

# Tenants', Leaseholders' and Residents' Consultative Forum

## AGENDA

**DATE:** Wednesday 31 October 2012

**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:** Nicola Fletcher, Democratic & Electoral Services Officer  
Tel: 020 8416 8050 E-mail: [nicola.fletcher@harrow.gov.uk](mailto:nicola.fletcher@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 disclosable pecuniary or non pecuniary interests, arising from business to be transacted at this meeting, from:

- (a) all Members of the Forum;
- (b) all other Members present.

## **3. MINUTES (Pages 1 - 26)**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 July 2012 and of the special meetings held on 26 September 2012 be taken as read and signed as correct records.

## **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: RENT AND HOUSING FINANCE OVERVIEW WORKSHOP (Pages 27 - 30)**

Report of the Divisional Director of Housing Services

**8. INFORMATION REPORT - RESIDENT SERVICES MANAGER'S REPORT AND FEEDBACK FROM OTHER COUNCIL LED RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES (Pages 31 - 38)**

Report of the Divisional Director of Housing Services

**9. INFORMATION REPORT - HOUSING COMPLAINTS HANDLING (Pages 39 - 44)**

Report of the Divisional Director of Housing Services

**10. INFORMATION REPORT - HEAD OF ASSET MANAGEMENT'S REPORT (Pages 45 - 52)**

Report of the Divisional Director of 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 next meeting will be held at 2.00pm on Wednesday 19 December 2012

**AGENDA - PART II - NIL**

This page is intentionally left blank

# TENANTS', LEASEHOLDERS' AND RESIDENTS' CONSULTATIVE FORUM MINUTES

## 17 JULY 2012

**Chairman:** \* Councillor Bob Currie

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

**In attendance:** Thaya Idaikkadar Minute 121 - 131  
**(Councillors)** Kairul Kareema Marikar

\* Denotes Member present

† Denotes apologies received

### Representatives From the Following Associations Were in Attendance

Antoneys Close Tenants' and Residents' Association  
Churchill Place Tenants' and Residents' Association  
Cottesmore 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

## 121. Attendance by Reserve Members

**RESOLVED:** To note that there were no Reserve Members in attendance.

## 122. Declarations of Interest

Agenda Item 7 – Information Report – Asset Management Update; Agenda Item 8 – Information Report – Housing Business Plan Update; Agenda Item 9 – Information Report – Housing Changes Review Update; Agenda Item 10 – Information Report – Garage Strategy; Agenda Item 11 – Housing Ambition Plan No. 3 (2012/13); Agenda Item 12 – Resident Services Manager’s Report and Feedback from Other Council Led Resident Involvement Activities.

Councillors Bob Currie and Mano Dharmarajah declared personal interests on the above items in that they attended monthly meetings of the Eastcote Lane Tenants’ and Residents’ Association. They would remain in the room whilst the matters were considered and voted upon.

Councillor Kairul Marikar declared a personal interest in the above items in that she was a tenant of the Council. She would remain in the room whilst the Forum considered and voted on the matters before them.

Agenda Item 12 – Resident Services Manager’s Report and Feedback from Other Council Led Resident Involvement Activities

Paddy Lyne declared a personal interest. She would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

## 123. Minutes

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 10 May 2012 be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

## 124. Public Questions, Petitions and Deputations

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

## RESOLVED ITEMS

## 125. INFORMATION REPORT - Asset Management Update

An officer introduced a report which updated the Forum on progress made in relation to Asset Management. The officer reported the following issues:

- response repairs contracts had been awarded to the relevant contractors within the Harrow East, Harrow Central and Harrow West areas. There had been a smooth transition during the switchover process from the previous contractors to the new contractors;

- the procurement of the framework contracts to deliver planned investment works was nearly completed and would be presented to Cabinet on 19 July 2012 for approval;
- robust plans would be put in place to monitor the contractors' performance;
- the Forum wished to thank Paul Mullins, the previous Interim Project Manager for the work he had conducted on the procurement of the new repairs contractors;
- with the change of contractors, the Council was required to strengthen its client side personnel. A new structure for the Asset Management Team had been agreed and a number of roles within the new structure had been filled by existing staff. The remainder of the roles had been advertised internally and any unfilled posts would be advertised externally;
- the Repairs Charter had been implemented on 1 July 2012. The drive for this Charter had been to reflect those areas which were of most importance and to provide value for money. In addition the Chartered Institute of Housing had launched their own repairs charter which set out 6 core requirements. Having studied this document, the Council's own Repairs Charter met most of their requirements;
- in relation to the performance of the Asset Management service, it had been expected that there would be a significant dip in performance as a result of changing contractors for response repairs. However this had not been experienced;
- customer satisfaction had not dropped as anticipated in relation to the change of contractors for response repairs. Customer satisfaction surveys would now be conducted by the Council and scoring would now take place on a score between 0 -10 (10 being excellent). Any score below 6 would be followed up to identify any lessons that could be learnt;
- consultation on the Capital Investment Plan 2012/13 had concluded in June 2012. The Asset Management Team hoped to produce a 3 year investment programme as a longer time frame would provide more certainty and allow decisions to be based on actual data collected;
- in order to raise the quality of the Asset Management service, a sub-group had been created comprising of 7 to 8 Leaseholders to consider various issues. The fundamental issues related to communications, charging, billing and service delivery by caretakers and contractors. An action plan had been agreed;
- the views of the Forum, in relation to the ongoing issues of leaves blocking the gutters at properties in Milmans Close, had been

discussed by the Chairman and the Chief Executive. There were currently no plans to prune the trees. The Council had requested quotes on placing leaf grills over the relevant gutters to help prevent blockages.

During the discussion on this item, Members of the Forum raised a number of issues, which the officer responded to as follows:

- the next best solution to address the problems surrounding leaves blocking gutters in Milmans Close was to install leaf protectors in the relevant gutters;
- the External Decorations Programme did not address windows that needed replacing. This was dealt with under the Capital Investment Programme. A 5 year External Decorations Programme had been produced over 5 years ago but for a range of reasons was never delivered as planned. Consequently a new 5 year plan had been produced. Separate briefings could be provided for individual Tenants and Residents Association (TRA) representatives on window replacements if they required it;
- for areas that were close together, works would be conducted at about the same time on the External Decorations Programme. Information on the insulation programme would be provided at the next meeting of the Forum;
- officers would investigate an issue raised by the Leaseholder Support Group that when writing to a generic email address for the Council relating to the monitoring of the response repairs contractors, this was being blocked;
- any feedback would be welcomed if there were any other areas identified for the External Decorations Programme;
- in an individual case where the previous contractor had not performed a duty they said they had conducted, the Council had paid out compensation to the person affected and would be claiming the expenses back from the previous contractor.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

## **126. INFORMATION REPORT - Housing Business Plan Update**

The Forum received a report which provided an update in respect of the Housing Business Plan.

An officer introduced the report and highlighted the following issues:

- the Council had agreed to make a payment of £88.461million to the Government. The loan to fund this payment was taken out with the Public Works Loan Board on 28 March 2012 and was a 50 year



maturity loan (repayable at the end of the 50 year term) at a fixed interest rate of 3.48%. The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) business plan model had now been updated to reflect the amount borrowed at the actual rate achieved;

- the HRA had now been remodelled to take account of the revised opening revenue position and the Major Repairs Reserve balance of £4.148 million able to be brought forward as a result of capital funding decisions in 2011/12;
- right to buy sales were previously included at a notional 3 sales per year, but for the purposes of producing an updated model, the sales numbers had been assumed using the model used by the Department of Communities and Local Government when calculating the amount of debt Harrow had taken under self financing;
- the revised projections had been included within the report and showed a healthy revenue position with revenue balances of £242 million accruing over 30 years as well as a fully funded capital programme;
- £7.7 million had been identified for investment in services, residential and response repairs and in change management;
- it was hoped that the arrangements would allow the Business Plan to have a significant influence on the budget setting process;
- there were still some areas that needed addressing. This included the rental strategy for which proposals were still under development;
- the Garage Strategy also needed addressing. This was a key consideration which needed to be developed;
- options for reducing homelessness also needed to be addressed. This involved looking at the private rental sector and services for home owners;
- it was important to note that the Business Plan was not set in stone and was constantly being developed and refined.

During the discussion on this item an officer responded to a query raised by a Member of the Forum by stating that concerns regarding the Right to Buy scheme taking property out of those eligible to be rented were noted. However Central Government regulations on Right to Buy schemes had to be followed.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

## **127. INFORMATION REPORT - Housing Changes Review Update**

An officer introduced a report which set out an update on the Housing Changes Review which involved a full review of and completion of a range of housing strategy and policies as required by the Localism Act 2011.

The officer reported the following issues:

- there were 2 main policies being presented to the Forum, one on the Tenancy Strategy and one on the Housing Allocation Scheme;
- the Tenancy Strategy set out the Council's guidance on the introduction of flexible fixed term tenancies in Harrow. The Strategy was deliberately long term in its nature to allow the best use of the Council's housing stock and would provide advice for all social landlords to follow;
- consultation had taken place on the Tenancy Strategy since May 2012. Since the consultation had commenced, approximately 70% of the respondents were supportive of the Strategy and the need to make better use of the Council's housing stock;
- the Tenancy Strategy set out how it would be introduced and how it would be reviewed at the end of a fixed term period;
- the Strategy proposed income and savings limits at which a household would be deemed to be able to find suitable affordable housing. This had been an area where a range of views had been expressed and was an area for further discussion;
- several responders to the consultation had expressed a view that all new tenancies should be for a fixed period of time but should be automatically renewed in certain circumstances;
- the Housing Allocation Scheme's main objective was to reduce the amount of time people waited for social housing;
- some people had to wait for 5 – 8 years which was unacceptable as they had been identified as having a social housing need. Therefore in the current national economic climate, the only way to reduce this was to reduce the number of people eligible for social housing;
- within the report the number of bands and category of people eligible for social housing was proposed to increase from 4 to 5 bands. This would allow for a greater degree of flexibility. There would be a reduced priority for older children with a greater concentration on younger children. Medical priority criteria would also be made more robust;
- two main areas which required further discussion related to whether or not to provide a priority for those on low incomes or those who provide a contribution to the community;

- it was proposed to exclude people who did not live in Harrow, those who were owner occupiers, those who owed Council rents from those eligible for social housing;
- two key areas to address if the new Housing Allocations Scheme was adopted was consideration of how the move from the existing to the new scheme was managed.

