

Tenants', Leaseholders' and Residents' Consultative Forum

AGENDA

DATE: Tuesday 8 November 2011

TIME: 7.30 pm

VENUE: Committee Rooms 1 & 2,
Harrow Civic Centre

MEMBERSHIP (Quorum 3 Council Members)

Chairman: Councillor Bob Currie

Councillors:

Mano Dharmarajah

Mrs Camilla Bath (VC)
Kam Chana

Representatives of Individual Housing Estate Tenants' and Residents' Associations

Reserve Members:

1. Victoria Silver
2. Ben Wealthy

1. Susan Hall
2. Barry Macleod-Cullinane

Contact: Mark Doherty, Democratic Services Officer
Tel: 020 8416 8050 E-mail: mark.doherty@harrow.gov.uk

AGENDA - PART I

1. ATTENDANCE BY RESERVE MEMBERS

To note the attendance at this meeting of any duly appointed Reserve Members.

Reserve Members may attend meetings:-

- (i) to take the place of an ordinary Member for whom they are a reserve;
- (ii) where the ordinary Member will be absent for the whole of the meeting; and
- (iii) the meeting notes at the start of the meeting at the item 'Reserves' that the Reserve Member is or will be attending as a reserve;
- (iv) if a Reserve Member whose intention to attend has been noted arrives after the commencement of the meeting, then that Reserve Member can only act as a Member from the start of the next item of business on the agenda after his/her arrival.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

To receive declarations of personal or prejudicial interests, arising from business to be transacted at this meeting, from:

- (a) all Members of the Committee, Sub Committee, Panel or Forum;
- (b) all other Members present in any part of the room or chamber.

3. MINUTES (Pages 1 - 16)

That the minutes of the meeting held on 19 July 2011 and of the special meeting on 28 September 2011 be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

To receive questions (if any) from local residents or organisations under the provisions of Executive Procedure Rule 51 (Part 4D of the Constitution).

5. PETITIONS

To receive petitions (if any) submitted by members of the public/Councillors under the provisions of Executive Procedure Rule 49 (Part 4D of the Constitution).

6. DEPUTATIONS

To receive deputations (if any) under the provisions of Executive Procedure Rule 50 (Part 4D of the Constitution).

7. INFORMATION REPORT - FEEDBACK FROM OTHER COUNCIL LED RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES (Pages 17 - 24)

Report of the Divisional Director, Housing Services.

8. INFORMATION REPORT - ASSET MANAGEMENT UPDATE (Pages 25 - 30)

Report of the Divisional Director, Housing Services.

**9. INFORMATION REPORT - HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) FORECAST
OUTTURN 2011-12 (Pages 31 - 36)**

Report of the Interim Director of Finance.

**10. INFORMATION REPORT - RESIDENT SERVICES MANAGER REPORT (Pages
37 - 44)**

Report of the Divisional Director, Housing Services.

11. SUGGESTIONS FOR AGENDA ITEMS FOR NEXT MEETING

12. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

Which cannot otherwise be dealt with.

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To note that the Forum is next due to meet on 11 January 2012.

AGENDA - PART II - NIL

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TENANTS' AND LEASEHOLDERS' CONSULTATIVE FORUM MINUTES

19 JULY 2011

Chairman: * Councillor Bob Currie

Councillors: * Mrs Camilla Bath * Mano Dharmarajah
* Kam Chana

* Denotes Member present

Representatives from the following Associations were in attendance:

Antoney's Close Tenants' and Residents' Association
Churchill Place Tenants' and Residents' Association
Eastcote Lane Tenants' and Residents' Association
Elmgrove Tenants' and Residents' Association
Harrow Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations
Harrow Weald Tenants' and Residents' Association
Kenmore Park Tenants' and Residents' Association
Leaseholder Support Group
Little Stanmore Tenants' and Residents' Association
Pinner Hill Tenants' and Residents' Association
Weald Village Tenants' and Residents' Association

48. Introductions

Following introductions by those present at the meeting, the Chairman wished to welcome the newly appointed Members to the Forum.

49. Attendance by Reserve Members

RESOLVED: To note that there were no Reserve Members in attendance at this meeting.

50. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: That the following interests were declared.

Agenda item: 8. NFORMATION REPORT - Feedback from other Council led Resident Involvement Activities; 9. INFORMATION REPORT - Launch of Housing Ambition Plan 2; 10. INFORMATION REPORT - Review of Terms of Reference for TLCF; 11. INFORMATION REPORT - Resident Services Manager Report; 12. INFORMATION REPORT - Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Outturn Report 2010-11; 13. INFORMATION REPORT - Asset Management Team

Councillor Bob Currie declared personal interests on the above items in that he attended monthly meetings of the Eastcote Lane Tenants' and Residents' Associations. He would remain in the room whilst the matters were considered and voted upon.

Councillor Mano Dharmarajah declared personal interests on the above items in that he was a member of the Eastcote Lane Tenants' and Residents' Association. He would remain in the room whilst the matters were considered and voted upon.

51. Appointment of Vice-Chairman

RESOLVED: To appoint Councillor Mrs Camilla Bath as Vice-Chairman of the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Consultative Forum for the 2011/2012 Municipal Year.

52. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meetings held on 21 February 2011 and 31 March 2011 be taken as read and signed as a correct record subject to the inclusion of representatives of Kenmore Park Tenants' and Residents' Association being marked as present.

53. Public Questions, Petitions and Deputations

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were put, or petitions or deputations received.

RESOLVED ITEMS

54. INFORMATION REPORT - Presentation by the Kier Group

In accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, the following item was admitted late to the meeting to allow a representative

from the Kier Group to have the opportunity to review the salient points of the repair and maintenance contract during the last four years prior to a new contract being considered by Cabinet on 8 September 2011.

The Kier representative advised that:

- customer satisfaction had reached 75% in 2010, a 10% increase from 2008;
- Decent Homes customer satisfaction was consistently reported at 95%;
- Kier attended estate walkabouts, sponsored garden makeover schemes and refurbished community centres;
- in 2010/11, 75% of repair work was completed within the first visit;
- the accident incident rate was zero, with no accidents being reported in over one million working hours;
- Kier had delivered over 3300 Decent Homes on time and within budget;
- performance in terms of total cost per property for repairs and voids in 2009/10 was in the upper to mid quartile. Kier ranked 10th out of 27 authorities in terms of value for money;
- Kier was returning £140,000 of overhead costs to the Council as part of it's LEAN Review;
- two full time apprentices were employed on Kier's contract framework;
- challenges over the last four years included a complicated client management structure, key personnel changes and payment delays.

In response to questions, the representative advised that:

- a recent incident involving a fall from scaffolding was still under investigation and was not included in the statistics as no outcome had been reached;
- the £140,000 being returned to the Council would remain within the repairs budget;
- the possibility of recruiting additional apprentices was being explored;
- thorough procurement exercises were conducted when awarding contracts, with individual tenders being opened under strict conditions;
- there were a number of options regarding sustainable energy being investigated. Cleaning of solar panels would be inclusive of the maintenance programme, if they were installed;

- staffing statistics included permanent staff, sub-contractors and the supply chain;
- the turnaround times for the completion of work were affected by a number of categories within the contract. Emergency jobs for example would require immediate attention;
- it was believed that the two apprentices had successfully completed the programme. It was always the priority for Kier to retain those who had successfully completed their training. New training and recruitment initiatives were being considered;
- payment delays were caused by a complex pricing structure, with jobs being priced individually. A discrepancy highlighted with an individual job would result in the whole account being postponed. Sub-contractors would still receive payment in such circumstances.

