

Voids, allocations and lettings

- Last year we let a total of 268 council properties.
- We reduced the average time it takes us to relet a property from 33 days to 23 days, making Harrow one of the top performers in London. This is a huge improvement and means that we are maximising the use of our stock, by providing homes for people in the shortest time possible. Our high performance in void turnaround has led to some tenants informing us that not enough time is being allowed for them to move into their new home. We have reduced this year's target to 27 days, after reviewing our performance and listening to customer feedback.

Rents

- We collected £20.6 million in rent last year. This is 97.4% of all the rent owed to us, which is an improvement on the previous year (96.6% in 2006/7). This year we have a newly structured rent team, and we plan to increase rent collection to 98.5%.
 - Last year we reduced the proportion of tenants with more than 7 weeks' rent arrears from 7.39% to 7.15%. Our target for 2008-09 is to further reduce this to 6%.
 - This year we will continue with the Rent First! campaign and ensure that we maximise the use of our debt prevention service, to assist people who are having problems paying rent.



Tenancy management

- Last year we served a total of 508 Notices Seeking Possession to tenants in rent arrears, and we evicted 13 tenants due to high levels of debt. This is higher than we expected, but reflects catch up on our overall arrears performance in previous years.
- This year, our new arrears prevention team will focus on ensuring that all residents who are experiencing difficulty in paying rent receive the required welfare and debt prevention support. They will also ensure that persistent non-payers are swiftly taken to court and evicted.
- Last year we introduced new tenancy conditions to all secure tenants.
- This year we will revise both the tenant and lessee handbooks.
- Last year we continued to follow the principals of the Respect Agenda, and we are already seeing the benefits of a revised case management system for dealing with anti-social behaviour (ASB) on housing estates.
- We evicted one person for ASB last year. We also had 4 incidents of racial harassment reported to us, all of which were fully investigated. This year we will continue to monitor and promptly investigate all race hate crimes. In addition, our new anti-social behaviour (ASB) team will focus on serious cases of ASB, neighbour dispute and domestic violence. Working with the police and the Safer Neighbourhood Team, they will ensure that our tenancy agreement is fully enforced against perpetrators of ASB.

Estate management

- In 2007-08 we completed around 30 projects to make improvements to our estates, in consultation with individual Tenants and Residents Associations. These range from installing new lighting, gates, doors, fencing and other security measures, as well as providing disabled parking bays, improving parking controls and better access.



New security door at Shaftesbury Circle



Stonegrove Estate fencing

Revamp of Grange Farm play area

Thanks to funding from the Raebarn House Development of £10,000, new equipment for older children was installed in the play area and pathways were resurfaced. Much to the delight of the residents!

"We have waited ten years for this to happen".

"You have made us so happy".

"My child looks out of the window and wants to play on OUR play area".

"This area helps me to amuse myself with basketball, meet other friends and make new ones".

"The play area is always in full swing with younger kids and parents in the inner play section with older children".



- Last year we also completed a review of our caretaking service. This year we will be consulting with residents on improvements for caretaking and other estate services.

- As part of the estate services improvement project, we will be market testing the grounds maintenance service to achieve an improved service for residents, and better value for money. In addition to improved caretaking services, this project could incorporate plans for parking controls and a new cleaning service for council estates.

Repairs

- In July 2007 there was a major change in the way we deliver repairs to council homes, with the start of our new partnership contract with Kier Building Maintenance.
- Telephone surveys from Kier show that 99.6% of residents were satisfied with repair work carried out to their property.
- Over 20,000 repair orders were placed during the year, 60% of which were classed as emergency or urgent. We'd like to reduce the proportion of urgent repairs raised to 45% by the end of 2008-09, to free up money to carry out more routine maintenance.
- We completed 92% of urgent repairs within government time limits. We want to increase this to 97.5% in the coming year.
- We completed non-urgent repairs within an average of 16 days, and our target is to reduce this to 10 days. Following consultation with tenants through Homing In, from April 2008 we revised our priority times for repairs to council homes and brought them in line with government guidelines. Our monthly monitoring for this year shows that we are already exceeding our 2008-09 target.
- Last year we kept 63% of all appointments made. A key priority for us this year is to improve on this figure, and we have set ourselves a target of 90%.
- This year we're installing repairs diagnostic software to reduce administration and improve efficiency, by helping to diagnose a repair at the first point of customer contact.

