

Meeting:	Tenants' and Leaseholders' Consultative Forum
Date:	Tuesday 10 November 2009
Subject:	Rechargeable Repairs Policy
Responsible Officer:	Lynne Pennington, Interim Divisional Director Housing Services
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane - Portfolio Holder for Adults & Housing.
Exempt:	No
Enclosures:	Recharge Repairs Policy

## Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report sets out the need for the council to change the culture of tenants, leaseholders and their visitors not taking responsibility for the increased level of damage caused to the housing stock and surroundings areas.

### **Recommendations:**

The policy to be agreed and implemented.

### **Reason:**

(a) To provide a service that gives value for money.

(b) This policy will increase income for the council and improve the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) balance.

(c) The policy will assist and support the enforcement of the terms of the tenancy and lease agreements.

## **Section 2 – Report**

### **Introduction**

- 2.1 For some time tenants and leaseholders have had the rechargeable term included in their tenancy and lease agreements but a policy has not been created and implemented. Officers are attempting to negotiate the costs of rechargeable repairs with tenants and leaseholders without this policy to date. There is a noticeable increase in damage to the housing stock and surrounding areas which is calling for this policy to be implemented as early as possible.
- 2.2 A number of officers from Housing Services, the Property Management team and Access Harrow have contributed to this policy to ensure the needs and impact on their respective service areas have been addressed.

### **Current Situation**

- 2.3 A substantial amount of the current budget allocation for minor works and voids repairs (including rubbish clearance) is absorbed on items that could be recharged to current & former tenants and leaseholders. In 2008/9 £75,262.43 was spent on voids where a possible charge could be made to tenants.
- 2.4 New Housing managers have been recruited to the Resident Services team. One of their priorities is raising the profile of Housing Management by increasing the Housing Officer presence on our estates. Housing Officers now have a target number of tenancy visits to complete where damage, alterations and mismanagement of properties can be promptly identified and the necessary action taken. Housing Officers and Void Officers are now visiting tenants twice within the 28 day notice period prior to ending their tenancy. During this period rechargeable works are identified. The non existence of this policy has been an absent tool for officers asking tenants to pay for damage, alterations and mismanagement.

From September 2009, Housing Officers now have the delegated responsibility of being warrant officers. They can serve warrants on properties where access has been refused to carry out annual gas inspections. Once access is gained it is another opportunity for officers to inspect the maintenance of properties, negotiate repairs and/or recharge the tenant/leaseholder.

- 2.5 Leaseholders are responsible for a number of leaks into our properties. Leasehold officers spend a considerable amount of time negotiating recharges with leaseholders for the damage caused. The implementation of this policy would help to reinforce their obligation.
- 2.6 There is an increased level of joint working with the police in the borough to solve crime. Information sharing with the police has assisted to locate and arrest perpetrators of Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) and criminal suspects residing or associating within our stock. The police are causing damage to our properties by forcing entry. Tenants and Leaseholders will be charged for this damage if it is proved they are associated with crime.

## **The need for change**

- 2.7 Harrow Council wants be recognised as one of the best councils by 2012.
- 2.8 Councillors, staff, resident associations have all noticed the complacency of the council with regards to recharging. It will take some time to reverse this culture but we must start now by insisting tenants and leaseholders take more responsibility to look after their homes, the surrounding areas and the actions of their visitors.

## **Further information**

- 2.9 The attached policy has been circulated to 10% of tenants asking for their comments. Only one response has objected to the policy being implemented.
- 2.10 Rechargeable Works Procedure is 'work in progress'. It will outline the interfaces between all authorised officers dealing with minor repairs and maintenance issues, detailing their responsibilities.

## **Implications for this recommendation**

- 2.11 Consideration has to be given to the vulnerable customers such as the elderly, disabled, customers, with learning difficulties, those who genuinely cannot afford to pay the recharge.
- 2.12 It will take some time to change the culture with customers around recharging for repairs. It is envisaged this charge will not be a priority payment for our customers. Our customers are more likely to pay their rent, Council Tax and utility bills. It is anticipated this will contribute to a poor collection rate.

## **Financial Implications**

- 2.13 Increased costs can be absorbed within existing budget provision.
- 2.14 Given the challenges in managing the financial stability of the HRA it is essential that budget management encompasses not only financial controls over expenditure, but that income is maximised. This policy will enable additional income to be generated and budgeted within the HRA subject to recovery levels.
- 2.15 Subject to consultation and approvals it is assumed this policy to be implemented in 1 January 2010. Additional income generated will be reflected in quarter 3 outturn position and this also will detail the actual level of recovery.

### Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name: Donna Edwards	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the* Chief Financial Officer
Date: 6 July 2009		
Name: Paresh Mehta	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the* Monitoring Officer
Date: 21 September 2009		

### Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Karen Connell  
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Background Papers: Rechargeable Repairs Policy

If appropriate, does the report include the following considerations?

1.	Consultation	YES
2.	Corporate Priorities	NO