RESOLVED: That the presentation be noted.

55. INFORMATION REPORT - Feedback from other Council led Resident Involvement Activities

An officer introduced a report which provided feedback on a number of Council led resident involvement activities. She advised that:

- 169 residents had become involved in the Resident Recruitment Campaign during 2010/11. At the end of Quarter 1, 51 residents had become involved, with a large number contributing to the Council's parking strategy consultation;
- shortlisting for the Estates in Bloom competition would commence on 25 July 2011, with judging taking place in August 2011;
- costing work was underway to recruit apprentices for the caretakers service.

In response to questions, the officer advised that:

- all access issues for sheltered housing were being addressed;
- consideration would be given to consulting Neighbourhood Champions in relation to resident recruitment.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

56. INFORMATION REPORT - Launch of Housing Ambition Plan 2

An officer presented a report which introduced the launch of the Housing Ambition Plan 2 (HAP 2). She advised that:

- the HAP 2 provided Members and residents the opportunity to scrutinise performance in relation to progress made at quarterly Challenge Panels. The next Challenge Panel would be held on 28 July 2011;
- the appendix to the Plan included a 'You Said - We Did' document that took account of the challenges presented by members and residents at previous challenge panels. There was also a simplified scorecard to engage residents and hopefully assist with providing constructive feedback;
- it was envisaged that a new Communications Planning Team would be established to take account of a range of issues and what residents wanted. Members of the Forum would be kept up to date with the progress of the Team.

In response to questions, the officer advised that:

- the possibility of including previous years indicators on the Housing Scorecard would be considered;
- there was no definitive reason as to why the number of those in temporary accommodation had increased. A possible reason could be emerging nervousness in the market as a consequence of benefit changes, but detailed analysis would be conducted;
- in light of Government reforms, the Housing Department was likely to be placed in an unprecedented situation with extra demands on the service. An update on the Government proposals would be provided at a future meeting of the Forum.

RESOLVED: That the item be noted.

57. INFORMATION REPORT - Review of Terms of Reference for TLCF

An officer introduced a report which highlighted proposals for the review of the Terms of Reference for the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Consultative Forum. In response to questions, she advised that:

- the possibility of changing the name of the Forum to make it more inclusive for all residents would be considered;
- further options regarding voting would be looked into. As the Forum was a subsidiary body of Cabinet, it had no direct decision making powers but had the ability to recommend matters to the Executive for final decision. Votes were sought on topics such as rents to gauge how suitable the Forum felt proposals were;
- provisions to allow members of the public to speak at meetings were included in the Executive Procedure Rules in the Council's Constitution;

- a requirement of the Tenant Services Authority was for the Council to develop resident scrutiny. Reports were now being presented at quarterly meetings of the Harrow Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations' to scrutinise performance.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

58. INFORMATION REPORT - Resident Services Manager Report

An officer introduced a report which provided an update on the work conducted in relation to Resident Involvement. She advised that:

- £51,000 of credit notes in relation to electricity charges remained outstanding and were being pursued by the Council's Energy Manager;
- there were 206 miscellaneous properties within the borough;
- following legal advice, it had been determined that it would not be lawful to charge freeholders services charges;
- the Interim Head of Home Ownership had now left the Council. Officers were appreciative of her contributions during her time with the Council. Her replacement was now in post and was looking forward to her new role;
- prior to April 2007, no service charges were applied to tenants. Instead, charges were recovered as part of the overall rent. Since 2007, rents in Harrow had been de-pooled, a means of separating charges for services from rent.

In response to questions, the officer advised that;

- it was anticipated that the Value for Money Group would specifically investigate the area of service charges. These charges were applied for work conducted on land that was deemed to be owned by the Housing Department, as Council Tax income could not be used for these services. As it was the first year of operating in this way it was possible that some of these boundaries were unclear which could possibly result in tenants paying for services that they did not receive. The officer proposed to look into these matters in more depth at a Value for Money Residents Group where there would be the opportunity to look at a number of case studies to help explain how the boundaries were drawn up;
- miscellaneous properties were Council owned dwellings that were deemed not to belong to a particular estate. The 206 properties listed as miscellaneous did not pay service charges;
- including a London or UK average in future service charges tables for comparison purposes would be considered.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

59. INFORMATION REPORT - Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Outturn Report 2010-11

An officer introduced a report which set out the outturn for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for 2010/11. He advised that:

- at 1 April 2010 there were 5,058 dwellings and 1,170 leaseholders;
- money held in reserves was currently £4.784 million;
- average weekly rent was £86.60, with the average weekly service charge being £4.77;
- budgeted spend was greater than income by £0.677 million;
- at 31 March 2011, the total spend was £26,532 million. The income was £25,528 million;
- revenue balances reduced £4.784 million at the start of the year to £3.258 million in line with budget.

In response to questions, the officer advised that;

- the refund for the electricity charges were included in the bad or doubtful debt provision within the budget;
- 98.36% of rents were collected in 2010/11, which equated to an additional £350,000 on the previous year;
- £920,000 was available for external decorations this year.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

60. INFORMATION REPORT - Asset Management Team

An officer introduced a report which updated the Forum on the progress made with the Asset Management Team and included plans for the future. He advised that:

- following a recent recruitment process, a new Head of Asset Management had been appointed, subject to receiving satisfactory references;
- a high level of customer satisfaction had been achieved in relation to responsive repairs;
- a retro-fit trial was conducted on a property within the borough, with modifications including solar panels, reinsulated cavity walls and a

rainwater harvesting tank to improve efficiency and become more environmentally friendly.

In response to questions, the officer advised that:

- there were no plans to extend estate entry systems to video. Older systems would be upgraded to a modern standard;
- an additional column in the Programme for Major Works to monitor spend for previous years would be considered;
- the retro-fit trial was funded by a Government grant. The recipients of the retro-fit were selected with input from colleagues in the Housing Needs department and were obliged to subscribe to two year monitoring programme;
- the Community Energy Saving Programme (CESP) promoted the development of energy saving initiatives through community based partnerships which ended in 2012. Officers would investigate the possibility of applying for CESP funding, although research had indicated that suitable energy suppliers had reached the ceiling for available funds associated with the Programme.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

61. Suggestions for agenda items for next meeting

The following were suggested as agenda items for the next meeting of the Forum:

- Update on Disabled Access to Council Estates;
- Update on Installing Video Entry Systems to Council Estates;
- Update on Government Proposals Affecting Housing.

RESOLVED: That the items be noted.

62. Any Other Urgent Business

RESOLVED: That no items were raised.

63. Extension and Termination of the Meeting

In accordance with the provisions of Executive Procedure Rule 48.2 (Part 4D of the Constitution) it was agreed at 9.55 pm to extend the closing time of the meeting.

RESOLVED: That the meeting continue until 11.00 pm.

