

Appendix B

Harrow Council

Housing Stock Options Appraisal

Communication And Consultation Strategy

1st Draft

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Background

The Government requires all Local Authorities in England to undertake an Option Appraisal by July 2005 that determines the future management of and improvements to Council housing stock, including meeting the Decent Homes Standard by 2010. The London Borough of Harrow, with local authority tenants and leaseholders (for the purpose of this document, "tenant" will refer to both tenants and leaseholders), will carry out this Options Appraisal. There will be an assessment of the current condition of the housing stock and the investment required in order to deliver the Decent Homes Standard. The Option Appraisal will compare the different options that exist to address these needs so that Harrow and its tenants can choose the best option available.

Harrow Council wants tenants to be at the heart of the Options Appraisal process and will consult and communicate effectively and appropriately with tenants about the housing stock options appraisal. It is important to ensure that tenants receive open and transparent information, to enable tenants to make an informed decision about the future of their homes

The principle objective of this Communications and Consultation Strategy is to set out how Harrow Council will enable tenants, as the key stakeholders, to make a full contribution to the options appraisal process, through effective communication and consultation.

Harrow Council will also ensure that staff, elected Members and other key stakeholders such as RSLs, are fully consulted throughout the process by various existing consultation mechanisms, ensuring that they also are able to feedback into this process and to reinforce an understanding of the importance of tenant participation.

The Council will also work in partnership with First Call (Housing Consultants) Ltd., the Independent Tenant Adviser (ITA) appointed by the council to provide an independent and impartial advice service to tenants that is readily available. This will ensure that the integrity of tenant empowerment, choice and views are upheld at all times. The Communications and Consultation Strategy has been developed in conjunction with First Call.

Purpose and objectives of the strategy

This strategy will act as an effective plan and methodology for communicating and consulting with stakeholders to ensure that tenants will be able to make an informed decision on the future management and improvement of their homes. The key objectives of the strategy are to:

- Ensure information is communicated in the most appropriate and inclusive way to all tenants;
- Ensure the Council seeks the views of the maximum number of residents to inform the options appraisal process
- Ensure a balanced view is sought that is representative of the residents as a whole, especially BME residents and other hard to reach groups

Links to resident empowerment strategy

This Strategy is closely linked to and should be read alongside our Resident Empowerment Strategy and Tenant Compact. These documents clearly state how Harrow Council engages with its tenants to develop mechanisms for effective and inclusive decision making opportunities.

Harrow Options Appraisal Working Group

A working group has been established, the purpose of which is to oversee and guide the review of the stock options appraisal process. The group is made up of the following:

- Eight resident representatives, including tenants and leaseholders
- Four members, cross party
- Three officers of Harrow Council

The Terms of Reference for the Housing Stock Options Appraisal Working Group are detailed in Appendix A3.

Identifying and consulting stakeholders

An important part of the process is identifying all those individuals and organisations with an interest in the stock options appraisal process and ensure that they are all consulted and communicated with appropriately and effectively. Some stakeholders will have a direct and personal interest in the process. Others may be less directly affected but may wish to express their views or provide feedback. There may also be some stakeholders who just need to be kept informed. It is important that the communication and consultation arrangements are tailored to meet the needs of the various stakeholders. Below are detailed the various stakeholders who will have a direct or indirect interest in the process:

Key Stakeholders with a direct interest

- Individual tenants
- Options appraisal working group as the representative body for Harrow tenants
- Individual leaseholders
- Harrow Federation of Tenants and Residents Associations
- Housing applicants including homeless households in temporary accommodation in Harrow

- Members
- Housing staff
- Other Harrow Council staff directly affected by the options
- Harrow staff representative bodies

Stakeholders with an indirect interest

- Members of the Harrow Strategic Partnership (see appendix A2)
- People First Directorate
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Registered Social Landlords and housing associations operating in Harrow
- Community and voluntary organisations

Key stakeholders will be involved in and consulted with throughout the housing stock options appraisal and residents will be involved directly with the decision making process.

