

TENANTS AND LEASEHOLDERS PANEL

To: Councillors Alison Butler, Sean Fitzsimons, Tony Harris, Patricia Hay-Justice, Michael Neal, Avril Slipper and Sue Winborn

A meeting of the **TENANTS AND LEASEHOLDERS PANEL** will be held on **Wednesday 6th February 2013 at 6:30pm**, in **THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, The Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX**.

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28 January 2013

AGENDA - PART A

1. Disclosure of Interest

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct and the statutory provisions of the Localism Act, Members and co-opted Members of the Council are reminded that it is a requirement to register disclosable pecuniary interests (DPIs) and gifts and hospitality in excess of £50. In addition, Members and co-opted Members are reminded that unless their disclosable pecuniary interest is registered on the register of interests or is the subject of a pending notification to the Monitoring Officer, they are required to disclose those disclosable pecuniary interests at the meeting. This should be done by completing the Disclosure of Interest form and handing it to the Business Manager at the start of the meeting. The Chairman will then invite Members to make their disclosure orally at the commencement of the meeting. Completed disclosure forms will be provided to the Monitoring Officer for inclusion on the Register of Members' Interests.

2. Welcome and Introductions

3. Apologies for absence

4. Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 2nd October 2012

To approve the minutes as a true and correct record.

5. Matters Arising

6. Annual Rent Setting & Budgets

Keith Robbins (Finance Manager) (report attached)

7. Repairs Re-procurement update

Verbal report by Lorraine Smout (Responsive Repairs Manager)

8. Housing Complaints (Ombudsman referrals)

Chris Stock (Resident Involvement & Scrutiny Manager) and Pete Ward (Complaint Resolution Manager) (report attached)

9. Scrutiny Report (Customer Contact Services)

Chris Stock (Resident Involvement & Scrutiny Manager) and Scrutiny Panel Members (report attached)

10. Feedback on Annual Performance Report & STAR survey

Chris Stock (Resident Involvement & Scrutiny Manager) (report attached)

11. Your Housing, Your Questions feedback

Tim Nash (Resident Involvement Co-ordinator) (report attached)

12. Feedback

- a) **London Tenants' Federation** – Michael Hewlett
- b) **Mayor's Housing Forum** - Michael Hewlett
- c) **ARCH** – Michael Hewlett
- d) **Croydon Voluntary Sector Alliance (CVSA)** – Guy Pile-Grey
- e) **Croydon Congress** – Marilyn Smithies
- f) **All Ages Inter-generational Conference** – Sian Foley
- g) **Resident Involvement Champions** – Chris Stock

13. Any Other Business

14. Dates of Future Meetings

all in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Croydon at 6.30pm:
30 April 2013
23 July 2013
8 October 2013

TENANTS AND LEASEHOLDERS PANEL
Notes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 2 October 2012 in the in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon.

Present: Michael Hewlett (Chair), Syed Ahmed, Marion Burchell, Mark Burrell, Ken Coates, Peter Cooper, Chris Crossdale, Bernard Daws, Robert Dean, Sylvia Fletcher, James Fraser, Jim Mansell, Peter Mason, Julian Paine, Guy Pile-Grey, John Piper, Stephen Pollard, Marilyn Smithies, Maureen Symes, Laurence Taylor, Bob Varney, Kim Wakely and Colin Wood.

Councillors: Alison Butler, Tony Harris, Patricia Hay-Justice, Michael Neal, Sue Winborn

Observers: Dave Sutherland (Director of Housing Management Services), Peter Brown (Director of housing needs & strategy), Sian Foley (Head of Safe & Sustainable Communities), Judy Pevan (Stock Investment Manager), Bob Richardson (Head of Planned Maintenance & Improvements), Lorraine Smout (Head of Responsive Repairs), Chris Stock (Interim Head of Performance & Quality Assurance), Elaine Wadsworth (Head of Housing Strategy, Commissioning & Standards)

Note taker: Margot Rohan (Senior Members' Services Manager)

1. Disclosures of Interest : None

2. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting. There was a minute's silence in tribute to Malcolm Wicks MP, who died on 29 September.

3. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Avril Slipper, James Cassidy and Eric Webb.

4. Notes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 24 July 2012

The Notes of the meeting held on Tuesday 24 July 2012 were agreed as a true record of the proceedings.

5. Matters Arising

There were none.