64. Date of Next Meeting

RESOLVED: That the Forum were next due to meet on 8 November 2011.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 11.00 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR BOB CURRIE
Chairman

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TENANTS' AND LEASEHOLDERS' CONSULTATIVE FORUM SPECIAL MINUTES

28 SEPTEMBER 2011

Chairman: * Councillor Bob Currie

Councillors: * Mrs Camilla Bath * Mano Dharmarajah
* Kam Chana

In attendance: * Susan Hall
(Councillors)

* Denotes Member present

Representatives from the following Associations were in attendance:

Antoney's Close Tenants' and Residents' Association
Eastcote Lane Tenants' and Residents' Association
Elmgrove Tenants' and Residents' Association
Glebe Tenants' and Residents' Association
Harrow Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations
Harrow Weald Tenants' and Residents' Association
Kenmore Park Tenants' and Residents' Association
Leaseholder Support Group
Weald Village Tenants' and Residents' Association
Woodlands Community Association

65. Attendance by Reserve Members

RESOLVED: To note that there were no Reserve Members in attendance at this meeting.

66. Declarations of Interest

Agenda item: 4. NFORMATION REPORT - Budget Planning 2012/13 to 2015/16

Councillor Camilla Bath declared a personal interest on the above item in that she attended monthly meetings of the Eastcote Lane Tenants' and Residents' Associations. She would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

Councillor Bob Currie declared a personal interest on the above item in that she attended monthly meetings of the Eastcote Lane Tenants' and Residents' Associations. He would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

Councillor Mano Dharmarajah declared a personal interest on the above item in that she attended monthly meetings of the Eastcote Lane Tenants' and Residents' Associations. He would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

67. Deputations

RESOLVED: To note that no deputations were received at this meeting.

RESOLVED ITEMS

68. INFORMATION REPORT - Budget Planning 2012/13 to 2015/16

An officer introduced a report which outlined potential income options and provided an update on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) in advance of a draft budget being considered by Cabinet in December 2011. She addressed several key issues as part of the report.

HRA Reform

- As part of the current Government subsidy system, the Council paid approximately £7 million a year to fund housing needs nationally. This process would change in April 2012, subject to the approval of the Localism Bill which was being considered by Parliament;
- If approved, the Council would become self-financing, meaning that all rent and services charges would be kept without having to contribute towards the Government subsidy scheme. However, the Council would effectively need to buy its way out of the scheme by calculating its estimated earnings over the next thirty years. This would equate to approximately £85 million;
- If the Council were to borrow £85 million from the Government to meet the buy out clause, interest rates seemed favourable, ranging from 1.55% to 2.60% for longer term borrowing.

In response to questions, the officer advised that:

- Paying interest of 1.55% on £85 million would equate to approximately £1.3 million per year, a potential saving of approximately £5.5 million on the current Government subsidy scheme;
- The fluctuation of employment costs was due to additional staff being employed for specific short-term projects;
- Utility costs were difficult to budget. More robust data was needed to obtain a more accurate picture of utility costs per year;
- Key risks were inflation and interest rates. As the Council would be new to self-financing, a low rate short-term loan would possibly be most appropriate. Different scenarios would be looked at to identify risk prior to any loan being taken;
- £85 million would be the minimum amount required. This could increase by approximately £5 million;
- The Council did not have a separate debt portfolio. This meant that a decision would need to be made whether or not to separate the £85 million from the existing £60 million Council owned debt;
- Approximately 70% of rent was paid by those in receipt of housing benefit. This could generate issues in terms of Government proposals to reform the benefit system. Officers would investigate such issues and ensure that a robust plan was formulated;
- Limitations on the amount of rent the Council could charge would still apply;
- Increasing revenue by providing alternative means of energy could take place in future years. The HRA was ring-fenced with set processes to follow which did not currently cater for such proposals.

The Divisional Director of Housing Services summarised the views of the TRA's present by stating that officers would undertake to:

- Tackle social aspects of increased poverty;
- Seek innovative ways to improve and maintain housing stock;
- Source the renewable, most efficient means of energy;
- Formulate a strategy to cater for a changing demographic;
- Ensure the best quality of care for the vulnerable.

Facility Charges

- For tenants and some leaseholders in sheltered accommodation, the Council provided utilities for heating and lighting for individual flats. Officers were attempting to identify whether additional income could be generated to invest in the priorities in relation to the HRA reform.

In response to questions, the officer advised that:

- The averages listed in the report were based on historical data over the last three years. Prices for energy had fluctuated and the averages would be looked at;
- The feasibility of charging sheltered blocks according to their Council Tax band would be investigated;
- It was unclear whether individual sheltered flats had the means to control the heat that was being generated. The issue, as well as monitoring the condition of boilers within sheltered blocks, would be referred to the Council's Asset Management Team to investigate;
- The means of collating individual consumption data from sheltered flats would be investigated;
- Colleagues in the Energy Department were constantly seeking the best deals from energy suppliers;
- The system of providing fuel allowances for those over a certain age would be investigated;
- The possibility of installing water meters at sheltered blocks would be researched.

The Divisional Director of Housing Services stated that officers would undertake to:

- Establish whether those in sheltered accommodation could control their own heating;
- Conduct research on fuel allowances;
- Ensure the Council received the best tariff from energy suppliers;
- Monitor the condition of boilers;
- Ascertain whether Wardens could assist with calculating the energy consumption of each flat;
- Conduct an occupancy impact assessment for sheltered accommodation;

- Arrange for the Chairman of the Forum/Portfolio Holder for Housing to visit Goddard Court to assess their particular situation.

Rent Strategy

- Rent strategies were based on a Government formula;
- A priority was to ensure that more void properties achieved full rent to generate additional income;
- It was intended to charge a rent that was appropriate and which was capable of allowing necessary priorities to be met over the course of the thirty year business plan.

In response to a question, the officer advised that the suggestion of fixing local authority rent at a level under that of Registered Local Landlords (RSL) would be considered.

The Divisional Director of Housing Services stated that officers would undertake to:

- Devise a rent strategy that maximised income without penalising those in receipt of benefits;
- Formulate a model that maintained a gap between the amount charged for rent by the Authority and RSL.

Sheltered Services

- Further work was necessary to ensure that a revised way of calculating service charges for sheltered housing tenants was ready for implementation in April 2012.

In response to questions officers advised that:

- There was a need to ensure that the cost for services were recovered and to identify any areas where there was a shortfall in income realisation;
- Colleagues in the Adults Services Department and tenants in sheltered housing were being consulted on areas such as cost implications and how a new Sheltered Services model would affect those in receipt of a supporting people grant. A report would be provided to a future meeting of the Forum;
- Tenants should not be charged for services they had not received. Errors with the system would be addressed to ensure that tenants received the services they were paying for;
- Issues with grounds maintenance would be investigated.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.00 pm, closed at 10.05 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR BOB CURRIE
Chairman

**REPORT FOR: TENANTS' AND
LEASEHOLDERS'
CONSULTATIVE FORUM**

Date of Meeting: 8 November 2011

Subject: **INFORMATION REPORT -
Feedback from other Council
led Resident Involvement
Activities**

Responsible Officer: Lynne Pennington, Director of Housing
Services

Exempt: No

Enclosures: Appendix 1 - Outcomes of Resident
Involvement

Section 1 – Summary

This report provides feedback to TLCF on a wide range of Council led service specific and service wide resident involvement activities, and also reports on the outcomes of resident involvement, for example what the department has done differently because of the input received from residents.

