

Cheltenham Borough Council

**Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee -
10th June 2009**

Cabinet – 23rd June 2009

**The Future for Tenant Participation in Cheltenham -
Progress Report**

**Report of the Cabinet Member Community Development
and Housing**

1. Executive Summary and recommendation

1.1 The issue

Following on from reports on this issue to Cabinet on 11th March and 22nd July 2008, work has been progressed with tenant and leaseholder representatives to attempt to develop a new and more robust representative organisation. This report outlines activity to date and outlines options for the future of this project.

1.2 I therefore recommend that Committee/Cabinet decide their preferred option for future action from those outlined in section 4 of this report.

1.3 Summary of implications

1.3.1 Financial

£20,000 budget is available from the Housing Revenue Account in 2009/10 to facilitate the first stages of this work. Once a new sustainable structure is evidenced, the funding of ongoing running costs from the Housing Revenue Account will be revisited.

**Contact officer: Sarah Didcote
E-mail: sarah.didcote@cheltenham.gov.uk
Tel no: 01242 264125**

1.3.2 Legal

The Council is under a duty to consult with its tenants and its leaseholders. How this is done is a matter for each housing authority. Officers should seek specific legal advice if there are proposals to set up a body independent of the Council and CBH

Contact officer: Donna McFarlane
E-mail: donna.mcfarlane @cheltenham.gov.uk
Tel no: 01242 775116

1.4 Implications on corporate and community plan priorities

1.4.1 None as a direct result of this report

1.5 Statement on Risk

CS 2.3	The council's long term funding ability of key VCS infrastructure organisations	12
CS 2.11	On going corporate budgetary cuts	16

2. Introduction

2.1 In the period January to June 2008 there have been a number of meetings, facilitated by the independent consultant Ian McDougal, with tenant and resident representatives and a range of stakeholders. Examples of tenant organisations have been looked at and a site visit to Bristol has also taken place.

2.2 The tenant and leaseholder representatives elected an interim subcommittee to act on their behalf and organisation and skills training was organised by Cheltenham VCA and the Cheltenham Volunteer Centre.

3. Progress Report

3.1 From the outset the group has remained small. It has failed to attract, recruit or retain many new members. CBH tenant participation workers have canvassed for support but with little result. In spite of the enthusiasm and quality of training being provided by accredited third sector organisations, attendance at the sessions has continued to deplete with attendance as low as four tenants at the last training session, and the leaseholder representative has withdrawn.

3.2 Due to such low attendance the trainers have been unable to effectively deliver the

training programme and secure adequate capacity and enthusiasm within this small, and largely unrepresentative, group to forward plan, develop a new vision for the organisation or address the issues of the past. Their advice is that to continue on this route is unlikely to achieve the stated aims and they are concerned about the lack of numbers and a representative framework.

4. Options for the Future

4.1 Strengthening CBH's current framework of involvement which includes:

a range of mechanisms to engage with tenants at local neighbourhood, service specific and operational levels. Please see Appendix A for the structure of involvement and details of each mechanism.

Whilst this model is inclusive and addresses many of the issues of service challenge and development some would claim it lacks demonstrable independence from the provider and a borough wide strategic influence. The question is whether that distance can evidence added value and provides value for money. The tenant participation resource is housed within CBH, if the requirement to service an independent organisation is the chosen option there would need to be an allocation of funding from within the Housing Revenue Account.

4.2 Back to Basics

The federation grew out of a successful Tenant Umbrella Group which ran successfully for many years out of an office in the Lower High Street Resource Centre. Its purpose was to help establish, then coordinate the work of estate and block based tenant and leaseholder associations. A return to a similar arrangement would change the focus to where, arguably, it is most required in recruitment and retention of new member organisations – capacity building at the base. Such a representative forum could, by co-ordinating the work of the tenant and resident associations, collate issues raised and represent the collective body of resident associations within a borough wide strategic brief to influence policy and strategic planning of both CBH and CBC.

4.3 Continue on the current course

This currently would seem to be the more fruitless and costly of pursuits. It would need to be predicated on a serious and wide ranging recruitment and retention campaign by the current group's members, the development of a representative and democratic framework of operation, a realistic business plan and a desire to work together and rise above the issues of the past. This currently is not happening in spite of the resource being made available.

5. Consultation

5.1 In light of the issues raised by the trainers detailed in section 3.2, Councillor John Webster and Kathryn Chamberlain, Head of Service - Stronger Communities, attended a planned training session on 29th April, whereby 6 tenant members of the sub committee were present, to discuss their feelings of their progress to date and

the way forward. The tenants shared their concern about the limited number of tenants involved and therefore the effectiveness of the training programme to build sufficient capacity to enable them to achieve their original aims. They accepted that the immediate action they needed to focus on was to recruit more tenants, to increase their skill base and capacity, to then move forward with regard to their aims as developed in the first training session, i.e.:

CTLV Goals

- To be a bridge that helps to empower and enable people to take action for themselves
- To recognise and achieve the ambitions of all residents in their aim to help and supports tenants, leaseholders and the community
- To be a voice for tenants
- To be able to signpost people to the right places for information and support
- To involve a wide range of people who are residents, in the organisation
- To have clear aims and objectives
- Clear structure to help representation
- To develop a code of conduct
- Clarify if funding is available and if so how to get it
- Agree how we tell others what we have done

The group agreed to meet on 29th May to develop a leaflet and plan a recruitment drive. No formal support has been identified at this stage.

5.2 In the preparation of this report consultation has taken place with:

Tenant representatives

Cheltenham VCA

Cabinet, 22nd July 2008

The Future for Tenant Participation in Cheltenham -

Progress Report. Version 1

Cheltenham Volunteer Bureau

Cheltenham Borough Homes

CBC Housing Client Officers

Background Papers	<p>Cabinet Report “The Future for Tenant Involvement in Cheltenham - Update” 22nd July 2008.</p> <p>Cabinet Report “The Future for Tenant Involvement in Cheltenham” 11th March 2008.</p> <p>Also reports to Cabinet on 18th December 2007 and 30th October 2007.</p>
Report Author	<p>Cabinet Member Development and Housing, Cabinet Member Community Development and Housing, 01242 511424, cldr.john.webster@cheltenham.gov.uk</p>
Accountability	<p>Cllr John Webster</p>
Scrutiny Function	<p>Social and Community</p>