The Options Appraisal Working Group will invite stakeholders and others to attend meetings of the Group as and when appropriate.

Existing consultation structures

Harrow has a wide range of existing consultative arrangements in place, which will be used during the housing stock options appraisal process. Other arrangements will be developed as necessary to assist with the process. The key focus areas for consultation will be:

- Formal and informal tenant participation arrangements, as described in the Resident Empowerment Strategy
- Specific arrangements for consulting leaseholders, as described in the Residents Empowerment Strategy.

Existing staff consultation mechanisms will be used to ensure that staff are fully consulted with throughout the process, including:

- E-mail bulletins
- Intranet based information
- Management team meetings
- Team meetings and briefings

Resources

Provision has been identified from a number of sources, including the Housing Revenue Account, to secure the following resources to facilitate the housing stock options appraisal:

Resource

- Project manager
- Stock condition consultant
- Technical / financial appraisal consultant
- Independent Tenant Advisor
- Publicity and consultation
- Contingency sums

In addition, Harrow Council employs one Tenant Participation Officer and two Tenant Participation Assistants on a full-time basis, who will be actively involved in the process. Residents will be involved throughout the process through the establishment of the Options Appraisal Working Group and other groups as necessary for key elements of the process. The lead officers involved are:

Project Sponsor – Anna Robinson

Project Management – Justin Lloyd-Williams

Resident Involvement – Rebecca Caprara

Stock Condition – Alison Pegg and Gwyneth Allen

Financial Appraisal – Simon Waple

Service standards and performance – David Hooper

Many other officers will be involved throughout the process. Resources required and used will be kept under regular review to ensure that the housing stock options appraisal is delivered to time and within budget.

Proposed consultation with residents on the options appraisal

Harrow Council is committed to consulting and communicating effectively and appropriately with residents about the housing stock options appraisal. It is important to ensure that residents receive open and transparent information, to enable residents to make an informed decision about the future of their homes. A Resident Empowerment Strategy is being developed, which provides four stages in the consultation process:

- Information about the housing stock options appraisal process
- Information relating to stock condition, taking into consideration resident expectations and aspirations
- Information about the options for the Council's housing stock, based on the information from the financial appraisal
- Consultation on the preferred option for residents.

Harrow Council intends to use a variety of methods of consultation during these four stages:

- Regular newsletters with pre-paid return cards
- A series of local meetings with feedback forms
- Focus groups
- Advice surgeries
- Freephone hot-line
- Web-based information with feedback and query forms
- Publicity information on community centre notice boards and in the local press
- Factsheets on different aspects of the housing stock options appraisal process
- Door-to-door visits where appropriate

The overall methodology is described in more detail in the section - Communication and consultation methodology.

The Options Appraisal Working Group will focus on all aspects of the process:

- Stock condition and resident expectations and aspirations
- Financial assumptions, resources available and funding gaps
- Service standards and resident expectations and aspirations of housing management standards
- Communications and consultation

Role of Independent Tenants Advisor

A resident panel made up of HFTRA and resident representatives from the Options Appraisal Working Group have selected and appointed an Independent Tenants Advisor (ITA), First Call (Housing Consultants) Ltd., to ensure that the provision of independent advice to tenants is readily available to ensure that integrity of tenant empowerment, choice and views are upheld at all times. This will enhance all consultation with tenants. The ITA plays an integral role in the implementation of the options appraisal process. Their role will be to:

- Identify and deliver training and support;
- Identify and advise of barriers to meaningful tenant involvement;
- Advise tenants' representatives at key meetings and prepare them for such meetings;
- Check facts and assumptions for tenants, advising on some of the key assumptions e.g. those underlying stock condition information, HRA business plans and housing strategies;
- Advise on the detail and deliverability of options;
- Advise / check on the delivery of the empowerment strategy.