6. Welfare Reform

Elaine Wadsworth (Head of housing strategy, commissioning and standards) gave a presentation (Appendix 1):

- Housing Benefits officer unable to attend
- Background about government cuts and reducing benefits
- £18bn to cut over next 4 years
- Sensitive to ensure publicity does not cause anxiety
- Universal benefit – all existing benefits rolled into one
- Benefit cap – maximum a household can receive per week = £350 for single people, £500 for everyone else
- Under-occupancy penalty – benefit will be cut where households have more rooms than they are assumed to need

- Communication – letters out in October to explain changes and who to contact – leaflets and website will also provide information
- Income officers will see all those affected – at home or in the office
- Under-occupation – will offer assistance to aid transfers and a lodging scheme to fill under-used accommodation
- Household budgeting advice – training sessions
- Other support – events, help getting into employment, online claiming, Open House (tenants' magazine)
- Sheltered Housing – supported housing exempt
- Will help people find other homes to move to – help them to help themselves
- Will offer help in changing provider for gas and electricity etc.

The following questions were raised:

- What about situations where single mothers are not able to get tenancy for their children where they live part time with mother, part with father?

Elaine Wadsworth: Rules say no extra room for having children to stay or friends etc.

- Where children have officially left home but occasionally come and stay, will all couples have to be rehoused in smaller properties?

Elaine Wadsworth: The rules are very strict. There are no exemptions unless one has a carer or is a pensioner.

Dave Sutherland: Couples will have to move to a smaller property or have reduced benefit.

- Credit Union – if no job, cannot pay in. If lodgers are taken, how can tenants open a bank account without a job? With firms leaving Croydon there are no jobs.

Dave Sutherland: Tenants have a right to take lodgers.

- Is there an assurance of flexibility because people with health problems do not need added pressure and anxiety?

Dave Sutherland: We have anticipated the need for more resources.

- Housing officers need to flag up people who have difficulties. How time-limited are special payments? STOP scheme – will the council look at references and credit check?

Dave Sutherland: It is down to individual tenants to find lodgers and make checks. Special transfer payments are not time limited.

Elaine Wadsworth: STOP is a scheme run by young people who are homeless. People from prison or who are dangerous will not be referred.

- Why has there not been any publicity earlier?

Elaine Wadsworth: The details have been emerging over time. We did not want to give a false impression and cause alarm.

Dave Sutherland: Information is out there. The Benefits Office is sending out leaflets.

7. Repairs Re-procurement – Progress Report

Judy Pevan (Stock Investment Manager) circulated a report (Appendix 2) and Lorraine Smout) Head of Responsive Repairs gave a brief summary:

- Need new contract in place by 2014
- Looking at putting more into scope this time – gas servicing, gas repairs, door entry repairs etc
- Bigger procurement exercise

- Looking to go to one main contractor from existing two – perhaps for next 15 years
- Important to ensure value for money
- Make sure people are involved to get views on how procurement is managed
 - Attending workshops
 - Evaluation – site visits (training involved)
- Looking to move to price per property – move away from detailed list of rates – focus on quality and ensuring work done correctly
- Recommendations to be taken forward to strategy procurement board 24 October

The following questions were raised:

- Last Disability Panel was cancelled – what is the new date?

Lorraine Smout: The intention is to ensure the panels are included.

(Date for Housing Disability Panel is 14 November)

- Do we have assurance that the council dictates how work is carried out rather than contractor? Gas servicing – does it include old boilers and reservicing, rather than changing?

Lorraine Smout: Repairs service in place is dictated by the council. There are a number of penalties if work is not carried out properly. We are monitoring. Gas repairs and gas servicing are managed together to minimise visits to each property. There has been a reduction in repairs and ad hoc replacements – we have already seen improvement.

- Suggestion of moving from 10 year to 12 or 15 year contract – what will be in place to ensure it works for that time?

Lorraine Smout: Apprenticeships, training in contracts – something in place to make sure it is still value for money and that we can break if necessary with 12 or 15 year contract.

- Contractors already sub-contract a lot of their work. Surely more work will involve more sub-contractors? What is advantage of one contractor if more sub-contractors involved?

Lorraine Smout: Advantage with one contract because of scale. There will always be some things sub-contracted with more work over more properties but contractors will employ more full-time employees to cover work.

Judy Pevan: We will develop the scope of the contract to be competitive and attractive to the market – to deliver efficiencies.

