

**LONDON BOROUGH OF RICHMOND UPON THAMES
HOMELESSNESS FORUM
Minutes of the meeting held at York House, Twickenham, on
Monday 6 April 2009 at 2 pm**

Present:

Ken Emerson	LBRUT
Suzanne Akuffo	LBRUT, Resettlement Team
Elisabeth Bamber	Twickenham Citizens Advice Bureau
Peter Cason	Metropolitan Police
Tom Bush	LBRUT
Amy Cheswick (in the Chair)	Richmond upon Thames Churches Housing Trust
Ben Davies	Spear
Richard Eason	LGBT Forum
Joanna Gregory	Furniture Scheme/MIND
Beryl Hawkins	Clerk (LBRUT)
Catherine Howard	Kingston & Richmond Law Centre
Jane McInerney	LBRUT
Anne Mawer	Mid Mediation & Counselling
Debi Provenzale	Mid Mediation & Counselling
Kiran Randhawa	LBRUT
Gavin Rodgers	London & Quadrant Housing Trust
Brian Short	Vineyard Project
Tracy Stanley	LBRUT
Cass Williams	SCF
Farah Zeb	Refuge

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Louise Brice, Principal Resettlement Officer, LBRUT; Dan Butler, Policy & Research Manager, LBRUT; Councillor Denise Carr; Sue Fox, LBR/SWLSTG; Rebecca Mear, Refugee Action Kingston; Linda Toulmin, Richmond Housing Partnership; Ed Tytherleigh, SPEAR, Nicky Younge, Centre Manager, Welcare Richmond.

In the absence of Ed Tytherleigh, Ken Emerson took the chair.

2. INTRODUCTIONS All present introduced themselves.

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 September 2008 were agreed as an accurate record.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Choice Based Lettings Scheme (Ref: Minute 8) Ken Emerson reported that the Council was not in a financial position to proceed with a choice based lettings scheme; and bids for funding from Communities and Local Government would need to be submitted by October 2009.

5. VOTING FOR CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR

As the only nominee, Ed Tytherleigh was duly elected chair.

Amy Cheswick and Linda Toulmin were nominated for vice-chair. The Forum agreed to appoint two vice-chairs. As the only nominees, Amy and Linda were duly elected.

Amy Cheswick took the chair.

6. TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE HOMELESSNESS FORUM

The Forum received draft terms of reference. It was noted that the terms of reference had been updated on the recommendation of the Homelessness Strategy and had been circulated to all Forum members.

Richard Eason stated that, as chair of the Richmond LGBT Forum, he had been unable to attend the homelessness strategy consultations although he had participated in the housing strategy consultation workshops. The Forum agreed that Jane McInerney should liaise with Dan Butler regarding this issue.

ACTION BY: JMcl/DB

The Forum agreed the revised terms of reference, subject to references to the vice-chair being changed to plural.

7. UPDATE BY KEN EMERSON, HEAD OF HOUSING OPERATIONS, LBRuT

Ken Emerson, Head of Housing Operations for the London Borough of Richmond, presented summary data on homelessness in the borough from 2004/05 to 2008/09. The Forum noted that:

- The annual report would provide more detailed information and would be available for the September 2009 meeting of the Forum.
- The total number of homeless for 2008/09 shown in the data should be updated from 130 to 132.
- The number of single and young people accepted as homeless had remained constant for a number of years, at about 45% of total acceptances.
- For 2008/09, of the 132 people accepted as homeless, 46 were young people.
- In the majority of cases, the reason for homelessness was that parents or other relatives were no longer willing or able to accommodate the applicant.
- Only a small number of applicants gave mortgage arrears as a reason for homelessness; there had been an uptake in the number of people asking for advice on mortgage arrears in the last few months, but this had not translated into people losing their homes.
- Ken should be informed of any specific requests for information to be

provided in the annual report.

In response to questioning from Forum members Ken stated that:

- In his experience, there was little evidence of homelessness arising from homophobia of parents; it might be possible to produce statistics by counting from paper records.
- The reasons for parents being no longer able to accommodate young people, includes some cases of violence.
- The reduction in the number accepted homeless due to violence could be partly due to the success of the Safety First scheme.
- The statistics only show those that are statutorily homeless; landlords who have reciprocal arrangements can often re-house vulnerable people and they will then not need to approach the Council.
- The number of people being re-housed is at its highest.
- If tenants have a lot of points on the register, every effort will be made to prevent them from becoming homeless, and therefore losing points.
- The Safety First scheme provides support to women who are the victims of violence to enable them to stay in their own homes.

It was noted that Kingston Churches Action on Homelessness with the Royal Borough of Kingston was setting up a night shelter for homeless people; SPEAR could provide contact details.

The Forum congratulated Ken on producing an overview on homeless acceptances so soon after the end of the year.

It was noted that the Steering Group would be drawing up a list of what data was needed for the annual report.

8. PRESENTATION BY TRACY STANLEY, ON BEHALF OF DAN BUTLER, POLICY AND RESEARCH MANAGER (HOUSING), LBRuT

Tracy Stanley, from the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames, reported on actions in the Homelessness Strategy for the Housing Policy Team for 2009/10. The Forum noted that areas for action would include:

- the evidence base for BME homeless acceptances, this number is 3 times greater than that of white British acceptances;
- the effect of the credit crunch on the housing market generally and within the borough;
- the housing needs of ex-offenders;
- evaluation of the Mediation Service;
- the link between affordability and mobility;
- research into homelessness resulting from domestic abuse, 9 out of 10 homelessness acceptances arise from domestic abuse;
- youth homelessness;
- an enhanced Housing Options pilot to establish best practice.

