RESIDENTS' HOUSING SCRUTINY GROUP

Meeting held on 12th December 2012
at Hathaway Community Centre, E12 6LR

Present: Cllr Ellie Robinson (Chair) and Cllr John Gray
         Sean Moseley, Dawn Harris

Also Present: Councillors Andrew Baikie, Anthony McAlmont and Terry Paul
              Julie Beveridge, Head of Housing Compliance, John Smith,
              Head of Housing Management, Nigel Mould, Neighbourhood
              Manager (East), Russell Thornton, Head of Rent Service and
              Luke Byron-Davies, Scrutiny Manager

Apologies: Councillor Patricia Holland
           Mary Klu, John Kemp and Stella Damm

The meeting commenced at 7.00 p.m. and closed at 9.00 p.m.

1. Welcome and Introductions

Cllr Ellie Robinson welcomed all in attendance to the meeting.

2. Minutes

The minutes from the meeting that took place on 16 October were agreed
as a correct record.

3. Update on Actions

Luke Byron-Davies (LBD), Scrutiny Manager, explained that all actions
emanating from previous meetings had been completed.

4. Forward Work Programme

Luke Byron-Davies (LBD), Scrutiny Manager, asked members to note the
forward work programme and asked that any additional items are
submitted for future meetings.

5. The focus of the Group's Meeting is Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)

Cllr Ellie Robinson explained that the agenda item would be split into three
sections that were:

- Housing Compliance
- Enforcement and Safety
LBN’s Garages

**Housing Compliance**
Julie Beveridge, Head of Housing Compliance, and John Smith, Head of Housing Management, presented the Housing Compliance section by explaining that the focus of the work was making sure that tenants complied with their tenancy agreements. The policy of the team is to aim to visit each council tenant once a year. Often issues found are in regards to waste and clutter outside, damage inside the property and illegal sub-letting. In performing this function, it was explained that the team works closely with colleagues in enforcement and information and data is shared between teams.

In addition to the regular day-to-day running of the team’s duties, one-off operations are undertaken that involve two day joint working with the Police, Customs and Excise and other council teams. These intensive projects have been successful in identifying a range of compliance and criminal issues.

**Enforcement and Safety**
Nigel Mould, Neighbourhood Manager (East), presented the Enforcement and Safety section by stating that not many councils have access to the resources that Newham has in terms of the quadrant system and the volume of officers. However, due to the issues in the borough each neighbourhood manager faces challenges over how best to deploy resources.

A variety of interventions were explained to the Group and these were working in partnership with the Police to collaborate on projects, using the CCTV vehicle to pinpoint certain areas with reported ASB and longer term projects to design out crime. An example of designing out crime was the work that was undertaken in Warrior Square to make the area safer by improving the outdoor spaces.

**Questions**
The Group pointed out that in 2011, photographs of suspected people involved in the riots were featured in the Newham Mag and asked if this could be done again to target suspects of other crimes. In response it was explained that this was an option but this approach did not always have a great amount of success.

In response to a question in regards to the usage of tracing agencies, in the view of officers this was not the most appropriate course of action. Officers added that there were a number of internal methods including access to investigators.

The Group explained to officers that problems with sub-let properties such as leaks were causing issues for other tenants. Officers agreed that there could be issues in some cases and explained that they took seriously compliance for landlords.
The Group discussed the issue of regulating the landlords through the method of licensing and it was explained that the cost for landlords of registering with the Council would be relatively small and that action needed to be taken. It was explained that problem landlords are also in the private sector and work is going on with a variety of agencies including housing associations to reduce problem landlords.

The Group asked if the council website was up to date on information for tenants. Officers confirmed that there was a programme for updating the web pages and tenants were being involved in these changes.

A question was asked in regards to Right to Buy leases and whether for anti-social behaviour or other appropriate reasons the leaseholder had lost their lease. Officers confirmed that to their knowledge no leases had been lost due to anti-social behaviour.

**Garages**

Russell Thornton (RT), Head of Rent Service presented a report on the council’s approach to its rental garage stock. It was explained that the policy was to wherever possible publicise vacant garages and to rent them to people that needed them for their cars. It is planned that rental income will be wherever possible reinvested into improving the stock of disused garages.

Most tenants pay in advance and the system for payment is made as simple as possible. The tenant needs to show that they are not in arrears and that they do need the garage. When garages are either in the wrong area where there is no demand or they are in a very poor condition the garages will where appropriate be removed.

**Questions**

The Group asked what the waiting time for a garage normally is. RT responded that it depends which area the garage is being sought, but the process has been sped up over the last few months. A member of the group explained that it took his friend two years to receive a garage, and in response RT stated that it would normally be quicker that that.

In response to asking if multiple garages were permitted, RT explained that multiple garages were only permissible if the tenant had one car per garage and could prove the use was to house a car.

The Group asked if garages could be used for other uses such as storage. RT stated that this was not planned because garages were not completely secure methods of storage. RT added that the aim was to have the right stock in the areas of the borough that most needed them. Cllr Baikie added that if garages were outsourced then rents would be higher and instead local councillors and community hubs can have a greater input into making sure that the correct garage policy is in place. The pressures on finances, Cllr Baikie explained means that the resources being diverted to garages
are limited.

The Group asked whether the garages were actually making a profit when the overheads for the team were removed and if profit was being made whether it could be ring-fenced for further investment. RT agreed to provide information on the garage rental budget to the Group (009).

The Group asked if people would be able to repair garages themselves and in return receive a discounted lease. RT responded that many garages have hazardous materials including asbestos but some garages could be suitable for this purpose.

Action

009

Information on the budget of the renting of garages to be circulated to the Group.

6. AOB

There was no further business.

7. Date of the next Meeting

The next meeting of the Group will be at 7-9pm, Wednesday 13 March 2013 at East Ham Town Hall.
London Borough of Newham
Residents' Housing Scrutiny Group
12th December 2012

Housing Garages

Russell Thornton – Head of Rents
John Smith – Head of Housing Management
This presentation -

- Basic facts
- Future challenges
- Any questions?
Background – Garages the facts

- LBN have 2,497 Garages
- 849 Let (end of 2011-12)
- 960 Let (as at 04.11.12)
- 1,537 currently void / vacant
- 809 demolished to date
- 255 Applicants on waiting lists
- Garage rental per week £11.58 (£13.87 with vat)
- Garage income: 2011-12 - £549,679
  2012-13 £690,400 (projected) an increase of 25%
- Garage Arrears: £7,843 credit at 31.03.12 Currently £16,395.36 credit at 04.11.12
- How to apply for a garage – go to: www.newham.gov.uk or phone 020 3373 8922
Refurbished Garages
Examples of Garage sites (good and bad) -
Site disposals and development

- Abbotsbury Close E15
- Janson Close E15
- Mortham Street E5
- Tunmarsh Lane/Humberstone Road E13
- Maiden Road E15
- St Winifreds Ave/Rectory Road E12
- Butchers Road E16
- Dormer Close E15
- Pitchford St E15
- Meredith St E13
Garages – Future challenges

• Finance
• Pressure on repairs budgets
• Land management
• Disposals
• Anti-social behaviour
Any questions?