Decent Homes and planned maintenance

- Kier Building Maintenance took over the contract for Decent Homes works in October 2007. During 2007-08, we reduced the number of non-decent council properties from 3680 to 2323, which is a reduction of nearly 37%.
- Last year we installed:
 - 672 new kitchens
 - 566 new bathrooms
 - 160 new central heating systems
 - 412 new windows and doors.
- This year, we will continue to work with Kier. We plan to complete the Decent Homes programme by April 2009, which is one year ahead of the target set by central government.

Mrs Callan from Eastcote Lane Estate in her newly refurbished kitchen by Kier "...The workers were the best - clean and tidy and really nice people. They were always the same men too, which was good. I'm more than happy with my new kitchen and bathroom - they're absolutely marvellous!"



Regeneration of Mill Farm Close

- Last year we completed an options appraisal for the regeneration of Mill Farm Close. Following consultation with residents, Cabinet approved that we progress with redevelopment proposals outlined in the Tribal options appraisal report. This enabled us to progress the redevelopment of the estate by inviting Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to submit proposals for assessment.
- In March 2008 a resident steering group was setup for consultation and training with the Independent Tenant Advisor, to go through the expressions of interest. The initial 6 expressions of interest have been shortlisted to 4 RSLs, who have been invited to submit more detailed proposals.
- An estate event will be held on 12 July, which will enable residents to see the proposals from 4 RSLs and provide feedback. A report is to go to Cabinet in October 2008 with the chosen RSL for approval. A ballot will then be held in April 2009, and if there is a majority vote, work will commence to finalise the project. We aim to transfer Mill Farm Close to the successful RSL before March 2010.

Tenant and leaseholder participation

- Last year we appointed First Call to work with residents to explore the 'Right to Manage' option. Our pre-feasibility work is near completion and by July 2008, we will have a better understanding of which parts of the borough will benefit from formal feasibility.
- Last year we helped to setup Grove Estate Residents Association. We also helped set up Milton Road Residents Association, which unfortunately folded not long afterwards. We do however continue to recognise block representatives. Stonegrove Estate TRA also folded but an Estate Representative was voted in in March 2008 to represent the residents on the estate.
- This year, our newly structured resident participation team will focus on the following key areas:



Lisa and Heena from Grove Estate RA

- Supporting residents in the creation of new residents associations and assisting with established ones.
- Supporting residents associations to become more involved in the day-to-day delivery of services to their areas and estates; this includes involving residents in major improvement projects to housing estates.

What else is in store for 2008-09?

Benefits of a restructure - during 2007-08, we had a thorough review of our housing management service. We considered feedback from complaints, satisfaction surveys and comparison with other housing organisations, and in April 2008 we put in place a new structure for Resident Services. These changes include the creation of two anti social behaviour officers, a dedicated arrears prevention team and maintaining the traditional patch based housing officer as a main point of contact for residents. This year will be the start of real improvements to all aspects of our housing management service.

Improved customer contact - Resident Services is changing a number of practices in order to improve access to staff and services. These primarily concern duty arrangements and telephone answering, whereby staff have specific duty days, and telephone answering machines will no longer be used. We will also have appointment systems for ASB and arrears prevention work.

Website improvements - we have recently made additions to the Harrow Council website, which allows tenants to find the contact details of their housing officer by typing in their address. During the course of this year we will develop our website further to make it more interactive.

Electronic management system - later this year we will be implementing new management systems to ensure that enquiries and service requests are dealt with swiftly, consistently and professionally. All correspondence, forms and other information will be electronically managed and processed to agreed service timescales, resulting in a more efficient customer focussed service. Our electronic management system will take effect from September 2008.

Standards for customer care - this year there will also be a corporate review of customer care standards, and Housing Services will play a key part in consulting on and devising these standards.

Tenant satisfaction survey 2008-09 - this summer we will commission a research company to carry out a satisfaction survey to a random sample of our tenants. The questionnaire will cover key aspects of housing management, and the results will allow us to see what we're doing well, where we need to improve, and help us to develop and implement an action plan. This survey will be carried out every two years, and it will also allow us to compare tenants' views with other local authorities.