During the discussion on this item, Members of the Forum raised a number of queries which officers responded to as follows:

- the Tenancy Strategy set out key points of a child's education and the consideration provided to this factor when renewing tenancies. If a child was in a key point in their education, the tenancy could be renewed for a limited period to allow a more stable environment;
- the existing tenancy agreements had a clause to ensure that tenants kept their gardens tidy and the Council were doing more to enforce this;
- non key repairs could be restricted if a tenant did not look after their property, so pressure could be exerted this way;
- there was a huge demand for Council and Housing Association accommodation which was difficult to meet so other options had to be investigated. Priority had to be given to those who had no other option but to live in social housing;
- people were only moved into private rented accommodation if their current accommodation was unsuitable. The new scheme would allow people to be house more quickly;
- if those in sheltered housing had the sufficient funds they could go into privately owned sheltered housing. This would be investigated.

A Member of the Forum commented that the Housing Allocations Scheme was welcomed.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

## **128. INFORMATION REPORT - Garage Strategy**

An officer introduced a report which provided an update on the current position of garages owned on Council owned housing estates and the aims and objectives of the emerging Garage Strategy.

The officer reported the following key points:

- the council owned 957 garages and carports located on housing estates across the borough;

- there were currently two scales of charges for garages, with a slightly higher charge for private lettings than for those let to the Council's tenants and resident leaseholders;
- demand for the rental of garages varied considerably on different sites and depended on their condition. Some garages were in a reasonable state of repair whilst others remained void due to disrepair, vandalism and antisocial behaviour;
- some garage sites had the potential to be developed for affordable housing to contribute towards meeting the housing need in the borough;
- a garage strategy was being progressed to deal with the issues associated with garages and to make best use of the sites;
- there were currently approximately 480 void garages. Only 100 of these were of a standard that would allow them to be let. Unfortunately there was not sufficient demand on these sites to let the garages;
- there were currently 33 people on waiting lists for various garages, although the Council had prevented letting some of the garages because of disrepair;
- in recent years both the maintenance and management of garages had not been given sufficient resources or priority to optimise their use and the resultant income. Towards the end of the last financial year, the Council had invested £20000 in renovating 20 garages at Shaftesbury Circle. Following the works the garages are all ready to be let and only 3 remain void;
- if all 957 garages and carports were let, this could generate a gross annual income of £683,911. However only around 44% of this gross annual income was being realised. If nothing was done the current income received was likely to reduce year by year;
- it would not be possible to generate income from garage rents further without investing more revenue into improving the existing stock and improving the management of garages;
- a previous Garage Strategy had been presented to the Forum in 2010. However the introduction of the Housing Revenue Account Reform had brought about new opportunities to develop new affordable housing contributing to meeting the housing needs of priority households;
- the objectives of the Garage Strategy included determining which garage sites had development potential, to consider what future investment was needed to maximise income generation and to review garage rent levels and determine a rental strategy for the HRA Business Plan;

- the Council were currently in the 4<sup>th</sup> stage of the Strategy and had accumulated information on the stock condition of the garages. An initial review of the sites had divided the sites into 3 groups: those sites that have development potential; those sites that have constrained development potential and those sites that have no development potential;
- the Council were now considering how to make best use of the garage sites, on the basis of their suitability for the development of affordable housing, demand for letting and cost of repair;
- a Garage Strategy Steering Group (The Group) had been established with a range of representatives to take the strategy forward. One meeting of the Group had been held so far;
- the Group had identified that identification was required of sites attracting anti social behaviour to develop an action plan to resolve the issues;
- for those garages with development potential the Group had identified that a planning officer was required to provide planning advice. Site visits would be conducted to the sites and feasibility studies would then be commenced;
- for those sites without development potential, the Group had identified that further information needed to be collated to enable an analysis of the demand and repair status of garages in order to identify priorities for repair and subsequent letting;
- for those garages without development or garage letting potential, the Group had considered that it may be appropriate to consider a change of use for some garages that would either be community or commercially driven to bring in further income to the HRA;
- in summary, Garages needed to be robustly managed to avoid nuisance complaints and deal with and Health and Safety issues that arise.

During the discussion on this item, Members of the Forum raised a number of issues which officers responded to as follows:

- there was a difference in garage letting charges between council tenants and non-council tenants due to the rules surrounding Value Added Tax (VAT);
- it was noted that there were some concerns that garages were being used for commercial enterprises. This is why better management was required in relation to garages to ensure that there were regular inspections;

- there were issues to be resolved surrounding the locality around the garages to ensure that they were more easily accessible.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

### **129. Housing Ambition Plan No. 3 (2012/13)**

The Forum received a report on the Housing Ambition Plan (HAP) which was the service plan for Housing Services. An officer introduced the report and made the following points:

- the first HAP had been produced in 2012 and comprised of an action plan to address areas of weakness. The second HAP looked at addressing changes required by Central Government in relation to Housing. This third HAP was the most comprehensive and ambitious housing service plan. Its aim was to deliver excellent services shaped and valued by the Council's communities;
- the HAP included team commitments around a number of different areas. It also had an objective for staff of getting closer to the customer;
- the HAP also contained a spreadsheet listing the projects which they would deliver and the relevant timescales. There was also a scorecard of key performance indicators;
- monitoring of the objectives contained with the HAP would be carried out internally via the housing management team, the Council's improvement board and the quarterly HFTRA Challenge Panel.

In referring the HAP itself the officer made the following points:

- the HAP contained an initial section which detailed the vision of the Plan. There was a greater onus on staff to understand and get closer to their customers;
- in the current national economic difficulties it was important to have a strong strategic core and make accurate projections;
- the HAP linked into the Council's Community, Health and Well-being Directorate's vision;
- the HAP contained the relevant engagement structure for the HAP, of which the Forum was a key component;
- the plan referenced the Housing Leadership Group which would engage all housing managers and perform a number of roles including developing new initiatives and tracking performance. This would play a key role in learning and development;

- the HAP contained a series of commitments from the Housing Management Team. This ensured that these commitments were clear and that everyone in the service understood what was trying to be achieved;
- the HAP recognised the recent achievement of the Housing Services obtaining a gold standard in their recent Investors in People Inspection. The HAP also identified key action points to maintain this award;
- the remaining sections of the HAP identified individual team commitments.

During the discussion on this item, Members of the Forum raised a number of issues which officers responded to as follows:

- Bed and Breakfast accommodation was required at times for those requiring social housing. This was always done reluctantly and any stay was always kept to a minimum;
- any complaints regarding housing services were dealt with under the Council's corporate complaints procedure. If there were still concerns after this process, complaints could be made to the Local Government Ombudsman. Under the Localism Act it was anticipated that complaints relating to housing issues would be dealt with locally with a democratic filter and then a Housing Ombudsman. There was not much information available yet about how this operation would work in practice.

Members of the Forum commented that officers within Housing Service had provided excellent customer care to some of the TRAs and they were keen to work in partnership with them to achieve the best possible outcomes.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

### **130. INFORMATION REPORT - Resident Services Manager's Report and Feedback from Other Council Led Resident Involvement Activities**

The Forum received a report which set out a range of information providing feedback on a range of Council led service specific and service wide resident involvement activities.

An officer introduced the report and explained that due to the timing of the meeting performance information was still being processed and would be provided in greater detail at the next meeting.

The officer also reported the following points:

- the Council had received some benchmarking information in relation to other Councils which had demonstrated that the Council were performing well in relation to rent collection. Two statistics that were monitored were the percentage of current tenant arrears expressed as



a percentage of the overall annual amount charged to tenants in rent. The second was the amount of rent debt that was written off. The Council had been identified as being the best performing Council in London in these aspects;

- work had commenced in relation to universal credit. The main impact of this was that the Council may have to physically collect about 60-70% of the rent which was a significant change to the current collection process. A steering group had been established to look at what steps were required to address this change and awareness also needed to be raised in relation to the changes and whether direct debits could be utilised more frequently. The Council were working closely with the Citizens Advice Bureau to increase this awareness;
- work was continuing on the Council's commitment to tackling tenancy fraud. Almost one third of tenants had been visited. Extra resources had been allocated to this project because when conducting visits, other unrelated issues were being advised of providing valuable learning experiences;
- a Council officer had met recently with Housing Associations to outline the support provided by the Council in relation to tackling fraud. This involved providing training and support on investigations;
- a new way of working in relation to estate services was being piloted. This involved a mix of static and mobile caretakers and the introduction of wet cleaning in communal areas of the flat blocks;
- this year's round of tenant inspection of housing estates in partnership with Hillingdon had taken place. This involved a small group of tenants inspecting estates at random within Hillingdon and grading them. Tenants from Hillingdon also then inspected and graded an estate visited at random within Harrow. This had produced a positive outcome for the Council in that the estate within Harrow had been scored at 84%.

During the discussion on this section of the report, Members of the Forum raised a number of issues which the officer responded to as follows:

- a request for volunteers from TRAS to become involved as Tenant Inspectors had been made through the HFTRA;
- the Council had noted that there had been challenges in relation to caretaking services generally. These issues would be addressed and it was envisaged that changes to the operations of caretakers would assist in this process. Caretakers would now be required to do whatever was necessary to alleviate the issue rather than have a set time on each relevant estate;
- it was noted that TRA representatives would like for Housing Services' department to further publicise their achievement in attaining a Gold



Assessment in the Investor in People accreditation for example via the 'Homing In' publication.

