

Committee:	Tenants' and Leaseholders' Consultative Forum
Date:	Tuesday 10 November 2009
Subject:	INFORMATION REPORT – Update by the Interim Divisional Director of Housing Services
Responsible Officer:	Lynne Pennington - Interim Divisional Director of Housing
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane - Portfolio Holder for Adults and Housing Services
Exempt:	No
Enclosures:	None

## Section 1 – Summary

1.1 This report sets out a range of information items that the Divisional Director would like to bring to the attention of the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Consultative Forum.

FOR INFORMATION

## Section 2 – Report

### 2.0 Recommendation:

2.1 The forum is asked to note the contents of this report.

### **3.0 Reason (For recommendation)**

3.1 The report contains a number of different pieces of information each of which would not warrant a report in its own right but are sufficiently important to bring to the attention of TLCF.

### **4.0 Report**

#### **4.1 Harrow Federation of Tenants and Residents Association**

The Portfolio Holder for Adults and Housing, and other members of the housing senior management team attended the last HFTRA meeting. The Director gave a verbal update on some of the issues reported further upon in this Director's report.

In addition to reporting on those matters referred to below, there were two matters that the Director agreed to look into and respond. Firstly the issue about dogs in council housing was discussed and clarification was sought on recent publicity with regard to the Kier contract.

The team will be reporting back to the next HFTRA that providing dogs are cared for, are clearly not dangerous and kept safely in the house or in secure gardens or on leads then there is no reason why tenants of council houses cannot own dogs.

The Director, as requested sent a note confirming the position with regard to the Kier contract. Since then however a member of TLCF and the LSG has submitted a series of questions and these are being looked into.

#### **4.2 Leaseholder Support Group**

The Divisional Director attended the last Leaseholder Support Group and listened to a very wide-ranging set of concerns and questions from leaseholders. She will ensure that a formal response to all the enquiries is presented to the next Leaseholder Support Group.

In the meantime however there have been a number of matters to bring to the attention of TLCF.

A Leaseholder Open day was held which was very well attended with a range of information stands. The event was professionally run and thanks and acknowledgement need to go to the residents who volunteered to make the event such a success.

An interim Leaseholder Service Manager is to be recruited pending the appointment of a permanent post. A verbal progress report will be made at

TLCF; in the meantime, the Chair of the LSG, the Divisional Director and the Service Manager for Resident Services are involved in the interview process.

### **4.3 Electricity**

Partly in response to a question put to TLCF from J. D. Ratcliff, from the HWTRA, and partly because the Divisional Director intended to provide some feedback to TLCF on the electricity issue, this item is included in the Director's report.

The Corporate Director of Housing received a report indicating major problems in billing and recharging electricity to leaseholders. The report suggested that the HRA may also be affected by these problems. The Divisional Director of Housing attended the Leaseholder Support Group to report that internal audit will be conducting an inquiry into the report in November 2009. Following attendance at the LSG and in response to a direct request from the LSG, the Corporate Director wrote to the LSG advising them that the Chief Executive was aware of the proposed audit and confirmed that Harrow was treating the report very seriously and would act upon its findings.

### **4.4 Recruiting Permanent Management Team**

Tribal; an executive recruitment agency, has been appointed to manage the recruitment to four new members of the housing senior management team. The posts of Divisional Director of Housing and Service Managers for Residents Services; Asset Management; and Strategy and Partnerships have all been advertised in the professional housing journal of the Chartered Institute of Housing on Friday 16<sup>th</sup> October 2009.

Tribal are managing the process and it is hoped that final interviews for the Divisional Director post will take place week commencing 30<sup>th</sup> November 2009. If this is successful, we hope that he or she will then be involved in the final selection of the three managers between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> December 2009.

AT TLCF, the Divisional Director will clarify the format that the final selection process will take and will discuss the possibility of TLCF members being involved in the process. It is likely that the final selection interview for the Divisional Director will be on the 2<sup>nd</sup> December, so can interested TLCF members please keep this diary date free.