FOR INFORMATION

Section 2 – Report

Introduction

- 2.1** This report provides an update on the various officer led resident involvement activities that are taking place across Housing.
- 2.2** It is important to note though that some activities have been delayed, or put on hold pending the outcome of a review that HQN have been commissioned to undertake in to our current Resident Involvement structure. This review is underway currently and is targeted at helping us ensure that all the various resident involvement activities fit together effectively, to avoid duplication of work, to clarify roles and responsibilities and to agree processes and sign off procedures. A number of officers, residents, the portfolio holder for housing and the vice chair of TLCF have been interviewed as part of the review. The cost of this work is being funded from the contingency provision.
- 2.3** At the time of writing the report there are no outcomes to report from this review, but if it is possible to do so a verbal update will be given at the meeting.
- 2.4** This is the third time a report to TLCF has included an appendix that details what has been done differently as a consequence of residents involvement-in other words capturing the successful outcomes of resident involvement. Members of TLCF have an opportunity to ask for more information on any of the entries on the table if they are not convinced these changes have been made. This process is intended to help officers and residents to work together to further develop resident scrutiny of housing's performance.
- 2.5** However it should be noted that there are also a number of areas where resident involvement has led to recommendations for change that are still being developed. Examples are where residents have been asked for their views on changes to operational procedures (such as the Anti Social Behaviour procedures) where work on reviewing the procedures is not yet complete or in determining what steps can be taken to improve customer services following the first round of resident led mystery shopping. These outcomes, once finalised, will be reported to future TLCF meetings.
- 2.6** This report also gives an update on progress with each of the 3 local offers chosen by residents for this year.

Asset Management

- 2.7** The Asset Management Group has a meeting planned on 24th November to explore ways to improve resident engagement in the service.

Councillors Currie and Bath have both been invited to attend and a report on the outcome of this meeting will be made to a subsequent TLCF.

- 2.8** Paul Mullins has set up a tenants group to take an active part in the decisions to be taken as the procurement of the future repairs contract progresses. It is anticipated that this group will continue to be involved in monitoring the contractor (or contractors) after the contract has been awarded. To help with this contact is being made with other local housing organisations who already have active resident engagement in monitoring performance of repairs and major works contracts to allow residents to see first hand how this is achieved.
- 2.9** The largest major works scheme this year is at Francis Road. Asset Management staff have held drop in meetings for local residents and have set up a monthly project team meeting with resident representatives.

Estates Services Steering Group

- 2.10** At the meeting on 8th September 2011 there was some detailed discussions about the perceived failing of the Grounds Maintenance team to deliver against the service level agreement.
- 2.11** The Group demanded a meeting with officers which due to annual leave is still in the process of being arranged.
- 2.12** In addition to this, and as a result of these concerns and the increase in the number of complaints received both directly from residents and through Estate Inspections senior officers the housing portfolio holder discussed his concerns with the Leader and arranged a strategic meeting to determine what needs to be done. Officers are currently working through the agreed actions from this meeting which will be shared at the next residents meeting.
- 2.13** A further Estates Services Steering Group is to be convened to take things forward, a date for which had not been agreed at the time of writing this report.
- 2.14** In July it was reported to TLCF that 6 consultation meetings had taken place to discuss proposals to resolve parking issues on certain housing estates with local residents. Following the meetings residents were invited to complete feedback forms with their preferred options before a final decision was made. These feedback forms have now been analysed and the way forward had been determined. However the receipt of a petition from a number of residents who did not attend consultation meetings has delayed things, but it is anticipated that the agreed schemes will move forward in the near future

Tenant Inspectors

- 2.15** In July it was reported that the Estates Services team had been working with the West London Estate Services Steering Group to train tenant inspectors to grade caretaking services. The first round of inspections, where our tenants inspected Brent Housing Partnership Estates and in return Brent tenants inspected Harrow estates went very well and recommendations for improvements to the service were taken on board.
- 2.16** Next year the inspection programme is to be extended so that our tenant inspectors will visit estates owned by all 6 of the West London landlords taking part in the scheme. In return 18 of Harrow's estates will be visited and inspected by tenants from the other 5 landlords. Now that the tenant inspectors have completed the first round of inspections the aim next year is for inspections to be more outcome focussed so that recommendations could lead to changes in the way caretakers work to improve the appearance of estates. Should the work of the inspectors lead to any recommendations to improve services it is anticipated that these can be met from existing service budgets. Any costs related to the inspections themselves can also be funded from existing budgets.

Complaints Panel

- 2.17** The complaints feedback panel has not met recently, due mainly to the departure of key staff in both the corporate and housing complaints teams. It is hoped to reconvene the panel early in 2012 when new staff have settled in and the new housing complaints process has been operating long enough to be able to measure improvements as a result.

Housing Editorial Board

- 2.18** The Housing Editorial Board now meets monthly to review and approve all housing communications to residents to make sure they are they are in Plain English, are clearly written and convey information in a format that will be easily understood by residents. At the last TLCF a request was made for more residents to get involved. One tenant now attends and a second is being invited. More tenant representatives would be welcome.
- 2.19** The Board has reviewed a number of leaflets, surveys and other information for tenants and leaseholders as well as signing off Homing In. However the purpose of the board and it's role in signing off information does need review as a number of items have come to the board before their content has been agreed elsewhere. It is anticipated that clearer guidance on the process to be followed to bring items to Editorial Board will emerge amongst the outcomes of the HQN review of the Resident Involvement structure.

2.20 A housing events and communications group met three times during the summer to oversee the Housing Changes consultation activity. The group was set up with this specific task in mind and, having completed its task has now been wound down. Members of the group reviewed proposed consultation activity, assisted with consultation roadshows and gave some helpful views which we can use for future consultations.

Sheltered Housing Review

2.21 Following the 3 consultation meetings held with tenants of sheltered housing feedback on the options that emerged from discussions has been sent to all sheltered housing tenants. It was agreed that officers would do further work on 2 or 3 options for the way the service would be managed in the future and then discuss these with tenants in more detail. Work is progressing well and further meetings with tenants will be held in mid-late November.

2.22 A sub group of tenants who represent their sheltered scheme at Harrow Sheltered Residents Association played a big part in helping to set up and structure the consultation meetings and helped to encourage tenants to attend. Officers would like to thank these tenants for their invaluable help.

Value for Money Group

2.23 The residents Value for Money group has been focussing on ensuring that tenant service charges are fair and provide good value for money over the last two meetings. The group questioned tenants being charged for services twice via council tax and HRA service charges to which the Finance Officer provided an example to demonstrate that this was not the case and explained how the shared amenities budget contributes towards an imbalance of charges. The group also queried the rules on Housing Benefit payment of service charges. In addition to service charges, where work is ongoing the group has looked at budget headings and what they include and Support Services costs (SSC's)

Local Offers

2.24 The 3 local offers that will be taken forward this year were chosen following the Housing Fair in April. These are:

- Consultation Charter
- Repairs Guarantee
- Improvements to caretaking service

2.25 Progress has been made on the Consultation Charter. A group of staff have met to develop an internal major works consultation procedure. Two leaflets on major works consultation for leaseholders and tenants have been prepared in consultation with HFTRA and approved by the Editorial Board. They are now at design and print stage. Other aspects of the consultation charter, including a revision to HFTRA and TRA

constitutions have been agreed by HFTRA but are awaiting the outcome of the recently commissioned HQN review of resident engagement.