It was noted that:

- There will be biannual monitoring of the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan.
- Areas for action would be considered by the Homelessness Forum Sub-group before further reports were made to the main Forum.
- Ideas from Forum members should be submitted to Dan Butler or Sarah Filby (Tel: 020 8891 7405) sarah.filby@richmond.gov.uk.

9. PRESENTATION ON SAFETY FIRST, BY TOM BUSH, HOUSING OPTIONS OFFICER (SAFETY FIRST OFFICER), LBRuT, AND PETER CASON, CRIME PREVENTION OFFICER

Tom Bush, Housing Options Officer (Safety First Officer), and Peter Cason, Crime Prevention Officer, gave a joint presentation on the Safety First scheme. Forum members received a printed copy of the presentation notes, an example of a completed agency referral form, and a list of potential material required for Safety First referrals.

Tom stated that:

- He had previously worked for SPEAR on the Rent Deposit Scheme.
- Further information on the scheme was available at the meeting for anyone interested.
- The scheme provides a multi-agency, holistic service to victims of domestic abuse and hate crime; its aims include deterring perpetrators, reducing victimisation, and reducing fear and it is very much part of Richmond's housing toolkit for preventing homelessness.
- Provision of free extra security in homes includes fitting extra locks, letter box covers, 'spy holes' and padlocks on gates.
- Support might include referral to a specialist agency, such as Refuge or Victim Support.

Peter stated that:

- He had been a Crime Prevention Officer for one year, following his retirement as a Police Officer.
- Various agencies make referrals to the scheme, via secure email.
- Once a referral has been made the Crime Prevention Officer will assess the level of risk, taking into account the state of the front garden, lighting, fencing, gates, sheds, garages, the security of windows above flat roofs, bins, ladders, and alarms, as well as the adequacy of internal security measures.
- Crime prevention surveys include both residential and commercial properties.
- The service is available to the elderly and vulnerable, as well as victims of domestic violence.
- Advice will be given on personal safety.
- Panic alarms are issued for use when there is a risk to life or of

serious damage.

- Activation of the alarms is monitored and the Housing Options Officer takes action on reports; the alarms are attached to a BT landline and activation is relayed to a 24-hour response centre; 35 panic alarms are in use within the borough.
- Panic alarms are supplied free for the first six months, after which time the client pays a rental of £6.50 a month.
- The scheme has been operating since October 2006 and has helped 104 households; 30 of these related to distraction burglaries and the remainder to domestic abuse or hate crime.
- The scheme is working well and is a good example of partnership working.

In answer to questioning, it was noted that:

- Safe rooms are not currently available within the borough; the Police had not received any requests for safe rooms.
- Panic alarms are financed by the Police.

Tom and Peter were thanked for an interesting and informative presentation.

10. UPDATE ON SPEAR'S HOSTEL REFURBISHMENT BY BEN DAVIES, SPEAR

Ben Davies, from SPEAR, on behalf of Ed Tytherleigh, updated the Forum on the refurbishment of SPEAR's hostel. It was noted that:

- Drawings of the planned improvements to SPEAR's hostel were completed in 2007.
- £972,000 has been granted from the Hostel Capital Improvement Fund to change the hostel from having 12 bed spaces in 6 shared rooms into a 14-bed facility with 14 separate en-suite rooms.
- The original plan was for 4 of the spaces to be for females, but the priority now is provision for single white males.
- The mental health assessment units will not be going ahead as planned; discussions have taken place with CMHT and Richmond Churches Housing Trust and it is expected that the units will be provided elsewhere in the Borough.
- While the improvement works are taking place SPEAR will be maintaining services via Kaleidoscope in Kingston and links with voluntary and statutory organisations will be maintained.
- When the improvements have been completed, there will be a total of 14 rooms, with a maximum of 4 for people with more complex needs, such as mental health or drug or alcohol abuse. Needs of clients are expected to range from low/medium to medium/high.
- Beginning in July 2009, work is scheduled to take 8 to 9 months, with August 2010 being a more realistic completion date.
- There are plans for a training centre to be located in the back garden.
- One of the aims of SPEAR is to provide meaningful_occupation; to this

- end, the programme will provide funding and opportunities for training.
- The hostel will provide accommodation for homeless people between the ages of 18 and 65.
 - Separate provision will be made for young people.
- SPEAR's one-stop-shop for homeless people and people at risk of becoming homeless will be moving from ETNA to 89 Heath Road, Twickenham in June 2009.

11. MID MEDIATION AND COUNSELLING LIMITED

It was noted that Mediation in Divorce, established in 1984, had changed its name to Mid Mediation and Counselling Limited.

12. MINUTES AND AGENDA FOR MEETINGS OF THE FORUM

It was noted that in future minutes and agendas for meetings of the Forum would be sent electronically.

15. NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Forum would be held in the Salon, York House, Twickenham, on Monday 21 September 2009 from 2 to 3.30 pm.

The meeting ended at 3.20 pm.