

REPORT FOR: Tenants', Leaseholders' and Residents' Consultative Forum

Date of Meeting: 10th May 2012

Subject: **INFORMATION REPORT – Resident Services Manager’s Report and feedback from other Council led Resident Involvement Activities**

Responsible Officer: Lynne Pennington
Divisional Director of Housing Services

Exempt: No

Enclosures: None

Section 1 – Summary

This joint report sets out a range of information items that the Resident Services Manager would like to bring to the attention of the Tenants', Leaseholders' and Residents' Consultative Forum and provides feedback following discussions and questions raised at previous TLRCF meetings. It also provides feedback to TLRCF on a wide range of Council led service specific and service wide resident involvement activities.

FOR INFORMATION

Section 2 – Report

2.0 Updates from previous discussions and new items for information

Leasehold Services

Performance

2.1 The Leasehold Team continues to improve performance in the collection of money due. As at 31st March service charge arrears are £69,648.40 and £17,467.43 for major works. Performance targets were exceeded by more than £30,000 in 2011/12 where the year end target was to reduce service charge arrears to £100,000.

Information

2.2 The West London Housing Directors Group asked Harrow Council to host an initial meeting to explore Leasehold Services: Joint Working between West London Boroughs, with a view to achieving efficiency savings. The meeting took place on 6th March 2012. However there is a wide range of different structures and arrangements in place in each of the West London Boroughs to provide services to leaseholders. In addition there is a clear need for local knowledge to be utilised to deal with specific leaseholder queries, and for service charge calculation, billing and collection. The group is therefore recommending to the West London Directors Group that there is no merit in exploring joint working further at this stage.

2.3 The Leasehold Team issued ground rent notifications this year in advance of the actual demands being issued. A number of complaints were received about this being a waste of money. However it is a legal requirement to send out notification of the ground rent in March. The actual demands will be sent out within the next 30 days.

2.4 Another legal requirement is for leaseholders to be provided annually with details of the insurance cover provided. To comply with the FSA regulations all leaseholders will receive details of the Council's buildings insurance cover during April.

Tenancy Management

Anti Social Behaviour Success

2.5 TLRCF Members may be interested in a successful outcome to a long running ASB complaint- using a technique called shuttle mediation. Our colleagues in the Corporate Community Safety Team undertook this form of mediation on our behalf on the case which was essentially a situation where two neighbours, one a tenant and one a leaseholder had stopped talking to each other, originally over an issue with a skip. This escalated into a serious neighbour dispute and led to many complaints to housing staff regarding noise and the behaviour of children in both families.

2.6 Mediation is often used for neighbour disputes where both parties agree to sit down a talk about their complaints together and can be successful. However in this case things had deteriorated so badly the people concerned refused to even meet together. So instead the mediators met with each party separately and listened to all the complaints from both sides. They then proposed a solution, which with some negotiation was acceptable to both sides.

2.7 A mediation document was then drawn up which both families have agreed to follow, meaning that no further complaints should arise. This is our first success using this type of mediation, and it is time consuming but if the outcome is as we hope to have ended a long running neighbourhood dispute and a great deal of officer time dealing with complaints it will have been worthwhile.

Financial Inclusion Awareness Roadshow

2.8 On Wednesday 18 April various services and partners joined forces to hold this session for tenants and leaseholders living in the Harrow Weald area.

2.9 Income Management, Leasehold Services, Resident Involvement, Tenant Resident Association, Housing Benefits, Harrow Insurance Services, Excite, Credit Union, My Harrow Account, Housing Needs (Under Occupation), A2 Dominion & the Citizens Advice Bureau were all present to provide a financial service in line with the governments Financial Inclusion Agenda. From 6.30-8.30 all the services displayed their wares at Cedars School, Harrow Weald. Disappointingly the attendance from Harrow tenants and leaseholders was low but this can be attributed, at least in part to the appalling weather. A2 Dominion had one customer.

2.10 This session was the first of four road shows Resident Services will lead on for this year. It is hoped that we can ensure an increased turnout to future events and are working with the Federation to make the events more successful.

Digital Switch Over

2.11 At the time of writing this report we have not received any complaints about the switch over from our tenants or leaseholders. This would indicate that the publicity and guidance from Housing Services has paid dividends.

Tenancy Strategy

2.12 Every Local Authority has to have an agreed and published Tenancy Strategy by 15 January 2013 under Social Housing Tenure Reform. An officer project team has been set up to draw together Harrow's strategy, taking on board the views of TLRCF members at earlier discussions on the housing changes. Once we have a draft document consultation will take place with all tenants. This will include consultation on whether we should now use Introductory Tenancies, a decision we previously put on hold pending this strategy being developed.

Tenancy Fraud

2.13 Work continues in this area and progress continues to be made. One figure that clearly demonstrates this is that 31.2% of our stock received tenancy audits between April 2011 and March 2012.