- Will smaller expert companies be merged into a new company? If people see Croydon Repairs Service, people know who they are – recognise vans and only one number to phone.

Lorraine Smout: It is not about mergers but some may become sub-contractors.

Croydon Repairs Service is about branding so people know what it is. There may be some specialisms.

- How do we know the Price Waterhouse procurement team is independent? They have so many fingers in so many pies.

Lorraine Smout: Reporting to Price Waterhouse goes across council to give overview. Top priority is about tenant satisfaction.

8. STAR survey

A verbal summary was given by Chris Stock (Resident Involvement Manager):

- Satisfaction survey to 4,000 tenants in July
- Results not quite ready
- To have session for feedback – to work together to see what results mean
- Interesting results – different parts of borough, different age groups etc
- Will invite to come to afternoon meeting late October/early November

9. Tenant Scrutiny Update

Chris Stock gave a quick update:

- Finished all investigation
- Done shadowing, benchmarking, mystery shopping, interviewing residents as left contact centre
- Putting report together – meeting next Thursday
- Final report to come back to TLP

10. Housing Question Time Events

Chris Stock (Resident Involvement Manager) gave a brief summary of the report:

- Proposals to enhance involvement framework
- Events along similar lines to Council Question Time
- Key difference – met with Resident Involvement Group – want councillor involvement but not for them to lead
- Managers of services to be there to answer questions, plus Cabinet Member
- Different branding to Council Question Time
- One on 7 November in Council Chamber
- One on 27 November in Longheath community centre
- Pilot to see how they do
- Can submit questions in advance or on the evening
- Questions will be recorded with any answers – made available on council website
- Name suggestions:
 - A Question of Housing (5 votes)
 - Your Housing Your Questions (7 votes)
 - Your Housing Any Questions (1 vote)
 - Your Housing Questions (3 votes)
- Winning name: Your Housing Your Questions

The following questions were raised:

- How will chair be chosen?

Chris Stock: Resident Involvement Group agreed chairs for first two meetings – important to have experienced chairs, to manage strongly and to ensure councillors do not dominate. First two meetings will be chaired by Michael Hewlett and Marilyn Smithies.

- Cheaper all round to dispense information by email.

Chris Stock: Only 49% of tenants have access to email so have to be mindful of this. People who attend can provide email address but we will post information to others.

11. Residents' Network

Chris Stock (Resident Involvement Manager) gave a verbal update:

- Become members of Residents' Network
- For residents and officers involved in tenant scrutiny
- Web-based service – available to all
- Conferences and training
- To register let Chris know and he will provide website and password

12. Feedback from External Organisations

London Tenants' Federation (LTF) – Michael Hewlett gave feedback from latest meeting:

- Money received from London Council ceases from March 2013
- Formed company – London Tenant Company
- Drawing up business plan so can bid for funding

Mayor's Housing Forum – Michael Hewlett:

- Next meeting December

ARCH – Michael Hewlett:

ARCH Tenants' Group Conference on 19 September – 3 awards – Croydon won Innovation and sustainability award for their 'All ages' intergenerational project for integrating different age groups into Croydon's resident involvement project and achieving a reduction in anti-social behaviour as a result.

- Kim Wakely attended the meeting and reported:
 - Peter Kirkpatrick, recently elected chair of ARCH Tenants' Group and tenant of Great Yarmouth Borough Council, opened the conference by welcoming delegates and thanking Kettering Borough Council and Pinnacle psg for supporting the event
 - John Conway, Head of Housing (Kettering Borough council) spoke about the life skills programme 'Move On, Move In' to help ensure younger tenants are able to sustain their tenancies and develop new skills
 - Tenant of Year award to Michelle Fleet, from Birmingham City Council, for demonstration of kindness and selflessness in taking on the role of resident representative during a programme of refurbishment work and putting the needs of others first despite her own poor health
 - Chose 2 from 6 workshops – one in morning and second after lunch
 - Thank you to Ken Constantine, Sian Foley, Alison Crisp and all the council officers who assisted

Croydon Voluntary Sector Alliance – Guy Pile-Grey:

- Nothing to report
- Meeting shortly and will report to next TLP

Croydon Congress – Marilyn Smithies:

- Nothing to report as no meeting

All Ages Inter-generational Conference – Sian Foley:

- Next event 30 Oct at Jury's Inn (restricted on size – 70)
- Together we Can
- Mix of ages
- All ages strategy
- Workshops, games and fun
- Inviting residents actively involved in various relevant groups
- Working tables – locality based
- Give opportunity for people to get to know their neighbours better

Resident Involvement Champions – Chris Stock:

- Event 10 October – London Tenant Scrutiny Network
- Opportunity to share good practice

13. Any Other Business

Supported decoration scheme (SDS) - Bob Richardson: Confirmed that tenancy colleagues were producing a list by the end of October of tenants who qualified for internal redecoration under this programme. The budget is £250,000 and work is scheduled to start in November. About 120 homes will be included in the 2012/13 programme.