Harrow Council wants to be open and transparent in its dealings and will ensure that the ITA is given access to all relevant information and invited to all meetings in relation to the options appraisal. The role of the ITA is to fully examine and analyse all the option issues and to report back to residents on the detailed option proposals. The ITA can act as a spokesperson for residents, provided they reflect resident views and have resident agreement to undertake such. First Call has arranged separate meetings for resident representatives where residents can receive relevant advice and information, as well as provide a freephone advice line and a special email address for Harrow tenants.

Equality and Diversity Issues

London Borough of Harrow is a diverse borough, with 41% of the population from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities. This is reflected in the Council tenant population; therefore a key aim of this strategy is to ensure that BME tenants and leaseholders are effectively represented in consultations. It is also important that other, traditionally hard-to-reach groups are involved in the process. Below is detailed the methods to be used for consultation and communication with the various groups:

- **BME residents**

The Council will provide pre-translated material into the most requested languages, plus offer translation or interpretation into other community languages. Existing contacts with community and faith groups in the borough will also be used to ensure different groups are kept informed throughout the process and are given the opportunity to become involved. Separate focus groups may be arranged for different languages as and when appropriate or necessary.

- **Residents with disabilities**

Newsletters and other written material will be produced in plain English and will also be offered in large print, Braille, on audio-tape or in a format appropriate for people with learning disabilities. Venues for events will be wheelchair accessible and provision will be made for BSL signers or a hearing loop where required. Information will also be provided to carers or tenants' families to assist residents in understanding the options.

- **Older residents**

Events will be organised in sheltered housing schemes at times to suit tenants. Sheltered Housing wardens will receive information and training briefings on the options being considered, to enable them to answer questions and respond to tenants' concerns.

- **Young residents**

Separate focus group meetings will be arranged for younger residents where appropriate.

- **Geographical isolation**

The Council will arrange for transport to and from events relating to the housing stock options appraisal where requested. Staff who have been trained and briefed will also conduct home visits as required.

- **Residents with young children**

The Council will offer to pay for child care facilities where tenants wish to attend an event relating to the housing stock options appraisal.

As part of the selection process the ITA will need to demonstrate their ability to work effectively to ensure involvement of all the diverse groups in the borough. Targets will be set and monitored against, for the involvement of those who have been previously hard to reach.

Communication and consultation methodology

A wide variety of both established and new communication methods will be used to communicate and consult on the housing stock options, taking into consideration the needs of different stakeholders:

- Existing 'Homing In' and 'Homeseeker News' newsletters will be used to disseminate information, report progress and seek feedback from tenants, leaseholders and other stakeholders, including applicants and households in temporary accommodation
- Local, estate based meetings
- Focus groups with different interest groups and estates
- Advice surgeries
- Freephone hot-line provided by First Call (Housing Consultants) Ltd
- Web-based information with feedback and query forms at www.harrow.gov.uk
- Publicity information on community centre notice boards and in the local press
- Factsheets on different aspects of the housing stock options appraisal process
- Door-to-door visits where appropriate

Please see **Appendix XX** for details of the timetable of the project and associated consultation and communication with residents at different levels.

Publication of Feedback

Feedback from residents about aspirations, expectations, concerns and views about the housing stock options will be collated and published on Harrow's website dedicated page, in tenant newsletters and update information sheets and other media where relevant.

Member Involvement

An Option Appraisal Cabinet Advisory Panel has been established as part of the formal Cabinet structure of Harrow Council. It is made up of 5 cross party members, plus four tenants and one Unison representative. Its purpose is:

- To receive updates on the progress of the Housing Options Appraisal process and to consider proposals for the Council's housing stock in detail, prior to consideration by cabinet
- To receive updates on progress towards the decent homes standard in respect of the Council's housing stock and to consider proposals in detail, prior to consideration by Cabinet
- To consider and make recommendations to Cabinet on the letting of property improvement, planned maintenance and responsive repairs contracts and to periodically review performance and value for money of these contracts

The Terms of Reference for the Options Appraisal Cabinet Advisory Panel is at appendix A4.

