

REPORT FOR: Cabinet

Date of Meeting:	15 July 2010
Subject:	Housing Ambition Plan 2010/2012
Key Decision:	Yes
Responsible Officer:	Lynne Pennington, Divisional Director Housing Services
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Bob Currie, Portfolio Holder for Housing
Exempt:	No
Decision subject to Call-in:	Yes
Enclosures:	Ambition Folder – circulated to key officers and Members only, and placed in the Members' Library

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report sets out the key elements of the Housing Ambition Plan that will be measured by whether Customers believe that the housing service is one of the best in London by 2012.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is asked to approve the virement of £512k from HRA revenue balances, and £82k within the HRA capital programme to resource the delivery of the Housing Ambition Plan in 2010-11.

Reason: (For recommendation)

To resource delivery of the Housing Ambition Plan in 2010-2011.

Section 2 – Report

2.0 Summary

2.1 The Housing Ambition Plan (HAP) contributes to the Better Deal for residents by setting out improvements needed to strengthen customer access, increase customer focus and involvement and ensure that housing's approach to equality diversity and value for money issues are main streamed into day to day business.

2.2 The success of the plan will be judged primarily by customers however, a new over arching performance scorecard has been developed to provide an overall summary of the key performance elements and this also appears to meet current expectations of the new regulatory body for Housing landlord services, i.e. The Tenant Services Authority. This will help to turn elements of the Ambition Plan into the Annual Report and Local offers that the TSA expects social housing providers to deliver over the next year or so.

2.3 The Plan is complemented by a communication and engagement calendar which ensures all staff will be positively engaged in the development and delivery of the plan. Each team responsible for elements within the plan have produced their own Team Commitment to set out their main contributions to achieving the overall Ambition and progress against this will be discussed and celebrated regularly as part of the engagement calendar. The final draft of the Plan was launched at a staff event on the 12th May, and 72 of the 74 members of staff who completed an end of launch review said they either strongly agreed or agreed to contribute to the delivery of the Plan.

2.4 Tenants and Leaseholders are aware of the plan; they were involved in the original review that led to the plan; they have received presentations at a range of their meetings and are proactively involved in developing specific projects within the plan. More needs to be done to deliver an engagement framework that increases the role that all customers (not just tenants and leaseholders) can play and ensures they have regular and meaningful opportunities to contribute and assess satisfaction. However, discussions have taken place with them and they are keen to be involved in the development of such a calendar.

2.5 The Ambition Folder that accompanies this report has been discussed with the new Portfolio Holder for Housing who has given his support to the plan and requested a copy of the folder be distributed to the administration. It contains many of the actions identified in the Administration's commitments and will be monitored regularly with the Portfolio Holder at meetings with the Corporate Director and members of the Housing Management Team.

2.6 The plan needs also to be complemented by a cultural change programme that will assist staff to do things differently around the cross cutting themes of customer focus and access, equality and diversity, value for money and satisfaction. Clearly staff are all familiar with the CREATE values which are critical to the manner in which we want to deliver the cross cutting themes in the HAP. More work needs to be done to develop this part of the programme, but the process has started with colleagues from HRD and discussions with a group of staff volunteers to identify what the programme could look like.

3.0 Options considered

3.1 Following a desk top review of the HRA and proposed changes to the HRA subsidy system it is likely that housing will stay a retained service with Harrow. Whilst the plan was not developed with this in mind, it is an important factor in determining the importance of investing in the plan.

4.0 Background

4.1 The HAP is an attempt to consolidate all aspects of housing service into one plan which can then be used to assess delivery and report progress to a range of stakeholders within and outside Harrow.

4.2 It builds on the successes identified in previous inspection reports from the CAA and CPA which awarded housing 3 out of 4 stars in 2008 and recognised improvements in housing, particularly around preventing homelessness, meeting housing needs and meeting the Government's target to halve the numbers of households in temporary accommodation one year ahead of schedule.

4.3 It also builds on the independent Housing Quality Network (HQN) service review primarily of landlord services which took place at the end of 2009. It also incorporates the core business of the service.

4.4 The concept of 'Commitments' which is a really important part of the plan came from a discussion at the staff conference in January. Following a presentation of the results of the staff survey, management made some commitments and staff said they thought this approach was too traditional and the service would only move forward if the commitment was from everyone in the organisation. We therefore embarked on a process of involvement to produce the commitments which can be developed over time.