Landlord Structure shows no names. Is it possible to supply names? Why do we need 5 neighbourhood caretaking managers?

Dave Sutherland: At time sent out, we did not have all the names as we were recruiting. Can send out with minutes. Reduced number of managers by 6 – 54 caretakers. Previously had 3 – not enough. Would not want to go lower than 5. (See appendix)

Leaseholder Panel – meeting next Wednesday 10 October. Would it be possible to know how many leaseholders are here?

Michael Hewlett: Only you.

Chris Stock: We are looking at what leaseholders want – meetings or open day or what?

14. Dates of Future Meetings

All in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Croydon at 6.30pm

- Wednesday 6 February 2013
- Tuesday 30 April 2013

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8:07pm

Lead Officer(s): Directors of Housing Management and Resources

Wards: All

Agenda Item:- 6

Subject: HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT RENT, SERVICE CHARGE,
GARAGE RENT AND BUDGET SETTING – 2013/14

1. DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

The Panel are asked to comment on:

- 1.1 Rent increases for all Council tenants for 2013/14, in line with the National formula for social housing rents. The average rent increase will be 4.36%;
- 1.2 That the full cost of services provided to those tenants who receive caretaking, grounds maintenance and bulk refuse collection services are recovered via tenants service charges, this being achieved with a 3.1% increase;
- 1.3 Charges for garage and parking space rents increase by 4.36%;
- 1.4 Heating charges for Council tenants remain unchanged, see detailed in **Appendix 2**;
- 1.5 To recommend to the Council the approval of the budget for the Housing Revenue and Capital Accounts for 2013/14.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 This report provides information on the proposed rent increase for Council housing tenants for the financial year 2013/14 and other charges for tenants for 2013/14.
- 2.2 The report also provides information on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget for the financial year 2013/14 (**Appendix 1**).

3. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT

- 3.1 The HRA is the main business account for the housing service. It continues to be a ring-fenced account, funded primarily from tenants' rents. The services provided to tenants, for example: responsive repairs, management services and caretaking, are paid for from this account.

- 3.2 Long term financial planning is based on the HRA 30 year business plan which is updated annually to reflect actual expenditure, changes in stock numbers and financial projections.

HRA Self-Financing

- 3.3 The Localism Act received Royal Assent in November 2011 and included the replacement of the national HRA subsidy system with a system of self financing from 1 April 2012
- 3.4 Croydon's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) took on an additional debt of **£223.126m** which will need to be repaid over 30 years by the HRA.
- 3.5 The 'valuation' was based on 30 year subsidy calculations for Croydon, discounted to a current value. The Council borrowed money to make a one off payment to Government. This loan is to be financed and repaid from the HRA.
- 3.6 The following assumptions have been included within the HRA business plan:
- Rent will continue to rise in line with the National Social Rents policy (Government's Rent Restructuring guidelines), and that convergence with formula rents (i.e. the same rents as would be paid by Housing Association tenants for a similar property) will be achieved in **2015/16**. This is also the government's assumption in the self financing valuation which allows Croydon to service the additional debt.
 - Following convergence in 2015/16, rents will continue to rise at **RPI plus 0.5%**
 - Investment in new council homes of **£6m** per annum from 2013/14 to 2018/19
 - Investment in major repairs and improvements will increase at least **RPI plus 2%** in order to address the backlog of works.
 - All homes to be maintained to the decent home standard over time.

4. HRA Budget – 2013/14

- 4.1 The attached Appendix 1 provides a draft budget for the HRA for 2013/14 based on the proposed rent and service charge increases.
- 4.2 The main changes proposed to the HRA for 2013/14 are identified below. The budget will ensure that existing services are maintained and allow for an increased level of investment in the repair and improvement of homes.
- 4.3 **Increases in Rent**
- As in previous years the rent increase for Council Tenants has been set in accordance with the National Social Rents policy (Government's Rent Restructuring guidelines). The self financing settlement assumed that the Rent Restructuring guidelines are followed.

