



EDINBURGH TENANTS FEDERATION

Edinburgh's Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations

Progress Report

January 2009 to March 2009

Introduction

This is the third 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 January and March 2009.

This report follows the priorities outlined in the Work Plan for 2008/09.

- 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.

In January the Executive Committee carried out a six monthly review of progress on delivering the 2008 / 09 work plan commitments. This was a productive meeting that ensured we remained focused on priorities, noted where we had been over ambitious or there were unanticipated developments and refined our plans accordingly.

Report

Involving and engaging more fully with our members

At the end of March our membership stood at 49. In addition we have 28 associate members made up of 14 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. We have sent out three copies of Federation Matters and one issue of Tenants Voice went to print in March but was not available for distribution until April. The website has been updated regularly.

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 Burns Supper on 28th January was very successful and we are now preparing for the Federation Meeting on 27th April and the AGM in June.

We continue to offer help and support to member groups. We have continued to support the tenants and residents groups in Gracemount and North Sighthill on the regeneration of the areas and involvement in the Development Groups. A new group in Granton has been set up to concentrate on the refurbishment of the houses. A new group has also been set up in Coatfield Lane and Giles Street with their first committee meeting taking place soon. Committee skills training was provided to Calders Sheltered Housing Complex Residents Association and a meeting with another group took place to apply for funding. Ongoing support is being provided

to the Laichfield and Chesser Loan sheltered housing group; it is hoped a committee will be formed here soon. We have also provided advice to Viewpoint Housing Association's new Tenant Participation Officer and attended a meeting of the Viewpoint Tenants' Representative Group.

Continuing and developing ongoing work

Repairs

The Repairs Strategy Group has met twice to oversee the council's housing repairs budget and discuss issues of concern such as gas servicing and complaints monitoring. There have also been a series of meetings with Edinburgh Building Services to progress issues of concern. Over the past few months we have reviewed and updated the Repairs Policy and have been particularly concerned about EBS' plans to gather personal information from tenants. Representatives feel that as landlords the council should already have this information and should share it with EBS where there is a need for it. Finally, Federation representatives attended a Customer Service Excellence lunch where they spoke to the assessor about EBS' performance and customer services. Customer Service Excellence is the replacement for Chartermark and EBS is the first part of Services for Communities to be assessed for this. Pinnacle has now ended its relationship with EBS and the EBS management team are now fully in charge.

Federation representatives had their quarterly meeting with Housing Property Services at the end of March. They learned about the planned capital programme over the next four years and discussed ways of making the letters sent out by HPS more tenant-friendly. As part of this they questioned the need for so many different staff to be involved in tenant liaison work throughout the life of a kitchen and bathroom installation. At present there can be four or five different staff involved at different stages. What do you think? Is this confusing, or did it all make sense when you had this work done in your house?

The Federation's Repairs Group met in January to co-ordinate all these activities and continues to meet quarterly.

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 the Mental Health Working Group and the demolition programme.

The Caretaking Service Improvement Forum has met once in this period and received a report on service developments. The Waste Management project is now being rolled out citywide on a block by block basis. Residents in each block are consulted on what recycling facilities they would like to see and where they should be located. The feedback from early consultations and monitoring the pilot projects is extremely positive.

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. Council officers have drafted terms of reference for a strategic group as we have suggested, and we continue to work towards this.

