

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

Date of Meeting: 24th April 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 Key service priorities continue to be progressing:

- Implementation of the Resident Services restructure proposal which integrates a service review of leadership and communication has been delayed to reflect the outcomes of consultation with staff and Unions Implementation will now be rolled forward into April 2013 with a number of posts now ready to be advertised
- Sheltered Housing Review Implementation – recruitment to all posts near on completion with finer logistics and practices and procedures to be rolled out during April 2013
- Consultation on the community based leadership project with an existing community centre and agreeing terms of lease – finalising of lease subject to one final area of negotiation in terms of window security
- Preparation for welfare reform
- Completion of the Resident Involvement Strategy and embedding tenant and leaseholder scrutiny arrangements – tenant and leaseholder scrutiny panel due to complete first review by the end of April
- Service Planning and HAP 4 preparation 2013/14 – sign off meeting due 9th April 2013

2.0 Updates from previous discussions and new items for information

2.1 Leasehold Services

2.2 Performance

2.3 The Right to Buy Discount increased to £100K in the last budget. As a result the number of Right to Buy enquiries and applications continues to grow. During the period 1st April 2012 to 31st March 2013 our records indicate that we sold 14 properties in comparison to one sale in the previous financial year.

2.4 With the additional resource the Leasehold Team have completed the task of scanning all leases onto CIVICA. This means that staff now have immediate access to leases to respond to any enquiries received from stakeholders regarding lease conditions.

2.5 Information

2.6 The project developing MyHarrow Account for leaseholders is progressing well. There has been a slight delay as the major supplier involved in the delivery of the portal has been working on delivering services based on Council Tax and Benefits due to the major welfare reform changes. However it is scheduled to be in place by June.

2.7. Ground Rent invoices were posted to all leaseholders during the week commencing 8th April 2013. This year we informed leaseholders in several forums of the legal requirement to send out a Ground Rent Notifications prior to the issue of an invoice and, this resulted in far less enquires and complaints being received in comparison to previous years.

2.8 The Leasehold Team has now billed in the region of £600K to leaseholders for their contribution to the cost of completed major work schemes. A number of leaseholders are now on affordable payment plans. Individual appointments continue to be offered to all leaseholders who wish to discuss the payment options available to them.

2.9 Housing Management

2.10 Performance Income Management

2.11 The high performance of rent recovery continues. The record rent arrears recorded at the beginning of February has been surpassed by a balance of £372,982 recorded in the middle of March.

2.12 The team will have to work hard to maintain this performance with the first tranche of the welfare reform taking place at the beginning of April. The team are making personal contact with tenants who have been identified as needing support. They are being sign posted to other agencies including CAB for further specialist advice.

2.13 A third direct debit dated (25th of each month) will be introduced this month. This now provides a total of three direct debit dates to be offered to tenants who choose to pay by direct debit and seeks to improve our maximisation of income opportunities.

2.14 Information

2.15 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 and have been working with colleagues to develop criteria for a range of schemes for assistance in financial hardship.

2.16 The CAB project for Welfare Reform Awareness was extended until the end of March to facilitate staff absence and pressures from other service areas. The content requirements for the final report has been agreed with the CAB and on completion will be presented at a future meeting of TLRCF.

2.17 Performance Tenancy Management

2.18 Housing Tenancy Fraud:

We have been successful in securing £200k government funding towards tenancy fraud for the next two years. A comprehensive bid endorsed by portfolio holders and the Director of Housing proved that a lot has been

delivered by the team to date and that we have plans to deliver more with the support of the funding.

2.19 The National Mobility Scheme

Welfare Reform has impacted on those who have more bedrooms in their accommodation than they need. Housing Benefit will no longer pay for bedrooms that are not being occupied.

The proposed revised National Mobility Scheme will assist households in housing need to move across the country and access support and employment advice.

The scheme will assist us to respond to welfare reform and benefit caps, whilst offering more options to tenants to move. The scheme makes use of low-demand or hard-to-let properties across the country.

So far 15 authorities have committed to joining the scheme. Our neighbours Barnet and Ealing are included.

We are looking forward to working with colleagues in piloting this scheme as another option to make best use of our stock.

2.20 Tenancy Audits

We are pleased to report that our target to visit 35% of our stock between April 2012 and March 2013 has been achieved. Tenancy audits are a rolling programme but we set ourselves yearly targets to ensure a manageable number of properties are visited by Housing Officers and to establish appropriate occupation and management of our dwellings.

2.21 Tenancy Agreement Review

Consultation is in progress for staff, tenants, members and stakeholders. A number of presentations have been made to groups and feedback from both these forums and online has been positive. All consultation will end on the 10th May 2013 with a view to launching the revised tenancy agreement on the 1st July 2013.

2.22 Sheltered Housing Modernisation

2.23 Work to implement the Sheltered Housing review is ongoing. Managers are continuing to meet with staff and Trade Unions to ensure a seamless transition.

2.24 As previously reported all permanent staff have been interviewed and been successful in gaining positions in the new structure. The remaining posts have been advertised and interviews have been taking place over the past few weeks. Due to the vast numbers of applicants, it has not been possible to have all new staff in place for the 1st April; however, we are now in a transitional period until the end of May and will have all staff in place by 1st June. The new staff teams will be visiting all 18 schemes to introduce themselves to tenants by way of meet and greet sessions.

2.25 Resident Involvement and Activities

2.26 Circulation of the Customer Involvement Strategy (2013-2016) is has been delayed but will now take place during April 2013.

2.27 Contact by the Resident Involvement Team with non - constituted TRA's is being prioritised, for development. A meeting date for Pinner Hill TRA (which includes Miller Close) has now been agreed, which HFTRA have agreed to chair. A door knocking exercise at Pinner Hill will take place to generate improved attendance by residents in May.

Section 3 –Report Back from Resident Involvement Activities

3. Estates Services Steering Group (ESSG)

3.1 The terms of reference for ESSG have been discussed with the group and copies have been issued. All comments will be considered and draft terms of reference will be written and taken to the next meeting for consultation and discussion prior to new terms of reference being agreed.

3.2 The trial period for the new way of working for caretakers which started on the 1st August 2012 is now completed. Feedback received has been very positive. We are now considering rolling out the use of estate based caretakers to all sites across the borough which will enable us to include wet cleaning to all blocks.

3.3 The apprentices have now been interviewed and were successful in gaining permanent positions within the team. We will aim to take on 2 more apprentices giving young local people an opportunity to work and gain practicable experience and qualifications.

The next meeting of the ESSG is on the 12th June 2013.

3.4 Value for Money Group

3.5 The last meeting of the group took place on the 19th March 2013 when the focus was Public Liability Insurance. The next meeting will take place on the 16th April 2013 where the topics for discussion will be the VFM section of the draft Asset Management Strategy and the Green Deal and energy efficiency agenda for 2013/14.

3.6 Developing Tenant Scrutiny

3.7 The Harrow Tenants' and Leaseholders' Scrutiny Panel have recently completed Equalities Impact Assessment training, and have now received the requested information pack for the new tenant six weekly visit review. The service review for six week tenant visits, including interviews with officers, is on target to be completed by the end of April 2013, when, on completion of the review an initial report will be submitted to the Housing Management Team.

3.8 HFTRA Scrutiny and Challenge Panel

3.9 The panel last met on the 27th November. The next meeting due to take place on the 4th March was cancelled due to tenant and leaseholder representative illness. The next meeting date has yet to be confirmed.

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.

Section 7 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name: Dave Roberts	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Chief Financial Officer
Date: 10 April 2013		

Section 8 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact:

Toni Burke
Interim Head of Resident Services
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Background Papers: None