- Under current legislation, rents are being increased to the Formula Rent, with the aim of converging the levels of council rents with those of housing association rents by 2015/16. Both rent and service charges are covered by housing benefit, although a small number of tenants (large families) will be affected by the introduction of the benefit cap which will limit total weekly benefit payments to £500.
- The proposed rent increase for 2013/14 has therefore been applied according to Rent Restructuring Guidelines. Rent and service charge increases are limited to retail price index (RPI) at September 2011 + 0.5% + £2. The September 2011 RPI was 2.6%.

4.4 **Service Charges**

- The unpooled service charge for caretaking, grounds maintenance and bulk refuse collection will increase in line with the rent restructuring guidelines (excluding the additional £2). It is proposed that the charges for 2013/14 will therefore be:
 - Caretaking – £7.48pw (an increase of £0.22)
 - Grounds maintenance and refuse collection – £1.94pw (an increase of £0.06)

4.5 **Heating Charges**

- Only a small number of tenants use communal heating systems and are charged a fixed weekly amount for the gas they use. Apart from the Handcroft Road Estate all other schemes are retirement housing schemes for older people. The way in which Croydon purchases energy changed in 2009 by entering a bulk purchasing consortium and as a result it is proposed that heating charges will not be changed from 2012/13. See Appendix 2 for details on weekly heating charges.

4.6 **Garages and Parking Spaces**

- It is proposed that the rents for garages and parking spaces in 2013/14 will increase in line with dwellings rents by 4.36%.

5 **Draft housing investment programme**

- 5.1 The table overleaf sets out the summary of proposed expenditure in 2013/14 compared with 2012/13. In total, the resources for all purposes – responsive repairs, major repairs and improvements, and measures to increase housing supply, have increased by £7.045m to £48.107m. This represents an overall increase of £18.074m since 2011/12 after which self-financing was introduced.

Table 1

Housing Supply	2012/13 £000	2013/14 £000
Assisted Private Purchase Scheme (APPS)	500	500
Special Transfer Payments	250	250
Larger Homes	100	100
New Build Council Housing	3,750	6,000
Sub-Total	4,600	6,850
Repair and Improvements	23,271	27,771
Total capital expenditure	27,871	34,621
Responsive and Cyclical Repairs Budgets	13,191	13,486
Grand Total	41,062	48,107

6 Draft Planned Maintenance and Improvement Programme

- 6.1 It is proposed that the annual planned maintenance and improvement budget, which is used for maintaining homes at the decent home standard and for other major works to our stock such as external decorations, will be £27.771m, an increase of £4.5m over 2012/13 and £13.551m since 2011/12. The Government's decent homes target – that 100% of social homes should meet the standard by 31 March 2011 – was met on time for the council's stock. We will continue to invest in our properties to ensure they are maintained at this standard over time.
- 6.2 The proposed resources for responsive and cyclical repairs will be £13.486m. The total cost of responsive repairs was increased in 2011/12 partly due to the increased number and cost of repairs and partly due to a realignment of work between responsive repairs and programmed works which means we are investing more in major improvements and preventative maintenance which should save money going forward on responsive repairs. The proposed level of funding is sufficient to meet the ongoing repairs requirements.

7 Housing Supply

- 7.1 The housing revenue account has traditionally been used to fund a number of supply initiatives to increase the council's housing stock or make better use of the existing stock. These supply measures will enable the council to address local housing need and help tenants who need to move because of overcrowding or other reasons.
- 7.2 The Assisted Private Purchase Scheme budget will remain at the current £0.5m. This scheme assists qualifying council tenants to purchase a home in the private sector. The special transfer payments scheme, which provides financial help to under-occupying tenants who move to smaller homes, will remain at £0.25m.

8. FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 Revenue consequences of report recommendations

	Medium Term Financial Strategy			
	2012/13 £,000	2013/14 £,000	2014/15 £,000	2015/16 £,000
HRA Budget				
Current Budget	82,235	85,640		
Effect of Decision	82,235	85,640	Not known	Not known
	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>		

8.2 The financial considerations are contained in the main body of the report and a high-level summary of the Housing Revenue Account for 2013/14 is provided at Appendix 1.

