

LONDON BOROUGH OF HARROW

CABINET – 18 NOVEMBER 2010

Minute 87 (Agenda Item 5, Councillor Questions 3, 4 and 7)

The following questions to which written responses have been provided subsequent to the meeting are hereby appended to the minutes.

Councillor Q 3 – Answer to supplemental question

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

Asked of: Councillor Bill Stephenson

Supplemental Question: In the summer, at a Cabinet meeting, both yourself and the Portfolio Holder for Housing gave undertakings to seek to recover all monies owed to the account. How far along are you to progressing this?

Answer: Since the summer, officers have presented members with a number of options for maximising income to the HRA and recovering monies due. There are a number of proposals and improved practices that are currently either underway or receiving serious consideration.

1. More effective management of the section 20 process which has commenced and has the potential to benefit the HRA in the region of £1m in 2010/2011.

2. More effective management of the voids process with an agreed returnable standard which will be rechargeable should the standard not be achieved on termination of the tenancy.

3. A tenure neutral approach to service charges which could result in freeholders being charged for services.

4. More effective management of rental income and former tenant arrears which is showing significant improvement on previous years.

5. A review of the rental strategy to ensure that the strategy already approved and considered by TLCF last year is still fit for purpose in light of the new pressures that residents will face following the CSR announcements.

6. Reviews in relation to the use and charging arrangements for garages and community centres.

7. 'Help to Let' designed to charge private landlords for helping them to find tenants.

All of these issues have been discussed with the Portfolio Holder and with me at Challenge Panel(s). Resident consultation is at different stages on each of the issues, however the administration is confident that decisions will be made and in place in respect of all of the elements by the end of the financial year.

Councillor Q 4 – Answer to main question

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

Asked of: Councillor Bob Currie, Portfolio Holder for Housing

Question: How are you improving resident engagement under the Housing Ambition Plan?

Answer: In September, Housing Service produced its first Annual Report which was submitted to the Tenant Services Authority.

The report builds on the tasks set out in the Housing Ambition Plan and highlights how the Council is improving opportunities for resident engagement and make services more transparent and accountable.

The report is very comprehensive, but I would highlight that we now have 120 residents signed up to be more engaged; we have a variety of service improvement areas that residents are actively engaged in, e.g. Repairs, Income Management, Mystery Shopping, Anti Social Behaviour, Complaints and others.

The report was written in full consultation with residents and includes a number of quotes and case studies from them. Copies can be provided to any Councillor who has not seen the document.

In addition to this, Housing Services is currently undertaking an extensive review of resident satisfaction and will use the results of this to find ways continue to improve the service.

The following question was not reached in the time limit of 15 minutes and a written response was provided to the questioner, and is hereby appended to the minutes.

Councillor Q 7 – Answer to main question

Questioner: Councillor Susan Hall

Asked of: Councillor Phillip O'Dell, Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Safety

Question: Can you provide an update on your proposed parking review?

Answer: Parking covers a broad range of matters of interest to the public, and the administration wants to ensure that the parking policies applied in Harrow meet the objective of managing parking opportunities and ensure the free movement of vehicles along the highway; and that they are fair and equitable across the borough. Officers have been asked to produce an assessment of the various strands of parking issues and to suggest options for their future development. This work is progressing.