Investment and Regeneration

There have been five meetings of the Investment & Regeneration Group as the hectic pace to finalise the business case to build council houses continued. The workload has been extensive. We received regular updates on progress and contributed on all aspects of the project as it developed. This included scrutinising the business plan and the bid for a share of the £25m allocated by the Scottish government to encourage the building of council houses. We discussed and received assurances on the risk assessment and on tenants' concerns about any impact on the Housing Revenue Account and the programme to deliver modern standards to all council houses by 2015. We discussed in detail pooling additional borrowing costs associated with the new houses rather than introducing premium rents, and the financial impact of converting plans for mid market rent homes to affordable rent homes. Both of these proposals are being pursued. Our representative participated in the selection of the consultants who will carry out the master planning in the three regeneration areas from April 2009. We took part in extensive consultations in Royston Wardieburn on the question of whether to demolish or refurbish. This resulted in both a decision to proceed immediately with a refurbishment programme in line with tenants' priorities, and to ETF supporting the establishment of a residents' association to participate in the delivery of the programme and the improvement of the area. Finally, we have had ongoing discussions on the commitment to give tenants in the regeneration areas undergoing demolition priority in the allocation of the new affordable rented homes. The question is how to fulfil the commitment to tenants to be part of planning the new community and to have the option to return to live in and develop that community when the finances dictate that the proportion of affordable rented homes will be far lower than expected and required. Agreement on how best to deliver this commitment is nearing a conclusion.

There have been three meetings 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. There were regular updates on and discussion of all of the above developments prior to formulating views and briefing the representatives in preparation for joint meetings with council officers. In addition, there has been extensive lobbying of MPs and MSPs on the urgent need for major investment in affordable rented housing, on the case for writing off historic housing debt and why now especially the importance of affordable rented housing should be recognised and promoted, ending the fixation with home ownership that lies at the root of the current economic crisis.

Regeneration Areas

The Development Groups in North Sighthill and Gracemount are progressing well; North Sighthill had a presentation from Napier University on their vision for the area. Gracemount is progressing with the masterplanning of the area as the first new build in that area will take place in 2010. Representatives from these areas are continuing to meet with the Investment & Regeneration Working Group. The Granton, Royston and Wardieburn Residents Association has been set up and the committee are meeting twice monthly: once as the committee and once with Council officers to manage the refurbishment programme, tackle outstanding repairs and maintenance issues and develop and improve the environment and open spaces.

Estates and Tenancy Management

The Estates and Tenancy Management Improvement Forum continues to meet regularly to develop a citywide approach on Neighbourhood Environmental Plans and Neighbourhood Improvement Programme projects. The Forum also takes the lead on developing guidelines on different service standards and citywide policies on aspects including abandoned cars, estates walkabouts and fly-tipping. Progress on all this work is on-going and we hope before long to develop an estate walkabout training day similar to those carried out in the multi-storeys.

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 been extremely busy over the past quarter. In particular we were heavily involved in planning and organising a tenants' conference that took place on 28th March to gather participants' views on the Tenant Participation Strategy and also to measure the council's performance on a range of services. The short-life working group set up last year to guide and prepare the Federation's contribution to the council's inspection by the Scottish Housing Regulator met several times to devise a set of performance standards against which the council could be measured, and to research and subsequently suggest services that are of greatest importance to tenants. Sadly the subsequent conference was poorly attended.

Following our meeting last November with the Community Safety Manager on the implementation of the Antisocial Behaviour Strategy, Executive Committee representatives have started a series of regular quarterly meetings with the officers responsible for the customer satisfaction surveys. This is an opportunity to monitor the feedback, gain an insight into what is being learnt and how that is influencing improvements to the services provided. Antisocial Behaviour policies and procedures are currently being updated and we expect to be consulted on these. This meeting also proved a valuable opportunity to provide the link with ongoing work in respect of vulnerable tenants and the steps being taken to ensure that they are recognised and responded to appropriately.

Additionally this quarter, Federation representatives expressed their concerns over the lack of a strategic oversight body to look at the stair cleaning service and this is now being addressed. They also expressed concerns over the personal information being sought by Edinburgh Building Services as part of their pursuit of Customer Service Excellence. This has resulted in meetings between Edinburgh Building Services, Housing and Regeneration and the Research section to see how best they can work together to collect and share appropriate information.

Working with Registered Social Landlords and their tenants

The Federation's Housing Association Tenants sub committee has held four meetings during this period. The early part of the year was devoted to drafting a response to the Scottish government's consultation on proposals for Investment in Affordable Housing. The draft response was circulated to all member groups and discussed and finalised at a meeting arranged for that purpose.