8.3 Although the council borrowed an additional £223.126m, the loan is at a fixed low rate of interest, meaning the HRA will not be susceptible to changes in interest rates. The main risk areas in the Housing Revenue Account are the responsive repairs and programmed works budgets. A well-established monthly monitoring process is in place to assist in the management of expenditure in these areas. There is also a risk that there will be an increase in the level of arrears as a result of the rent increase, combined with the changes in the housing benefit under the government's welfare reforms. Mitigation of this impact is dealt with in paragraph 12 below.

8.4 The development of financial plans for the Housing Revenue Account has involved the consideration of a range of options for investment in Council homes including further investment in existing stock as well as the building of new homes.

8.5 The Housing Revenue Account 30 Year Business Plan Model has been updated to reflect the self financing settlement and will be reviewed and updated every 12 months. The HRA is now directly included in the Council's overall financial strategy to ensure alignment of financial governance with other council services.

(Approved by Paul Heynes, Head of Finance - Head of Finance, DASHH on behalf of the Director of Finance)

9. COMMENTS OF THE COUNCIL SECRETARY AND SOLICITOR AND MONITORING OFFICER

9.1 The Solicitor to the Council comments that under section 25 of the Housing Act 1985 (the Act) the Council has the power to determine reasonable charges for its tenancies and leases, and is required by the Act to review these from time to time and to make such changes as circumstances may require. In addition, the housing authority is required, in exercising its functions under these provisions, to have regard to any relevant standards set under section 193 of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008.

- 9.2 In accordance with the Act the process for varying the rent and charges for secure tenancies and leases is determined by the terms of the tenancy agreement or lease, while for non-secure tenancies section 25 specifies the procedure to be followed. The Council is required to give tenants' written notice of the proposed changes to their rental.

(Approved by: Jessica Stockton for and on behalf of the Director of Democratic and Legal Services, Council Solicitor and Monitoring Officer)

10. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT

- 10.1 There are no immediate Human Resource considerations for LBC staff arising from this proposal.
- 10.2 (Approved by: Michael Pichamuthu, HR Business Partner, on behalf of Pam Parkes, Director, Workforce & Community Relations)

11. CUSTOMER IMPACT

- 11.1 The proposed HRA budget for 2013/14 includes a rent increase of 4.36%, and increases in service charges of 3.1%. Charges for rent and service charges are eligible for Housing Benefit.

12. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 12.1 The increase in rent of 4.36% will have an impact on current tenants. The increase is in line with the National Social Rent Policy which was introduced to keep rents affordable and comparable across the social housing sector. By adhering to the National Social Rent Policy tenants are protected from excessive rent increase by the limits and caps imposed by those guidelines. The full increase is eligible for housing benefit, although a small number of tenants (fewer than 50) will be subject to the benefit cap being introduced in April 2013. Large families in all rented tenures who are not in receipt of working tax credit will be affected by the benefit cap and this will make renting anywhere in London unaffordable to most large families even based on current rent levels. This rent increase will ensure the HRA is properly funded in 2013/14.
- 12.2 Mitigation of the impact of the rent increase on tenants who are not in receipt of housing benefit will be in the form of advice on welfare benefits (from income officers and the four welfare rights advisers dedicated to advising council tenants), referrals to specialist debt counselling, and help with money management.. Income officers have started a programme of visits to all households affected by benefit changes in 2013, which will include those to be affected by the benefit cap, and will be explaining options and referring people to specialist help or to advice sessions where appropriate. The council is also developing a money management campaign, with advice for all residents and money management sessions specifically for council tenants.

- 12.3 The effect of self-financing and the rent increase is a higher level of investment in new housing supply measures and in improving the council's existing stock which will have a positive impact on many groups with protected characteristics because they are more dependent than average on social housing. One of the areas of expenditure which people struggle with is heating costs and this is particularly true for those living in homes which are hard to heat because of their construction or design. The capital programme, next year and in the longer term, will include investment in homes with solid wall construction and other hard-to-heat properties so will be of particular benefit to tenants with the highest heating bills.

13. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- 13.1 New homes funded by the council are subject to regulatory requirements in terms of scheme design and protection for the environment. All new council homes will be built to Level 4 of the Code for Sustainable Homes.
- 13.2 Energy efficiency measures (upgrading boilers, central heating systems and insulation; double-glazing, and the kind of measure referred to above for hard-to-heat homes such as external cladding) are a key investment priority within the repair and improvement programme. These measures will contribute to a reduction in CO₂ emissions as well as reduce heating bills and ensure that keeping the home warm is affordable.

