

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

Date of Meeting:	2 nd July 2014
Subject:	INFORMATION REPORT Head of Resident Services Report
Key Decision:	No
Responsible Officer:	Lynne Pennington Divisional Director of Housing
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Glen Hearnden Portfolio Holder Housing
Exempt:	No
Decision subject to Call-in:	No
Wards affected:	All
Enclosures:	None

Section 1 – Summary

This 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. It also seeks comments on a proposal to take the Forum "out on the road" in various locations across the borough.

FOR INFORMATION AND CONSULTATION

Section 2 – Report

1. Introduction

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

- Finalisation of the restructure
- Welfare reform implications for Resident Services going forward
- Incorporating HAP 5 commitments and service plans into staff IPADS and targets

2. Updates from previous discussions and new items for information

2.1. Leasehold Services

Performance

- 2.1.1. For the period 01.04.14 – 17.06.14 we received 14 new Right to Buy applications and have a further 42 applications pending. The trend of sales continues with 10 properties being sold since 1st April 14.
- 2.1.2. The Leasehold Team generated a gross asset income of £2,044,750 from 10 Right to Buy, sales, which reduces to a net income value of £1,078,450 after applying £966,300 in eligibility of Right to Buy discount. In addition, the 10 sale completions allows the Authority to recover income of £28,500 in Right to Buy administration fees from the proportion of RTB income payable to Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG).
- 2.1.3. For annual service charges, £117K was outstanding at year end. A further £11,480 was invoiced for ground rent in April 2014 leaving a balance owing of £86,363 as at 31st May 2014. Therefore £42,117 was successfully collected in service charge income between 1st April and 30th May 2014.
- 2.1.4. Similar collection achievements were made with major work recovery. The sum of invoices due at 1st April 2013 was £292K. Throughout the period 1st April 2014 to 30th May 2014 an additional £81,304 was invoiced for major work schemes and a further £47,766 income was collected, leaving a net outstanding balance of £270,000 as at 31st May 2014.

2.2. Information

2.2.1. The Right to Buy Discount will increase to £102,700 in London on 21st July 2014. Thereafter it will increase by the Consumer Price Index (based on the previous September's figure) on the 6th April each year. This will result in increased workload to the team as all live Right to Buy application offer letters, will need to be reissued unless the tenant request that the Council does not do so within 21 days.

In addition it is proposed that the discount for houses be increased up to a maximum of 70%.

Along with other services within the Council we are piloting the document scanner to detect the use of fraudulent documents during the Right to Buy, process.

2.2.2. We have started preparing the annual service charges which will be invoiced to leaseholders towards the end of the next quarter.

2.2.3. The Leasehold Team recruitment remains a work in progress.

2.3. Housing Management

Performance Income Management

2.3.1. The collection rate has been fairly consistent since our last report.

2.3.2. Rent arrears currently stand at £487,764.

2.3.3. There has been a slight improvement in the collection of recharges from void properties. A handful of ex-tenants have contacted Housing Officers to make an agreement to pay off the recharge or have paid the charge in full.

2.3.4. We are planning to introduce another method of payment for tenants who are able to use mobile phones to pay their bills.

2.4. Performance Tenancy Management

Dog Agreement Launch

2.4.1. Our Responsible Dog Owners' Agreement has now been launched. A number of tenants have signed up to the agreement and we are hoping to increase sign ups over the summer period.

It is a voluntary agreement that will help us to manage dog ownership within our stock, on housing land and to benefit the borough as a whole.

We will continue to help tenants and residents in surrounding areas with micro-chipping of dogs in partnership with the Dogs Trust. All dogs must be legally micro-chipped by April 2016.

