



## EDINBURGH TENANTS FEDERATION

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

# Progress Report

October 2009 to December 2009

## Introduction

This is the second quarterly progress report on the work plan agreed by our members at the Federation's AGM in June 2009.

Three priority areas of work were identified for this year:

- a) to continue to develop ongoing work;
- b) to support our members in strengthening tenant participation locally and at Neighbourhood Partnership level; and
- c) to improve our communications with tenants and more widely.

This report outlines the actions that the Executive Committee has taken between October and December 2009 to tackle these priorities.

## Report

### *Continuing and developing ongoing work*

#### **Repairs**

Representatives of the Federation's Repairs Group have met regularly with the Council's repairs service, Edinburgh Building Services, and with Housing Property Services which oversees capital programme works. Through these meetings representatives continue to monitor the repairs budget, tackle officers over the kitchen and bathrooms programme, gas servicing and performance standards, including tenant satisfaction. Separate meetings were held to learn of EBS's future plans and to discuss performance monitoring, and to learn of the Council's plans regarding gas servicing. ETF representatives will be involved in taking both of these pieces of work forward in 2010.

#### **High Flats**

The Federation's High Flats Group continues to meet regularly, and representatives continue to meet with councillors and council officers through both the Multi-Storey Working Group and the Caretaking Service Improvement Forum. The work on mental health, originally initiated by the High Flats Group and the Multi-Storey Working Group, received praise from councillors at the Health, Social Care and Housing Committee. At the last meeting of the High Flats Group members received a presentation from officers from the Council's temporary accommodation service.

#### **Stair Cleaning**

In the autumn representatives on the Stair Cleaning Group began looking at strategic issues concerning the stair cleaning service and at what would need to be done in order to put the service out to tender. There was a day-long meeting in December which looked at the timescales and tasks that would need to be done in

preparation for tendering the service later in 2010, and representatives are now working towards this, looking at the documentation required. Representatives continue to monitor day-to-day performance and have asked for more monitoring information to be provided at their regular meetings with the stair cleaning service and the contractors currently engaged in the service.

### ***Investment and Regeneration***

There have been several meetings of the Investment and Regeneration Group as the master planning in the three regeneration areas really picks up. Regular updates have been provided on the progress of the project. Rehousing in Fort House commenced in November 2009. The Council received a further £1.25 million from the Scottish Government to build new Council housing: this will be spent in Pennywell.

Although we have expressed our concerns regarding mid market rent the Council is making a small proportion of the affordable housing available for mid market rent. We will continue to express our displeasure at this. The Scottish Government is pushing for mid market rent to be included as part of the new Council housing and we will be having a session with the Council on the guidance for this when it is published.

We are still working on an agreement with the Council to offer those wishing to return to the area a priority when applying for housing.

### ***Liaison Group***

The joint ETF/Council Liaison Group has responsibility for the detailed monitoring and planning of tenant participation activity with the council, and for overseeing the Federation's funding via a Service Level Agreement.

The group met in November, to discuss the future Service Level Agreement for ETF, since our current contract runs out on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010. At this meeting, the City of Edinburgh Council decided that a 'mini review' of ETF would take place which would help the Council decide if we will be funded for 2010/2011. The review was carried out in December, and ETF was issued with a draft report to which we have responded.

The Review recommends that the ETF Service Level Agreement be renewed for one year, that a more wide ranging review of ETF be carried out in 2010/11 and that discussions take place on how City of Edinburgh Council will commission work to support Tenant Participation beyond 2011.

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

Dunedin Canmore Housing Association Tenants Forum has now voted to formalise the working relationship with ETF. This will include ETF providing development support to tenants to enable the forum to operate independently of Dunedin Canmore Housing Association.

The Housing Association Tenants Sub Committee (HATS) has met again to discuss how Housing Association tenants could work towards improving tenant participation with their landlords. Link Housing Association attended the last meeting, and will meet with ETF to learn about how to do a Tenant Led Inspection. Port of Leith

Housing Association will attend the next meeting, and the group continues to find out about different landlords' service charges.

### ***Tenant Led Inspections***

The Tenant Led Inspection team worked very hard over this quarter. They conducted an in-depth inspection about void properties and the standard at which homes are let to new tenants during October and November. They then produced reports of their findings and made recommendations to the two landlords that they inspected in parallel – the City of Edinburgh Council and Dunedin Canmore Housing Association. These were published in December and both landlords are expected to respond by mid-February 2010.