The officer then presented the forum with details regarding the Sheltered Housing Review. The officer explained that it was envisaged that a report would be presented to Cabinet in September 2012, and officers were keen to input any views expressed by the Forum.

The officer made the following points:

- the key reasons for making a change in relation to sheltered housing included delivering service improvements, it provided an opportunity to modernise, to respond to a 40% reduction on Supporting People funding over the next 3 years and ensure consistency in the way all schemes operated;
- there were 18 Sheltered Housing schemes and 551 self contained flats. Each scheme had one designated warden however only 5 resident wardens currently remained. There were several wardens who were part time and tenants did not have much of a choice in who they spoke to resolve issues;
- staff usually had to work in isolation and a 40% reduction in Supporting People would mean a reduction in staff if no action was taken;
- it was therefore proposed to retain 18 frontline posts, but to divide these into 2 staff teams. The first team would focus on housing management and the second team would focus on support;
- two new posts would also be created within the proposals. One was a scheme co-ordinator and one would be a handyperson;
- more staff hours would be available under the proposals. Wardens currently worked 553 hours per week. Under the new structure 648 hours of staff time would be utilised;
- an informal consultation with staff and tenants on the proposals was conducted in 2011. Formal consultation was now taking place with staff and would close on 18 July 2012;
- the feedback received to date had been mixed. Most people recognised the need for change but concern had been expressed regarding a reduced staff presence;
- Sheltered Housing was funded through both Supporting People Grant (SPG) and HRA. The SPG was paid on the basis that Wardens spent 95% of their time providing support to all 551 Sheltered tenants, however many tenants did not require a support package;
- currently the SPG was means tested so tenants not in receipt of benefits were charged a weekly support charge of £15.25;

- the SPG needed to make savings of at least £200k by 2015. These savings could be achieved by changing the funding arrangements by moving from a long term to a short term designation. This meant that the support service would now be free but a new service charge of £15.25 would cover the enhanced housing management of sheltered housing. Tenants would be no worse off financially but receive a better service.

During the discussion on this part of the report, Members of the Forum raised a number of queries, which officers responded to as follows:

- there were issues with ensuring that any IT provided at Sheltered Housing locations were compatible with the Councils systems. It was hoped that this would still be progressed as the Council's IT infrastructure was developed;
- the support service was different to Home Care. Home care related to personal care;
- there was currently a helpline service which was utilised if wardens were not present at the site.

The Chairman requested that an update report on Sheltered Housing be provided at the next meeting of the Forum.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

### **131. Date of Next Meeting**

**RESOLVED:** To note that the next meeting would be held at 7.30 pm on Wednesday 31 October 2012.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 2.05 pm, closed at 5.05 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR BOB CURRIE  
Chairman

# **TENANTS', LEASEHOLDERS' AND RESIDENTS' CONSULTATIVE FORUM SPECIAL MINUTES**

## **26 SEPTEMBER 2012**

**Chairman:** \* Councillor Bob Currie

**Councillors:** \* Mrs Camilla Bath \* Susan Hall (1)  
\* Mano Dharmarajah

**In attendance:** \* Thaya Idaikkadar Minute 135  
**(Councillors)**

\* Denotes Member present  
(1) Denote category of Reserve Members

### **Representatives From the Following Associations Were in Attendance**

Churchill Place Tenants' and Residents' Association  
Eastcote Lane Tenants' and Residents' Association  
Harrow Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations  
Honeybun Estate Tenants' and Residents' Association  
Kenmore Park Tenants' and Residents' Association  
Little Stanmore Tenants' and Residents' Association  
Milman Close Tenants' and Residents' Association  
Weald Village Community Association  
Weald Village Tenants' and Residents' Association

### 132. Attendance by Reserve Members

**RESOLVED:** To note the attendance at this meeting of the following duly appointed Reserve Member:-

Ordinary Member

Reserve Member

Councillor Kam Chana

Councillor Susan Hall

### 133. Declarations of Interest

Agenda Items: 4 - Information Report: Housing Changes Review Update; 5 – Information Report: Housing Rent Options Paper

Councillors Bob Currie and Mano Dharmarajah declared non pecuniary interests in the above items in that they attended monthly meetings of the Eastcote Lane Tenants' and Residents' Association (TRA). They would remain in the room whilst these matters were considered and voted upon.

### 134. Deputations

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

## RESOLVED ITEMS

### 135. INFORMATION REPORT: Housing Rent Options Paper

Officers introduced a report which outlined to the Forum some of the options which might be available to the Council if it wished to alter the existing rent strategy. Officers reported the following issues:

- the aim of the report was to draw attention to the options for changes to the rent strategy as early as possible as in the past there had been criticism of the timetable for the strategy;
- further consultation would take place on the options and this would include writing to all Tenants' and Residents' Associations (TRAs) and placing information on the website;
- the reforms to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) had begun and it was now self-financing. The HRA would be required to deliver the objectives which had been set;
- the current strategy was based on the Government convergence policy, which was an increase of the Retail Price Index (RPI) plus the convergence increase. It was assumed that the existing rent would converge with the target rents in 2015;
- the Council was not required to change the rental policy;

- one of the options was to continue with the current policy which had been agreed by the TLRCF and Cabinet for 2011 and continued for 2012. The current arrangement was considered a safe option and was dependent on the RPI. It could be considered the preferred option for the short term while HRA self-financing settled;
- if it was decided to change the policy, one option was to disregard the rent convergence policy and have a locally agreed policy. The benefits of this option included that it was a 'scientific' approach to setting rents, it would maintain the rent differentials between different types of dwellings and it would generate additional income for the HRA. As an example, if the average rent was to be increased by 5% it would generate an additional income of approximately £60 million over a 30 year period. However, if the rents were considered too high, then the rent rebate subsidy would be withdrawn and in the example of a 5% increase, £38 million would have to be repaid, resulting in a net benefit of £22 million.
- the risks of disregarding rent convergence included the potential perception of the change being a means to raise some money, the rent rebate subsidy limitation reducing the net benefit and that Council rents would lose comparability with those of Registered Social Landlords.

During the discussion on the first two options outlined, Members of the Forum raised a number of issues, which the officers responded to as follows:

- the HRA subsidy, which was a national Government subsidy for housing, was different to the rent rebate subsidy. The rent rebate subsidy would be reduced if rent levels were too high;
- the policy for setting rental levels was based on the rent convergence policy set by Government. This was calculated using the value of the property and the average earnings of the area in which the property was situated;
- the initial aim had been for rental levels to converge with the target level in a 10 year period. However, the Government had extended the time period by four years because the RPI was high and convergence would now be achieved by 2015;
- the 5% increase was an illustrative figure and RPI would be a factor in determining an increase in average rents;
- the net benefit would accrue over the 30 year period and the year on year increases in additional income for the HRA would be smaller;
- target rents were affordable but the definition affordable rents was different. The Government definition of affordable rent was rent which was up to 80% of private rental levels. Target rents were calculated;
- the property valuations from January 1999 were used for the target rent calculations;

- housing associations tended to follow the Government policy regarding rental levels but they did have more flexibility, such as being able to offer properties being re-let for affordable rents. The Council was only able to offer new properties for affordable rent. It was not a deliberate policy for there to be a divergence between the Council and housing associations;
- it was possible that there could be a legal challenge resulting from the difference in rules between what a local authority was able to do as compared to a housing association

During the discussion on this item Members of the Forum made the following comments;

- it was questionable if it was appropriate to include an option as being a high risk politically in the risks in the matrix;
- the information was not easily understood and the report should be redrafted to explain the options easily and clearly;
- the Housing Plan had been developed for a 30 year period but the immediate future was unclear;
- a training session regarding the options for changes to the rent policy should be arranged.

An officer advised that the purpose of the report was to make the Forum aware of the options and that a decision on the rent policy was not required until March. Training would be arranged.

**RESOLVED:** That a training session on the options for changes to the rent policy be arranged.

### **136. INFORMATION REPORT: Housing Changes Review Update**

The Divisional Director of Housing Services introduced the report which updated the Forum on the Housing Changes Review and focused on the final draft Tenancy Strategy and Tenancy Policy.

The Divisional Director of Housing Services reported the following issues:

- consultation had been carried out regarding the housing changes and the feedback had been included in the report;
- the draft Tenancy Strategy explained how the Council intended to introduce fixed term tenancies for new tenants for its own housing stock, including the complaints and Appeal process;
- the draft Tenancy Policy explained how the draft Tenancy Strategy would be implemented;

- as a result of the consultation, the Strategy had been amended to include that care leavers in the specified groups would be given an automatic renewal of a fixed term tenancy unless their circumstances changed;
- the Strategy now included that all non specified groups would be given a 5 year fixed term tenancy which would be reviewed at the conclusion of the 5 years;
- life-time tenancies would be offered to under-occupiers who had reached state retirement age and who were moving to a smaller property, older people moving into sheltered or extra care housing and older people who had reached state retirement age and were moving into a one bed general needs property;
- fixed term tenancies, for certain groups, would be automatically reviewed provided that the tenant's circumstances had not changed since they were originally housed;
- the circumstances of care leavers would be reviewed and if there had not been any changes then the tenancy would be renewed. It was anticipated that the majority of care leavers' tenancies would be renewed;
- there had been changes to the income and savings limit at which a household would be deemed to be able to find suitable affordable housing. The income limit had been slightly reduced and the savings limit had been increased to £24,000;
- the final consultation on the draft Tenancy Strategy and Policy would commence on 27 September and last for 8 weeks. It would be placed on the website and information would be sent to all TRAs.