5.0 Content

5.1 The plan is split into 5 parts:

5.2 Part 1 sets out the Housing Services over arching ambition and the Housing Management Team and Housing Ambition Group (all staff) commitment to 'Doing Things Differently'. It includes key components of the golden thread that links the main national, regional and local drivers that impact on the Housing Strategy for Harrow through to the individual's

contribution to the overall ambition. It also sets out the dates of the 6 part process for engaging all housing staff in the delivery of the plan.

5.3 Part 2 sets out the Partnership and Strategy Team's over arching ambition of providing high performance and low cost services sensitive to the diverse needs of the borough. This is built upon individual team commitments from the Enabling Team, the Strategy and Performance Team, the Business Support Team and the Admin Support Team.

5.4 Part 2 sets out commitments ranging from the ambition to provide an excellent strategic housing service by 2012; bring over 200 empty properties across the borough back into use; deliver a good range of affordable homes to practical work to improve the working environment as well as implementing a customer satisfaction framework and achieving an overall customer satisfaction rating of 75% by 2012.

5.5 As at the 1 April 2010 there were 696 empty private sector homes recorded in Harrow and we have a target to bring back 200 homes into use per annum. This target has been in place for a number of years. Over the past three years performance has been as follows: 2007/8 189 private sector homes brought back into use, 457 in 2008/9 and 219 in 2009/10. Performance can vary significantly depending on the range of incentives, such as grants and leasing schemes, available to encourage owners to bring properties back into use and which will be different from year to year.

5.6 Part 3 sets out the Housing Needs Team's over arching ambition to empower customers to improve their housing situation. This is built upon individual team commitments from the Customer Services Team, the Housing Advice and Housing Assessment Team, the Housing Options Team, the Temporary Accommodation and Private Rented Accommodation Team and the Voids and Allocations Team.

5.7 Part 3 sets out over 30 specific commitments. These range from the provision of expert housing advice to prevent homelessness for more than 850 households facing housing problems each year, especially tailored for vulnerable households and achieving the lowest number of homeless acceptances of any London borough by preventing homelessness and finding suitable alternative housing solutions. This team also seeks to achieve 85% customer satisfaction with the housing reception service and ensuring that at least 85% of customers are seen within 15 minutes of arrival/appointment time as well as offering a personal conversation to every customer who wishes to apply for council housing and if necessary empowering him or her to find a suitable housing solution.

5.8 Part 4 sets out the Resident Services Team's over arching ambition to provide a customer driven service that improves satisfaction and meets the needs of vulnerable people. This is built upon individual team commitments from the Home Ownership Team, the Income Team, the Tenancy Management and Anti Social Behaviour Team, the Sheltered Housing Team and the Estate Services Team.

5.9 Part 4 sets out over 20 specific commitments. These range from a commitment to improve customer and leaseholder satisfaction to 75% by 2012; significantly increase the range of options and opportunities to enable residents to be directly involved in the development and delivery of services; increase service charge and rent collection rates to 98% and above; develop a new approach to tackling anti social behaviour alongside colleagues in community and environment; deliver improvements to the services to residents in sheltered blocks; improve the appearance of estates and introduce local customer satisfaction surveys from June 2010.

5.10 Part 5 sets out the Asset Management Team's over arching ambition to provide quality sustainable homes. The individual team commitments will be developed once the final Asset Management Structure is in place. However in the meantime the new Asset Manager has worked with residents to identify the most important aspects of the service that they would like the commitments to focus on. These commitments include the need to publish a rolling 3 year forward plan for all capital investment; clear service standards for all planned and routine maintenance; maintaining 100% decent homes standard; maintaining 99.9% gas servicing compliance and ensuring a 100% stock condition data base including information from a 100% asbestos survey.

6.0 Performance Issues and measuring success

6.1 A new suite of indicators has been developed and incorporated into a single scorecard which includes national indicators; customer satisfaction indicators; service stream indicators; customer service standards; workforce measures and data quality indicators.

6.2 This scorecard together with the relevant team commitment will be reviewed at an individual level during IPAD and one to one discussions; at local and divisional team meetings. It will be reviewed and challenged by the Housing Management Team and by the Housing Leadership Group and generally progress will be discussed, lessons learnt and success celebrated at the meetings of the whole Housing Ambition Group 6 times over the two year life of the plan.

6.3 Progress against the scorecard will form the basis of housing's report to the Adults and Housing Management Team, to the Improvement Board, to the Portfolio Holder and to meetings of the Harrow Federation of Tenants and Residents and the Tenants and Leaseholder Consultative Forum and other customer involvement forums to be developed over the life of the HAP. Key measures will also appear in the quarterly Strategic Performance Report to Cabinet.

