

**LONDON BOROUGH OF RICHMOND UPON THAMES
HOMELESSNESS FORUM**

**Minutes of the meeting held at York House on
Monday 15 September 2008 at 2 p.m.**

Present:

Ed Tytherleigh (Interim Chair)	Spear
Trevor Akerman	Leaving Care Team
Collette Boylan	Vineyard Project
Caroline Clarke	LBRUT/Housing Needs
Rachel Dickson	Vineyard Project/Furniture Scheme
Ken Emerson	LBRUT
Delroy Ettienne	LBRUT
Sue Fox	LBR/SWLSTG
Joanna Gregory	Furniture Scheme/MIND
Beryl Hawkins	Clerk (LBRUT)
Matt Hatton	Kingston Churches Action on Homelessness
Bridget Jones	Richmond College
Surinder Sembi	EMAG
Rania Niuomanis	Richmond CMI & T
Shola O'Grady	RHP
James Rowlands	LBRUT Community Safety Team
Nicky Simpson	LBRUT
Ehud Sivosh	Richmond Citizens Advice Bureau
Eleni Walia	Housing Services, LBRUT
Beverley Walsh	Age Concern, Richmond
Cass Williams	SCF
Nick Young	Kingston/Richmond Probation

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Jane Bailey, Elisabeth Bamber, Twickenham Citizens Advice Bureau; Liz Dewson, Victim Support; Rebecca Mear, Refugee Action Kingston; David Sidonio, Richmond Council for Voluntary Service.

2. INTRODUCTIONS

All present introduced themselves.

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 May 2008 were agreed as an accurate record.

4. PENNY WADE

The Chair reported that the former Forum Chair, Penny Wade, had died following a short illness and paid tribute to her work, particularly on behalf of Spear, The Vineyard Project and the National Childbirth Trust. Forum members observed a minute's silence in memory of Penny.

5. CHAIRING ARRANGEMENTS

The Forum noted that arrangements for the election of chair would be an item on the agenda for the next meeting. Joanna Gregory reminded Forum members of the original intention that the chairmanship should be held on a rotational basis.

Ed Tytherleigh, Spear, stated that changes to the way in which the Forum operated were expected and that Forum members would be consulted about charring arrangements before the next meeting. It was noted that the Forum steering group comprised Ed Tytherleigh, Dan Butler, Eleni Walia, the Research and Statistics officer and a representative from the Primary Care Trust (currently vacant). The membership of the steering group will be reviewed.

The interim chair until will be Ed Tytherleigh, until a chair was elected.

6. HOUSING STRATEGY

Nicky Simpson, Planning & Policy Manager, Housing & Well Being for the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames, presented a paper setting out progress on Richmond's Housing Strategy for 2008 to 2012. Nicky stated that:

- Two consultation workshops had already taken place and had been well attended (25 and 15). Four more workshops were imminent.
- The strategy had seven main themes:
 1. **More affordable homes** – It is proposed that 160 new affordable homes will be developed in 2008/09 and 120 in 2009/10.
 2. **Better quality and greener homes**
 3. **Preventing homelessness**
 4. **Supporting independent living**
 5. **Understanding and influencing the housing market** – As the planning authority, the local authority has a responsibility to understand the market. The private rented sector attracts young professionals and the authority will be addressing the issues of affordability in the private rented sector and the ability of low income households to gain private rented accommodation.
 6. **Promoting housing choice**
 7. **Creating thriving communities**

Nicky Simpson asked Forum members to contact Eleni Walia by the end of the week if they wanted to know more about the consultation and to send comments to Eleni by 30 September 2008.

Nicky explained that there would be an action plan to cover the four years of the Strategy. The plan for the first two years had been drawn up. The plan for the second two years would be drawn up following the review, which would take into account changes in policy arising from the change

in Mayor of London and could be affected by a general election.

The Forum noted that:

- The ratio for social and intermediate housing targets has changed under the new Mayor of London from 70:30 to 60:40. The implications of this are being dealt with at regional level.
- The planning target under the Local Area Agreement is 398 over three years. This is an increase from 350.
- There is a high level of need within the borough for both new social rented and intermediate housing.
- The Housing Strategy covers all housing needs.
- The Council plans to support people in finding employment and obtaining benefits through closer working with Job Centre Plus.

Forum members made the point that a £300,000 property might not be affordable for many people living in the borough and that the limited value of shared ownership, with the possibility of falling into debt, was not an attractive option. Nicky Simpson stated that planning permission would not be granted unless a proportion of properties in a development proposal met stringent tests on affordability.

It was noted that:

- The London Plan target of 270 new homes a year was for all housing in Richmond, including homes for private sale.
- The Housing Provision Team, with Spear, had resettled 560 households in 2007/08.
- Lack of housing provision was the biggest cause of homelessness.
- The Strategy mirrored need for BME housing
- The variation in rates within the social rented sector was an issue for RSL partners. It was suggested that rates overall were likely to increase as funding was needed to repair older properties and provide services for tenants.

7. HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

Ken Emerson, Head of Housing Operations for the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames, circulated the draft Homelessness Strategy and stated that all Forum members may have received a copy by email as part of the consultation. Ken stated that:

- The Strategy builds on the success of earlier strategies.
- The need for private rented accommodation was greater than ever. The private rented sector allowed people to choose where to live, for example, to move nearer to good schools, but there was a need for affordability.

It was noted that after September the draft Strategy would be sent to the CLG Department (Communities and Local Government). Richmond's

consultation timescale was in line with that of other authorities.

8. CHOICE-BASED LETTINGS SCHEME

Ken Emerson stated that consultation was taking place on the introduction of a choice-based lettings (CBL) scheme in the borough in line with government policy. Ken stated that:

- Under the scheme, all tenants would be able to bid for properties, as opposed to the current points scheme, where a single offer was made.
- The scheme did not create properties.
- The consultation questionnaire had been sent to all on the borough's homeless register.
- The closing date for questionnaires was in August, but responses were still being received.
- About 230 questionnaires had been returned and were being analysed.
- The consultation included questions about internet access and other communication links and whether helping bidding would be needed.

In answer to questioning from Forum members, it was noted that:

- Homelessness due to repossession had not gone up. The Council had received three approaches in the past 18 months.
- Richmond had the highest per capita debt and also the highest per capita asset.
- A CBL scheme is more likely to attract funding if the proposal is well received by tenants.
- The scheme will need to be costed and a report will be made to the January 2009 meeting of the Health, Housing and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- Authorities that have introduced CBL, for example, the London Boroughs of Hounslow and Ealing have found that waiting times have not been reduced and without a points system it is not clear to clients who is taking up available places and why they are kept waiting.
- The cost for weekly advertising is not significant – the database can be updated continuously and use made of text and email alerts.
- The elderly, housebound and others who may have access issues are likely to be supported. This could include home visits.
- Free digital TV boxes will be provided if necessary.
- The CBL website has the facility to convert to any language, use speech and have the font size and background colours changed.

9. OVERCROWDING

Ken Emerson reported that a consultation was being carried out on overcrowding to find out about the quality of life for tenants. Ken stated that:

- The questionnaire included questions about Seaside and Country

Homes.

- Enabling older people to move to retirement destinations is a way of alleviating overcrowding.
- Most people living in Richmond prefer to stay where they are.
- The Council is proposing to stop allowing building on green corridors between houses.

10. MENTAL HEALTH ACCOMMODATION REVIEW

Ken Emerson updated Forum members on the Mental Health Accommodation Review:

- Those directly affected have been consulted.
- A draft report will be available in the next 10 days, following consideration by senior managers.
- Housing is not the sole issue for mental health clients.
- An immediate change is that more clients will be eligible and therefore it will be possible to help more clients.
- The second priority will be to increase capacity for dual diagnosis clients. Currently, Kingston Lane mental health hostel provides the only 24-hour support.
- The consultation will be available on the Council's website. Those with greatest interest will be alerted.

It was acknowledged that there was a need to address the needs of vulnerable mental health clients with dual diagnosis who could not be accommodated in existing mental health accommodation.

11. SPEAR

Ed Tytherleigh provided an update on behalf of Spear:

- Spear's view is that the Homelessness Strategy addresses the key issues for homeless people. However, there are no additional resources to implement the Strategy.
- Spear is providing mentoring for vulnerable tenants and is currently providing support and promoting social inclusion for 71 tenants. Last year it assisted around 600.
- Spear is advertising in The Guardian for a Skills Development Worker to provide support across its six service areas.
- Funds for refurbishment of the Richmond roundabout hostel have been granted and arrangements have been made with another provider for the hostel to decant while the work is undertaken.

Ed reported on the numbers of clients supported by Spear since the last meeting.

12. NEW POSTS

Ed Tytherleigh reported that Spear was appointing an officer for three

days a week to facilitate additional volunteering opportunities for clients and that CRI was appointing a designated worker for service users. Further information was available by emailing Ed.

13. MEMBERSHIP OF THE FORUM

Eleni Walia informed the Forum that she would be moving to the Policy & Research Social Care Team and that this would be her last meeting of the Forum. Eleni thanked Forum members for their support.

14. ROUGH SLEEPERS

Ed Tytherleigh reminded Forum members of the availability of a leaflet advertising Spear's helpline for rough sleepers.

15. NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Forum would be held in the Salon, York House, Twickenham, on Monday 30 March 2009 from 2pm to 3.30 p.m.

The meeting ended at 3.25 p.m.