During the discussion on this item, Members of the Forum raised a number of queries which officers responded to as follows:

- efforts were being made to address fraud issues relating to housing and benefits;
- the strategy and policy would not change the Council's responsibilities with regard to tenancy management. Tenancies would not be renewed if, following a review, it was determined that a tenant's circumstances had improved and they had alternative options available. The Council would offer help in finding alternative accommodation;
- it was a possibility that some tenants would not keep their properties at a suitable standard if they were given a fixed term tenancy. This would be addressed as a part of tenancy management and conditions would be included in the tenancy agreements;
- a tenant would have to be reconsidered for inclusion on the waiting list again if their circumstances changed in a negative manner following a fixed term tenancy not being renewed;

- the new draft strategy and policy would not affect tenancy management and the processes for dealing with tenants carrying out acts of anti-social behaviour would remain the same;
- discretionary succession would only be offered to a carer who had given up their accommodation to care for a minimum of 12 months, when the property met their needs and where no alternative realistic housing option existed;
- a carers' right to stay in a property would remain until the end of the fixed term tenancy and then it would be reviewed;
- an introductory or probationary tenancy would be offered for a 12 month period and this was exclusive of the 5 year fixed term tenancy.

Members of the Forum made the following additional comments during the discussion:

- the review at the end of a fixed term tenancy would discourage people from improving themselves;
- a fixed term tenancy might help discourage anti social behaviour and promote better behaviour;
- it was important to look after the most vulnerable people and there was a limited number of properties available;
- a fixed term tenancy of five years was generous;
- there were concerns that, in some instances, the Council was not informed when a tenant passed away and the carer continued to reside in the property.

The Divisional Director of Housing Services advised that comments and feedback on the draft Tenancy Strategy and Tenancy Policy could be submitted via the Council's website and as a TRA response.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 2.08 pm, closed at 3.19 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR BOB CURRIE  
Chairman



# **TENANTS', LEASEHOLDERS' AND RESIDENTS' CONSULTATIVE FORUM SPECIAL MINUTES**

## **26 SEPTEMBER 2012**

**Chairman:** \* Councillor Bob Currie

**Councillors:** \* Mrs Camilla Bath \* Susan Hall (1)  
\* Mano Dharmarajah

\* Denotes Member present  
Denote category of Reserve Members

### **Representatives From the Following Associations Were in Attendance**

Churchill Place Tenants' and Residents' Association  
Eastcote Lane Tenants' and Residents' Association  
Harrow Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations  
Honeybun Estate Tenants' and Residents' Association  
Kenmore Park Tenants' and Residents' Association  
Little Stanmore Tenants' and Residents' Association  
Milman Close Tenants' and Residents' Association  
Weald Village Community Association  
Weald Village Tenants' and Residents' Association

### **137. Attendance by Reserve Members**

**RESOLVED:** To note the attendance at this meeting of the following duly appointed Reserve Member:-

Ordinary Member

Councillor Kam Chana

Reserve Member

Councillor Susan Hall

**138. Declarations of Interest**

Agenda Items: 4 – Information Report: Housing Tenant and Leaseholder Survey 2012; 5 – Information Report: Housing Complaints Handling

Councillors Bob Currie and Mano Dharmarajah declared non pecuniary interests in the above items in that they attended monthly meetings of the Eastcote Lane Tenants' and Residents' Association (TRA). They would remain in the room whilst the matters were considered and voted upon.

**139. Deputations**

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

**RESOLVED ITEMS**

**140. INFORMATION REPORT: Housing Tenant and Leaseholder Survey 2012**

An officer introduced the report which outlined the proposals for the 2012 tenant and leaseholder survey which would be carried out in October 2012.

The officer made the following comments:

- the survey was sent out every two years by post to tenants and leaseholders and used to inform service changes;
- the survey would be sent out on 6 October in hard copy and would also be available for completion online;
- the survey was being administered by an independent research company, BMG;
- the survey would be sent to all 4,500 sheltered tenants, leaseholders and general needs tenants. A reminder would not be sent to general needs tenants but would be sent to leaseholders and sheltered tenants;
- a tenant and leaseholder advisory group had been established which had been involved in the preparation of the survey. In addition, there had been consultation with Harrow Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations (HFTRA), Leaseholder Support Group (LSG) and the Housing Editorial Board;
- a meeting with BMG was taking place on 27 September and any comments raised by the Forum would be taken to that meeting;

- the survey included a set of core questions which would be used for benchmarking purposes and a set of service specific questions;
- the survey was being publicised and there was a prize draw to encourage people to complete the survey. There was an option for people to opt out of the prize draw;
- unnecessary text had been removed and the questions had been streamlined. Questions relating to complaints and anti-social behaviour would be dealt with separately.

During the discussion on this item, Members of the Forum raised a number of issues to which the officers responded as follows:

- the cost of a 4 page survey booklet and one reminder being sent to leaseholders and sheltered tenants was £12,600. The costs of advertising and translations had been included but the costs of officer time had not been;
- the tender had been offered to 6 companies and two had submitted bids. The fee to BMG included the mail out, compilation of the data, presentations of the results and workshops;
- the suggestion of selling advertising space on the survey would be raised with BMG;
- the cost of the survey would be approximately £2,300 lower if the survey was only sent to 40% of general need tenants as in previous years;
- the survey was not directed at freeholders;
- posters advertising the survey would be displayed on all notice boards and so in theory everyone would be aware;
- for sheltered tenants, it would be better if assistance in filling in the survey was not given by wardens as some of the questions were about the wardens. Contact numbers would be included and an officer would attend events at sheltered accommodation to raise awareness of the survey. The wardens were aware that a survey would be sent out;
- it was anticipated that the final report and survey results would be available in January and that a report outlining the initial results would be submitted to the Forum meeting in December.

An officer then outlined the changes to each of the surveys and explained how they differed from the version included on the agenda.

The officer made the following comments regarding the draft tenant satisfaction survey;

- an introduction and instructions on how to complete the survey would be included at the beginning. A positive opt in for information to be passed to the Council would be included as would an opt out for the prize draw;
- questions about the length of tenancy, length of residence at the property and the number of people who resided at the property had been included;
- a question about the welfare benefits changes and the potential implications had been included to ascertain the general level of understanding regarding these issues;
- in the general services section, a question about health and safety had been added;
- the section titled advice and support had been removed;
- in the contact and communication section a question had been added about access to the internet and 'My Harrow' had been added as an option in the question about preferred methods of communication;
- the question about satisfaction with gas servicing had been removed;
- the questions relating to estates had been amended to include grass cutting and grounds maintenance. In addition, the section had been amended to reflect the estates survey;
- a new section had been included about involvement, with questions about groups and how to contact them.

The officer advised that the draft sheltered tenant satisfaction survey was the same as the general survey except that the estates section was not included and there were some additional questions about the service in their sheltered housing scheme.

The officer outlined the changes to the draft leaseholder satisfaction survey:

- the estates section was the same as the general survey;
- the external repairs question remained;
- the survey included the question about access to the internet.

The Members of the Forum made a number of comments about the surveys, to which the officers responded by making the following points:

- it was not compulsory to complete the questions in the equality monitoring section. The Council had a duty under the Equalities Act 2010 to ask these questions and the information was then used to help shape services;
- the monitoring form, was a corporate form which was based on census categories and has been adapted to reflect Harrow's local communities;

- consideration would be given to explaining that gas servicing was obligatory as a part of the survey;
- the question about benefits changes would be general and the aim was to gauge awareness of the issues and to help shape communications;
- the addition of a question about knowledge of the procedures to make appointments with officers would be raised;
- BMG would be supplied with data of when properties last had repairs carried out to ascertain whether the responses related to the previous or current contractor. The current contractor had taken over on 1 July 2012;
- the equality monitoring form was a corporate one and queries regarding the categories would be reported.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

#### **141. INFORMATION REPORT: Housing Complaints Handling**

An officer introduced the report which explained some of the changes for handling complaints relating to Council landlord services introduced by the Localism Act 2011. The officer made comments including the following:

- the Council had a three stage internal complaints procedure. Under the current arrangements, once this procedure had been exhausted complaints were investigated by the Local Government Ombudsman if the complainant remained dissatisfied with the final response;
- from April 2013 the Housing Ombudsman would take over investigations of complaints about the council's landlord functions, not the Local Government Ombudsman;
- the Localism Act also required that complaints pass through a democratic filter in an attempt to find a local resolution. Members of Parliament and Councillors were defined by the Act as a Designated Person. The filter could take the form of a tenants' panel, which had to be recognised by the landlord. The Act did not contain much detail and this had led to differing opinions over the implementation and application of the democratic filter. A meeting had been arranged to discuss this with the Housing Ombudsman and West London Councils;
- clauses within the Act stated there were circumstances in which the democratic filter did not have to apply, in particular where the landlord had robust internal procedures. There was some confusion on how this would be applied operationally, as the view of the Housing Ombudsman was that that a local resolution should be sought before the complaint was investigated;

- under the present arrangements, if someone was dissatisfied with the outcome of the final decision then the matter could be forwarded to the Local Government Ombudsman within one year. Under the new arrangements the matter would have to be forwarded to the Housing Ombudsman within 8 weeks;
- it was only landlord complaints which could be referred to the Housing Ombudsman, all other complaints relating to housing needs and homelessness would still be referred to the Local Government Ombudsman;
- if a complaint was a cross-departmental one, it would be for the Ombudsmen to decide which would deal with the matter.

The Members of the Forum made a number of comments to which the officer responded as follows;

- in 2011/12, there had been 190 complaints made against the Council as a landlord and of these 7 had been investigated by the Local Government Ombudsman. The outcomes of the complaints investigated were that 3 had reached a local settlement, 3 had been concluded as having insufficient evidence of maladministration and 1 had not been investigated. There had been no decisions against the Council;
- the decision of the Housing Ombudsman would be final and would be enforceable with court action;
- the outcome of the meeting with the Housing Ombudsman would help to clarify the situation regarding the democratic filter;
- a report would be submitted to the next meeting of the Forum to outline the final arrangements.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 3.20 pm, closed at 4.13 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR BOB CURRIE  
Chairman

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

---

**Date of Meeting:** 31 October 2012

**Subject:** INFORMATION REPORT: Rent and  
Housing Finance overview workshop

**Responsible Officer:** Lynne Pennington, Divisional Director of  
Housing Services

**Exempt:** No

**Enclosures:** None

### **Section 1 – Summary**

The purpose of this report is to seek comments on and support for the proposed outline approach to the workshop and also to obtain ideas from the Forum around options for maximising attendance at the sessions.