7.0 Resources and financial implications

7.1 We have been working with finance colleagues to identify the additional costs required to deliver the plan which can be resourced from the HRA. We believe there will ultimately be savings as a consequence of the improvements but these may not be realised until 2012.

7.2 The HRA has funded potential improvements in the service recently through working with Access Harrow to improve customer contact; working with Community and Environment to extend the anti social behaviour service across the borough and developing a Lean review of Leaseholder services. Whilst these improvements are much needed, they have not been identified as a direct cost of the HAP because each element was already being planned before the HAP was created and if successful, the Lean Review has the potential to benefit the HRA from upwards of £300k year upon year.

7.3 The additional resources required to support the HAP range from temporary measures that need only be in place for the duration of the plan to more permanent changes designed to radically improve elements of service delivery.

7.4 The temporary measures include:

1. A communications contract with central comms to improve internal and external communication and engagement
2. Temporary support to develop an improvement plan for older person accommodation, particularly as it relates to warden services
3. Costs associated with applying for the Customer Service Excellence Standard
4. Extended secondment to ensure that Civica supports the HAP
5. 2 project management co-ordinator posts
6. The provision of PCs to sheltered wardens

7.5 The permanent measures include

1. An additional resident involvement officer to help meet the Tenant Services Authority requirements to increase resident engagement in all aspects of the housing service
2. Alterations to Civic 2 to improve sanitary facilities and reception
3. Creation of a Management Support Team which involves changing one person's duties and an additional post
4. An additional senior professional within resident services
5. The establishment of an asset management technical client service

7.6 The Estimated costs of the additional Temporary measures are approximately £338k in 2010-11.

7.7 The Estimated costs of the additional Permanent measures are approximately £174k in revenue and £82k in capital in 2010-11.

7.8 Funding exists to support these costs because the 2009-10 HRA budget assumed net expenditure of £1,056k resulting in HRA balances of £4,087k. The final net expenditure position of the HRA was £358k, an under spend of £698k. (Although a significant proportion of this related to external decorations which have subsequently been included in the new 2010/2011 capital investment programme, an increased capacity to accommodate the HAP exists)..

7.9 Ongoing costs are estimated at £96k Revenue & £43k Capital (2011-12) then £24k revenue savings (which include savings from the Lean Review) and £43k Capital from 2012-13 onwards. The additional ongoing costs will be reviewed as part of the budget setting process for 2011-12.

7.10 A full schedule of associated costs is available should members require it.

8.0 Environmental Impact

8.1 Measures included in plan particularly around sustainable homes are designed to have a positive impact on the environment. Specifically all of the housing regeneration schemes being developed in partnership with RSLs are required to achieve Sustainable Building Code 4; Future investment programmes will aim to improve energy efficiency and housing is working with partners to reduce fuel poverty.

9.0 Risk Management Implications

9.1 Housing services has a comprehensive risk register which has been reviewed in light of the HAP. The main risks to bring to members attention are those associated with the fact that the long term benefits and risks of HRA reform have yet to be finalised. A response to the Government's latest paper is required by the 6th July. Separate discussions are taking place with regard to this with the appropriate Portfolio Holders.

10.0 Equalities implications

10.1 Many of the measures included in the plan are designed to improve housing's knowledge of its customer base and one of the commitments is to implement a monitoring framework for the 7 strands of equality and diversity to improve access by all sectors of the community.

11.0 Corporate Priorities

HAP contributes to cleaner and safer streets through its commitment to improve the appearance of estates and it is working with colleagues in community services to contribute funding to and develop a borough wide approach to tackling anti social behaviour.

HAP contributes to building stronger communities through its customer focus and commitment to increase the numbers of residents who are proactively involved in developing the housing service which is clearly about making neighbourhoods places where people want to live.

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name: Donna Edwards on behalf of the
Chief Financial Officer

Date: 17 June 2010

Name: George Curran on behalf of the
Monitoring Officer

Date: 17 June 2010

Section 4 – Performance Officer Clearance

Name: Martin Randall on behalf of the
Divisional Director
Partnership,
Development and
Performance

Date: 18 June 2010

Section 5 – Environmental Impact Officer Clearance

Name: John Edwards Divisional Director
(Environmental
Services)

Date: 17 June 2010

Section 6 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact:

Lynne Pennington
Divisional Director Housing
Adults and Housing 0208 424 1998

Background Papers: None

**Call-In Waived by the
Chairman of Overview
and Scrutiny
Committee**

NOT APPLICABLE

*(for completion by Democratic
Services staff only)*