 2008. Our final contribution was to give a presentation on our involvement and recommendations to the Council's all party Review Scrutiny Group in early August. This was a major piece of work that was long overdue. If an earlier review had been followed through the impact or pain would have been less severe and would not have coincided with the above inflation rent increases required to deliver the Scottish Housing Quality Standard.

### **Estates and Tenancy Management**

The Federation representatives have been contributing to the work of Council's Estates and Tenancy Management Improvement Forum since February. The Forum is developing a citywide approach on how Neighbourhood Improvement Programme money can be spent and the process for verifying that projects are appropriate for funding from the housing revenue account. It has also been developing guidelines for a citywide approach to regular estates inspections. 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.

### **Working with Registered Social Landlords and their tenants**

The Federation's Housing Association Tenants Sub Committee has recruited a new member and found a replacement tenant representative to the Council's Tenant Participation Working Group. The sub committee has continued its promotional work on the need for tenant involvement with housing association landlords. Every opportunity has been taken to do this through *Tenants Voice*, by writing to tenants groups representing housing association tenants and by preparing a page to be added to the ETF web site. The sub committee took the lead in providing a stall to promote ETF and the value of tenant participation at a recent all day tenants conference organised by the Rowan Group of housing associations.

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 has been preparing for discussions in the autumn on establishing a more formal relationship with Dunedin Canmore Housing Association and agreeing a future plan of work and support that could be provided by ETF.

The other key focus of the sub committee has been to ensure that in all its activities ETF addresses the particular concerns and interests of housing association tenants. At its regular monthly meetings the sub committee checks all forthcoming events for relevant opportunities to speak directly to the needs of housing association tenants.

### **Tenant Led Inspections**

In this quarter the two tenant inspection teams which carried out inspections of the repairs reporting processes in the Council and Dunedin Canmore Housing Association in June, have finalised their assessments and recommendations for improvement. This involved the two teams meeting to compare assessments and to identify the additional lessons and recommendations that can be gleaned from a comparative study. Subsequently, each team has submitted its report to the respective landlord. The teams are now making arrangements to present their reports formally and to discuss the landlords Action Plans, that is, how each landlord intends to deal with the respective team's recommendations for improvement. In addition, the teams have prepared summary reports for wider distribution to ETF members and other interested parties.

The Tenant Led Inspections Group made a presentation on tenant inspections and the work of the group to the Tenant Participation Working Group in August and to the Rowan Group's Tenants Conference in September. There is a request to make a presentation to a Tenants

Information Service workshop in November. This new addition to our tenant participation toolkit is generating considerable interest.

These were pilot inspections and in the next quarter the Tenant Led Inspections Group will consider the lessons that have been learnt by both tenants and landlords and how to progress tenant led inspections in Edinburgh. The latter is likely to include producing a case study on the work of the group thus far to share with others considering going down this path, developing a programme of future tenant inspections and recruiting more tenant inspectors.

### **Tenants and Mental Health**

Executive Committee representatives have continued to pursue our concern to ensure more joined up working and co-ordination in the cross service support for vulnerable tenants experiencing mental health problems. This has involved meetings with Council officers, attendance at meetings on suicide prevention and participation in a conference examining the impact of the Mental Health Act five years on from its implementation. This work is ongoing as there is much to be done to ensure all services work together to deliver proper care and support to vulnerable tenants in our communities.

### **Housing Area Boards**

We have held one city wide meeting of tenant representatives to Housing Area Boards in this quarter. This is an opportunity to learn of developments across the city in the work of the Housing Area Boards and of progress in their relationship and involvement with the Neighbourhood Partnerships. This sharing of experiences serves as a means of support and a source of ideas, as well as providing the Federation with an overview of progress and difficulties that informs our discussions at a strategic level. The feedback continues to confirm that development across the city is mixed and that integration with Neighbourhood Partnerships is at a very early stage. There remains concern about dis-engagement, the undoing of previous participation arrangements and difficulty in accessing Neighbourhood Partnerships as the focus of the Council has shifted to the rolling out of community planning at an area level. We continue to provide support to the tenant representatives in the South West who are experiencing particular difficulties in developing the Housing Board and a relationship with the Neighbourhood Partnerships.

### ***Expanding the membership of the Executive Committee***

Membership of the Executive Committee now stands at twelve. The Executive Committee has spent some time planning how this could be expanded and how it can nurture and support tenant representatives who express interest in getting more involved, without overwhelming them and scaring them off again! Part of this is down to publicity that is planned to provide a better understanding of what Executive Committee members and other representatives do in order to hopefully inspire others to think 'I could do that'.

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. The Executive Committee has been discussing what more could be done to develop a firmer working relationship with like-minded organisations within Norton Park in the first instance, and to identify common areas of interest that we could perhaps develop together,

such as the lack of support and co-ordination for vulnerable tenants/tenants with mental health issues. This will be a longer term project, but expect to read updates in future Progress Reports. Meanwhile we are making preparations for our involvement in a visit of Swedish tenant and landlord representatives to the city in early October. We are very much looking forward to learning about the different ways they have of providing and managing housing, and especially how tenants are involved in improving services and conditions. Our workers also 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 first 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 October and then circulated to our members and funders, the CEC/ETF Liaison Group and the Tenant Participation Working Group.

The Tenant Participation Working Group meeting in August discussed the Federation's Annual Report and received a presentation on Tenant Led Inspections which stimulated an interesting discussion. The Tenant Participation Working Group also approved a Briefing Session on Tenant Participation for elected members which the Federation helped to organise and deliver. The success of this event has led to a request to run a similar event for senior managers and this is planned for the autumn.

### ***Future Projects***

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

### ***October 2008***