**FOR INFORMATION**

## **Section 2 – Report**

### **2. Proposed outline of workshop**

- 2.1. Following feedback on the Rent Options paper provided at the last TLRCF meeting, we are proposing to hold one or more workshops over the next few weeks on rents and other housing finance issues. Tenants, leaseholders and members will be invited to the workshop(s) and attendees will be involved in discussions on aspects of the new Housing Finance system, including looking at options for rent setting in the future.
- 2.2. The workshop will start from our current position with the Housing Revenue Account from April 2012. We will then consider priorities going forward, the risks we face arising from welfare reform and other changes to the regulatory framework of the HRA and the steps we are taking to minimise the potential impact of those risks. We will also touch on “new strategic housing issues”, and how these will affect the HRA, including the likely introduction of fixed-term tenancies and changes to the allocations policy, and finally we will look at how the essential and desirable elements of HRA expenditure could be funded in the future, including a look at possible alternative rent strategies the Council may wish to consider, the advantages and disadvantages of each, and issues around timescales for implementation.
- 2.3. We envisage a mixed approach to the workshops, with a mixture of presentations and small group discussions, with facilitators and structured feedback.
- 2.4. We have set out below the proposed structure and content of the workshop, and are seeking comments from the Forum on these, and a feel for whether the Forum are in support of our proposal for taking this forward. In addition we would welcome any suggestions from the Forum that would help to maximise attendance at the workshop.



## **Proposed structure and content of workshop:**

- Introductions and opening comments
- Outline of the current position of the Housing Revenue Account following the introduction of self-financing (presentation)
- Priorities for the HRA going forward
  - Capital spend
  - Revenue spend
  - Local priorities
  - Other ideas for initiatives

(facilitated group discussions and feedback session)

- Financial risks and mitigation of risks (presentation)
- New strategic housing issues (presentation)
- Funding the HRA, including discussions around rent options (facilitated group discussions and feedback session)
- Summary and Q & A
- Close

## **Conclusions**

2.5. We are at a stage now where we are starting to develop HRA services, such as restructuring Resident Services so as to improve the service we are delivering and ensure we are able to get closer to our customers, and we know that some of the initiatives being considered will mean additional ongoing costs for the HRA, which will in turn reduce HRA balances in the long-term. The full impact on the HRA of some items (e.g. welfare reform) may not, however, be known in time for setting the 2013/14 budget, or potentially even a year or two beyond that, so we may not have a firm long-term forecast for several years.

2.6. The HRA is principally funded by Council's tenants' rents, and it is appropriate that discussions around future expenditure are held alongside discussions around future income levels. The purpose of the proposed workshops is to raise awareness of the issues arising in the HRA and to set out the context within which decisions about future rent levels need to be taken, and to explain what potential options may be available to the Council should it wish to change its current policy in relation to rents.

### **Section 3 – Further Information**

3. All relevant information is contained within the report.

### **Section 4 – Financial Implications**

4. Financial matters are integral to the report. The proposed workshops can be contained within existing budgets.

### **Section 5 – Corporate Priorities**

5. The content of this report sets out the proposed structure and content of one or more workshops we intend to hold for tenants and members in respect of housing finance and rent options, and supports the corporate priority of ‘united and involved communities’ by engaging more effectively with residents.

### **Section 6 - Statutory Officer Clearance**

Name: ...Roger Hampson.....	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Chief Financial Officer
Date: .....17/10/2012.....		

### **Section 7 - Contact Details and Background Papers**

**Contact:** Dave Roberts, Housing Finance Business Partner  
Direct 0208 420 9678

**Background Papers:**  
None

**REPORT FOR: Tenants', Leaseholders' and Residents' Consultative Forum**

---

Date of Meeting: 31<sup>st</sup> October 2012

Subject: **INFORMATION REPORT – Resident Services Manager’s Report and feedback from other Council led Resident Involvement Activities**

Responsible Officer: Lynne Pennington  
Divisional Director of Housing Services

Exempt: No

Enclosures: None

**Section 1 – Summary**

This joint report sets out a range of information items that the Head of Resident Services would like to bring to the attention of the Tenants', Leaseholders' and Residents' Consultative Forum and provides feedback to TLRCF on a wide range of Council led service specific and service wide resident involvement activities.

**FOR INFORMATION**

## **Section 2 – Report**

### **1. Introduction**

1.1 This is the first report of the Interim Head of Resident Services since commencing in post on the 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2012.

1.2 My key service priorities for the forthcoming 6 months are:

- Implementation of a restructure proposal across the services that makes best use of additional HRA resources to invest in front line staff and bring the service Closer to the Customer
- Sheltered Housing Review Implementation
- New ways of working for caretakers - 6 month pilot commenced
- A community based leadership project with an existing community centre
- Preparation for welfare reform-including a project now underway in partnership with CAB to help us learn more about the impacts on tenants & leaseholders as well as on our ability to maintain income collection levels
- Introducing the recharge policy and improving income collection of former tenant arrears, s20 and leaseholder service charges
- Completion of the Resident Involvement Strategy and embedding tenant and leaseholder scrutiny arrangements
- Undertaking significant s20 consultation processes on the capital programme
- Improving communication with leaseholders
- A service review of leadership and communication

1.3 I acknowledge the challenges faced in taking forward these priorities and will be working closely with housing colleagues and in particular developing joined up working approaches with the Head of Asset Management to ensure successful outcomes for HRA funded services.

1.4 I look forward to providing TLRCF with updates on progress with these priorities and service performance over the next 6 months.

### **2. Updates from previous discussions and new items for information**

#### **2.1 Leasehold Services**

#### **2.2 Performance**

2.3 Members of TLRCF may be interested to know that we have received increased interest in Right to Buys. Since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012 to –date we have received 25 applications and 5 properties have been sold. This is a significant increase on last year when no properties were sold.

2.4 The Leasehold Team are continuing to work on scanning all leases onto the CIVICA computer system so that they are readily available to deal with leasehold enquiries. The team are now a third of the way through the project.

## **2.5 Information**

2.6 The annual service charge bills were sent to all leaseholders at the beginning of September 2012. We have received feedback that the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and explanations sent out with the bills were extremely helpful.

2.7 The Leasehold Team put a significant amount of effort into working with stakeholder services to screen the costs prior to billing. This has resulted in less than 5 % of leaseholders having a query on their annual service charge bill this year.

2.8 Now that the annual service charge bills have been sent to all leaseholders the Leasehold Team will be actively resolving any queries and, taking consistent but firm action to pursue any outstanding bills where payment plans are not in place. An updated arrears position shall be reported to the next meeting.

## **2.9 Housing Management**

### **2.10 Performance Income Management**

2.11 At the start of quarter 2 (July 2012), rent arrears were at an all time low of £394,753. This is a record for the Income Management Team who have worked really hard to achieve and maintain this collection rate.

2.12 During August of quarter 2, there was a seasonal increase in rent arrears due to the summer holidays. It is a historical pattern that paying rent is not as high a priority for our tenants during this period. Tenants were written to within their rent statements at the beginning of the quarter asking for rent payments to be given priority over this period. Information was also included about the forthcoming Welfare Reform and the personal advice being provided by our local Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB). Despite this increase in arrears, it is encouraging news that our collection rate is still up on this time last year. From 95.19% to 96.41%.

2.13 Rent arrears are beginning to recover from this seasonal increase. We have shifted resources to have more emphasis on rent recovery which will contribute towards more agreements being made with tenants. We are pursuing the introduction of a third direct debit payment date to widen the options for rent to be paid.

### **2.14 Information**

2.15 Preparation for the impact of Universal Credit is developing within the department and across the council.

2.16 From the beginning of August 2012, a number of our tenants have been visited by the CAB. Early indications from those visits tell us that:

- Tenants are aware of the forthcoming changes and are concerned.
- Many of those visited do have a transactional bank account
- 100% of those visited would prefer direct payment of rent to continue
- Tenants do not want training in budget management
- The majority state they do not have money worries.

2.17 There is a lot more work and analysis to be done around these visits and we will tailor our services to provide support to our tenants on the regular feedback we receive. An analysis of the feedback from the CAB can be provided to a future meeting of the TLRCF if requested.

## **2.18 Performance Tenancy Management**

2.19 TENANCY AUDITS: Work continues on our enhanced regime of tenancy audits. Despite the seasonal impact on rent collection, August was quite a successful month for finding tenants at home to complete these audits. Statistically, we are ahead of our annual target at the end of quarter 2. We continue to find vulnerable tenants from these audits and are working with our colleagues in Community Health Adults team to provide additional support.

2.20 HOUSING MOVES: Increased efforts have been made to encourage tenants to move out of large properties they are under occupying. Housing Officers are identifying more of these properties from the audits which has contributed to more larger properties becoming available this year as opposed to last year. 18 tenants have successfully moved under the occupation scheme this year.

2.21 A small number of tenants have registered to move to the Olympic Park where supported and disabled adapted properties are due to be advertised.

2.22 TENANCY FRAUD: Progress with tenancy fraud has become more challenging. During the first year of this initiative many of the perpetrators gave up their tenancy voluntarily on the evidence presented to them. This year we are having to take our investigations further in order to get results. Tenants are happy to challenge us legally before terminating the tenancy.

2.23 Despite these challenges, our continued effort to recover these much needed properties has resulted in four success cases this year.

