



## EDINBURGH TENANTS FEDERATION

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

# Progress Report

June 2009 to September 2009

## Introduction

This is the first 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 June and September 2009 to tackle these priorities.

## Report

### *Continuing and developing ongoing work*

#### **Repairs**

The Federation's Repairs Group has met twice in this period. It elected new representatives for its regular meetings with the Council. 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. Over the summer the Repairs Group surveyed the Federation's membership about priorities for the coming year and is currently looking at how best to implement those recommendations.

#### **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. At the last meeting members looked at choice based letting and environmental issues.

#### **Stair Cleaning**

Representatives have started to set up a steering group to look at strategic issues and to prepare for putting the service out to tender in 2010. Representatives agreed reluctantly with a decision to extend the current contracts for a further year because it was clear that much more work needs to be done to ensure that future contracts are managed more robustly, including having penalty clauses for missed cleans or poor workmanship. In the meantime the meetings that monitor the existing contracts continue to take place quarterly.

#### **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. It was confirmed that Fort House will be included in the demolition programme with rehousing to start in 2010. The Council

received £1.67 million from the Scottish Government to build new Council housing this will be spent in Gracemount. City of Edinburgh Council has also submitted another bid for just over £6 million for building 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. The Council has also provided us with the Strategic Housing Investment Programme, which has increased this year but it is likely to decrease again next year.

### ***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 has met only once this quarter, for a special meeting to look at the future of our service level agreement. Our current funding arrangement runs out at the end of March 2010. The meeting did not come up with any firm proposals and we were due to meet again in September but the Council asked to postpone the meeting till November.

The Tenant Participation Working Group met in September and received updates on the tenant led inspection and the planned end of the Just Rewards scheme.

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

ETF made a presentation to the Dunedin Canmore Housing Association Tenants Forum in June to propose that ETF provide some development support to tenants to enable the forum to operate independently of Dunedin Canmore Housing Association. The Forum agreed to ballot its members on this issue, however the ballot has not yet taken place.

The Housing Association Tenants Sub Committee (HATS) has met twice since June discussing how Housing Association tenants could work towards improving tenant participation with their landlords. Viewpoint Housing Association tenants reported that a Registered Tenant Organisation has been established. At the next meeting tenants from Link Housing Association will discuss how tenants can get involved, as well as looking at service charges.

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

The workplan charged the Federation with carrying out another Tenant Led Inspection this year. A team of ten inspectors launched the latest inspection, about void properties and the standard at which homes are let to new tenants, at the end of September. This followed months of solid preparation and training. The inspection is looking at both City of Edinburgh Council and Dunedin Canmore Housing Association in parallel, and the team expects to publish its findings and recommendations in early January 2010.

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

We have continued to encourage Council services to work together to provide better support for tenants with mental health problems. In the last three months we have seen staff from the Health and Social Care department join our regular Mental Health Working

Group meetings. We have seen a report go up to the Health, Social Care and Housing Committee which gives formal recognition to the work we are doing. We have also worked with other agencies and as a result Breathing Space will be issuing key fobs with their contact details to all tenants in multi-storeys. This initiative has been described as 'groundbreaking' by City of Edinburgh Council, and ETF has had some local and national press on this issue.

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

At the end of September membership stood at 43 groups. In addition we have 24 associate members made up of 10 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***

Over the past few months 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 have taken place with two sheltered housing complexes to set up groups with one already being established and another is in progress. Committee skills training has also been delivered with further training being identified in some groups.

### ***Regeneration Areas***

The Development Groups in North Sighthill and Gracemount are continuing to progress well. The master plan for Gracemount has been submitted for planning application and the designs for the new housing are being drawn up. The Gracemount flats will be down by the end of October with the site expected to be cleared by the end of year in preparation for the new build starting in 2010. In North Sighthill the master plan is at the early stages. Broadway Malyan have been attending the Development Group meetings to start the progress and to plan for the consultation process. In Granton the residents association is continuing to meet with Council representatives regarding the refurbishment programme. This work has now started and the group are keeping an eye on how this is progressing. A Council officer agreed that to meet with tenants before the meeting to tackle any outstanding repairs and maintenance issues.

### ***Estates Inspection Training Day***

Representatives worked through the Council's Estates and Tenancy Management Improvement Forum to develop and deliver an estates inspection training day in South West Edinburgh at the end of September. Tenants were invited to learn about the Council's processes for reporting on estates inspections and following up to ensure that repairs and environmental clean-ups were carried out. The feedback that participants gave will help to influence how walkabouts in that part of Edinburgh are carried out in future, and further training days are expected to take place in other parts of the city.

### ***Block Walkabout Training Day***

Representatives from the Caretaking Service Improvement Forum have helped to organise a further Block Walkabout Training Day which will take place in October. These days are now organised on an annual basis and provide an opportunity for tenants living in the multi-storeys to learn more about how the performance of their caretaking service is monitored and measured and the influence that tenants have on the process.

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

Support has been provided to tenant representatives in the South West area. The role of tenant participation in community engagement continues to be unclear with participation structures still focussing on community councils. A review of the South West Area Board

has been taking place over the past few months where a steering group has been looking at the role of the area board, membership, role of staff, neighbourhood partnership involvement and housing management performance indicators will be explored with a view to improving service delivery.

The Federation was well-represented at a conference entitled *Neighbourhood Partnerships: Going Forward Together* at the end of September. The event was organised by City of Edinburgh Council and was designed to celebrate the successes of Neighbourhood Partnerships and provide inspiration to those engaged in them. It was felt by some Federation representatives that it would have been useful for the conference to focus on the problems many of them face in trying to engage with the Neighbourhood Partnership structures. Some interesting and thought-provoking workshops were provided which may have given us some ideas for the future. There remains a need both locally and strategically to make clear the opportunities for tenant participation in Neighbourhood Partnership structures.

### *Improving our communication*

This remains a priority for the Federation as, largely due to staff changes and handling the rest of our workload, work in this area has been limited over the past three months.

We received some publicity for the Federation's groundbreaking work on vulnerable tenants in the multi-storeys, with our Convenor giving an interview on Radio Forth and a Council-issued press release that was picked up by the Evening News and the e-newsletter of the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations.

Our Tenant Led Inspections work has been publicised in Dunedin Canmore Housing Association's latest tenants' newsletter.

Our Information and Publicity Group has started to plan a series of articles about the Federation for possible inclusion in other Registered Social Landlords' publications for their tenants. This work is ongoing.

We continue to develop our web presence. In the last three months we have established a 'fan page' on Facebook which is linked to our own website, and we are keen to see more of our members connecting to this. The Facebook site gives everyone the chance to comment and discuss issues of concern, which is a great way of improving communication between our members.

### **Evaluation and Monitoring**

This is the first 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 October and then circulated to our members and funders, the CEC/ETF Liaison Group and the Tenant Participation Working Group.

### **October 2009**