

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

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Date of Meeting: 19<sup>th</sup> December 2012

Subject: Resident Services Manager's Report and feedback from other Council led Resident Involvement Activities

Responsible Officer: Lynne Pennington  
Divisional Director of Housing

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.

**Recommendation:**

That the report be noted

## **Section 2 – Report**

### **1. Introduction**

1.1 Whilst maintaining performance across frontline service provision my key service priorities detailed in the last report to TLRCF are progressing effectively with much emphasis at the moment being placed upon;

- Implementation of the Resident Services restructure proposal which integrates a service review of leadership and communication
- Sheltered Housing Review Implementation
- Consultation on the community based leadership project with an existing community centre and agreeing terms of lease
- Preparation for welfare reform
- Completion of the Resident Involvement Strategy and embedding tenant and leaseholder scrutiny arrangements
- Service Planning and HAP 4 preparation 2013/14

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

#### **2.1 Leasehold Services**

#### **2.2 Performance**

2.3 Further to the update provided at the last TLRCF meeting the number of Right to Buy enquiries and applications continues to grow. Since the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012 our records indicate that we have received 42 applications, and 8 properties have now been sold.

2.4 The Leasehold Team are making good progress with scanning all leases onto the CIVICA computer system. They are now over half of the way through the project.

#### **2.5 Information**

2.6 The Leasehold Team is always looking at exploring new / different ways of enhancing the provision of services being offered to leaseholders. To this end, the Team is seeking to create an electronic consultation forum with as many leaseholders as possible, initially, to carry out the following activities:

- Obtaining feedback on policies to be considered and/or implemented by the Council
- Providing regular updates on legislative changes relating to leasehold matters
- Reporting on imminent major works programmes affecting the block/estate of leaseholders.

This will be an on-going exercise that will be enhanced over time based upon Leaseholder needs.

## **2.7 Housing Management**

### **2.8 Performance Income Management**

2.9 Our previous all time low balance of rent arrears has been impacted by the non payment of rent at the end of August. We have made some recovery but still have a little way to go to reach the levels reported in July 2012. As at 25<sup>th</sup> November 2012 our rent arrears for current tenants stood at £435,339.

2.10 We are sending targeted cases 'Ten Top Tips to Avoid a Christmas Debt Hangover' leaflet. This leaflet has been designed by the Citizens Advice Bureau. The tips range from: Plan Christmas Early/Don't Bank on an Overdraft/Read the Small Print/Do Your Own Credit Checks.

### **2.11 Information**

2.12 Preparation for the impact of Welfare Reform continues to develop within the department and across the council. Resident Services and other housing colleagues currently represent housing on a number of corporate forums.

2.13 The CAB project, around Welfare Reform Awareness, to visit a number of our tenants and leaseholders continues, with 212 tenants having been visited by the end of October 2012. Work is now commencing to make contact with leaseholders.

### **2.14 Performance Tenancy Management**

2.15 GAS SAFETY: The new contract migration to Quality Heating Services (QHS) highlighted some historical performance concerns and the amount of inspections outstanding did increase. Joint working arrangements with QHS have now been embedded and enabled recovery from this position. Staff have been proactive in responding to this matter over recent weeks and have been very successful in arranging appointments with tenants rather than having to pursue legal warrants to enter properties to carry out inspections.

2.16 GARDEN MAINTENANCE: Each Housing Officer has been asked to target ten gardens on their patch which have been poorly maintained and where bulky refuse items exist. Housing Officers will be working with the tenants of these gardens to remove these items responsibly. They will also assist them to keep up the maintenance of their gardens to hopefully prevent this breach of their tenancy being enforced. By the end of March 2013 it is hoped that 40 gardens will have been tackled and further reports on progress with this exercise will be reported to future meetings of the TLRCF.

2.17 HOUSING MOVES: We continue to work with our Housing Needs colleagues to raise awareness for our tenants who are under occupying our properties of the implications of Welfare Reform and Bedroom Tax. Many tenants living in 3 / 4 bed roomed properties will not receive full housing benefit to cover the size of the property. They will only receive benefits to cover the size of property to suit their need. Unfortunately we are finding

many of our tenants are not engaging this new concept and we will have to work harder to make tenants understand the changes afoot. Our Under Occupation Policy is currently being reviewed to offer realistic incentives for tenants to down size.

