

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

Date of Meeting: 30th April 2014

Subject: **INFORMATION REPORT – Head of Resident Services Report**

Responsible Officer: Lynne Pennington
Divisional Director of Housing

Exempt: No

Wards affected: All

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.

Views are invited on the priorities for Resident Services over the next 12 months.

FOR INFORMATION AND CONSULTATION

Section 2 – Report

1. Introduction

1.1. Key service priorities have continued to place an emphasis on:

- Welfare reform implications for Resident Services
- Development of HAP 5 commitments and service plans

1.2 Although performance statistics for the 2013/14 year end are to be finalised this report aims to include key performance outcomes for Resident Services.

2. Updates from previous discussions and new items for information

2.1. Leasehold Services

2.2. Performance

2.2.1. This financial year saw the Right to Buy discount increase to £100K, which has led to a significant increase in RTB applications and sales. For the period 01.04.2013 – 31.03.2014 69 Right to Buy applications were received resulting in 36 sales. 14 of these completions took place during quarter 4. Given the stable economy it is predicted that this trend of year on year increases will continue.

2.2.2. The Leasehold Team generated a gross asset income of £7,602,750.00 from the 36 Right to Buy sales, which reduces to a net income value of £4,066,275.00 after allowing for the application of the Right to Buy discount. In addition the right to buy completions allow the Authority to recover income of £102,600 in Right to Buy administration fees from the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

2.2.3. For annual service charges the debt owing as at 31.03.13 was £97K. An additional £365K was invoiced to leaseholders in September 2013 by way of the annual service charges for 2012/13. The year end debt (31.03.14) is £117K meaning £345K was successfully collected from leaseholders and recovered to the Housing Revenue Account during the financial year.

2.2.4. Similar collection achievements were made with major work recovery. Invoices due as at 01.04.13 were £292K. Throughout the year a further £300K was invoiced and the net balance as at 31.03.14 is £236K.

2.2.5. Leaseholders experiencing financial difficulty continue to be offered the opportunity to set up monthly payment plans by direct debit in order that they can repay the debt in manageable

monthly sums. Where this is not feasible the team proactively work with mortgage lenders to recover the debt, signposting leaseholders to the CAB where appropriate.

2.3. Information

- 2.3.1. The 2014/15 Ground Rent notification was issued to leaseholders in March. This is a legal notice that must be sent to all leaseholders prior to invoicing. The actual Ground Rent invoice will be sent to all leaseholders, at the end of April.
- 2.3.2. The Leasehold Team recruitment is now underway and it is hoped that new team members will be in place by the summer.
- 2.3.3. In response to tenant feedback we are reviewing the information contained on the Council's website, to provide greater clarity to tenants on the Right to Buy process and, working with the Grants2Move team in offering information to tenants on alternative housing options.

2.4. Housing Management

2.5. Performance Income Management

- 2.5.1. The rent arrears figure as at the end of March stood at £459k against a target of £450K.
- 2.5.2. We have 293 accounts that are under occupying and affected by the size criteria as at February 2014. This has resulted in an additional £280,413 of rent charges for 2013/14. As at the end of February 2014, £208,987 of the £248,057 that was due to collected by that date has been collected. This has resulted in approximately £40,000 rent arrears that can be contributed to the welfare reforms.
- 2.5.3. There has been a noticeable increase in the number of claims for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) from our tenants. Whilst the total amount awarded is yet to be confirmed Housing Officers continue to encourage tenants to claim the government funding (DHP) which is suppressing the expected rent arrear increase from the introduction of Welfare Reform.

3. Performance Tenancy Management

3.1 Tenant Mobility

We held our second Mutual Exchange event at the end of February 2014. Over 200 Harrow social housing tenants attended the event which was considered to be a success. The event was financially supported with a grant from the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG). We received £3000 funding from the West London Mobility Demonstration Projects funding. We also took the opportunity to

have a photo booth at the event to encourage those tenants without their photograph in file to have one taken whilst they were there.