2.14 Although the Department for Communities and Local Government is monitoring the performance of Local Authorities in this area, there are concerns nationally that Registered Providers (Housing Associations) are not delivering in the area of social housing fraud in partnership with Local Authorities. Karen Connell, our lead on Tenancy Fraud is re launching the invite to Harrow Registered Providers with the support of the Chartered Institute of Housing. Properties recovered by Local Authorities and Registered Providers can all be offered to homeless families hence the need for partnership working.

Estates Services and Sheltered Housing

Sheltered Housing Modernisation

2.15 Formal consultation with Tenants and staff closed on 5th March 2012. Feedback was largely positive and we received some ideas from both staff and Tenants that could lead to amendments to our original proposal. Unfortunately, we were unable to discuss these ideas with colleagues in the Finance Department until 17th April and this has caused a delay in formulating a final proposal for consideration by the Members Policy Task Group and the Tenant, Leaseholder and Residents Consultative Forum. (If these groups approve the proposals in principle final approval would then need to be given by Cabinet.) We will keep Tenants and staff informed of developments and will present our final proposal to the TLRCF as soon as possible.

3. Resident Involvement and Activities

3.1 A meeting was held on the morning of the 13th April 2012 to monitor progress with the Resident Engagement Review action plan and for the group to receive updates. Good progress had been made with the plan with a number of actions being in progress or completed before the target dates. Achievements so far are namely:

- Draft revised constitutions are in place
- A suite of advice and procedure notes are in draft to be approved by the Editorial Board
- Estate representative profile and criteria agreed
- Work has commenced on drafting a Resident Involvement Strategy
- A draft tenant, leaseholder and resident training plan has been developed
- The involvement database has been refreshed and now truly reflects those with an interest in engagement
- Dedicated Resident Involvement section within Homing In

The Resident Involvement Team is continuing to work on a number of

initiatives that arise from the actions within the plan.

3.2 The Resident Involvement Team hosted a TRA Get Together on the 5th April 2012. The event was attended by over 30 residents. A young person from the Youth Service acted as Master of Ceremonies and presentations were given by young people residing on our estates about what involvement means for them. The feedback forms have now been analysed and the event highly praised for its diverse and interesting content. A further event is planned for the autumn of this year.

3.3 The team hope to raise the profile of involvement with young people further and are attending a meeting of the Youth Parliament on the 2nd May 2012 to make a presentation.

Estates Services Steering Group (ESSG)

3.4 The last ESSG meeting was held on the 1st March 2012 and included discussions on Grounds Maintenance and the proposal to introduce a mix of static & mobile caretakers. Dave Corby from Public Realm attended and a large proportion of the meeting was taken up with grounds maintenance issues.

The next meeting is on the 7th June 2012 and the agenda will include updates on the above mentioned topics along with recharging for bulk clearance, which we didn't have time to cover at the last meeting.

Housing Editorial Board

3.5 The Housing Editorial Board has not met since the last TLRCF report.

Value for Money Group

3.6 The Value for Money sub group met on 24th April. Discussions included the ongoing challenge to the level of Support Services Charges made to the Housing Revenue Account and Dave Roberts, our new Finance Business partner explained his initial work programme and how his work would involve the group. A detailed discussion also took place on the future of the group and how it could work in partnership with tenant scrutiny panel once it was established.

Developing Tenant Scrutiny

3.7 A tenant scrutiny and co-regulation awareness raising session was held on the 13th April 2012 and facilitated by Housing Quality Network Ltd (HQN) The event was attended by staff, Members, currently involved residents but also new tenants who had expressed an interest in the scrutiny process. The session was very informative and tenants expressed a desire to be further involved. Resident Services will now be working with Members, Corporate colleagues and residents to develop the next stages.

HFTRA Scrutiny and Challenge Panel

3.8 The HFTRA Scrutiny and Challenge Panel is due to meet again on 31st May. An update from that meeting will be provided to a future TLRCF

Section 4 – Further Information

4.1 Resident Involvement review and action plan updates will be provided to the next meeting of TLRCF.

4.2 Progress with Scrutiny and Co-regulation updates will be provided to the next meeting of TLRCF.

4.3 Progress with Leasehold Services: Joint Working between West London Boroughs will be reported to the next meeting of TLRCF.

Section 5 - Financial Implications

5.1 Any financial issues are contained within the body of the report and any service improvement issues that arise as a result of residents ideas and suggestions will be considered within the relevant service area budget.

Section 6 - Equalities Implications

6.1 There are no equalities implications associated with this report
No Equality Impact Assessments have been carried out.

Section 7– Corporate Priorities

7.1 All of the above contribute to the corporate priorities, in particular:

- Keeping neighbourhoods clean, green and safe.
- United and involved communities: A Council that listens and leads.
- Supporting and protecting people who are most in need.

Name: Milan Joshi



on behalf of the
Chief Financial Officer

Date: 25th April 2012

Section 8 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact:

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Background Papers: None