

**REPORT FOR: TENANTS',  
LEASEHOLDERS' AND  
RESIDENTS'  
CONSULTATIVE FORUM**

---

**Date of Meeting:** 11 January 2012

**Subject:** **INFORMATION REPORT – Resident Services Manager’s Report**

**Responsible Officer:** Lynne Pennington, Divisional Director of Housing

**Exempt:** No

**Enclosures:** None

**Section 1 – Summary**

1.1 This report sets out a range of information items that the Resident Services Manager would like to bring to the attention of the Tenants and Leaseholder Consultative Forum and provides feedback following discussions and questions raised at previous TLRCF meetings.

**FOR INFORMATION**

## Section 2 – Report

### 2.0 Updates from previous discussions and new items for information

#### Leasehold Services

- 2.1. As reported to TLRCF in November 2011 the leaseholder team billed £430,000 in annual service charges for the 2010/11 financial year in August. Progress is being made with collection of these charges and the outstanding amount reduced to £136,000 as at the end of November 2011.
- 2.2. For major works £112k has been billed since April of which £88k has been collected to date. 114 leaseholders have opted for a payment plan so they can pay their bills over a longer period. A major works loan facility is being developed which will give another option to assist leaseholders to pay larger bills and this will be reported to Cabinet in January.
- 2.3. Work is progressing to ensure that the information provided to the leasehold team from other service areas is more detailed and accurate. This is to ensure that next year's bills will be clearer as well as fairer and transparent and to reduce the number of queries and challenges received from leaseholders.
- 2.4. This includes ongoing work with the grounds maintenance team to gather accurate information on services provided, a review of how caretakers' time is accounted for as well as a project to obtain up to date meter readings from all communal meters and a comprehensive check on which flats each meter covers. We are also working to improve the accuracy of information on communal repairs undertaken with Asset Management.

#### Tenancy Management

- 2.5. **Tackling Social Housing Fraud.** As previously reported to TLRCF Karen Connell, Senior Professional Housing Management has been leading for Resident Services on a campaign to tackle social housing fraud such as illegal subletting in partnership with Harrows corporate anti-fraud team (CAFT). This campaign continues to be successful with a further 3 properties returned since the last TLRCF report making a total of 8. A number of other cases are under investigation or awaiting court dates.
- 2.6. Progress continues to be made with increasing the number of tenancy audit visits that are being completed. As reported previously a temporary member of staff has been employed until March 2012 and has a target to complete 30 visits per week. Many of these are randomly selected but others have been undertaken as a direct result of concerns raised by tenants about unusual activity in a council tenancy, or suspicions that it is not occupied by the actual tenant. In addition to this officers work all

housing management staff have also taken part in a series of tenancy audit days where one particular estate is targeted for visits on the same day. A number of issues have arisen from these visits, either in relation to fraud or breaches of tenancy, outstanding repair issues etc which are now being investigated further by the relevant officer.

- 2.7. **Income Collection- Current and Former Tenant Arrears.** Progress continues to be made in improving collection on both current and former tenant rent arrears. At the end of the 2010/11 financial year current rent arrears had been reduced to the lowest they had ever been in Harrow with a collection rate of 98.36%. The benchmarking report which compares our performance with other social landlords in London shows that our performance in this area is among the best and we have improved from 23<sup>rd</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> out of a sample size of 28.
- 2.8. Less positive news is our performance on collecting former tenant arrears. The same benchmarking for report for 2010/11 puts us at 24<sup>th</sup> out of 28 other landlords. However although there is increased activity in this area since April 2011 there is inevitably quite a long lead in time to improving performance as firstly the former tenants have to be traced, and then they may only be in a position to make a payment arrangement of a small amount each week. However approximately 20 new payment agreements have been made so far this year and it is anticipated that the work currently being undertaken will start to show results that will reflect in improvements to performance by mid year in 2012/13.
- 2.9. As at 7<sup>th</sup> December current rent arrears stand at £416,942 and former tenant arrears at £816,386. However despite the disappointing figures owing to the long lead in time to improving collection of former tenant arrears this shows an improved collection rate on current arrears of £79,731 since April, with a net increase in overall rent collection of £43,521 to date this year. It is anticipated that further improvements will be made over the next few months.
- 2.10. **Resident Involvement.** Damian Roche from Housing Quality Network Ltd (HQN) completed an initial review of resident involvement and provided feedback on his findings to the Project Group on 8<sup>th</sup> November 2011. The report has also subsequently been discussed with staff and the HFTRA management committee.
- 2.11. A number of recommendations arising are being implemented with immediate effect, however, the vast majority will require further input into developing an action plan for the forthcoming 6-12 months.
- 2.12. Damian and Toni Burke will be facilitating an away day with staff and tenant, leaseholder and resident representatives on the 5<sup>th</sup> January 2012. The main purpose of this session will be to examine:
  - The role and key responsibilities of the Resident Involvement Team
  - The role and key responsibilities of HFTRA
  - The role that should be played by other groups/individuals (e.g. TRAs, TLRCF, etc)