- 3.2** During the financial year 2013/2014 there were 33 successful mutual exchanges. Since the event there are now 12 applications pending at the end of the year which is a third of applications for the whole year. We will use the remainder of the DCLG funding to hold a combined event with Brent Council.
- 3.3** Anti-Social Behaviour
The number of adult males perpetrating Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) is on the increase within our stock. We are interviewing tenants with relevant agencies, where necessary and are finding that the predominant reasons for this stem from mental health/substance misuse issues. We are in the process of reviewing our joint protocol with the Harrow Mental Health Service for the discharge of patients in housing need. This joint protocol will assist in ensuring that the support that is required for this vulnerable group is put in place.
- 3.4** Another area of concern is the increase in the number of young people (male and female) committing Domestic Violence. We are currently working with colleagues from across the council to review the Domestic Abuse Policy. We are pleased to report that the number of cases of racial abuse reported is very low.
- 3.5** Tenancy Fraud
The good work of repossessing properties continues at a steady pace. At the beginning of February our Housing Officers, Investigation Officer (Housing) and the Corporate Anti-Fraud Team spent a whole day targeting suspected tenancy fraud properties. The team were successful in recovering 3 properties on the day. Another property had been recovered outside of the targeted day which meant that 4 properties were recovered in 2 working days.
- 3.6** The total number of properties recovered for the year is 10.
- 3.7** The deadline for applications for a second Investigation Officer (Housing) has recently closed. We are hoping to interview and appoint by the end of April. One of the first projects for this officer will be to look at preventative measures at the beginning of our Housing Application process.
- 3.8** 26% of tenancy audit visits were completed against a target of 35%.

4. Tenant Photographs

4.1 We now hold photographs for 45% of tenants. This compares favourably with a figure of 24% at the same time last year.

4.2 Information for New Tenants

We wrote to over 300 tenants who were awarded tenancies in the last year to ask what information they would have liked to have received at their tenancy sign up.

We had a response from 13% of tenants who predominantly would have liked to receive more information about the dwelling they were about to move into. For example, where is the stop cock and how to operate the boiler.

The analysis of this information will be discussed with our colleagues in Asset Management and Housing Needs with regards to improving the information we can provide.

5. Recruitment

5.1 We advertised externally for a number of posts. The response has been healthy and officers are shortlisting over the coming weeks due to the high number of applications received. Current vacant posts are:

- 2 Full Time Housing Officers
- 1 Job Share Housing Officer
- 1 Part time Housing Officer (home based)
- 1 Housing Investigation Officer

6. Sheltered Housing

6.1 The Support Team have continued to provide intensive support to individual tenants. The support team are currently supporting 209 tenants which is just short of the target of 216 tenants set by Supporting People. Many of these tenants have benefited from having their entitlement to welfare benefits income maximised.

6.2 The number of well-being checks has decreased which is on target as specified in the contract with Supporting People. There has been a mixed reaction from tenants. Staff are revisiting tenants to reinforce how the new system is working to provide a more flexible and intensive service.

6.3 Works to the staff office base at Watkins House is near completion.

6.4 IT roll out of staff devices was due to commence from 7th April.

- 6.5 Activities have started across the schemes with art and needlework classes taking place at John Lamb Court.
- 6.6 The Tenant Involvement Participation Coordinator is in the process of working with tenants to organise trips during the summer months.

7. Estate Services

- 7.1 Estate Inspections (also note content of the Head of Asset Management's report)
- 7.2 As previously reported it was agreed that following the completion of the Resident Services restructure the estate inspection process would be reviewed and responsibility passed to each individual patch housing officer. Vacant Housing Officer posts have now been advertised externally and the recruitment process is currently being undertaken.
- 7.3 Work has commenced to develop this years' Minor Estate Improvements projects programme. A draft "wish list" has been prepared for further discussion with Harrow Federation of Tenant and Residents Associations (HFTRA). Views on the proposals would be welcomed from Members of TLRCF.

7.4 Garage Update

- 7.4.1 Repairs to 3 of the 4 pilot garage sites are nearing completion. Repairs to garages at Wood Close and Cowan Avenue should complete by the end of this week. Repairs to garages at Overbrook Walk should complete in the next 2 weeks, due to a newly discovered structural repair being required.
- 7.4.2 Repairs to garages at Harrow View have been postponed pending further resident consultation on parking at the rear of the shops.
- 7.4.3 The results of the pilot repairs should be clarified by June and this will determine the strategy for any future repair programme.
- 7.4.4 A marketing plan for the newly repaired pilot garages has been drafted and is going to Editorial Board in week commencing 14 April for sign off prior to being implemented. Residents of the surrounding estate will be given priority for garages, ahead of the wider community.
- 7.4.5 Augustine Road – the garages have been demolished and the base plates are now to be removed. All works should be finished by Good Friday. Network Rail is dealing with the fencing to the railway side of the site. Resident Services taking forward further consultation with residents to determine the future use of the site.