2.26 Progress has also been made on the Repairs Guarantee and this was discussed at HFTRA. However there is a conflict between what we can expect from the existing repairs contract and what can be expected in the future, following the procurement process. There is ongoing discussion on this but it may be appropriate to delay the completion of the guarantee until after the procurement exercise is further forward.

2.27 Enhancements to the caretaking service are also being planned to both deliver the local offer and respond to those areas within the resident satisfaction survey where satisfaction was less than 75%. Another initiative to help improve caretaking services is to increase resources in the caretaking team by introducing an apprenticeship scheme. This scheme is being funded from a budget created in the current financial year specifically for this purpose. An update on progress with this scheme is included elsewhere on the agenda.

Capturing Outcomes of Resident Involvement

2.25 The table at appendix 1 details individual or team actions that all housing staff have been invited to provide that demonstrate how consulting residents and listening to their views lead to changes in the way we work. Members of TLMCF are invited to challenge and/or ask for further information on anything contained in this table if they are not convinced these changes have been made, or would like some more details.

Section 3 – Further Information

All relevant information has been included in the report.

Section 4 – Financial Implications

This information report has no specific financial implications. Any service improvement issues that arise as a result of residents ideas and suggestions will be considered within the relevant service area budget.

Section 5 – Equalities Implications

There are no specific equalities implications arising from the information provided in this report. However once proposals move forward, should any equalities issues emerge impact assessments will be completed at that time.

Section 6 – Corporate Priorities

The proposals in this report incorporate the corporate priority:
United and involved communities: a Council that listens and leads

Name: Donna Edwards	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Chief Financial Officer
Date: 19 October 2011		

Section 7 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Maggie Challoner, Head of Resident Services, Tel: 020 8424 1473

Background Papers: None

Appendix 1 - Outcomes of Resident Involvement

Resident Involvement Activity or Staff Member/ Team Name who implemented the change	What has been done differently as a result of Resident involvement/consultation	Who was involved?	Comments from Residents/TLCF
Leaseholders told us they wanted more options to pay their bills	We are introducing major works loans to provide longer periods for leaseholders to pay their bills	Leaseholder support group and staff	
Leaseholders told us that they wanted to have an input into policies that affect them	We asked the Leaseholder Support Group for input into our response to the London Assembly report into Leaseholder service charges.	Leaseholder support group and staff	
Leaseholders told us they were unsure about what was covered by the Council's building insurance policy	We sent a copy of the policy to the Leaseholder Support Group and to aid understanding we have arranged for a presentation on the policy to be made at the October meeting of the group. We are also currently working on an internal process to enable claims for repairs to be submitted promptly		
Housing Editorial Board	Residents made comments on the look and content of the Housing Changes booklet, and these were implemented	Residents representatives, portfolio holder for housing and staff	

**REPORT FOR: TENANTS' AND
LEASEHOLDERS'
CONSULTATIVE FORUM**

Date of Meeting: 8 November 2011

Subject: **INFORMATION REPORT – Asset
Management Update**

Responsible Officer: Lynne Pennington, Divisional Director
Housing Services

Exempt: No

Enclosures: None

Section 1 – Summary

This report sets out to update the forum on progress made in the Asset Management Team and review current performance.

FOR INFORMATION

Section 2 – Report

Structure

2.1

Following a second recruitment exercise for the role of Head of Asset Management, Derek Stewart has been appointed and he joined the Council on the 15th August 2011. He has a wide range of experience working in the Housing Sector for both Local Authority's and Housing Associations.

2.2

Later in the report under section 2.9 an update is provided on the procurement process for the new repairs service. It is however clear the changes planned will require the council to strengthen the client side as it will need to perform a range of functions that are currently provided by the contractor or consultants. Some examples include Quantity Surveyors, Clerk of Works, Service Excellence / Improvement and Gas. Work is under way to quantify the new structure, but it is estimated there will be 5-6 new roles in the revised Asset Management Team.

Responsive Repairs

2.3

The performance scorecard for Asset Management shows at the end of August that tenant satisfaction with works carried out in their home had risen to 91% and well above the target of 88%. However the number of appointments made and kept for the same period had fallen to 93.7% and the target is 95%.

2.4

The average cost of a repair has also increased from £116 to £124, however if you take out of the calculation the work that could be described as capital and tends to be more expensive, the average cost actually drops to £108.

Gas Safety

2.5

Health and Safety of the council's tenants and leaseholders is a top priority and gas safety is a key element of this obligation. The council has a target of 100% of all properties to have a current gas safe certificate [CP12]. At the end of August the performance stood at 99.12%. Kier have performed well in this key service area and all outstanding properties are in the council's no access procedure and they are given the highest priority. We only have 7 properties that have a CP12 outstanding for more than one month.

Voids

2.6

The average time taken to relet an empty home is generally very good at below 24 days and at half way through the financial year the council would expect to have had 150 voids. In fact there has only been 134. However the average cost of each void is of concern. The budget was set using an average cost of £1,464, but in reality the average costs have been £2,267 which is putting a lot of pressure on the bottom line. This year the council has had over 10 voids where the cost to relet the unit has been in excess of £5,000. In response a new approvals process has been installed and all voids over £2,000 will need Head of Service sign off to proceed and any void estimated to be over £5,000 will need Divisional Director sanction to proceed.

Capital Programme

2.7

Work is well under way to procure and deliver the 2011/12 capital programme. The annual budget is £11,176,000 which is made up from £6,360,000 for this year and a carry forward of £4,816,000 from 2010/11. It is a large programme and the key elements are as follows:

- Kitchen renewals - £1,275,000
- Bathrooms - £1,300,000
- Adaptations - £1,100,000 [council stock]
- Enveloping - £1,296,000

In a number of the programmes we are going out to competitive tender using an on line system called BRAVO. The kitchen renewal programme has been issued and 46 expression of interest have been received. The council is very hopeful that very competitive prices will result and we will be able to do more renewals within the existing budget. Progress on the programme delivery will be monitored by the Asset Management Improvement Group.

2.8

The major project at Francis Road continues, but the site start date is now projected to be March 2012. Leaseholder consultation has been complete and the project is now with the planners for final approval. A Project Progress Group has been created to ensure residents are kept fully informed and this meets monthly. Design drop in events have also been established to ensure the consultation process meets all residents needs.

Procurement of New Contracts

2.9

At its meeting on the 8th September the Cabinet agreed not to extend the current Repairs and Maintenance contract with Kier that terminates at the end of June 2012. The decision was taken to move to delivering the service via a network of smaller local contracts which it is felt will deliver a more responsive service to tenants and leaseholders at more competitive rates which will enable the council to deliver a much improved service.

2.10

A Project Board has been created to oversee and ensure the project is delivered as approved by the Cabinet. The board has three portfolio holders, a member of the opposition, a tenant / leaseholder representative and several senior council staff. The board will be meeting monthly.