Tenancy Fraud

- 2.4.2. We have been successful in appointing a second Housing Fraud Investigation Officer. This officer will focus on the prevention of tenancy fraud by intercepting fraudulent applications. Tenancies can be obtained by deception, misrepresentation and submitting false documentation. The new investigation officer will be scrutinising the application process with a view to prosecuting offenders under the new Prevention of Social Housing Fraud Act 2013. This act has been introduced to support local authorities with pursuing such crimes through the courts.
- We have received the last payment of fraud funding from Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG). This funding is for tackling tenancy fraud up to March 2015.

Introductory Tenancies

- 2.4.3. We have started to interview the tenants who were awarded introductory tenancies from August 2013 onwards. The purpose of interviewing these tenants is to review the management of their tenancy in view of a decision to extend the introductory tenancy or to award a secure 5 year tenancy. The interviews will be predominantly held with those who have failed to manage their rent accounts satisfactorily. The aim of the review will be to extend the introductory tenancies and work with the tenants to sustain their tenancy and hopefully convert it to a secure tenancy.
- We have now appointed to the two remaining full time Housing Officer posts and both are now in post.

2.5. Sheltered Housing

- 2.5.1. The Support Team have continued to provide intensive support to individual tenants.
- 2.5.2. Support coordinators have worked with over 200 tenants providing intensive support to the most vulnerable in Sheltered Housing. Support coordinators have started to do assessments for people applying to live in Sheltered accommodation. Since 15th January 2014, staff have carried out 41 assessments and explained the benefits of Sheltered Housing. This has enabled the eventual move into sheltered housing to be a smooth process.
- 2.5.3. The number of well-being checks has decreased which is on target as specified in the contract with Supporting People. Staff

are revisiting tenants to reinforce how the new system is working to provide a more flexible and intensive service.

- 2.5.4. Works to the staff office base at Watkins House have now been completed. New telephony, IT and a follow me printer are currently being installed. The office has been furnished and staff are expected to be using the premises by the end of June.
- 2.5.5. IT roll out of staff devices was due to commence from 7th April. This is currently happening with 50% of the staff in possession of new laptops which are being tested for connectivity issues. A range of measures are in place to train all staff in use of new equipment and to upskill those who need help with Outlook and Word.
- 2.5.6. Resident activities have now been moved to Watkins House, as this is more central for tenants, numbers have also increased.
- 2.5.7. There will be a total of five trips arranged for residents this summer
- 2.5.8. Exercise classes will start during the second week of July in the sheltered schemes; this will be piloted across 4 schemes.

2.6. Estate Services

- 2.6.1. 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. Whilst the recruitment process was being undertaken, it was decided that the programme for the 1st Round 2014 should continue with Estate Services. By way of further realignment, it was agreed that the presence of a Contract Surveyor was not needed on the inspections.

This makes sense because:

- A) The level of repairs picked up during estate inspections were generally in the knowledge and of a level that could be undertaken by the Project Manager, Estate Services. Any repairs that were of a complex nature are referred to the Contract Surveyor for further action.
 - B) There would be a consistency of inspection across the borough.
- 2.6.2. As at 18 June 2014, 2/3rds of inspections have been completed with 1/3rd of post inspections already completed. All repairs are now 100% post inspected and outstanding items followed up separately and only marked off once complete. The entire programme is on time and within reasonable expenditure on every estate.

2.6.3. The last report advised that work had commenced to develop this years' Minor Estate Improvements projects programme. A total of 22 projects are in the pipeline for this year of which 15 have already been agreed to process. We envisage additional schemes will be considered as Estate Action Plans are developed by Housing Officers. The MEI programme will be delivered on time and within budget again.

2.7. Garage Update

Garages Review

2.7.1. We have held meetings with tenants and residents in two of the pilot areas listed for garage demolition, Arrowhead and Augustine Road Garages.

2.7.2. The meetings have been well attended with ward councillors present. A number of good suggestions came out of both meetings. The feasibility of the suggestions made will be discussed with the relevant colleagues in order to confirm with the tenants and residents as soon as possible.