## **2.24 Complaints**

2.25 During quarter 2 we saw a decrease in the number of complaints received about the service. Seventeen complaints received were resolved at stage 1. There were no complaints pending at stage 2 and only one complaint at stage 3.

## **2.26 Sheltered Housing Modernisation**

2.27 The proposal to restructure the Sheltered Housing service was approved by Cabinet on 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012. We are now working on implementing the new staffing structure which we hope will be in place by 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013. We aim to have a transitional period during February and March before the new service goes live. We will ensure that tenants are introduced to any new or additional staff.

2.28 To ensure that the new service operates well we are setting up a Service Review Working Group. The Group will consider issues leading up to the implementation of the new service in April 2013 and then from April 2013 to March 2014 be involved in monitoring the new service.

2.29 The new service will further be discussed and consulted with the unions during implementation to address the needs/concerns of individual staff.

## **2.30 Resident Involvement and Activities**

2.31 The review action plan is now more or less complete with any outstanding actions being captured within the draft Resident Involvement Strategy. It was agreed by the Resident Engagement Review Project Team that their role was now complete and that monitoring progress with strategic actions will be captured by existing forums.

2.32 The annual election process for Sheltered Housing representatives took place in July and the Housing Sheltered Residents Association continues to be supported by the team.

2.33 The Resident Involvement Team facilitated Estates in Bloom in August 2012 including short listing, judging and a presentation in the Mayor's Parlour for winners. The estate based winners were Grange and the Sheltered winners Sinclair House.

2.34 The Resident Involvement Team facilitated a programme of Summer Events across the Borough in partnership with TRA's. Whilst achieving varying degrees of success in terms of engaging new tenants and leaseholders some were well attended and were also used to carry out valuable consultation on changes to Council Tax Benefit. A group is to be convened to have a debriefing session on the events generally and decide what options to consider in forthcoming years.

2.35 HFTRA and the Resident Involvement Team hosted the second TRA "get together" this year on the 4<sup>th</sup> October. The aim of the event is to enable representatives from across all TRA's to get together in an informal social environment and share experiences and ideas and to thank them for their commitment and involvement over the last 6 months. The event was well attended and feedback received to date, very positive.

## **Section 3 –Report Back from Resident Involvement Activities**

### **3. Estates Services Steering Group (ESSG)**

3.1 The last ESSG meeting was held on the 29<sup>th</sup> August 2012 and included discussions on Grounds Maintenance and the new costings, the new window cleaning contract, an update on the Estate Based & mobile caretakers and the introduction of wet cleaning in the communal areas of the flatted blocks.

3.2 The trial period for the new way of working for caretakers commenced on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2012 and will be reviewed in 6 months. It is proposed to provide a cleaning service using the time freed up by the mobile and estate based caretaking arrangements. We are also developing a proposal to make the apprentice posts permanent caretaking posts, when their training is completed. A focus group was set up as a sub-group of ESSG to take this idea forward. They have now met twice with a third meeting planned.

3.3 The next meeting of the ESSG is on the 28<sup>th</sup> November 2012 and the agenda will include updates on the above mentioned topics along with recharging for bulk clearance, which didn't get covered at the last meeting.

### **3.4 Value for Money Group**

3.5 The Value for Money sub group met on the 18<sup>th</sup> September 2012. Discussions centred on how efficiencies on the HRA are being invested in services for both Asset Management and Resident Services. The group also discussed the development of SLA's for Support Service Charges (SSC's) with a particular interest in Access Harrow. Jonathan Milbourn has been invited to attend the next meeting in October.

### **3.6 Developing Tenant Scrutiny**

3.7 Appointments have now been made to the full permanent Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Panel. 7 tenants' and 1 leaseholder plus 2 Youth Parliament representatives will be holding their first meeting by the end of October. This will form part of their induction process before agreeing a training plan with them and developing a programme of service areas to be reviewed.

### **3.8 HFTRA Scrutiny and Challenge Panel**

3.9 The panel met on the 25<sup>th</sup> September and received updates on progress with the service plan from each of the Housing divisions. Resident Service discussions took place around achievements with rent collection and other performance, progress with tenant and leaseholder scrutiny, information on the CAB project, progress with caretaker pilot scheme and plans to ensure that Resident Involvement management is maintained.



## Section 4 - Financial Implications

Any financial issues are contained within the body of the report and 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 equalities implications associated with this report.  
No Equality Impact Assessments have been carried out.

## Section 6 – Corporate Priorities

All of the above contribute to the corporate priorities, in particular:

- Keeping neighbourhoods clean, green and safe.
- United and involved communities: A Council that listens and leads.
- Supporting and protecting people who are most in need.

Name: Roger Hampson	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Chief Financial Officer
Date: 12 October 2012		

## Section 8 - Contact Details and Background Papers

### Contact:

Toni Burke  
Interim Head of Resident Services  
Tel: 020 8420 9638  
Email: [Toni.burke@harrow.gov.uk](mailto:Toni.burke@harrow.gov.uk)

**Background Papers:** None

This page is intentionally left blank

**REPORT FOR: Tenant, Leaseholder and  
Resident Consultative  
Forum**

---

<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	31 October 2012
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>INFORMATION REPORT: Housing Complaints handling</b>
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	Lynne Pennington Divisional Director of Housing Services
<b>Exempt:</b>	No
<b>Enclosures:</b>	Housing complaints Localism Act Changes Flowchart

## **Section 1 – Summary**

This report is an update to the 26<sup>th</sup> September 2012 TLRCF report on the changes for handling complaints relating to council landlord services, introduced by the Localism Act 2011.

It gives a definitive position on the application of parts of the Localism Act that were unclear at the time of the September report following a meeting with the Housing Ombudsman Service and several London Local Authorities. The report also provides details of other key points raised at this meeting.

TLRCF are asked to take note of the amendments as well as the updates from the Housing Ombudsman meeting and to make any comments on the proposed next steps, in particular on 2.15

**FOR INFORMATION**

## Section 2 – Report

### Amendments to the 26<sup>th</sup> September 2012 Report

- 2.1** It was reported in paragraph 2.6 of the 26<sup>th</sup> September report that the ‘democratic filter’ would not apply where the landlord has internal procedures in place to handle complaints. The Housing Ombudsman (HO) has now made clear that the ‘democratic filter’ will apply to **all landlords of public rented housing** regardless of whether a landlord has internal procedures. This means that the ‘Democratic filter’ will apply to complaints about the council’s housing landlord functions.
- 2.2** Also in paragraph 2.6 it was stated that the complaint had to be referred to the HO within 8 weeks of exhausting the landlord’s complaints procedure. The HO has said this will not be the case and that if the complainant does not involve a ‘*designated person*’ (DP) in the course of their complaint, then s/he must wait for 8 weeks after the end of the final stage of their Landlords complaint policy before approaching the HO.
- 2.3** In paragraph 2.9 it was stated that referrals had to be made within 8 weeks of exhausting the landlord’s complaints procedure. The HO has clarified this and stated that the period within which complaints must be referred to his office is 6 months. This is tighter than the current 12 months LGO timeframe for complaints referrals.

### Updates from the Housing Ombudsman meeting

#### The Role of the Democratic Filter (Designated Person)

- 2.4** The introduction of the ‘democratic filter’ in complaints investigation is designed to give greater choice to the complainant (see appendix 1 flowchart); encourage complaints to be resolved locally and rarely pass to the Housing Ombudsman for investigation.
- 2.5** Under these changes, from April 2013 any MP (in England) or any Harrow Councillor is defined as a Designated Person and can approach the landlord in their role as a Designated Person (DP).<sup>1</sup> A ‘*designated Tenants Panel*’ can also act as a (DP) subject to being recognised by the Landlord.
- 2.6** The Localism Act does not define the role of the DP apart from that of referring complaints to the Housing Ombudsman. What else the DPs may do is left up to the landlord and the DPs to decide and reach a local consensus on. However, **the DP can not decide on the outcome of a complaint but can make recommendations** (not just to the landlord but also to the complainants), which can either be taken on board or rejected by either party.

---

<sup>1</sup> Councillors can only act as a DP within the administrative boundaries of the local authority to which they are elected.

- 2.7** The complainant can approach the 'Designated Person' at any stage of their landlord's complaint procedure and does not have to wait for the exhaustion of the landlord's complaints policy before doing this. This means that a complainant could approach the DP at stage 1, 2, or 3 of their complaint.<sup>2</sup>
- 2.8** The London Borough of Richmond have appointed a councillor as a 'Tenants' Champion.' The HO views this as a possible model for other landlords to follow or adopt.

### **'Designated Tenant's Panels'**

- 2.9** Tenant panels are not given an automatic status as a 'designated person' under the Localism Act (as are MPs and Councillors) and must be 'recognised' by the landlord. The Act discourages landlords from actively setting up 'designated tenant panels' or putting in place a system to support their creation or set-up. The HO made clear that tenants are expected to take a lead and approach the landlord, if they wish to act as a DP. The HO does not expect landlords to have recognised tenant panels by April 2013 as these are not likely to be fully operational until 2015/16.

### **Harrow's former 'Tenants Complaints Feedback Panel'**

- 2.10** Although not under the title of 'Designated Tenants Panel' or with the same remit, the council convened a 'Tenant's complaints feedback Panel' during 2010/11. This was made up of a group of tenants who had made complaints relating to the services provided by Housing. The group met to look at the contents and style of responses being made and commented on where improvements to responses could be made. The group ceased to operate in 2011, due to staffing issues within the Strategy and Performance Team. We intend to reconvene this group within the next few months, although we are seeking new members as the former members do not wish to resume the role. TLRCF are welcome to nominate representatives to join this Panel if they wish.

