

Meeting:	Tenants' & Leaseholders' Consultative Forum
Date:	22 nd July 2008
Subject:	Estate Services
Responsible Officer:	Divisional Director of Housing – Gwyneth Allen
Portfolio Holder:	Portfolio Holder for Adults & Housing - Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane
Exempt:	No
Enclosures:	None

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report sets out proposals and actions to improve the provision of estate services to Council housing estates

Recommendations:

TLCF is requested to agree to consulting on the options shown under paragraph 2.4 (main options)

TLCF is requested to note short term improvements to service delivery under paragraph 3:1

Reason: (For recommendation)

The council is required to consult on any proposed changes to its services.

Section 2 – Report

2:1 Background

2:1:1 Estate services comprise the following:

Caretaker Services
Grounds Maintenance Services
Building Cleaning (internal common parts)
Parking Controls

2:1:2 Estate services are provided through directly employed teams for caretaking within the housing management (residents' services team). Grounds Maintenance is provided through a Service Level Agreement with the Council's Public Realm Team. Both building cleaning & parking controls are provided on an ad hoc basis through the caretaker service and for parking through a private company named BTP.

2:1:3 In October 2007 a report was published:

A review of the caretaker service – undertaken independently by Brent Housing Partnership.

2.1.4 Whilst this report recommended a number of short term improvements to both services it also highlighted the need to ensure value for money and indicated that service improvements are necessary. Action plans have been produced as a result of the reports.

2:1:5 In respect of building cleaning there are only ad hoc arrangements, as this service is not currently provided. Residents are expected (through their tenancy agreements) to clean the internal parts to buildings.

2:1:6 Car parking controls are provided through a private company (BTP). This arrangement cannot be expanded to cover all housing estates. If the service is to be extended to a new supplier there is a need to procure this competitively and the service would need to be self-financing.

2:1:7 In addition to the report mentioned above, there is sufficient anecdotal evidence to determine that existing services are not performing satisfactorily. There is a need to ensure short-term improvements are put in place immediately and to consult residents on proposals for a remodelled service.

2:2 Current situation

2:2:1 In response to the report mentioned above residents' services has put in place the following improvements to ensure that in the short term services are visibly improved to residents:

a) Building cleaning:

An additional £65,000 for the 08/09 financial year has been made available to undertake a deep cleaning program for the internal areas of all our council blocks. The hygienic condition of buildings is variable however all are in urgent need of cleansing. The work will be carried out by our caretaker

service operatives and the work will be approached through prioritising “worst first” blocks. It is planned that the cleaning program will begin at the end of July and continues throughout the financial year. Service charges relating to this aspect of the service will not be recharged to tenants or leaseholders. Funds are available through savings within the housing revenue budget and will be supplemented through the contingency.

b) Grounds maintenance

Recent meetings with the Public Realm Team have focussed on the slow start to the grounds maintenance service and an improvement plan has been agreed to be fully operational by the end of July 2008:

All schedules will be published and available to all TRAs and published on notice boards on housing estates/blocks,
A mechanism for deducting payments for non-service delivery has been introduced,
Closer monitoring of service delivery through estate services supervisors will be regular and frequent.

c) Caretaker Service

Caretaker staff have recently provided a number of improvement suggestions which are now being implemented;

Publication of daily/weekly caretaker visits and tasks to housing estates to be shown on estate sign boards and notified to TRAs,
Direct contact with TRAs on a weekly basis
Introduction of deep cleaning service
Higher level of visibility of caretaking staff when on estates
Complaint and issues inbox to be set up and immediately communicated to caretakers.

d) Car Parking Controls

No short-term improvements (see longer term options)

2.3 Why a change is needed

2.3:1 Outcome of caretaker review

2:3:2 In February 2004 the audit commission produced its inspection findings rating Harrow as 2 star service with good prospects for improvement. The report listed a number of recommendations and notably in respect of the caretaking service:

“A long term improvement plan should be developed for the caretaking service in consultation with departments and stakeholders that impact on the service”¹

2.3.3 In respect of the grounds maintenance service the report stated

¹ Audit Commission Housing Service Inspection February 2004

- *Inconsistency in the quality of the grounds maintenance service*
- *The grounds maintenance service does not provide good value for money²*

2.3.4 In September 2007 a review of the caretaker service was conducted independently by Brent Housing Partnership, their work was supported by Kensington & Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation (TMO)

The objective of the review was to:

“This review will be limited to a basic assessment to establish whether Harrow’s Caretaking Service is an efficient and effective service, what, if anything, can be done to improve services to residents, and whether the service provides good value for money”³.