2.11

The contracts to be tendered are as follows:

- Responsive repairs for the East, West, Central Harrow and Corporate
- Domestic gas and boiler servicing and repairs
- Larger gas boiler servicing and repairs [e.g. sheltered housing]
- Adaptations
- Framework contracts for major investment works such as kitchens, bathrooms, roofing, windows and doors.
- Lifts
- Warden Call
- CCTV
- Emergency lighting and fire detection

2.12

The timescale to deliver this complex change process is tight and the following dates are key:

- W/C 3rd Oct 2011– OJEU notice published [European Advert]
- W/C 28th Nov 2011– Short listed contractors invited to tender for the contracts
- Jan – Feb 2012 – Detailed tender evaluation completed
- March 2012 – Contracts awarded after Cabinet approval on the 8th March 2012
- April – June 2012 - Contract mobilisation

The plan is aimed to start the new contracts from the 1st July. However if there is any slippage the Cabinet have approved a possible extension with Kier for 3 months, but every effort will be made to avoid this. In order to focus on the responsive contracts being ready for the 1st July the frameworks for planned works will be procured during the spring / early summer 2012.

2.13

It is important tenants and leaseholders are involved in this important process and this will happen in the following ways:

- Housing Fair [took place in April]
- Resident panel meetings taking place monthly
- Articles in Homing In
- Residents to be part of the contractor evaluation panel
- Informal consultation with leaseholders and formal consultation letters distributed
- Membership of the Project Board
- Reports to TLCF

Section 3 – Further Information

All relevant information is contained in the report, but further progress reports will be made to the TLCF in the future

Section 4 – Financial Implications

The report has highlighted the following financial implications:

- The increase costs of void works to empty homes and the new approval process that has been put in place to manage costs
- The increase in the client side by 5/6 new roles, which has received Cabinet approval
- The procurement of new contracts for the repairs and maintenance service, which again has Cabinet approval

Section 5 – Equalities implications

Equality Impact Assessments have been carried out for the repairs procurement.

Section 6 – Corporate Priorities

The report incorporates the following corporate priorities:

- Keeping neighbourhoods clean, green and safe:
The new repairs contracts / capital programme
- United and involved communities: A Council that listens and leads:
Tenant and leaseholder involvement in the new repairs contracts
- Supporting and protecting people who are most in need:
Provision of the repairs service
- Supporting our town centre, our local shopping centres and businesses:
Allowing local contractors to apply to deliver the new repairs contracts

Name: Donna Edwards

on behalf of the
Chief Financial Officer

Date: 18 October 2011

Section 7 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Derek Stewart, Head of Asset Management 0208 424 1075 or 07919 697637

Background Papers: None

**REPORT FOR: TENANTS' &
LEASEHOLDERS'
CONSULTATIVE FORUM**

Date of Meeting: 8 November 2011

Subject: **INFORMATION REPORT -
Housing Revenue Account
(HRA) Forecast Outturn 2011-12**

Responsible Officer: Julie Alderson, Interim Director of
Finance

Exempt: No

Enclosures: Appendix 1 - HRA Forecast Outturn
2011-12

Section 1 – Summary

This report provides a projected outturn for the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the financial year 2011-12 as at the close of September 2011 (Quarter 2).

To note the HRA position at the end of September 2011.

FOR INFORMATION

Section 2 – Report

HRA Forecast outturn 2010-11 (Revenue)

Context

1. The HRA had balances of £3,779k on 1st April 2011. The table below illustrates the anticipated position as at the end of March 2012. Appendix 1 provides further details.

Description	2011-12 Deficit /(Surplus) £'000
Balance brought forward	(3,779)
In year deficit	1,247
Balance carried forward	(2,532)

Table 1 Forecast Revenue position 2011-12

2. The original budget approved by Cabinet in February 2011 showed that expenditure would be greater than income by £822k. This position has been increased by £522k in respect of the approved carry forward relating to external decorations.

Income

3. HRA income levels are forecast to be £54k lower than expected when the budget was set.
4. This is due mainly to £100k Anti fraud grant, originally assumed receivable in the HRA, now recognised in the Housing General Fund. This has been offset by improved void turnarounds.

Expenditure

5. Voids & response repairs are expected to exceed budget by £145k and £136k respectively due to higher unit costs (Voids unit cost £2,267 year-to-date vs £1,464 budget; Response unit cost £125 year-to-date vs £99 budget).
6. External decorations are substantially complete and it is expected some £170k can be funded from capital in line with latest guidelines.
7. Utility costs have been reviewed using latest consumption levels and it is expected capacity of £146k exists in this area.
8. The HRA is regulated by the Government's Subsidy system and includes an estimated payment of £6,988k. Reduced interest will increase this amount by £301k. This will be however be offset by £462k lower borrowing costs caused mainly by low interest rates.

9. Some costs can however be charged to capital, such as boiler replacements, as referenced in the Asset Management Progress Report. Although the unit cost of response repairs is slightly lower than expected, the volume will be kept under review given the remainder of the winter months.
10. Review of other expenditure indicates salary pressures in respect of the Sheltered Housing Review as well as capacity in the provision for bad debts (improved collection performance).

HRA Forecast outturn 2011-12 (Capital) Context

11. Capital expenditure originally approved for 2010-11 amounted to £6,360k. This has been increased by £4,834k of budgets brought forward from the prior year to £11,194k.
12. The table below shows the expected spend against budget:

Description of Capital Scheme	Budget	Estimated spend	Estimated variation
Extensions	302	293	(9)
Aids & Adaptations	1,100	800	(300)
Housing Programme	9,793	9,229	(564)
Total	11,194	10,322	(873)

13. Of the revised budget of £11,194k, it is expected some £873k will not be spent this financial year.
14. It is expected some £654k will be carried over to be spent in 2012-13 (£300k of this is Council House adaptations). The remainder relates mainly to costs expected to be lower than originally estimated.

Section 3 – Further Information

15. The period 6 position, which has yet to be reported to Cabinet, has been reported to the Forum given its proximity.
16. An update will be given to the Forum in respect of the Quarter 3 position at the February meeting.

Section 4 – Financial Implications

17. This report, which is financial in nature, is for information only.

Section 5 - Equalities implications

18. There are no equalities implications.

Section 6 – Corporate Priorities

19. The HRA Forecast outturn contributes to the Council's Corporate priorities.

Name: Roger Hampson	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Chief Financial Officer
Date: 19 Oct 2011		

Section 7 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Milan Joshi, Housing Finance Manager Tel : 020 8416 8662

Background Papers: 30 year HRA Business Plan, HRA Budget & Financial Strategy 2011-12 to 2013-14

Appendix 1 – HRA forecast outturn 2011-12 (quarter 2)

