

Housing performance 2008-09 and plans for 2009-10

Voids, allocations and lettings

- Last year we let a total of 264 properties.
- The average time it took us to relet a property was 26.6 days, against a target of 27 days. We are still one of the top performers in London and this means that we are maximising the use of our stock, by providing homes for people promptly.
- 20 households moved into smaller accommodation using the underoccupier scheme and received an average assistance of £3230, which included removal fees.

Tenancy management Anti social behaviour (ASB)

During the year :

- 12 Notices seeking possession were served.
- 3 Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABC) were made. An ABC is a written agreement made between a person causing ASB and their local authority, Youth Inclusion Support Panel, landlord or the police.

Rents

- The average rent for 2008-09 was £81.55.
- 70% of tenants are satisfied that the rent for their property represents good value for money.
- We collected £21 million in rent last year. This is 96.17% of all rent owed to us.
- We reduced the proportion of tenants with more than 7 weeks' rent arrears from 7.15% to 7.09%.
- During last year we served a total of 456 Notices Seeking Possession to tenants in rent arrears and we evicted 12 tenants due to high levels of debt.
- The new arrears prevention team focussed on ensuring that all tenants who experienced difficulty in paying rent received the required welfare and debt prevention support. Last year 84 tenants were referred to Money Advice. The total debt of these cases was £121,000.
- 71% of tenants are satisfied with the advice they receive on rent payments.

Decent homes and planned maintenance

- Last year we:
 - installed 1311 kitchens
 - installed 793 bathrooms
 - installed 462 heating systems
 - rewired 260 properties
 - replaced 179 WCs
 - replaced windows to 47 homes
- The decent home standard was achieved in 1408 homes
- We also :
 - replaced the boilers at 4 sheltered housing blocks
 - refurbished / replaced lifts at 2 sheltered housing blocks
 - completed works on 'means of escape' at 6 sheltered housing blocks
 - updated aerial systems at 5 sheltered housing blocks
- 97.12% of homes with gas received gas servicing certificates (CP12s)
- Updated Stock condition survey. This will allow us to programme all future works required.

Repairs

- Kier continue to deliver the repairs service to council homes.
- 92% of tenants were satisfied with work carried out to their property according to telephone surveys carried out by Kier.
- 88% repairs were completed at the first visit.
- 97% of urgent repairs were completed within government timelimits (repairs covered under Right to Repair) an improvement of 5% from the previous year.
- The tenant satisfaction survey carried out in Sept – Nov 2008 indicated that overall satisfaction with the repairs service had decreased but when tenants who had repairs completed within the last year were asked to comment on different aspects of the repairs service the results were more positive by rating the following as good:
 - Attitude of workers – 80%
 - Keeping dirt and mess to a minimum – 75%
 - Overall quality of work – 68%
 - Speed with which the repair was completed – 70%
 - Being told when workers would call – 66%
 - Time taken before work started – 60%
- Housing contributed to a 'Lean Thinking' process mapping for repairs – this project is looking at the whole process starting with when a tenant reports a repair through to completion of the work. The objective is to identify key issues causing weaknesses and work to determine tactical fix to make the process as smooth as possible with as few links in the chain and less prone to bottlenecks and delays. This project is ongoing.

Electronic management system

A new electronic management system was introduced in November 2008. All correspondence, forms and other information are electronically managed and processed to agreed service timetables. This has resulted in a more efficient customer focussed service, ensuring that enquiries and service requests are dealt with swiftly, consistently and professionally.

Tenant Satisfaction Survey

The survey took place in September – November 2008 – a National Indicator requirement. An action planning workshop used the results of the survey to identify and prioritise a number of actions needed to put in place. These have been put in the Housing Service Improvement Plan. The main priorities identified were: repairs, customer care and communication / consultation.