Christmas will make availability difficult, but if TLCF members would also be interested in being involved in the Manager interviews, please keep as much of the 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>, December 2009 free as possible.

The Interim Divisional Director will provide a verbal update at TLCF and answer any questions that TLCF members may have.

## **4.5 Service Improvement Review**

Housing Quality Network are undertaking a comprehensive service improvement review of the housing landlord service. There are a team of ten professionals who will be looking at every aspect of the service and helping staff to produce a comprehensive improvement plan. The plan will have two main functions; one to identify the priorities for action for the new permanent management team; and the second will be to help the landlord service understand what they need to do to prepare for future regulatory inspections of the service.

The process involves mystery shopping, focus groups, a desktop review of important documents and a range of one to one interviews. They are on site from 16<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> November and the improvement plan will be produced before Christmas. HFTRA Chair has been invited to attend the feedback session from HQN at the end of November.

## **4.6 Staff Conference**

On the 16<sup>th</sup> September 2009, housing staff attended a staff conference. The focus of the conference was customer care and this too was attended by the HFTRA Chair

The aim of the conference was to brief staff on where the department is up to on key priorities; create space to consider good practice and thank staff for their efforts. The conference also highlighted where we need to do better and the event provided some space away from the front line to think about what our customers really want from the service.

A second conference is being planned for 14<sup>th</sup> January. This will be an occasion to share the service improvement plan mentioned above with all staff and it will hopefully be an opportunity for them to meet some of the new permanent members of the management team.

Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane chaired the event, which was also attended by the Corporate Director of Adults and Housing.

## **4.7 Gas Servicing**

As TLCF will be aware, gaining access to provide gas servicing has been a problem. Since the last TLCF the resident services team have been engaged in serving warrants to gain access.

This has significantly improved the number of homes that are now safe and the process has also identified some issues which may have been the reason for not wanting officers to visit, sub – letting for example.

The process also identified some vulnerable people, who were nervous to allow access, but these issues have been resolved and at least those tenants are safe.

At the time of writing this report the next edition of Homing In is being printed and this includes a reminder to all tenants of the importance of gas servicing and appealing to them to allow officers access.

TLCF will be presented with the latest figures verbally at the meeting.

#### **4.8 Mill Farm Regeneration Proposal update**

TLCF has previously received updated on the regeneration proposals for the Mill Farm estate. Catalyst Communities Housing Association (CCHA) was unanimously selected by residents and the Council as our preferred partner to take forward the proposals in October 2008. Since then CCHA has worked closely with residents and the Council to develop detailed proposals for the estate. There have been lots of meetings where residents have got involved in designing the proposed new homes and agreeing how they want the estate to be managed in the future.

At the end of this process tenants and leaseholders were balloted on whether they wanted the estate to transfer to CCHA. The ballot closed on the 2 October and the results were announced by the Chair of the Resident Steering Group, Jacky Fineman on the 5 October 2009. The results are as follows: 82% of tenants voted and 88% voted in favour of the proposals, 56% of leaseholders voted and 100% were in favour. This is an overwhelming vote for the proposals to proceed. I would like to take this opportunity formally to thank all the residents who took the time and effort to get involved and work with us on what are exciting plans for the estate.

CCHA will be submitting a planning application for the redevelopment of the estate on 21 October 2009 and the intention is to transfer the estate to them by the end of March 2010 subject to consent from the Secretary of State. Work on building the new homes should then begin in early Summer 2010 with the first tenants being rehoused in early Autumn 2011.

#### **5.0 ASB**

Consultation has started with staff to see if the anti social behaviour service could be improved by transferring the staff currently providing this service within housing transferring to work with the corporate team also involved in this work.

The Service Manager for Residents Services will provide an update about this at TLCF

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on behalf of the\*  
Chief Financial Officer

Date: 26 October 2009

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