

Item No.	Classification: Open	Date: 8 May 2012	Committee Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Report title:		Resident involvement and resident association recognition and grants	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Strategic director of housing	

Recommendations

- 1 That overview and scrutiny committee note the contents of this briefing.

The resident involvement team

- 2 The resident involvement team currently deals with:
 - 127 active tenant & resident associations (TRAs) and six potential restarts
 - 110 halls and meeting rooms
 - Tenant council
 - Tenant fund administration, including tenant fund management committee
 - Co-ordination of area housing forums
 - Resident involvement working party
 - HRA savings working party
 - Constitutions working party
 - Halls working party
 - Support for the annual tenants' conference
 - A financial inclusion project in conjunction with the CAB
 - TRA training
 - TRA resource centres
- 3 Work is under way to create a new resident engagement strategy for the housing service. The intention is to increase and improve the ways in which teams across the department work with residents to improve services and communities. It is expected to be set around five themes:
 - Increasing resident engagement
 - Improving the quality of engagement
 - Achieving resident involvement throughout the housing service
 - Building partnerships
 - Value for money

It is proposed that the strategy will have an action plan detailing engagement across the service. We are working to complete the strategy by the end of the calendar year.

TRAs

- 4 The work with TRAs concentrates on those associations with most support needs. These range from those needing help because they are new, recently reformed or have had a major change in committee membership, through help with constitutional and governance issues, to the most serious cases

where there may be suspected fraud, or where relationships between individual committee members are seriously tense. In some cases we are working with police on areas of concern.

- 5 Seven TRAs are currently at a critical level – the point at which they are in danger of falling apart or where there are serious governance concerns. A further 59 have resident involvement officers assigned to support them.
- 6 The remaining 61 each has a named resident involvement officer, but their contact will mainly be with area management staff. The resident involvement officers will check in with them from time to time and are available to provide advice.
- 7 The team has recently agreed with residents a new recognition policy for TRAs, and a streamlined appeals process for TRAs that are refused funding. We are working on a new model constitution for TRAs.
- 8 As well as having named resident involvement officers, TRAs are supported through a training program. This covers key skills and knowledge needed by TRAs. Some courses are tailored to suit the needs of individual TRA committees. We have also commissioned external trainers, and have bought a range of on-line training packages that TRA members can apply to undertake.
- 9 The resource centres at Taplow and Albrighton are staffed three days a week and provide use of computers, internet access, printing and photocopying for TRA members.
- 10 Last year we established the first networking event aimed at committee members of TRAs. After a short presentation or exercise (this time the theme was financial inclusion), the rest of the evening is open so that residents can swap ideas, experiences and contacts in a relaxed and informal atmosphere. We intend to run two of these evenings each year.
- 11 One of the team has been working with the CAB to pilot a scheme to train financial inclusion mentors from two TRAs. This will be followed by a lottery fund bid to extend the scheme.
- 12 There are plans this year to work in partnership with the Southwark group of tenants' organisations (SGTO) and the youth service to have young advisors 'youth proof' TRAs. It is hoped they will visit TRAs and come up with a report on how TRAs might engage with young people better, and that they will present their findings at a special conference for TRA members.

Halls

- 13 Southwark housing has a range of facilities, from small flats and converted laundry rooms acting as meeting places and offices for TRAs to large community centres.
- 14 Historically, the arrangement for these facilities has been piecemeal. There has been no strategy and very few have formal agreements such as tenancy agreements, licenses or leases. Rents have little relationship to the size of the facility or its ability to generate an income.

- 15 We are working to:
- Write and agree a strategy outlining our approach to the management of halls. This will need considerable work and consultation, and is expected to be completed in early 2013.
 - Putting in place training for those managing halls on issues including health and safety, good practice on bookings and finances, legal requirements, governance models and business planning.
 - Complete a comprehensive database of information on every facility
 - Establish a halls working party to steer our approach to halls, and backed by an independent 'tenant friend' with expert knowledge in this field. This group has met several times and membership has been expanded to include additional delegates from area housing forums.
 - Survey all facilities in order to create a five-year investment program that will address poor conditions, outdated fittings, DDA and health and safety compliance.
- 16 We have also created 'resident-led bids' in which groups managing halls may apply for funding for items or works costing up to £5,000 each that will increase the use of their facilities. Most of these appear to be either minor works or furniture. The support staff are working to confirm the details of all bids and a panel of judges has been elected by the working party to judge the bids and award points against agreed criteria.

Review of the tenant fund

- 17 We are working with the tenant fund management committee to carry out a root and branch review of the tenant fund. With an income of over £0.5m a year, the fund covers the costs of:
- Southwark group of tenants' associations (SGTO)
 - Grants to TRAs
 - Two training staff and training delivery
 - A grants and support officer
 - Two resident resource centres
 - Annual tenants' conference
 - Expenses of the formal consultative structure
- 18 The review will question the arrangements and levels of funding for all of these functions and will seek to gain better value for money and effectiveness from the fund.