In addition, the sub committee continued to pursue establishing a formal work plan and financial arrangement with Dunedin Canmore Housing Association and discussions to finalise that work will take place soon. Finally, the sub committee has mapped out two new areas of work it is to pursue: an investigation into service charges for housing association tenants, especially differences within and across landlords, and an examination and comparison of tenant participation arrangements in three of the main housing associations in the city.

Tenant Led Inspections

2009 started with an opportunity to reflect on and learn the lessons from the pilot inspections carried out in 2008. A case study and resource pack on setting up a tenant led inspection scheme is now available and will be posted on the web site soon. A commitment has also been made to produce a shorter, simpler and more accessible magazine on tenant led inspections to inform and enthuse tenants considering becoming inspectors.

Thereafter, much of our work at the beginning of the year was planning a public meeting which took place at the beginning of March. The aim of the meeting was to talk about our experience as tenant inspectors to try and recruit some new tenants to join the team. Eleven tenants signed

up on the night and from that four have now started their training and another training programme is being mooted for the autumn.

We have also begun discussing possible subjects for our next inspection, but more thought on this is required before we can select one topic. We expect the next inspection to take place after the summer holiday period and that it will again be a parallel inspection of the Council and Dunedin Canmore Housing Association.

Staff met with the Tenant Participation Officer from Viewpoint Housing Association in January. She was keen to see whether tenant led inspections could be trialled within Viewpoint but after a lengthy discussion there was agreement that neither the tenants nor the staff were yet ready for something as rigorous as an inspection, but that we could work with them to learn and apply techniques such as mystery shopping in order to begin to look at the services they receive.

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 continued to be to make sure that frontline staff, such as concierge staff in the high rises, can access suicide awareness training. The Federation's first representative completed her training in February, and training for concierge staff has now begun. EBS are now keen to roll out the training programme to their frontline staff so steady progress is being made. Trying to ensure that all relevant services are linked up is like trying to put together a jigsaw puzzle when some of the pieces are missing. It's taking time but we are getting there.

Housing Area Boards

There has been one city-wide meeting of tenant representatives to Housing Area Boards in this quarter. We have continued support to tenant representatives in the South West area to tackle the deterioration in community engagement and tenant participation in that area. There are substantial differences in the practices across the six areas and in the relationships with respective neighbourhood partnerships. This is leading us to question the value of continuing quarterly city-wide meetings. We are considering whether ETF's future role in regard to Area Boards is to provide support and guidance to tenant representatives as required, whilst continuing at a strategic level to push for improvements in community engagement and tenant participation at the local level. Members' views on this would be welcomed.

Expanding the membership of the Executive Committee

Membership of the Executive Committee still stands at twelve. Our constitution gives us the capacity to have up to eighteen elected members and three co-opted members, and our next elections take place in June at our AGM. We would be pleased to hear from anyone that is interested in standing for election or in being co-opted. Please get in touch with the Federation office in the first instance and we'll be happy to chat to you about what membership of the Executive Committee involves.

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.

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 third 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 April and then circulated to our members and funders, the CEC/ETF Liaison Group and the Tenant Participation Working Group.

In the last three months we have conducted our annual members' survey. Thank you to everyone who has taken part. We will be presenting the results at the Federation meeting at the end of April and they will be available on our website afterwards.

Future Projects

This coming quarter traditionally sees our annual training for treasurers, and this year is no exception. This year in response to suggestions from last year's participants we have split the training into two elements. The finance training workshop now focuses on keeping a group's financial record-keeping in order, while we are organising a grant applications surgery to enable groups to obtain one-to-one advice on how to set a budget and apply for funding.

In preparation for the Annual General Meeting in June, the Executive Committee will be reviewing its progress in this year's Work Plan before putting together a new Work Plan for discussion at the AGM. Until then we will continue to work to the priorities set out in the current Work Plan.

April 2009