	Outturn variation 2010-11	Revised Budget 2011-12 £000	YTD Actuals £000	Forecast Outturn 2011-12 £000	Variation £000	Explanation
Operating expenditure :						
Employee Costs	-134	1,988	884	2,001	13	Recharge from Housing General Fund lower than expected due to vacancies.
Supplies & Services	35	630	245	648	18	Expected £60k relating to Communications Strategy and Printing of tenant statements expected - no budget provision.
Utility cost (Water, Gas, Electricity)	-320	679	252	533	-146	Review of consumption levels identifies capacity
Estate & Sheltered Services	250	2,240	892	2,267	27	Includes £75k capacity on Supporting People Grant which is maintained at 2010-11 levels. Overspends of £80k on service review and other staff issues.
Central Recharges	52	3,028	1,290	3,028	0	
Total Operating Expenditure	-117	8,565	3,563	8,477	-88	
Repairs expenditure :						
Repairs – Voids	156	619	298	764	145	Higher than budgeted unit costs resulting in estimated overspend.
Repairs – Responsive	149	2,611	815	2,747	136	Broadly neutral position assuming volume 17,344 and transfers to capital £183k.
Repairs – Other	-489	2,496	1,535	2,327	-169	Assumes full spend on cyclical and 20% capitalisation of External Decorations.
Total Repairs expenditure	-184	5,726	2,648	5,838	112	
Other expenditure:						
Contingency - general	140	170	0	200	30	Estimated spend includes repairs procurement, HRA business planning and strategic review.
Charges for Capital	-556	6,943	0	6,481	-462	Consolidated rate of interest down from 4.59% assumed in budget to 4.00% resulting in underspend, partly offset by additional subsidy payable.
RCCO	-500	0	0	0	0	
Bad or Doubtful Debts	-102	200	26	159	-41	Leaseholder billing completed Aug 2011. Provision based on more accurate ageing of debt.
HRA Subsidy	404	6,989	2,799	7,289	300	Lower interest rate results in higher than expected Subsidy payable.
Total Other	-614	14,302	2,825	14,129	-173	

expenditure						
Total Expenditure	-915	28,593	9,036	-28,444	-149	
	Outturn variation 2010-11	Revised Budget 2011-12 £000	YTD Actuals £000	Forecast Outturn 2011-12 £000	Variation £000	Explanation
Income						
Rent Income – Dwellings	224	24,501	8,014	24,552	-51	Reduced voids turnaround period averaging 26 days against budget assumption of 28 days.
Rent Income – Non Dwellings	47	754	303	714	40	
Service Charges - Tenants	-16	649	213	649	0	
Service Charges - Leaseholders	275	487	464	543	-56	Income of £520k was assumed for 2010-11 for closure of accounts (to be billed in August 2011), which included £61k relating to Ground Maintenance. It is assumed this income will not materialise as information from Service Manager - Public Realm (Maintenance) is that this is not expected to be received. In year service charges of £487k are expected to be accrued as part of 2011-12 closure and billed in 2012-13.
Facility Charges (Water & Gas)	9	507	163	486	21	
Interest	0	6	1	3	-3	
Other Income	-145	183	42	87	96	
Transfer from General Fund	-1	163	2	163	0	
Total Income	393	27,250	9,202	27,197	53	
In Year Deficit / (Surplus)	-522	1,343	166	1,247	-96	
BALANCE brought forward		3,779		3,779		
BALANCE carried forward		2,436		2,532		Balances are expected to reduce to £2,532k based on period 6 outturn position.

**REPORT FOR: TENANTS' AND
LEASEHOLDERS'
CONSULTATIVE FORUM**

Date of Meeting:	8 November 2011
Subject:	INFORMATION REPORT – Resident Services Manager Report
Responsible Officer:	Lynne Pennington, Divisional Director of Housing
Exempt:	No
Enclosures:	None

Section 1 – Summary

1.1 This report sets out a range of information items that the Resident Services Manager would like to bring to the attention of the Tenants and Leaseholder Consultative Forum and provides feedback following discussions and questions raised at previous TLCF meetings.

FOR INFORMATION

Section 2 – Report

2.0 Updates from previous discussions and new items for information

Housing Annual Report

- 2.1. Members of TLCF may recall that Harrow submitted our first annual report to the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) in October 2010. This report detailed our self assessment against 5 national standards set by the TSA and particularly covered our plans to engage with more residents in an effective, and meaningful way. Our second report was completed in October 2011. The report was written by officers with input and quotes from residents both individually and through HFTRA. It details progress made over the last 12 months in meeting the national standards, progress with the Housing Ambition Plan, resident involvement activities and progress with our local offers.
- 2.2. For the first time the report includes performance information which compares Harrow's performance with other London Boroughs and Arms' Length Management Organisations.(ALMOs). A summary of the report is being included in the November Homing In and the full report will be available on the web site, or in hard copy for any residents who express an interest in seeing it. Officers would like to thank residents for their valuable assistance in preparing this years' report.

Leasehold Services

- 2.3. The improvements to the service put into place over the last 12 months enabled us to bill service charges to all leaseholders in August, which was a month ahead of the required date. Where enquiries about bills have been received they have generally been resolved swiftly by working closely with the Council's Asset Management Team. Where it has been necessary to do so amendments to leaseholder bills have been made promptly.
- 2.4. Leaseholder fees are currently being compared with those of other Boroughs to see if they are fair and reasonable as part of the commitment to achieving value for money. This process is called benchmarking. Where we find that our charges are higher than elsewhere we will be proposing new fee levels in consultation with the Leaseholder Support Group.

- 2.5. We have begun the formal consultation process for the Repairs and Maintenance long term agreement. A notice of intention has been served on all leaseholders
- 2.6. In August the leaseholder team billed £430,000 in annual service charges for the 2010/11 financial year. This figure is for the annual service charge only and excludes recharges for s20 works.
- 2.7. A number of leaseholders have set up repayment plans to spread the cost of their bills over 10 months. The leasehold team has been actively pursuing old debt and as a result arrears have continued to reduce. Current debt as at 12th October is £303,035.61 which is made up from £247,667.43 from annual service charges and £30,591.16 from major works. Future reports to TLCF will provide detail on progress made in further reducing the arrears on service charges.
- 2.8. However it should be noted that approximately £60k of service charges for the grounds maintenance element could not be billed as there was insufficient information provided to the leasehold team to justify the charge. Officers are working on ways to ensure this problem is resolved before next years service charges are calculated.

Tenancy Management

- 2.7.1 **Tackling Social Housing Fraud.** As previously reported to TLCF Karen Connell, Senior Professional Housing Management has been leading for Resident Services on a campaign to tackle social housing fraud such as illegal subletting in partnership with Harrows corporate anti-fraud team (CAFT). Following a successful funding bid, a specialist Investigation Officer was jointly appointed by the teams in January n a 12 month contract to focus on this important area. To date 5 tenants have given back their tenancies as evidence of fraud has been gathered. In another case a tenant has been found guilty of criminal charges for obtaining a property by deception and a court date is awaited to gain possession of the property.
- 2.7.2 As the result of an invest to save bid agreed by the Interim Director of Finance we have been able to extend the contract for the specialist fraud officer until the end of March and employ a temporary member of staff, also until March to increase the rate at which tenancy audit visits are undertaken. These visits enable us to verify who is living in the property as well as identify any possible breaches of tenancy conditions.
- 2.7.3 Residents have reported concerns to the team where they believe social housing fraud is being committed and officers are investigating a number

of such cases. This has helped to reach a situation where a number of other live investigations are at an advanced stage and it looks as though the Council is likely to re-gain possession of more properties through this initiative.