The position on TRA recognition and grant funding

- 19 Recognition of a TRA by the council allows recognised TRAs to:
- Apply for grant funding from the tenant fund
 - Elect delegates and deputies to their area housing forum
 - Manage a hall or similar facility (if applicable)
 - Be seen as a representative group by the council for consultation purposes
- 20 A new recognition policy has been passed by area housing forums, tenant council and home owner council and will be taken as an IDM this month. It makes clearer what is required from TRAs, and the process for derecognition

if needed. Except in the most extreme and rare cases, derecognition would only be used as a last resort and after support has been offered to resolve problems.

- 21 Grant funding is paid from the tenant fund, with the home owners fund making a contribution. The minimum grant for all TRAs remains as it has for many years at £1,100 a year. If a TRA has more than 244 council properties in its area, it will receive £4.50 for each additional property.
- 22 The systems for grant funding and recognition are closely linked in that funding will only be given to recognised TRAs, and the application for grant is also the application for recognition.
- 23 However, it is possible for TRAs to be recognised, but to have failed to meet the funding criteria and therefore not to be funded. The reasons for funding being refused include significant governance issues, especially those relating to accountability and financial probity. Grant will also not be paid if there is over £10,000 in the TRA account, unless there is a valid reason such as that it is another grant earmarked for a purpose.
- 24 In 2010/11, the system for TRA grants applications and payments was changed from one in which all applications were invited at one point in the year to one where applications are made for recognition and grant funding within three months of each TRA's annual general meeting. This also meant that grant is now paid in advance rather than in arrears.
- 25 The new system meant that:
 - Grants processing and payments could be spread across the year, resulting in fewer delays and a more manageable throughput
 - The information provided would be current. Under the old system, it was possible for information used to assess funding eligibility and recognition to be up to a year out of date.
 - There would be a match between funding and recognition, with a clear decision being provided following each AGM
- 26 This meant that we called for two applications last year: one for 2010/11 under the old system, and one as AGMs happened under the new system for last year. This has caused some confusion for TRAs. Many TRAs initially applied only for one of the years, resulting in around only half the allocated budget being spent in 2011/12. It also created an initial backlog as we tried to process forms under two systems.
- 27 We have now closed applications for 2010/11, and have set an extended deadline of 30 September 2012 for grant claims for 2011/12. Letters to this effect have gone to TRA chairs and secretaries, and resident involvement officers are chasing up their TRAs to ensure that all those who want to apply for 2011/12 funding have done so on time.
- 28 Since applications are for recognition as well as funding, resident involvement staff are also trying to make sure that all TRAs have agreed recognition by 30 September.

Applications

29 This table shows the level of applications for the two grant years:

	2010/11		2011/12	
Applications received	80	63%	84	67%
No application made	47	37%	42	33%
	127		126	

30 Of the applications received, this is the breakdown in what has happened to them:

	10/11	11/12
Grants paid	60	64
Grants refused	8	4
Applications in hand	12	16
	80	84

31 Of those refused, these are the reasons:

	2010/11	2011/12
Inquorate AGM	1	0
Insufficient meetings	2	2
TRA became defunct	1	1
Accounts not agreed	1	0
Form incomplete/blank and no response to queries	2	0
Over £10,000 in account	1	1
	8	4

Issues raised at Walworth West area housing forum

32 For the thirteen TRAs listed for Walworth West, the following table shows the position at the time of the forum meeting and the position now (2/4/12).

	At AHF	Now
No applications for either year	4	1
Successful bids, both years	3	6
Successful application only one year, no application for the other	5	5
No application, then refused application (insufficient AGM)	1	1

33 Insufficient support for completing forms: residents were able to obtain help from their resident involvement officers, at the resource centres, and through the SGTO. Specific comments on why delegates felt there was insufficient support would be useful in order to improve the service.

34 Not knowing who resident involvement officers are: all TRAs received letters in [insert month] to inform them of their officers. The letters went to the chairs and secretaries and it is possible that some delegates had not been told in their committee meetings.

35 One TRA reported that their application form was lost and did not get any acknowledgement of receipt of their second application: there have been some problems with postal receipt of forms. The resident involvement team

was involved in five separate office moves in three months, and this made it very difficult to track down post. In addition, TRAs will have been used to giving their forms in at local offices in the past, and this may have caused further problems. We apologise for this.

The draft forum minutes identify the TRA representative who raised this issue, and the second application was not received until 30 March 2012, the day after the forum meeting.

- 36 We are about to review the way we process grants. We believe there is scope to cut the amount of information we require as some of it will have been picked up at TRA AGMs by the officers attending. We will be looking to reduce the size of the form.
- 37 We would welcome any comments and feedback from the committee on how we might improve the resident involvement service.