

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

Date of Meeting: 27th February 2013

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 1st April 2012 our records indicate that we have sold 13 properties.

2.4 The Leasehold Team are continuing to make progress with the scanning of leases. To speed up the process the team has managed to secure an additional resource for 3 weeks.

2.5 Information

2.6 The Leasehold Team have been working closely with the Business Transformation Project to develop MyHarrow Accounts for leaseholders. This will provide 24/7 access to leaseholders to view their service charge account on-line. It is scheduled to be in place early in the new financial year.

2.7. During the next month leaseholders will receive notification of Ground Rent due. This is a legal requirement and is not a request for payment. Leaseholders will be invoiced for their Ground Rent on expiry of the notification period.

2.8 Following the completion of a number of major work schemes including Kingsfield Estate, Bucknall House, Shaftesbury Avenue, Milman Close and Alexandra & Stuart Avenue; leaseholders will be billed shortly for their contribution to the cost of the work. The Leasehold Team will offer payment surgeries for leaseholders to come in and discuss their individual payment options.

2.7 Housing Management

2.8 Performance Income Management

2.9 The anticipated seasonal increase of rent arrears over the Christmas period did not happen. Intense targeted work from officers sustained the pre Christmas balance which put the team in a very good position to make a good recovery start to the New Year.

2.10 At the beginning of February another recovery record (beating that of last August) was set by our rent income team. The lowest rent arrear figure of £382,654 was recorded. This is a collection rate of 99.03%. This reduction in arrears is a key achievement as we prepare for the possible impact on our arrears balance from April due to the introduction of the bedroom tax. We have successfully notified all 350 tenants who will be affected from the 1st April 2013 by the introduction of the bedroom tax. We hope tenants will exercise the various housing options available to them to reduce the impact.

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 special meeting of the TLRCF on the 31st January 2013 received a report on the CAB project for Welfare Reform Awareness. A further report will be made available upon completion of the first project phase at the end of February 2013.

2.14 Performance Tenancy Management

2.15 Tenancy Agreement Review: Work has started on the revision of the tenancy agreement. The changes that are being proposed incorporate the new Localism Act 2012 changes to tenure - Housing Management will shortly be using introductory, demoted and flexible tenancies. There are also proposed changes to clauses regarding keeping animals in the home and succession rights.

Consultation will start with staff and HFTRA by the end of February with a view to starting consultation with all tenants from the beginning of March 2013. If all goes according to plan we aim to implement the new agreement by the middle of June 2013.

2.16 New Tenant 6 Week Visits: An overview of the New Tenant Six Week Visit was presented to the Scrutiny Panel in December 2012. We were very pleased to report good performance in the number of the visits carried out since April 2012. This service area has been chosen as the first review item for the Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Panel.

2.17 Mutual Exchange Event: We are holding an event on 23 April 2013 to assist those affected by the bedroom tax to downsize to more affordable

property anywhere in Harrow. The Sheltered Housing Team will also be present to promote services that Sheltered Housing can provide.

Tenants, from all Registered Social Housing providers in the borough of Harrow who are under occupying will be invited to this event. This will widen the options for tenants to move.

2.18 Sharing of Good Practice: Barnet Homes requested a visit to Harrow to discuss how we manage housing tenancy fraud. Barnet and Harrow already work in partnership to provide a legal service and it was pleasing when they requested to visit the Tenancy Management service. All officers in Housing and the Corporate Anti Fraud team spent a half a day discussing what works for us which was hugely appreciated by the officers from Barnet. Further meetings are proposed in the future.

2.19 Housing Tenancy Fraud: The Department of Communities and Local Government have invited local authorities to bid for further funding to tackle tenancy fraud. Since the recruitment of a specialist Housing Investigation Officer we have almost recovered one property per month over the last two years.

This is a huge achievement for the council. Savings of £564K have been identified and it is hoped that this will count towards our bid being successful for further funding for the next two years.

2.20 Complaints: During December and January performance has improved to 75%. Three out of four stage one complaints received were responded to on time.

Unfortunately we also received three stage two complaints after a period of receiving none at all.

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.

2.23 All permanent staff have been interviewed and been successful in gaining positions in the new structure. The remaining posts will be advertised within the next week for internal applicants only. Managers have visited all 18 schemes and met with tenants to discuss the new service to ensure all tenants understand the changes and how they will affect them from April 2013. The visits were very successful with large numbers of tenants attending the meetings positive feedback received.

2.24 Resident Involvement and Activities

2.25 The Resident Involvement Strategy (2013-2016) is currently being reviewed and will be completed for circulation in March 2013.

2.26 Meadfield development: The Resident Involvement Team is supporting Asset Management, in organising the completion ceremony of Meadfield

sheltered scheme following major refurbishment. The event is taking place on 26/2/13 with the Leader, Chief Executive, Portfolio Holder and other invited guests attending.

2.27 The new Resident Involvement Team leader has instigated a series of “meet & greet” appointments with all of the TRA & LSG chairs.

2.28 The Resident Involvement Team have started a door knocking exercise to generate an improved response from residents in TRA areas where attendance at meetings has been poor.

Section 3 –Report Back from Resident Involvement Activities

3. Estates Services Steering Group (ESSG)

3.1 Managers will be meeting with Councillor Currie and HFTRA to discuss terms of reference for the group and who should attend.

3.2 The trial period for the new way of working for caretakers which started on the 1st August 2012 is near completion. Feedback received so far has been very positive. The apprentice posts will be invited to apply for permanent caretaking posts and internal adverts will be out within the next week. If successful, by April 2013 we will aim to 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 4 times with a fifth and final meeting planned.

3.3 The next meeting of the ESSG is on the 6th March 2013...

3.4 Value for Money Group

3.5 Due to some group members having taken roles on the Tenants’ and Leaseholders’ Scrutiny Panel membership has somewhat depleted. Staff will be seeking to recruit more members to the group. The next meeting is due to take place on the 19th February 2013 when the focus will be an update on Public Liability Insurance.

3.6 Developing Tenant Scrutiny

3.7 The Harrow Tenants’ and Leaseholders’ Scrutiny Panel have attended a Housing Finance workshop, and recently had a presentation by scrutiny panel specialist Daniel Roche of HQN. The service review for six week tenant visits, including interviews with officers, is on target to be completed by the end of March 2013.

3.9 HFTRA Scrutiny and Challenge Panel

3.10 The panel last met on the 27th November. The next meeting is due to take place on the 4th March and will receive updates on progress with the

service plan from each of the Housing divisions. Resident Service discussions will focus on welfare reform and progress with tenant and leaseholder scrutiny.

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: Milan Joshi



on behalf of the
Chief Financial Officer

Date: 20th February 2013

Section 8 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact:

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Background Papers: None