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## **HFTRA conference bigger then ever!**

Hounslow Federation of Tenants and Residents Association (HFTRA) held their annual conference with the theme of 'Simply the Best', on Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> May at the Renaissance Hotel in Heathrow.

Each year the conference is getting bigger and bigger with over 200 adults in attendance this year and over 60 children enjoying the day with face painting and balloon modelling in the Kids' Zone.

Julie Brooker, the Chair of HFTRA, hosted the event said: "The event was a great success, we had a number of new tenants and residents in attendance this year and have received very positive feedback. I have already had residents asking to be put forward for next year's conference."

This year's workshops ranged from 'Modern help for older people' to 'Drug awareness'. Hounslow Homes Chief Executive Bernadette O'Shea and Director of Housing Jill Gale ran the main workshop 'Service Charges explained', which gave residents the chance to ask questions and join in the debates.

Tenant Barbara Ennis said: "The workshop on Service Charges was extremely useful. I learnt a lot about why I pay them and it was great to know I wasn't the only resident with questions."

The opportunity to network with other residents is very valuable and helps make the conference a memorable day. By swapping names, addresses and phone numbers, shared issues are resolved together - this is residents' involvement at its best.

Stands were also increased this year with a number of organisations represented including HFTRA, Hounslow Homes, London Borough of Hounslow, Treecare and Sodexo, all stands present offered some great giveaways from calendars to reusable bags for residents to enjoy. Other highlights included some great food and the opportunity for a manicure during the lunch break.

Feedback has been very positive and the ideas for next year's conference are already flooding in.

Tenant Pravina Vyas has been attending the HFTRA conference for the last 3 years and believes: "Each year the conference is getting better, the workshops are extremely helpful and it is great to see more stands this year on different services."

The conference concluded with Councillor Andrews, LBH Executive Lead Member for Housing & Community Safety launching a new initiative, Project Empower. Project Empower will release reserves money totaling £4m for projects and service improvements identified by residents. The project aims to empower residents by allowing them to decide how the money is spent. Residents in attendance were able to find out more about the project and how their choices would be considered.

The HFTRA conference can only get bigger and better and we hope to see even more tenants and leaseholders next year to experience first hand how we, as residents, can work together to make a difference.

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## Notes To Editor

- Sponsors of the 2009 HFTRA conference were T Brown group, Hounslow Homes, London Borough of Hounslow, Apollo and United House.
- Hounslow Homes was formed in 2002 as one of the first Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs) in the country. Hounslow Homes is tasked with managing the council's 16,500 homes and has delivered £120 million of refurbishment and improvement works to bring its housing stock up to the government's 'Decent Homes' standard, which took effect in 2006.

- The ALMO was awarded the highest possible three-star rating by the Audit Commission for excellent housing services in 2005.
- Services to residents include a free phone number and service, care-taking and ground maintenance

## **HFTRA**

- The Hounslow Federation of Tenants and Residents Associations (HFTRA) is an independent and non-political body made up of the various tenant and resident groups that represent the interests of council tenants and leaseholders in Hounslow.
- HFTRA's mission is to provide support for the communities where you live, helping you play a bigger part in improving your living environment.
- The people working for HFTRA are all volunteers, elected by the membership and their job is to talk to Hounslow Homes and the council about all sorts of housing-related issues and try to get the best deal for tenants and leaseholders.