- Is there anything that the team or HFTRA do not do currently that they think they could or should have a role in?
  - How can the team and HFTRA be better supported to carry out their role?
  - Any other ideas for promoting better working relationships
- 2.13. Both staff and HFTRA members have been invited to provide their initial thoughts in advance of the session to enable meaningful discussion to take place.
- 2.14. The outcomes from the day will help to establish the direction for taking the action plan forward effectively.
- 2.15. The Resident Involvement Team is also continuing to work on a number of initiatives as detailed below:
- Coffee drop in sessions
  - Future event planning
  - Sinclair Field play area development
  - Volunteer database refresh
  - Website development
- 2.16. **Estates Services and Sheltered Housing**
- 2.17. **Caretaking Review.** The caretaking standards photo book is well under way and is expected to be completed early in 2012. A draft copy was shared with the Estate Services Steering Group on 1 December which received very positive feedback.
- 2.18. A number of ideas came out of the staff away day held at the end of October, the most prominent being a suggestion to have a mixture of static and mobile caretakers. The staff felt that it may be beneficial to have static caretakers on the larger estates or estates where they often need to concentrate more of their time. These staff would then be able to go straight to their estates on each working day and be able to spend more time on the communal areas as they will not need to be travelling around the borough. The mobile team would be able to concentrate their time on the smaller estates and only have to visit the others to collect flytips or bulk rubbish. This proposal is only at the ideas stage and requires more discussion & wider consultation before final decisions are made.
- 2.19. The 2 apprentice caretakers have now started work and have spent the first few weeks with the caretaking team out on the estates.
- 2.20. **Parking schemes.** TLCF members will recall that officers were undertaking consultation with local residents in a number of areas of the Borough where local parking schemes are being proposed. We had developed a clear plan of what would happen and were developing a timetable. Then a petition received from one of the areas delayed progress.
- 2.21. A meeting was held on 30 November with the residents from the area where the petition was received. As a result we have received comprehensive feedback from residents and will make a decision whether to go ahead with this particular scheme by the end of December. This will then allow us to commence the implementation of the controlled parking schemes across the Borough in January.

2.22. **Sheltered Housing Modernisation.** Two further tenant consultation events have taken place and were well attended by 78 sheltered housing tenants. We are now considering the issues raised by both staff & tenants in the consultation and will commence formal consultation with staff about the changes to their roles on 16 January 2012. The review is still on track for full implementation early in the 2012/13 financial year.

## **Section 3 – Further Information**

3.1 This report contains a number of items of information and feedback from earlier TLRF discussions that do not warrant individual reports.

## **Section 4 – Financial Implications**

Any financial issues are contained within the body of the report.

## **Section 5 – Equalities Implications**

There are no equalities implications associated with this report

## **Section 6 – Corporate Priorities**

5.1 All of the above initiatives contribute to the corporate priorities, in particular united and involved communities: a Council that listens and leads.

Name: Roger Hampson	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Chief Financial Officer
Date: 9 December 2011		

## **Section 7 - Contact Details and Background**

### **Papers**

#### **Contact:**

Maggie Challoner

Resident Services Manager

Tel: 020 8424 2473

Email: Maggie.challoner@harrow.gov.uk

**Background Papers:** None