7.4.6 Clearance of garages known to contain rubbish is continuing with a final deadline of 18th April.

8. Resident Involvement and Activities

- 8.1** Harrow in Bloom – The Resident Involvement Team are currently organising the annual gardening competition. This year the competition has been rebranded as Harrow in Bloom and entries to the competition are invited from all residents living on a Harrow council estate, including TRAs', Young gardeners, Housing Association tenants, residents living in houses including council tenants and freeholders. This year there will be more emphasis on sustainability and biodiversity.
- 8.2** Noticeboard Audit – The team has carried out an audit of all the external noticeboards on Harrow council estates, to determine the serviceability and usage of the noticeboards. As a result of the audit, we found that where there are active TRAs, not all were making the most of boards by advertising meeting dates, or providing information about the local community and the TRA. On estates without a TRA, the noticeboards were either blank or displayed out of date information. The team has drafted a proposal for the future management of the noticeboards, where responsibility for the boards will be shared. The proposal is currently with HFTRA for consultation.
- 8.3** The role of an Estate Representative – As part of the review of involvement opportunities for residents, The team has updated the role of an estate representative, with changes such as the possibility of an them only covering certain streets where there is a large estate without a TRA. This review document is currently with HFTRA for consultation.
- 8.4** Harrow Sheltered Residents Association representatives – The team organised the election of representatives of all 18 Harrow council sheltered schemes. There is now a rep for 17 out of the 18 schemes. Information from HSRA meetings is distributed to all schemes.
- 8.5** Supporting current TRAs – The team is working with Weald Village TRA to submit an application for a pocket park, with help from Public Health and Public Realm. The team are also door knocking in the area, to raise awareness of this. They are also door knocking in the Little Stanmore TRA area to raise awareness of the TRA, and helping Pinner Hill TRA to obtain computers, for use in the community.

8.6 New TRAs' – The team have organised resident meetings at Brookside Close estate and the Honeybun estate, to promote the formation of new residents associations. Both of these areas have residents that have expressed a commitment in forming a TRA in April 2014.

8.7 Scrutiny Panel update – The panel are currently drafting their latest report on Estate Inspections.

9. Leasehold Support Group

9.1 The next meeting of the LSG is due to take place on 7th April, 2014 where the main area for discussion will be the leasehold service plan.

Section 3 – Report Back from Resident Involvement Activities

1. Estates Services Steering Group (ESSG)

1.1 The last meeting of the ESSG took place on 26th February 2014 where the main topics of discussion were tree maintenance and the wet cleaning programme.

2. Value for Money Group

2.1 The last meeting of the group took place on the 18th March 2014 when the group received a presentation on tenancy fraud.

Section 4 – Resident Services priorities 2014/15

1. This report incorporates the corporate priorities to deliver a cleaner, safer and fairer Harrow. The same corporate priorities are reflected within each of the Resident Services priorities for the forthcoming year.

2. The following priorities have provided the overarching titles beneath which each of the Resident Services teams have been able to develop detailed service plans.

- Develop tenant insight and customer profiling to drive forward a tailored service
- To maintain authorised secure tenancy occupation of social housing stock in Harrow

- To improve the customer satisfaction rate of tenants and leaseholders experiencing Anti-Social Behaviour.
- Manage the appearance of our estates
- To support the viability of the Housing Revenue Account
- To support and prevent financial hardship of tenants and leaseholders
- To provide quality value for money services to tenants and leaseholders
- To work closely with Homes for Harrow to input into the development process and explore the management of other forms of tenure.

Section 5 – Financial Implications

1. 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 6 – Equalities Implications

1. There are no equalities implications associated with this report. No Equality Impact Assessments have been carried out.

Name: Dave Roberts



on behalf of the
Chief Financial Officer

Date: 10th April 2014

Section 7 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact:

Toni Burke
Interim Head of Resident Services
Tel: 020 8420 9638
Email: Toni.burke@harrow.gov.uk

Background Papers: None