14 CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT

- 14.1 There are a range of measures within the council's repair and improvement programme that support the council's wider objective to improve community safety. These include installation of security entry door systems to flats, environmental improvements improved lighting, and a targeted security door programme.

15 HUMAN RIGHTS IMPACT

- 15.1 There are no human rights considerations arising from this report.

16 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION/DATA PROTECTION CONSIDERATIONS

- 16.1 The information contained in this report will be accessible as part of the Council's Publication Scheme maintained under the Freedom of Information Act, while information held by the Council supporting the report may also be accessible under that Act subject to consideration of any relevant exemptions.

Report author: Paul Heynes, Head of Finance - DASHH, Ext 65500

Contact Officer: Keith Robbins, HRA Finance Manager, DASHH, Ext 65750

Background Documents: None

Housing Revenue Account 2013/14

Appendix 1

	Original Budget 2012-13 £,000	Draft Budget 2013-14 £,000	Increase/ (decrease) £,000
<u>EXPENDITURE</u>			
Management - General	21,556	20,901	(655)
Management - Special	12,981	12,972	(9)
Maintenance and Repairs	13,362	13,486	124
Major Repairs Allowance	16,035	16,457	422
Capital Financing	11,865	12,638	773
Revenue Contribution to Capital Outlay	6,186	8,186	2,000
Provision for Doubtful Debts	250	1,000	750
	82,235	85,640	3,405
<u>INCOME</u>			
Dwelling rents and Service Charges	73,212	76,376	3,164
Garage rents	1,390	1,324	(66)
Other Charges	7,625	7,932	307
Interest on Council Mortgages	8	8	0
	82,235	85,640	3,405
DEFICIT / (SURPLUS) B/F	(1,200)	(5,359)	(4,139)
DEFICIT / (SURPLUS) C/F	(5,359)	(5,359)	0
Average Rent (50 Week year) including unpooled Service Charges	£99.64	£104.07	£4.43
Average Garage Rent	£11.17	£11.65	£0.48
Numbers of properties	14,087	14,075	(12)

Heating Charges From April 2013

Scheme	Accommodation	2012/13	2013/14	Change
Allington Court	1 Bed	£10.96	£10.96	£0.00
Arthur Court	Bedsit	£7.84	£7.84	£0.00
	1 Bed	£11.57	£11.57	£0.00
Arun Court	1 Bed	£10.38	£10.38	£0.00
Bell Court	1 Bed	£10.00	£10.00	£0.00
Borough Grange	1 Bed	£10.66	£10.66	£0.00
Brookhurst Court	Small 1 Bed	£10.59	£10.59	£0.00
	Large 1 Bed	£11.28	£11.28	£0.00
Creed Court	1 Bed	£10.17	£10.17	£0.00
Freemans Court	Small 1 Bed	£10.66	£10.66	£0.00
	Large 1 Bed	£11.28	£11.28	£0.00
Frylands Court	Small 1 Bed	£9.70	£9.70	£0.00
	Large 1 Bed	£10.56	£10.56	£0.00
Handcroft Road	1 Bed	£10.17	£10.17	£0.00
	2 Bed	£18.14	£18.14	£0.00
Kuala Gardens	Bedsit	£6.79	£6.79	£0.00
	1 Bed	£10.37	£10.37	£0.00
Laxton Court	Bedsit	£6.93	£6.93	£0.00
	1 Bed	£11.49	£11.49	£0.00
Purvis House	1 Bed	£11.14	£11.14	£0.00
Southlands	1 Bed	£10.66	£10.66	£0.00
Southsea Court	Small 1 Bed	£10.33	£10.33	£0.00
	Large 1 Bed	£10.73	£10.73	£0.00
Toldene	1 Bed	£9.87	£9.87	£0.00
	2 Bed	£16.41	£16.41	£0.00
Truscott	Small 1 Bed	£11.26	£11.26	£0.00
	Large 1 Bed	£11.42	£11.42	£0.00

