

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

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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:

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**Background Papers:** None