2.3.5 The review set out a number of recommendations both in the short, medium and longer term. The main finding of the report identified that the service did not provide value for money and there was a need to market test the service. In support of this the Audit Commission requires Landlords to market test their services, specifically the Key Lines of Enquiry will test the following: -

‘Has recently reviewed its procurement arrangements and who is best to deliver services, particularly for significant areas of expenditure. It has evaluated these and takes an approach which is the most cost effective and which provides high quality services in line with customer preferences’.

2.4 Main options

2.4.1 There is now a need to consult with residents and other stakeholders on how best to provide the full range of estate services delivered by the Housing service in the medium to longer term. This report seeks the endorsement of TLCF to consult on the following options and following this, report to TLCF within the current financial year providing specific recommendations having completed consultation:

2.4.2 Improve the existing services retaining in house provision of the service;

Currently the service does not fully cover the full scope of estate services namely internal cleaning. Retaining the service in house with improvements may require the ending of the service level agreement with the Public Realm Service and including grounds maintenance within an enhanced caretaker service. The service would include grounds maintenance, cleaning, and caretaker duties. A view on how to undertake parking control would need to be developed

2.4.3 Seeking an alternative contractor.

² Audit Commission Housing Service Inspection February 2004

³ Review of Harrow’s caretaking Service October 2007 – Brent Housing Partnership

This option would require formally tendering the complete service to a contractor within a formal contractual arrangement. It would require full market testing and adequate specification. It could involve the transfer of a number of council employees to the successful contractor. Monitoring and payments would be on performance and delivery of the service.

2.4.4 Maintaining “as is” arrangements with more effective monitoring and enforcement

This option would be least disruptive and work has already begun on improving the service to residents. It does not however allow facility to expand to deliver a full cleaning service necessary to cleanse buildings on a daily basis. Additional funds would need to be allocated from the HRA to purchase this service.

2.5 Other options considered

Options to be considered are set out in paragraph 2.4. Any other options suggested during the consultation period will be considered..

2.6 Implications of the Recommendation

2.6.1 Resources, costs and risks

Consultation can be undertaken within existing resources, at this juncture there are no risks to the service.

Failure to agree the recommendation may delay longer-term improvements to the service. The identified risk is continued dissatisfaction of the service and achieving better value for money.

2.7 Financial Implications

2.7.1 Set out the financial implications of the proposed decision, in particular:

The budget cost for estate services in 2008/9 is:

Grounds maintenance £430,000
Caretaking £631,181

2.8 Performance Issues

BV74 Overall satisfaction with landlord
BV74b Overall satisfaction with landlord (BME residents)

Both the above BVPI are at below lower quartile for CPA purposes but at middle quartile when reviewed through the tenant’s satisfaction survey undertaken in 2006 and compared London wide. Surveys are undertaken every two years and a further survey will be undertaken in 2008.

2.9 Risk Management Implications

All risks are set out in the report.

Risk included on Directorate risk register? No

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name: Donna Edwards	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the* Chief Financial Officer
Date: 4 July 2008.....		
Name: Paresh Mehta	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the* Monitoring Officer
Date: ...7.July 2008.....		

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: William Manning. Service Manager, Resident Services, 020 8424 1473

William.manning@harrow.gov.uk

Background Papers:

Caretaker Review October 2007

Audit Commission Key Lines of Enquiry (Housing Management & Estate Services)

If appropriate, does the report include the following considerations?

1.	Consultation	YES
2.	Corporate Priorities	YES