### **Other points from the HO meeting**

- 2.11** The landlord can not refer a complaint to the HO it has to be via the DP or by the complainant.
- 2.12** The HO has to be informed by the landlord of any 'designated tenant's panel' and will maintain a national register.
- 2.13** The HO also commented that the 3 stage landlord complaints procedures as increasingly seen as being outdated and unduly

---

<sup>2</sup> The council's current Corporate Complaints Policy has 3 stages. Once a complaint has been responded to at stage 3, the council's internal procedure is exhausted. The next stage is for the complainant to take their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman.

bureaucratic. The Council is reviewing its current Corporate Complaints Policy and may move to two stages.

## **Proposed Next Steps**

**2.14** The proposed next steps for housing in preparing for the changes prior to April 2013 include:

- a) Develop options to start work on developing a local consensus with DPs on the democratic filter; and
- b) Provide a progress report (with options) to the December TLRCF meeting.
- c) Work with corporate colleagues to review the corporate complaints procedure (as it applies to housing customers) and develop an action plan to communicate the changes across the council and to customers;

**2.15** TLRCF are asked to:

- a) Make comments on the report.
- b) To join or put forward nominations for a working group to be set up to develop options.

## **Section 3 - Financial Implications**

**3.1** There are no budget implications arising from this report.

## **Section 4 - Corporate Priorities**

**4.1** The proposals in this report incorporate the corporate priority: United and involved communities.

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

Date: 17 October 2012

## **Section 5 - Contact Details and Background Papers**

### **Contact:**

Nadeem Din  
Strategy & Performance Manager

Tel: 020 8416 8008

[Nadeem.din@harrow.gov.uk](mailto:Nadeem.din@harrow.gov.uk)

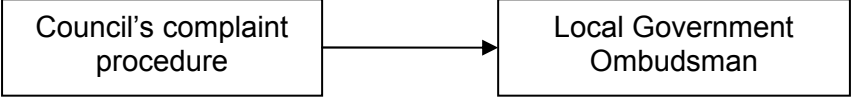
**Background Papers:**

Housing complaints Handling Report to TLRCF, 26 September 2012

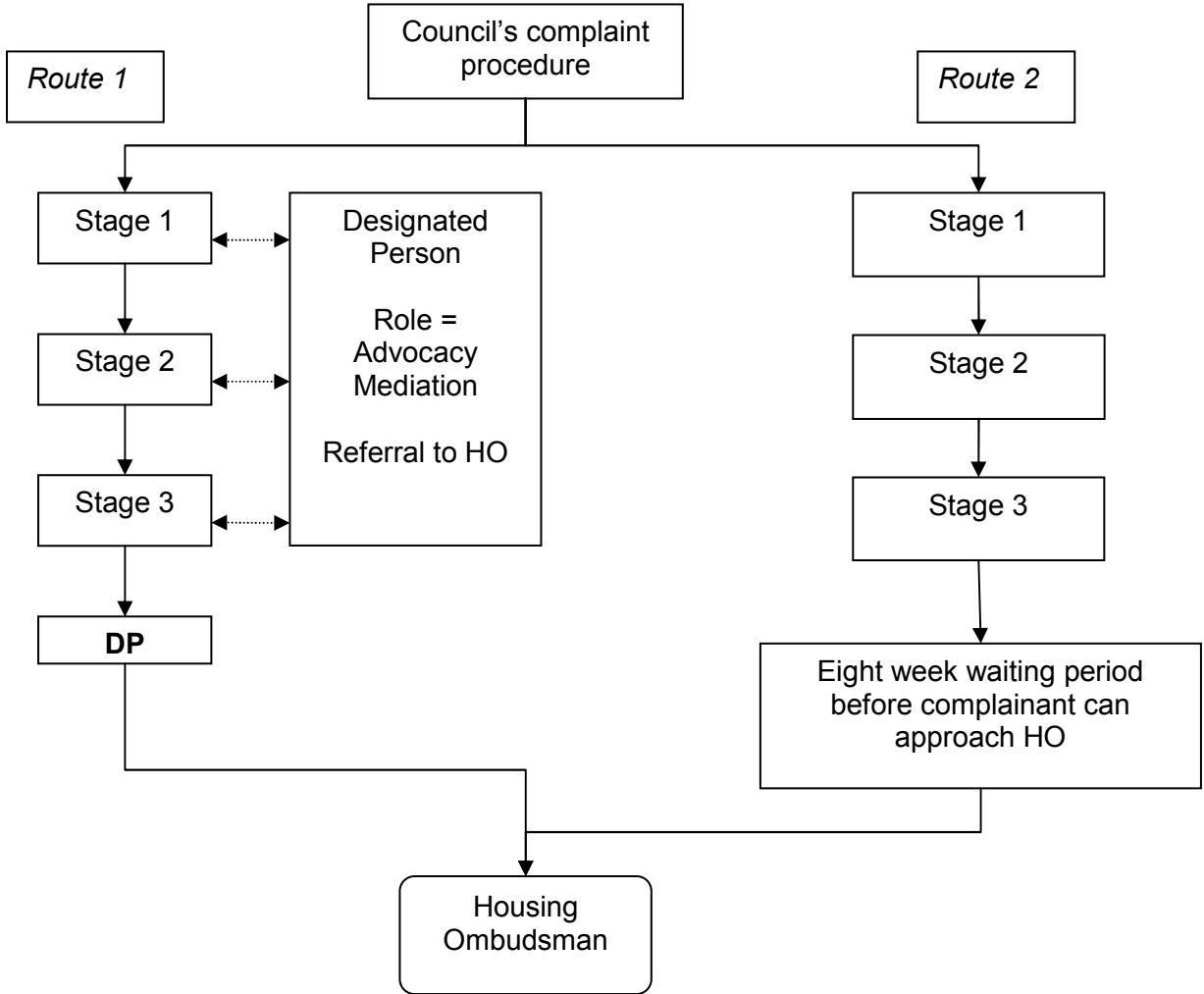
**Appendix 1** – Housing complaints Localism Act Changes Flowchart

**Housing Complaints Localism Act changes flowchart –  
From April 2013**

**Non Landlord  
function Complaints**



**Landlord function complaints**



Stage 1 & MP/Cllrs = 10 working days  
 Stage 2 = 20 working days  
 Stage 3 = 20 working days



**REPORT FOR: Tenants', Leaseholders' and Residents' Consultative Forum**

---

Date of Meeting: 31st October 2012

Subject: **INFORMATION REPORT – Head of Asset Management's Report**

Responsible Officer: Lynne Pennington  
Divisional Director of Housing Services

Exempt: No

Enclosures: Appendix 1 – Asset Management Structure Chart

## **1 Section 1 – Summary**

This report sets out a range of information items that the Interim Head of Asset Management would like to bring to the attention of the Tenants', Leaseholders' and Residents' Consultative Forum.

**FOR INFORMATION**

## **2 Section 2 – Report**

### **Updates from previous discussions and new items for information**

#### **1. Progress with recruitment to the client side structure and our key priorities for the next 6 months.**

- 1.1. Recruitment to the new Asset Management staffing structure is now almost complete. Two posts (Stock Condition Surveyor and Customer Experience Co-ordinator) remain vacant but appointments have been made, pending references and other clearances. Unfortunately it was not possible to appoint to the Empty Homes Co-ordinator post following an external advert. A decision was therefore taken in late September to make a temporary arrangement for approximately 4 months, and re-advertise after Christmas.
- 1.2. A structure chart to introduce the new team is included at Appendix 1. As has previously been reported some of the most positive things about the new structure is that it gives us the ability to both manage contracts more proactively, ensuring that tenants and leaseholder receive good quality, value for money services and progress a wide range of Health and Safety inspections. Details of progress on both of these are provided further on in the report.
- 1.3. Essentially the new staff structure consists of 3 teams. The first, managed by Andrew Champion is responsible for delivering the Capital programme and for planned and cyclical maintenance. The second team, managed by Kulwinder Singh-Rai is responsible for preparing future years investment in our homes and other assets, and undertaking Health and Safety inspections of all homes and other assets. The third team, led by Subhash Patel is responsible for responsive repairs, management of voids and the gas contract.
- 1.4. As this is my first report as Head of Asset Management I thought it would be useful to set out the priorities of the service over the next 6 months. As the restructure has almost been completed and the new contracts have now been operating for 3 months our key, and overwhelming priority is to ensure that we now deliver on the promises we have made to tenants and leaseholders through the Repairs Charter. This means:
  - delivering improved services that are good value for money
  - improved consultation with tenants and leaseholders about how we deliver services
  - establishing robust contract management arrangements and clear and accurate performance information that can be regularly reported.

- work more closely with Resident Services to ensure we present a more “joined up” approach to issues and concerns that cross both service areas
  - improve both communication, and partnership working with tenants and leaseholders
- 1.5 This means that future reports to TLRCF will be targeted to provide more detailed performance information on progress against these priorities.

## **2. Responsive Repairs and Voids Contracts**

- 2.1. The new contracts went live on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2012. There have been some teething problems, as was only to be expected with new arrangements but most of these have been overcome by joint working between staff and contractors. One major teething problem that was unexpected was that the interfaces between the Council and contractors computer systems did not work. The effect of this problem has been to delay the receipt of both performance information and invoices, in some cases for 3 months. Whilst I am pleased to report that these problems have now been resolved and that information is now being received, this has caused a delay in our ability to report on performance as there is now a backlog of information to process.
- 2.2. Despite these delays early indications are that overall the new contractors are performing well and that both the predicted savings and improved customer satisfaction are likely to be achieved. At the time of writing this report the quarter 2 performance information has not been finalized and customer satisfaction surveys with responsive repairs have not started. However both pieces of work are being actively progressed. A detailed performance report will therefore be reported to the next TLRCF meeting.
- 2.3. Contractor appraisal panels for the East, West & Central contracts and the borough wide gas contract are being established. These panels will include the contract surveyors and 2 local stakeholders. They will look at performance, customer satisfaction, complaints etc. and meet bi monthly. The first meeting will concentrate on establishing ways of working together on monitoring each contract area. Arrangements to report the outcomes of each contractor panel to the Housing Senior Management Team and the Portfolio Holder are currently under discussion, but future reports to TLRCF will include feedback on the overall outcomes of the monitoring.
- 2.4. Our new contractors, Slade, Linbrooks and Quality Heating along with Asset Management staff took part in all the Summer events arranged by the Resident Involvement Team over the last 3 months. This was a great opportunity for them to get to meet some of our tenants and leaseholders in an informal setting and a

handy-man service for minor repairs was offered at many of the events.

