

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

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**Date of Meeting:** 11th December 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 content of this report be noted

## **Section 2 – Report**

### **1. Introduction**

1.1 Key service priorities continue to be progressing with an emphasis on:

- Welfare reform implications for Resident Services
- Finalisation of the resident Services “Getting Closer to the Customer” restructure

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

#### **2.1 Leasehold Services**

#### **2.2 Performance**

2.3 The pace of Right to Buy applications and sales continues. Since April 2013, 46 Right to Buy applications have been received and 17 properties have been sold.

2.4 The Leasehold Team has worked hard to collect service charge and major work debt during the second quarter. As a result £49,192 service charge debt and £83,055 major work arrears was collected during the second quarter of the year. The Team continues to encourage leaseholders who are experiencing difficulty, to make contact so that affordable payment plans can be agreed to reduce their debt.

#### **2.5 Information**

2.6 The 2012/13 annual service charges were sent out during the week commencing 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2013. Approximately £400,000 was billed. This year we have encouraged leaseholders to pay by direct debit as this helps to make the payments manageable for leaseholders and, carries the most cost effective collection solution for the Council.

#### **2.7 Housing Management**

#### **2.8 Performance Income Management**

2.9 Over the summer we saw a seasonal increase in arrears materialise in addition to the impact of Welfare Reform.

2.10 The level of arrears as at the end of quarter two 2013 stands at £496k compared with £461k at the same time last year. This figure was calculated immediately prior to direct debit run which would result in a credit of approximately £24k (£472). Our income collection rate continues to improve and, at, 97.72% performance is currently in the top quartile for levels benchmarked across other London Boroughs. Detailed analysis of the impact

of spare room subsidy is on-going and resources targeted at those cases require intensive support.

2.11 The Housing Service has been working with corporate colleagues to finalise a Corporate Debt Policy to assist those who are in difficulty with paying their bills. The policy links the specific recovery policies for the different income types to the council. The policy has just been through a consultation period which finished at the end of November 2013. When the policy is finalised our Housing Officers will welcome the cross-reference corporate approach to collecting debt owed to the council. Council Tax, Housing, Business Rates, Sundry Debts and Parking CPN services have all contributed to this policy.

## **2.12 Performance Tenancy Management**

2.13 Home Fire Safety: A number of London Boroughs and welfare organisations have in place, or are developing, 'Sanctuary Projects' to assist individuals or families who have experienced domestic violence or hate crime. The aim of a Sanctuary Project is to make it possible for victims to remain in their own homes and feel safe. This can be achieved by providing a secure sanctuary room in their premises with items such as window grills, panic buttons, stronger doors etc. The sanctuary room, normally the main bedroom, provides a secure place to retreat to and a place from where assistance can be summoned if the victim is under threat. Within our Harrow housing stock we have a number of properties where 'Sanctuary' has been installed. In partnership with the London Fire Brigade we are currently conducting Home Fire Safety Checks in these properties to ensure the safety levels of the sanctuary installed is still fit for the original purpose it was installed. This review has been welcomed by our vulnerable tenants in occupation of these properties.

2.14 Free Micro chipping Dog Event: Forthcoming legislation will require all dogs to be micro chipped from 6 April 2016.

2.15 On Thursday 3 October 2013 staff from Resident Services and Environment Protection Teams held a pilot event in the Marsh Road, Community Hall, Pinner. The Dogs Trust charity were invited to work in partnership with us to offer a free micro chipping service to tenants, leaseholders and the wider community. Residents from Pinner, Stanmore, Wealdstone & Kenton attended and were very happy with the free service. The new Housing Portfolio Holder and a ward councillor also attended and welcomed the long term benefits of this initiative.

2.16 A further event is now planned for the 17<sup>th</sup> December 2013 at Buckingham Road garage site.

2.17 Cycle Storage on Estates: Cycle storage in the communal areas of our housing stock is a huge management problem faced by Housing Officers. It affects the route of escape from fire and is a general health and safety risk.

2.18 As cycling is a sustainable form of transport which is relatively cheap, affordable, healthy and good for the climate we would like to support our tenants and leaseholders to keep their cycles in a responsible manner by providing them with cycle hangers. Tenancy management staff are in discussions with the Borough Cycling Officer/Engineer regarding government funding to install these hangers on the estates where we have the problem of cycle storage. A feasibility study will be taking place in consultation with tenants and leaseholders' regarding priority needs for individual blocks.

2.19 Mutual Exchange: Since our Mutual Exchange Event held in April this year, four successful moves have taken place. In addition to the mutual exchange event, the Grants to Move Scheme that was consulted on during the event has now been launched. Our tenants now have three options:

1. **Downsize** and receive up to £4,500 to move to a smaller council or housing association property, and other expenses.
2. Receive a **Private Rented Grant** of up to £6,000 to move into a private rented property and,
3. Receive a **Home Ownership Grant** of up to £38,000 to leave their rented home and buy their own property.

2.20 A follow up Mutual Exchange event is planned in February 2014. It is proposed to use this event to also provide a booth inviting those tenants without photo ID to attend for their picture to be taken.