Information updates will also be provided through existing regular member e-bulletins.

Final Cabinet approval of options appraisal document will be at the 23 June 2005 Cabinet meeting, prior to submission to Government Office for London.

Staff and staff representative group involvement

Staff will be kept informed of the process through regular staff briefings, e-mail bulletins, team meetings and briefings and specific training sessions on aspects of the options appraisal process where necessary. A Unison representative is invited to attend the cabinet advisory panel to represent staff.

Timetable

A project plan is in place detailing the overall timetable for completion – see appendix A5.

Review

The Housing Stock Options Appraisal Working Group will review this strategy at key stages of the project, as detailed in the project plan. Regular update reports will go to the Working Group for consideration, to test whether the strategy is meeting its objectives.

Feedback received from residents throughout the process will be taken into consideration in the review of the strategy and amendments will be reported to the Working Group for approval where highlighted as necessary.

APPENDIX A COMMUNICATING AND CONSULTING WITH RESIDENTS ON HARROW STOCK OPTIONS APPRAISAL

PROPOSED TIMETABLE	Target date	Note
1. Introduce Options Appraisal		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform residents and other stakeholders of the options appraisal process through Homing In, communicate timetable/ listen to initial responses 	mid February	
2. Aspirations / objectives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> decent homes (plus) service standards environmental issues tenant options for management 	March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ITA and Council with OA Working Group, then wider publication for feedback
3. Stock Condition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Current condition Decent homes programme 	End March - April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Newsletter to all residents providing information
4. Financial appraisal and options <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Different models for each option Variations for consideration 	April – end May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ITA and Council with Working Group ITA and Council to consult with specific estates where necessary
5. Final tenant and leaseholder survey on preferred option	End May out for results by mid June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To all residents

METHODS OF CONSULTATION		
Borough Wide Consultation	Target date	Note
1. Newsletters <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Newsletters (Homing In) • Council Decent Homes / options appraisal special newsletter • ITA newsletters / factsheets <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is options appraisal • Stock condition and decent homes • Service standards and tenant options for management • Financial information • Options for Harrow and what they means for residents 	14 February 14 May 14 August 14 October mid April mid July March March March /April May May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be developed in accordance with protocol set out in consultation strategy
2. Advice surgeries <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use existing estate surgeries • Arrange surgeries on estate where no existing • ITA advice surgeries 	March - July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be discussed with residents • To be publicised on all communications
3. Freephone	March - July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ITA Freephone • Council freephone

4. Harrow Council Website <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create options appraisal page on Harrow website • Website – update weekly • Develop on-line query / comment / feedback form 	February - July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore potential for building by residents
5. Other publicity	February – August	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Libraries / Community Centres / etc. 	February - August –	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore potential
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local press 	February - August –	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications Unit to develop press release timetable for key stages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggestion boxes 	February - August –	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore potential
6. Door to Door visits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific questionnaire/survey on estates • Individual requests for residents unable to attend surgeries • 	April - July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ITA
Ethnic Minority Consultation	Target date	Note
1. Identify community groups to work with	February	
2. Provide information in appropriate languages	February-August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ITA and Council
3. Language specific focus groups where identified <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend community group meetings to identify issues • Arrange specific focus group meetings 	April - May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ITA and Council

Focus Group Consultation (suggestions)	Target date	Note
1. Identify issues on specific estates <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community facilities • Crime and safety etc • Environmental issues 	April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ITA and Council
2. Arrange estate sessions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commencing April 	April - May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ITA and Council
3. Consultation with elderly residents <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coffee mornings at sheltered schemes 	April - May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ITA and Council
3. Consultation with youth <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific estate events to identify issues 	April - May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ITA and Council
Leaseholder Consultation (suggestions)	Target date	Note
1. Public meetings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To explain process for leaseholders 	April - May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council and ITA
2. Individual Consultation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To identify individual concerns • To allay individual concerns 	April - May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance by Council and ITA