- 2.7.4 All such properties will become available for letting to households in housing need. It is estimated that social housing tenancy fraud costs the economy in the region of £900 million each year nationally and Harrow's progress in dealing with issues locally could have a significant impact on local communities.
- 2.7.5 **Income Collection- Current and Former Tenant Arrears.** Progress continues to be made in improving collection on both current and former tenant rent arrears. At the end of 2010/11 current rent arrears had been reduced to the lowest they had ever been in Harrow with a collection rate of 98.36%. In addition to continuing to pursue current rent arrears progress has been made in tackling former tenant arrears, an area that had not been tackled robustly for several years. Each of the 4 rent officers has now taken on a patch for former tenant arrears and older debts have been passed to a collection agency to progress. The procedure for writing off debts where tenants have died, or the debt is now so old it is no longer legally possible to pursue it is also under review.
- 2.7.6 Current rent arrears stand at £467,651 as at 9th October and former tenant arrears at £804,494. Progress in reducing these debts is often quite slow because where payment arrangements are reached these can take several years to reduce the debt.
- 2.7.7 The Council's scrutiny committee are investigating our current procedures to collect money owed to us, to ensure that are procedures have the correct balance between achieving value for money in income collection and ensuring that people are treated fairly and that we continue to use eviction only as a last resort. As has previously been discussed at TLCF the proposed benefit reform could have a significant impact on tenants' ability to pay their rent so any proposed changes to the rent recovery procedure will be discussed with residents, probably through the Value for Money group at a later date.
- 2.7.8 The improved income collection is having an impact on the amount of money needed to be set aside to potentially write off bad debts. Reducing arrears reduces the need for this provision and so leaves more money available to invest in services. At 1st April 2011 the total bad debt provision (rents and service charges) was £785,805. This was increased to £850,601 on 30th September- when the new years service charges were added to the debt and also because the way this provision is calculated was changed.

2.7.9 The bad debt provision is calculated by a formula that takes account of the age of the debt. In general current and former tenant arrears have reduced by £35k so far this year, but the new methodology of ageing the former tenant arrears from date of last transaction has put more of the debt in the high risk category of 365 days plus and therefore increased the required provision. For leasehold service charges, although bills have been sent out in August 2011, their ageing is still low risk at the moment. It is therefore anticipated that as income collection continues to improve the bad debt provision will reduce.

2.7.10 **Resident Involvement.** The Resident Involvement Team are working on a number of initiatives as detailed below:

- Coffee mornings. The first event was held at Brookside Community Hall with residents of Brookside TRA invited by personal letter. The Deputy Mayor attended.
- Tenants and Residents Association (TRA) Get Together. The first get together of committee members from TRA's was held in the Civic Centre on Thursday 13 October from 6.30 to 9.30 p.m. Ian Slaney from Highways gave a presentation on what steps are necessary to organise a Street Party in preparation for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and the Olympics in 2012. The attendees were welcomed by both the vice chair of HFTRA, Kim Chadwick, and the Resident Involvement (RI) team. There seemed to be plenty of things to discuss and judging by the lack of silence throughout the evening – it was a great success! The next TRA Get Together is planned for March 2012.
- Presentation to the HAD Deaf Drop In group. On Wednesday 12 October, following an earlier presentation to the Asian Deaf Club on Saturday 3 September, a presentation targeted at attracting more volunteers was given. One outcome of the meeting was an of a once every two months session where the council can get this groups views and opinions on a wide range of consultations taking place. This has been passed to Desiree Mahoney (Council-wide Consultation) to ensure she also has access to this group, as the opportunity is far wider than housing issues.
- Summer Events. The series of 6 events has now been completed. As this was the first year such events took place there are clearly some lessons to be learnt on what went well, and what did not work as well so meetings will be held with TRA's and HFTRA to plan 2012 Summer Events.
- Sinclair Fields. TLCF members may recall that one idea that arose from the summer events was to launch a multi- agency project to see whether funds could be raised, and support could be found to revamp these playing fields. The idea came from a group of young people who attended the summer event at Woodside. The project is progressing well and a number of partners have expressed an interest in working with us in developing the area. A resident meeting was held on Friday 7 October

where no objections were received to the project moving forward. Local residents have therefore been advised that the project will be taken forward, but that they will be kept informed before any decisions are made.

Estates Services and Sheltered Housing

- 2.7.11 **Caretaking Review.** The team are currently reviewing ways of working to enable a more proactive approach to maintaining the communal areas of estates and blocks of flats. This approach is intended to move from visiting an area and carrying out an agreed list of tasks at each visit to deciding what needs to be done at each visit according to the condition of the area or estate. Staff will work to a set of standards, illustrated by pictures to bring areas up to an agreed level of presentation. This approach will ensure that more time can be given to those areas that most need improvement.
- 2.7.12 An awayday is taking place with the staff on 28th October where the new approach will be launched. If there is more to report a by the meeting a verbal update will be given to TLCF
- 2.7.13 The other new initiative in the caretaking service is the apprenticeship scheme which is almost finalised. The scheme aims to give 2 local young people an opportunity to work with the caretakers for up to 2 years, whilst undertaking training that will lead to a formal qualification accredited to the National Apprenticeship scheme. At the time of writing this report the recruitment process is not concluded so again a verbal update can be given to the meeting.
- 2.7.14 **Parking schemes.** TLCF members will recall that officers were undertaking consultation with local residents in a number of areas of the Borough where local parking schemes are being proposed. The consultation ended and we had developed a clear plan of what would happen and were developing a timetable. However plans have been delayed because of a petition received from one area from residents who did not attend the consultation meetings. Although this only affects one proposal it has held up progress on all schemes because it is more cost effective to progress all the schemes that will go ahead together. Once the issues raised in the petition are resolved we will be able to move forward with plans for all schemes and advise residents accordingly.
- 2.7.15 **Sheltered Housing Modernisation.** The review of the sheltered housing service is progressing well. Following the consultation with tenants of sheltered housing, detailed elsewhere on this agenda, consultation has also taken place with the trade unions. A staff consultation event is planned for 19th October where draft job descriptions and the two options under consideration will be discussed. Following this event there will be further consultation with sheltered housing tenants before proposals are

finalised. The review is still on track for full implementation early in the 2012/13 financial year.

2.7.16 **Garage Strategy.** The stock condition survey of our garage stock has now been analysed and plans are being made to bring a number of garages where there is a waiting list of people looking to rent a garage up to a acceptable standard so they can be rented. However at present there is only sufficient funding available to improve a small number of garages. In addition one garage area where there have been some serious anti- social behaviour problems is being considered as a potential site for new homes. Officers will be discussing the future garage strategy at service planning meetings over the next few months and a further update will be provided to a future TLCF meeting.

Section 3 – Further Information

This report contains a number of items of information and feedback from earlier TLCF discussions that do not warrant individual reports.

Section 4 – Financial Implications

Any financial issues are contained within the body of the report.

Section 5 – Equalities Implications

There are no specific equalities implications arising from the information provided in this report. However once proposals move forward, should any equalities issues emerge impact assessments will be completed at that time.

Section 6 – Corporate Priorities

All of the above initiatives contribute to the corporate priorities, in particular united and involved communities: a Council that listens and leads.

Name: Donna Edwards

on behalf of the
Chief Financial Officer

Date: 19 October 2011

Section 7 – Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Maggie Challoner, Resident Services Manager, Tel: 020 8424 2473
Email: Maggie.challoner@harrow.gov.uk

Background Papers: None