

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

---

**Date of Meeting:** 11 December 2013

**Subject:** Housing project updates:  
Communications Plan, Grants to Move,  
Mobile and flexible working

**Responsible Officer:** Lynne Pennington  
Director of Housing

**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr Barry Macleod-Cullinane, Portfolio  
Holder for Housing

**Exempt:** No

**Enclosures:** None

**Section 1 – Summary and recommendations**

**Recommendations:**

TLRCF are asked to note the contents of the report and make comments on the updates given, particularly in relation to communications plan for 2014/15

**Reason: (For recommendation)**

To ensure TLRCF is aware of progress to date in these areas and has the opportunity to influence future priorities.

## **Section 2 – Report**

### **A. Communications Plan - context**

- 2.1 A communication plan was set up at the start of the year to support the priorities in the Housing Ambition Plan for 2013-14. It focuses on how we can best use tools such as print, direct communication, posters, emails, news media, social media and lobbying to deliver key messages to tenants, leaseholder, residents and other partners.
- 2.2 The plan incorporated the then corporate priorities and has been reviewed in the light of the cleaner, safer, fairer objectives of the current administration. It aims to build the reputation of the Housing department and includes four mini campaigns focussing on: getting closer to the customer, housing solutions for those most in need, selling our services and the improvements and repairs service (asset management).
- 2.3 Resident consultation is used to test the effectiveness of proposed messages and to get feedback to influence future initiatives.  
Mechanisms include:
  - a. Housing Editorial Board, which meets monthly to review text and design for proposed publications, leaflets and posters. (There are 4 resident representatives and up to 9 officer members at present.)
  - b. Surveys – e.g. the 2012 STAR survey showed that 91% of tenants read Homing In, the tenants & leaseholders' magazine
  - c. Other evaluation methods e.g. events, pilots, new initiatives and via focus groups
  - d. Calls for feedback via Homing In, letters to tenants and leaseholders etc.

### **B. Communications activity – April 2013 to date**

- 2.4 There has been extensive communications activity carried out this year and to summarise this includes:
  - a. Introduction of a monthly letter to tenants/ leaseholders – a short, simple, personally addressed letter which goes out in the months in which Homing In is not produced, and when there are service updates to convey.
  - b. Continued use of Homing In as the main quarterly news magazine for tenants and leaseholders for service issues, events and action items
  - c. Use of well-designed, printed leaflets to communicate key issues e.g. changes to the allocations scheme, grants to move, proposed new tenants' charter, Help to Let
  - d. Increasing use of internet/ web as a resource for information, self-help and a way for customers to report/ respond to events and receive updates.
  - e. Facebook page called 'Resident Involvement Harrow' was developed in August and has 39 likes so far.

- f. Promoting the value of using My Harrow in Homing In and letters to tenants/ lease holders (and piloting signing up new tenants and measuring how many have email accounts.)
  - g. Public events offering information/ advice e.g. drop ins on housing choices, helping you in tough times, mutual exchanges, private landlord forums.
  - h. Enclosures in rent statements e.g. as part of our anti-fraud campaign, we are offering a Key Amnesty in November 2013, and the use of posters on housing and community noticeboards to highlight key messages.
- 2.5 We have continued to issue press releases on items of news and, for example, received lots of television, radio and newspaper coverage of the Grants to Move launch in October.
- 2.6 We have promoted selling our services, for example, Help2Let/ Buy2Lease information leaflets are sent to all landlords who enquire about services and we advertise in Harrow People. Email newsletters go out to landlords on our database to update them on our services. We host two Landlord Forums a year in spring and autumn to supplement this activity.
- 2.7 There has been an increase in communications activity to support asset management initiatives including: working with contractors to support key messages (e.g. letters to tenants / leaseholders regarding calling Quality Heating direct, and the Linbrook Wates brand change), joint work on events to mark the start or end of projects and general activity to ensure consistent use of housing branding on all external communications.

### **C. Communications activity for 2014 / 15**

- 2.10 During 2014/15 we would anticipate once again using a range of communication tools and mini campaigns to support the priorities in the next Housing Ambition Plan.
- 2.11 It would be helpful to hear TLRCF's comments on communications activity for the year to date, in order to feed into the next Housing Communications Plan (2014-15).