**2.18 HOUSING TENANCY FRAUD:** The number of keys and tenancy termination forms being handed back to us is increasing. We are using targeted data to assist us in catching the perpetrators of subletting. Since our last update we have uncovered tenants residing in New Zealand, Sunderland and Leeds subletting their tenancies in Harrow. In all cases the tenants have terminated their tenancies without us having to take court action.

In October a Fraud Forum that we attend recommended that Channel Four News (C4N) approach us due to the good work being done by an authority with our stock size. C4N asked if they could film us working on a case where we suspect subletting activity and another case where a tenant has benefited from being housed from the homelessness list as a result of a property being recovered. This footage was filmed as part of the launch of the 'Protecting the Public Purse' paper prepared by the Audit Commission on 8th November 2012. Unfortunately other breaking news took priority on the night and the footage was dropped. However, the tenant of the suspected property that was filmed has since terminated their tenancy on the basis of the evidence stacked against them. This 3 bed roomed property will now be allocated to a family in need.

Each property recovered saves the council £18,000 per year where housing benefit is in payment or £7,000 per year where housing benefit is not in payment.

## **2.19 Complaints**

2.20 We have received fewer complaints in the first two months of quarter 3 (15) compared to quarter 2 (20). Whilst we hope that this trend continues we recognise the value that complaints can have on helping us target service areas needing improvement.

## **2.21 Sheltered Housing Modernisation**

2.22 Work to implement the Sheltered Housing review is ongoing. Managers are continuing to meet with staff and Trade Unions to ensure a seamless transition. The Resident Warden's migration package has now been agreed.

2.23 The Service Review Working Group has visited LB Hammersmith and Fulham to meet with residents who had been through a similar service review. Feedback received was very positive.

## **2.24 Resident Involvement and Activities**

2.25 The Resident Involvement Strategy (2013-2016) has been drafted and is now ready to go out for wider consultation.

2.26 The Resident Involvement Team attended the Harrow Youth Parliament Youth Summit Up on Thursday 29th November. They acted as facilitators on

group table discussions and also had a table promoting housing related activities.

2.27 The HSRA has reached a landmark third year of existence and continue to make an impact in helping reshape the Sheltered Schemes.

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

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

3.1 The last ESSG meeting was held on the 28<sup>th</sup> November 2012 and included discussions on Estate Inspections, Refuse & Recycling, the cleaning of Community Halls, 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 which started on the 1<sup>st</sup> August 2012 is ongoing. Feedback received so far has been very positive. It is proposed to provide a cleaning service using the time freed up by the mobile and estate based caretaking arrangements. It is proposed that the apprentice posts will become permanent caretaking posts by April 2013 at which time we will take on 2 more apprentices giving young local people an opportunity to work and gain practicable experience and qualifications. A focus group was set up as a sub-group of ESSG to take this idea forward. They have now met 3 times with a fourth meeting planned.

3.3 The next meeting of the ESSG is on the 26<sup>th</sup> February 2013 and the agenda will include updates on the above mentioned topics. It is also planned to invite officers from other sections/directorates to attend who have a role to play in estate service delivery.

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

3.5 The Value for Money sub group met on the 20<sup>th</sup> November 2012 and received a presentation from Jonathan Milbourn about Access Harrow performance management. Although attendance was low the presentation prompted interesting discussion around call handling and how the current free phone number is used. Future items agreed for discussion were Grounds Maintenance, Procurement, Public Liability Insurance update and the Housing Business Plan. The next meeting is due to take place on the 18th December 2012.

### **3.6 Developing Tenant Scrutiny**

3.7 The Harrow Tenants' and Leaseholders' Scrutiny Panel had their inaugural meeting 25th October at which Cllr Bob Currie and Lynne Pennington extended full co-operation to the Panel and offered any help they may require. The Panel has held a further two meetings and has determined its first review will be into new tenancy six week visits. The intention is to make recommendations by March 2013.

3.8 Two members of the Harrow Tenants' and Leaseholders' Scrutiny Panel and a member of the RI team attended the London Tenant Scrutiny Network meeting on 10th October. This forum will continue to be attended as a valuable opportunity for sharing good practice.

### **3.9 HFTRA Scrutiny and Challenge Panel**

3.10 The panel met on the 27<sup>th</sup> November and received updates on progress with the service plan from each of the Housing divisions. Resident Service discussions took place around the seasonal impact on 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: 4 December 2012		

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

### **Contact:**

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**Background Papers:** None