### 3. 2012/13 Capital Programme

3.1. Good progress continues to be made with delivery of the £9 million capital programme for the current year. All the work carried forward from the 2011/12 programme is either currently on site, or had been completed. Several of the new projects for 2012 are either on site or will be very soon, others are at the design stage. However the current projection is that the majority of the programme will be delivered by the end of the financial year. The table below summarises the current position with larger elements of the programme. TLRCF are asked to consider how they would like progress with the programme reported in future. The options would be:

- Details of progress on major projects (as above)
- Details of the amount actually spent to date on the programme
- Both of the above

<b>Element of Programme</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Status</b>
Kitchens and Bathrooms (carried forward from 11/12)	2,029,000	On site-due for completion November
Kitchens and bathrooms 2012/13	950,000	Start on site November-Complete March 2013
Enveloping 12/13 Windows and Doors (Houses)	420,000	Start on site November-Complete January 2013
Heating Programme 12/13	430,000	In preparation
Variety of enveloping projects 12/13	662,612	Either complete or starting on site November or January
Enveloping-Francis road	1,200,000	On site
HRA Fencing Programme	100,000	At Design Stage
Digital TV 12/13 Virgin Sites	155,000	On site
Lifts 12/13	300,000	Business case prepared
Variety of Structural issues	505,000	All to be complete by March 2013
Lofts and Pathway	277,963	At Design Stage

#### **4. Preparation for future years Capital Programmes**

- 4.1 Work is also progressing well towards establishing future years capital programmes with staff working to validate information held from stock condition surveys and establish outlines for future programmes.
- 4.2 The target is to validate a 3 year outline programme which will be reported to TLRCF in February. This will enable the detailed programme for the next financial year to be published by the end of March each year, following consultation so that we will be able to start work on delivering the works in April each year-spreading the programme more effectively across the year. This will place us in a much stronger position to deliver the full programme every year.

#### **5. Essential Improvements to assets that are not homes**

- 5.1 The Capital programme is, quite rightly predominantly targeted to maintaining our homes. However there are also ideas generated where capital expenditure could help resolve a management problem, reduce spend on responsive repairs in communal areas, generate income and/or improve the areas surrounding homes.
- 5.2 We are working towards a longer term investment plan, linked to the Asset Management Strategy and the HRA business plan where we will identify and programme major works to homes several years in advance.
- 5.3 However as yet there is no forward plan in terms of capital works to assets owned in the HRA that are not homes. This includes community centres, garages & car parks, and communal areas in sheltered schemes. It could also apply to improvements to open spaces on housing estates.
- 5.4 Many of the ideas for improvements to assets that are not homes are generated in Resident Services through Estate Inspections, enquiries from Councillors or tenants and leaseholders or from work done in focus groups such as the Estates Services Steering Group. In one example the idea came from a tenant's letter published in Homing In. Currently there is no procedure for costing such proposals, evaluating their benefit to tenants and leaseholders and deciding whether they should be included on future capital programmes-and if so how urgent they are.
- 5.5 A procedure is therefore in preparation to address this need, and discussions taking place to determine how large a slice of future Capital budgets should be set aside for this purpose. Once completed, and agreed with the Portfolio Holder the procedure will be discussed with tenants and leaseholders at the appropriate groups, to design a system to ensure effective engagement in the decision making process.

## **6. Update on Health and Safety Programme**

- 6.1 Members of TLRCF will recall that one of the commitments in the new Asset Management structure was to initiate a comprehensive inspection process to ensure we are meeting our obligations to tenants, leaseholders and users of our other assets such as Community Centres.
- 6.2 Work has started on this 12 month programme in August and we are prioritizing sheltered housing and communal areas in flats for Fire Risk Assessments. Works orders are being raised for any issues arising from the inspection, according to the urgency of the matter. The next stage will be to undertake inspections of our Community Centres. Plans are currently being made to begin the next stage of the programme which will be to undertake electrical testing in tenanted properties and legionella testing in all communal water tanks.

## **7. Repairs MOT's**

- 7.1 Members of TLRCF may recall the proposal to undertake 100 Repairs MOT's each year in the properties with the highest number of repairs orders raised. These are targeted to reduce the overall cost of responsive repairs by managing the most expensive properties differently. These MOT's are the responsibility of the Voids Contract Surveyor.
- 7.2. Unfortunately our inability to recruit to the Empty Homes Co-ordinator means that the Voids Contract surveyor has effectively been covering two jobs since June, and combining this with the IT issues we have had with the contractors impacting on workloads, the start on these is delayed. However they are programmed to start in November with a target to complete 50 by March 2013. A further progress report will be made to a future TLRCF meeting.

## **Section 4 - Financial Implications**

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

## **Section 5 - Equalities Implications**

There are no equalities implications associated with this report  
No Equality Impact Assessments have been carried out.

## **Section 6– Corporate Priorities**

All of the above contribute to the corporate priorities, in particular:

- Keeping neighbourhoods clean, green and safe.

- United and involved communities: A Council that listens and leads.
- Supporting and protecting people who are most in need.

Name: Roger Hampson	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Chief Financial Officer
Date: 17 <sup>th</sup> October 2012		

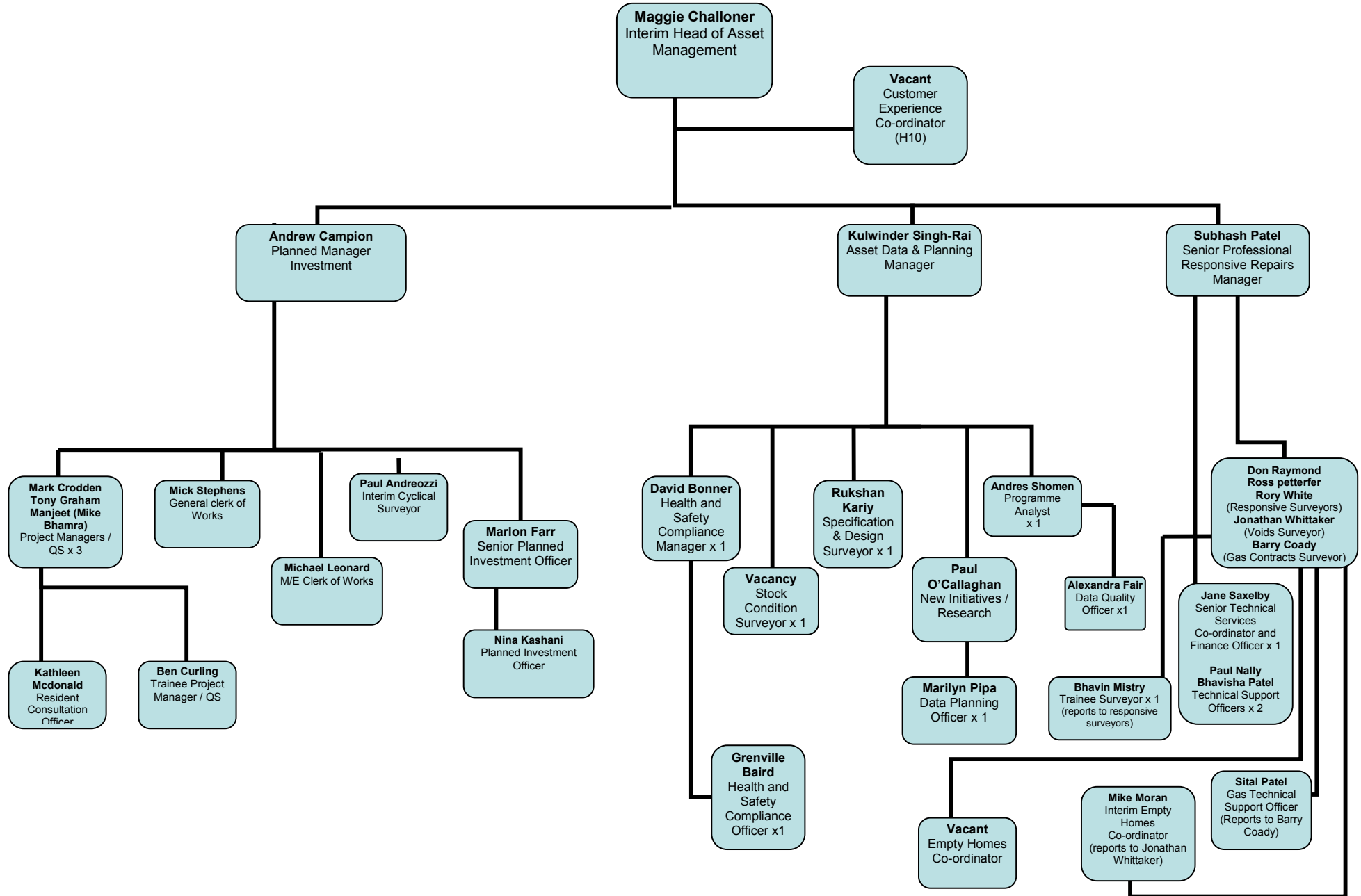
### 3 Section 8 - Contact Details and Background Papers

**Contact:**

Maggie Challoner  
Interim Head of Asset Management  
Tel: 020 8424 2473  
Email: [Maggie.challoner@harrow.gov.uk](mailto:Maggie.challoner@harrow.gov.uk)

**Background Papers:** None

# Asset Management – October 2012



52