### **D. Grants to Move scheme update**

- 2.12 The Grants to Move scheme launched on 30 September 2013 offering council tenants grants to vacate their council home and move in one of three ways:
- 1) Downsizing to a smaller council or housing association property
  - 2) Moving to a private rented property
  - 3) Buying a home privately
- 2.13 The scheme is entirely voluntary and officers offer support and advice to prospective movers, and carry out checks to ensure the proposed moves are sustainable in the longer term, and that they meet the

objective of freeing up homes to be allocated to households in high priority need.

- 2.14 To date 2 private rented moves have been completed. Both released two bedroom properties and the tenants who moved were relocating for family reasons.
- 2.15 There are currently 6 home ownership grants in the pipeline and a further 4 potential moves to private rented accommodation. Officers continue to work with tenants wanting to downsize, although there have been no moves yet under the enhanced scheme offered as part of the Grants to Move launch.
- 2.16 Officers propose to carry out further publicity for the Grants to Move scheme in January/ February 2014 and we are recruiting another officer to help follow up on enquiries. We will also review how the scheme is working after 6 months (end March 2014), to consider whether any adjustments are required to the way it works.
- 2.17 Members of TLRCF are invited to make comments on the Grants to Move scheme.

#### **E. Housing premises move and Mobile and Flexible working**

- 2.18 As part of a Council – wide project the Housing Department moved offices from Civic 2 to the Civic 1 building. The moves were phased over the period September to December 2013, and the offices are modern, flexible, open plan spaces that offer a better working environment than previously.
- 2.19 The Housing Reception area has also moved to the main Civic Centre building and now operates from the Access Harrow reception area. The new reception area is more spacious and offers better facilities than before. Customers are seen on an appointment basis, supported by a customer management system, and there are computers and telephones available for self service as required.
- 2.20 As well as office relocations, the project has enabled the provision of more up to date IT equipment to support mobile and flexible working. This should enable officers to work remotely, from home and from housing sites if this better suits their work.
- 2.21 The intention is that we work more effectively and save money on office and travel costs, as well as having more time to spend out on the estates and being more visible to customers.
- 2.22 Officers are still working on an action plan to make the best of the new technology and the potential for new ways of working. We will incorporate these in the next Housing Ambition Plan and report back to tenants, leaseholders and residents on their progress.
- 2.23 TLRCF are asked to note the progress in the office moves/ mobile and flexible working project and make comments on the project to date.

## Section 3 - Financial Implications

- 3.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.
- 3.2 For information, there is provision of £44,000 in the HRA to cover officer time in the Communications Team spent supporting and delivering the Housing Communications Plan. There is provision of £250,000 in the HRA and £256,240 capital in 2013/14 and 2014/15 to support the Grants to Move scheme. The costs of the office relocation, mobile flex project and IT upgrade have been met partly by the HRA and also by the corporate mobile flex and IT refresh budgets.

### Risk Management Implications

- 3.3 There are risk registers for the Grants to Move scheme and for the Mobile Flex/ Office Relocation budgets, which are reviewed regularly.

### Equalities implications

- 3.4 Equalities impact assessments were carried out for the reception moves and the mobile and flexible working projects, and were able to demonstrate improved access and facilities for people covered by the protected characteristics. The communications plan includes consideration of equalities and diversity.

## Section 4 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name: Dave Roberts	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Chief Financial Officer
Date: 28 Nov. 13		
Name: Paresh Mehta	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Monitoring Officer
Date: 28 Nov 13		

## **Section 5 - Contact Details and Background Papers**

### **Contact:**

Jane Fernley  
Housing Partnerships & Strategy Service Manager

Tel: 020 8424 1283 (Ext. 2283)

[Jane.Fernley@harrow.gov.uk](mailto:Jane.Fernley@harrow.gov.uk)

### **Background Papers:**

Grants to move information – [www.harrow.gov.uk/grants2move](http://www.harrow.gov.uk/grants2move)