### ***Tenants and Mental Health***

A report was submitted to the Health and Social Care committee outlining the work of ETF to raise awareness and improve services for tenants with mental health difficulties. This was commended as an area of good practice.

In addition ETF members met with the Minister for Housing and Communities Alex Neil MSP and Sarah Boyack MSP to update on ETF's work in this area and lobby for additional funding to support tenants with mental health difficulties.

### ***Antisocial Behaviour***

ETF has held a meeting with the Council's Antisocial Behaviour (ASB) Team to discuss improved tenant involvement in how ASB will be monitored.

ETF will be involved in the consultation of the Draft ASB Strategy and will seek members' views at a Federation Meeting on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2010.

### ***Rents***

ETF's work in influencing the ways rents are managed continued, with a meeting looking at the way the Council deals with and supports tenants in rent arrears. The meeting also considered the decision Stirling Council has taken: that no tenant will be evicted for being in arrears. ETF will work with the Council to develop letters for tenants, with a view to supporting the Council to improve this service for tenants.

### ***Strengthening local tenant participation***

At the end of December membership stood at 44 groups. In addition we have 26 associate members made up of 12 individuals and 14 organisations. We have continued to respond to all requests for support: from sending out information packs to designing and photocopying leaflets and posters, from giving advice to inspecting members' accounts.

### ***Outreach***

Our Outreach Worker has continued to support groups in the regeneration areas as well as making contact with people who are looking to set up a residents association. Meetings with one sheltered housing group have taken place on a monthly basis with the group working to set up a programme of events for the tenants in the scheme. Help has also been offered to a number of groups to fill out funding application forms. Committee skills' training has been provided to some groups.

## ***Regeneration Areas***

The Development Groups in North Sighthill and Gracemount are continuing to progress well. The master plan for North Sighthill has been consulted on and will be submitted for planning application in 2010. The Gracemount flats were successfully demolished in October and work to clear the site has started. The Gracemount Development Group was given a tour around some of the houses in Craigmillar and Greendykes to give an idea of different housing types and sizes that could be built in the area. The North Sighthill Development Group had a trip to John Wheatley College in Glasgow to see how a library, community facilities and college can work together. In Granton the residents association is continuing to meet with Council representatives regarding the refurbishment programme; this work will start in early 2010. Rehousing started in Fort House in November and is progressing well; Port of Leith Housing Association agreed to let some of their new development flats at the Waterfront to Fort House tenants.

## ***Housing Area Boards and Neighbourhood Partnerships***

Support has been provided to tenant representatives in the South West area. The review of the South West Area Board has taken place with a number of agreements for working now in place. Community Councils on the board have shown the willingness to learn about tenants problems and make an effort to contact them. However, RTO's have not been attending many meetings and they need to be encouraged to come along to meetings to discuss housing issues and influence their services. A review of how projects are selected through the Neighbourhood Improvement Programme has also taken place with a new structure now in place.

There remains a need both locally and strategically to make clear the opportunities for tenant participation in Neighbourhood Partnership structures.

Finally, in November the Federation held an extremely successful quiz night, welcoming many first-time teams from amongst its membership. In addition, those present raised £126 for Children in Need.

## ***Improving our communication***

This continues to be a priority for the Federation that we need to do more work on.

We have contributed to a publication the Council is planning to send to all tenants, but this has not yet been published.

We continue to develop our web presence. In the last three months we have continued to use our 'fan page' on Facebook to update members and supporters on our activities, to inform them of upcoming events, and to share news and links to articles that may be of interest. We are keen to see more members and supporters becoming involved with our activities on Facebook, which is linked to our own website.

We hosted a coffee morning for fellow tenants within Norton Park, which gave us an opportunity to explain about the work of the Federation and get ideas for how we can work together with some of the other organisations who are based in the same building as the Federation. ETF will be meeting with Shakti Women's Aid and Women onto Work to explore these links.

## Evaluation and Monitoring

This is the second quarterly report of our activities since the Federation's Annual General Meeting in June 2009. It will be discussed at our quarterly Federation meeting in February and then circulated to our members and funders, the CEC/ETF Liaison Group and the Tenant Participation Working Group.

***January 2010***