Estate Management

- 58 estate inspections took place with staff from Estate Services, Grounds Maintenance, Minor Works, Kier. Local Councillors and Tenant representatives are always invited.
- 73% of tenants are satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live.
- Minor Estate Improvements last year included:
 - Metal fencing installed to the rear of Cornell House and Alma Court to combat ASB and increase security for our elderly residents at both sheltered accommodation blocks.
 - Installed metal barrier gates at Westbere Drive and The Middleway garage areas to reduce fly tipping. Both areas have benefited with cleaner sites and less ASB.
 - Installed a fence at Holsworth Close to combat ASB caused by youths gathering.
- Environmental Estate Improvements last year included:
 - Wooden fencing installed to the rear of Durrant Court to combat ASB and increase security for our elderly residents. These additional security measures should help reassure the residents.
 - Resurfacing at Chenduit Way to increase parking on the estate.
- Successfully introduced a Rapid Response team to deal with emergency caretaking and fly tipping .

Resident involvement

- There are nine active Tenant and Resident Associations in Harrow. One soon to be established.
- Over 50% of tenants are represented by an association.
- The Leaseholder Support group meets quarterly.
- An Estate Services Steering group has been formed and held one meeting last year. The group will meet quarterly and will be consulted on improvements to estate services.
- Work has taken place with tenants in sheltered housing to start up their own association.
- Tenant representatives undertook training in housing finance, committee skills, first aid and other young people specific topics.
- A representative of Harrow Federation of Tenants' and Leaseholders' Associations is on the editorial board of the housing newsletter – Homing In.

Regeneration of Mill Farm Close

- Catalyst Housing Group were appointed as the preferred Registered Social Landlord partner to take on the improvement and regeneration of Mill Farm Close following a competitive selection carried out with residents in April - August 2008.
- Since January 2009 residents, the Council and Catalyst and their architects have been developing the plans for the estate including the design, how it will be managed in the future and possible community development initiatives. The current plans propose to demolish all the flats in Mill Farm Close and replace with new build housing to provide 86 replacement social rented homes of a different mix to include some larger family homes and around 79 other new homes for sale.
- A formal Offer document has been prepared after extensive consultation with residents and will be sent out in July 2009. A formal ballot of tenants and leaseholders will then take place in September 2009. The transfer of Mill Farm Close to Catalyst can only take place if the majority of secure tenants who vote in a secret ballot are in favour. Final approval would be given by of the Secretary of State.

Private sector housing / Affordable housing

- 457 empty homes were brought back into use.
- The number of private sector homes that were vacant for more than six months reduced by 37 to 447.
- Delivered 271 affordable homes, against a target of 219, through working with housing associations.

Staff Achievements

Four members of staff received CREATE (the council's values) awards. Two were winners under the categories Respect and Actively 'One Council' and two were runners up in the Engaged Communication and Taking Responsibility categories.

Leasehold Services

- The Leasehold Services team manage 1161 properties.
- In 2008-09 three properties were sold under the Right to Buy scheme.

Housing Needs

- The Homelessness Strategy was reviewed.
- At year end there were a total of 4261 households on the Housing Register, made up of 3673 homeseekers and 588 tenants (council and housing association).
- A temporary accommodation current reduction plan was developed and is on track to meet the CLGs 2010 target for temporary accommodation one year early.
- 955 cases were dealt with where positive action was taken to prevent or relieve homelessness.
- An overcrowding/underoccupiers action plan has been developed. Based on progress to date Harrow has been awarded £100k Pathfinder Grant.
- As at 31 March 2009 there were no families with children in B&B over six weeks and no 16/17 year olds in B&B.

Customer service

- The Council has introduced a set of customer care standards covering telephone calls, letters, faxes and emails, visits, requests for a service and complaints and compliments. The standards have been put in place to tell customers what level of service they can expect when they contact the Council. It also tells them what is expected from staff and what customers can do if things go wrong. Starting in April these standards will be monitored and reported on.
- Customer care training has been put in place for all housing staff. Phase one, for half of the staff, ran from February to June 2009. Phase two starts in September. The training consists of five modules covering: relationship building, communicating positively, getting the message across and dealing with difficult customers.

What else is in store for 2009-10. We will:

- Complete the Decent Home programme of works.
- Work with a local housing association to develop more extra care housing.
- Refresh the Older People's Housing review action plan.
- Progress outcomes of options appraisal of sheltered housing.
- Review the housing allocations scheme to ensure fair and balanced access between competing groups of applicants.
- Revise and issue Handbooks for Tenants and Lessees.
- Review and revise estate service provision.
- Review private sector renewal strategy.