2.21 New Tenancy Agreement Launch: Our new tenancy agreement was successfully launched on Monday 12th August 2013. At the time of writing this report we have signed up 4 Introductory/Secure, 13 Introductory/5 year fixed and 25 secure tenancies. A total of 42 tenancies

2.22 The number of new tenancy sign ups is lower than this time last year due to reduction in turnover and fewer voids coming through the system.

2.23 A new tool for managing Anti Social Behaviour: Earlier this year the new Borough Commander held a meeting with Harrow officers including Housing to introduce a tool to assist with managing Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) in partnership. Airspace is a computer based tool that is being piloted by the Metropolitan Police to encourage central reporting and management of ASB.

2.24 Housing Officers visited Sutton Police to see this tool in operation and to understand how it could support officers in their day to day management of ASB. The presentation from Sutton was well received but it was concluded that this software package can support us but cannot be used as a stand-alone management tool.

## **2.25 Sheltered Housing Review**

2.26 Most staff roles have now been appointed to. Service plans and staff development plans are in place to ensure that staff have the information and support they need to undertake the new posts. We are keeping tenants updated with regular newsletters and briefings and will arrange for them to be introduced to all new staff as soon as we can.

## **2.27 Estate Services**

2.28 The estate based caretaking service has now been rolled out across the Borough. The approach adopted resulted in interest from LB Redbridge who have now visited the service to see it in operation and have also invited our staff to visit them to talk to staff and residents. Redbridge are keen to implement a similar structure for their caretaking service and we will be providing them with formal feedback from our visit in the near future.

2.29 The Estate Service Team has now recruited 2 new apprentices. They are on a 12 month contract and are working closely with established caretakers across the Borough.

## **2.30 Churchill Place Car Park**

2.31 We have recently been approached by a commercial Estate Agent who is interested in leasing the underground car park. They are proposing a 15 year lease with 5 year break clauses. They are willing to pay £15k per year with a 2 month free initial period to allow for them to do required works to bring it up to standard. They have issued a draft lease which we are considering in consultation with Legal Services. No agreement has been reached so far as there are a number of issues which need further clarification.

## **2.32 Resident Involvement and Activities**

### **2.33 Resident Involvement TRA Rep's get together**

2.34 The Resident Involvement Team are holding a social meeting of all TRA/Sheltered scheme reps on the 12th December, to thank the reps for their continual hard work in representing the interests and views of council tenants and leaseholders and to help promote the work of the active TRAs' in the borough. Further details will be provided once the Resident Involvement Team have consulted with TRA's and Sheltered scheme reps.

### **2.35 Scrutiny Panel update**

2.36 The panel have completed their 1<sup>st</sup> review of how 6 week visits to new tenants are carried out and submitted their recommendations to the Housing Management Team. The review recommendations were well received by the Resident Services Team and all recommendations have been accepted for

implementation. The panel is currently reviewing the Estate Inspection process as its' second review area.

### **2.37 Estates In Bloom**

2.38 For this year's EIB competition, the Resident Involvement Team invited all constituted Tenant & Resident Associations and Sheltered schemes, to take part in this well established community event. There were 15 entrants to the competition – 10 sheltered schemes and 5 estates.

2.39 A short-listing panel made up council officers and an award winning independent nurseryman, shortlisted 8 sheltered schemes and 2 estates. The final judging panel consisting of the Mayor, portfolio holder, shadow portfolio holder, a nursery specialist and council officers, visited the 10 sites on 6/8/13, where they judged the entries on four main categories: Impact, Sustainability, Community Participation and Maintenance. All judges commented on the high calibre of entries, that made selection of a winner in the sheltered scheme and estates group that much harder.

2.40 The winners were announced at a Mayors' tea party, where representatives from all entrants were present and refreshments and live entertainment were provided, followed by an informative talk on the history of Harrow.

- The winner of the Best Estate plaque was Pinner Hill Community TRA
- The winner of the Best Sheltered Scheme plaque was Durrant Court.
- The overall champion and trophy holder was Pinner Hill Community TRA

### **2.41 Leasehold Support Group**

2.42 The last Leaseholder Support Group open meeting took place on Monday 7th October 2013 where discussions focussed on the recent billing round. The next meeting is due to take place on the 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2013.

### **2.43 Recruitment**

2.44 Following the resignation of a Resident Involvement Officer, a new officer has been recruited and started in post with Harrow in November 2013.

2.45 Appointment to the initial internal ring-fenced posts of the Resident Services Restructure is complete and the first round of internal adverts for the remainder of posts have now been publicised.

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

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

3.1 The last meeting of the ESSG took place on the 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2013.

3.2 Discussion took place regarding a number of issues including grounds maintenance and the caretakers' new ways of working.

3.3 The next meeting of the ESSG will take place in February 2014.

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

3.5 The last meeting of the group took place on the 15<sup>th</sup> October 2013 when the group received presentations on leasehold billing, void times, community centre charging and welfare reform. The meeting arranged for November was cancelled due to staff illness but will now take place on the 17<sup>th</sup> December where the main agenda item will be an insurance update.

## **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.

Name: Dave Roberts	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Chief Financial Officer
Date: 26 November 2013		

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

### **Contact:**

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**Background Papers:** None