2.8. Resident Involvement and Activities

2.8.1. **Harrow Estates in Bloom** – The Resident Involvement Team (RIT) has received a record 27 entries for this year's competition, which include the new categories of Best Front Garden and Best Young Gardener. This year there will be more emphasis on community, sustainability and biodiversity. The Resident Involvement Team, in collaboration with the Public Health team and our four contract partners, has secured sponsorship for the five categories:

- Best sheltered accommodation communal garden
- Best estate communal garden
- Best front garden
- Best container / Hanging basket display
- Best young gardeners (16 or under)

2.8.2. **Noticeboard Audit** – A work order has been raised to replace locks to all estate noticeboards without keys. This work, once completed, will ensure that estates that currently do not have an active Tenants' & Residents Association (TRA), or Estate Representative, will still receive updates and information from the Resident Involvement Team.

2.8.3. **Estate Representatives** – The Resident Involvement Team (RIT) have recruited new representatives at Cottesmore Estate, Harley Court, and Millman Close. At Stonegrove Estate in Edgware, following an Estate Representative recruitment drive, there were four applicants to become estate reps. The RIT will now organise a resident meeting, to try to establish a TRA for the estate.

2.8.4. **Weald Village Pocket Park** – 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 Harrow Arts Centre grant funding for an art project for the youth club.

2.8.5. **New TRAs'** – New TRAs' have been established at Brookside Estate, Glebe Estate, and Honeybun Estate, with meetings arranged for Cowan Avenue/Northolt Road and Stonegrove Estate.

2.8.6. **Scrutiny Panel update** – The panel are currently drafting their latest report on Estate Inspections for submission to the panel critical friend. Once completed and signed off the report recommendations will be presented to TLRCF.

2.9. Leasehold Support Group

2.9.1. The next meeting of the LSG is due to take place on 23rd June 2014 and will be the AGM.

2.10. Tenants', Leaseholders' and Residents' Consultative Forum (TLRCF)

2.10.1. The Forum currently meets four times (quarterly meetings) in the municipal year and is based in meeting rooms within Civic Centre 1. Attendance has varied over time with members having differing preferences for meeting times. As a result of this it was agreed to alternate meetings between evenings and afternoons. In pursuing the ethos of "getting closer to the customer" and the context of consultation and engagement going forward, now is an ideal opportunity to review the nature of the Forum and raise its' profile in the Borough. Members are requested to make comment on how they would like to see the

Forum operate in the future and consider the proposal to hold the Forums at various locations including estates across the borough throughout the year.

2.11. Report Back from Resident Involvement Activities

2.11.1 Estates Services Steering Group (ESSG)

The next meeting of the ESSG will take place on the 28th July 2014.

2.11.2 Value for Money Group

The last meeting of the group took place on the 17th June 2014 when the group received reports on Asset Management, Housing Needs, Regeneration and Communications.

3.0. Financial Implications

- 3.1 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.

4.0 Risk Management Implications

- 4.1 There are no risk implications arising from this information report. The Housing Risk Register includes risks associated with the failure to utilise RTB receipts.

5.0 Equalities Implications

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

6.0 Corporate Priorities

- 6.1 The Council's vision:

Working Together to Make a Difference for Harrow

The work of the Resident Services team meets the administration's priorities as follows.

- **Making a difference for the vulnerable**
To support and prevent financial hardship of tenants and leaseholders

To maintain authorised secure tenancy occupation of social housing stock in Harrow

- **Making a difference for communities**
Managing the appearance of our estates

To provide quality value for money services to tenants and leaseholders

Develop tenant insight and customer profiling to drive forward a tailored service

To improve the customer satisfaction rate of tenants and leaseholders experiencing Anti-Social Behaviour.
- **Making a difference for local businesses**
To work closely with Homes for Harrow to input into the development process and explore the management of other forms of tenure.

Section 3 – Statutory Officer Clearance

Name: Dave Roberts	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Chief Financial Officer
Date: 20 th June 2014		

Ward Councillors notified:	No
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Section 4 - 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