TENANTS' AND LEASEHOLDERS' PANEL
6 February 2013

Lead Officer: Executive director of adult services, health and housing

Wards: All

Agenda Item: 8

Subject: - Complaints handling and the Housing Ombudsman

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 The Panel is asked to comment on the new arrangements for complaint handling being introduced from April 2013 by the Localism Act 2011 and give their views on the options available for the handling of housing complaints by council tenants.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 This report outlines new arrangements which are coming into effect from 1 April 2013 for dealing with complaints by social housing tenants against their landlords. Councillors, tenant panels and MPs ("designated persons") will have the opportunity to play a more active role in resolving complaints at a local level.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Localism Act 2011 provides that tenants of local authorities, housing associations and ALMOs will be able to ask for their complaints to be considered by a "designated person" when their landlord's internal complaints procedure is finished.
- 3.2 Designated persons were introduced by the Government to improve the chances of complaints about housing being resolved locally. The idea behind 'localism' is that local people know best how to decide local issues. The introduction of designated persons is intended to involve local politicians and local people in resolving local housing issues.
- 3.3 It follows on from this that there is no central control or regulation of the development of local resolution mechanisms. It is therefore left to the council, together with tenants, to develop arrangements for Croydon's tenants.
- 3.4 A total of 30 cases concerning complaints against the council in its role as a landlord were considered during 2010/11 and so far this financial year there have been 21 cases.

4. DETAIL

4.1 *Who can be a designated person?*

A 'designated person' can be an MP, a local Councillor, or a Tenant Panel. Landlords do not have to set up tenant panels but they are expected to support their formation and activities if their tenants want them. To be effective the tenant panel must be 'recognised' by the landlord.

4.2 *What does the designated person do?*

When the landlord's internal complaints procedure has finished a tenant can refer their complaint to the designated person. A designated person will help resolve the complaint in one of two ways; they can try and resolve the complaint themselves or they can refer the complaint straight to the Ombudsman. If they refuse to do either the tenant can contact the Ombudsman directly.

4.3 The designated person can try to put things right in which ever way they think may work best. If the problem is still not resolved following the intervention of the designated person either they or the tenant can refer the complaint to the Ombudsman.

4.4 Complaints to the Ombudsman do not have to be referred by a designated person, but if they are not there must be at least 8 weeks from the end of the landlord's complaint process before the Ombudsman can consider the case. The law says that when the designated person refers a complaint to the Ombudsman, it must be in writing.

4.5 *What is the impact of designated persons on complaints procedures?*

Designated persons have no direct impact on a landlord's internal complaints procedure. MPs and local councillors have always been involved in complaints procedures as advocates for tenants. They will continue to have that role. Their specific role as designated persons is different as they play a more specific part in the procedure. The detail of that role is not spelt out in the Localism Act, but a part of it is to refer complaints to the Ombudsman.

4.6 In practice this means that if a complaint is not resolved at the end of the landlord's complaints procedure, the tenant can:

- refer the matter to a designated person OR
- wait 8 weeks and refer the matter directly to the Ombudsman.

A designated person has no legal authority over a landlord's policy or procedure.

4.7 A frequently asked questions sheet has been produced by the National Housing Federation and is attached for information (appendix A).

5. THE NEXT STEPS

- 5.1 The Council needs to decide, with tenants, who will be the designated person. If this panel wish to explore options for the development of a tenant panel a tenant steering group will be established to agree a proposal to be brought to the next meeting of this panel.
- 5.2 If the panel prefers local councillors or MPs to be designated persons then officers will brief them accordingly and tenants informed of the revised housing complaints procedure.

Report Author: Chris Stock, Resident Involvement & Scrutiny Manager, Ext. 62864

Contact Person: As above

Appendix A

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What is the role/remit of the designated person? Is it to act as an advocate for complainants, to review and resolve individual complaints or to rubber stamp requests to go to the Ombudsman?

A. The general role of the designated person is to assist in resolving tenant complaints and issues locally. In doing so, they may also participate with the landlord in using the learning gathered from complaints to help improve services.

There could be a number of ways that they could carry out this role and it is probable that different approaches will suit different local circumstances. Their role is to provide fresh and independent insight on complaints, from a tenant, councillor or MP perspective – playing a critical friend role suggesting views and approaches that may not have been considered by landlord staff and others in handling the complaint. Where a designated person considers that they are unable to resolve a complaint locally and if a complainant wishes and authorises them to do so, they have the option to refer a complaint to the Ombudsman once the landlord complaints process has been exhausted.

Ensuring that designated persons produce beneficial outcomes for tenants requires a culture where landlords, tenants, councillors and MPs encourage and nurture independent views and constructive challenge and value these as an integral part of the landlord business.

Q. What are the actual powers that a designated person has?

A. Designated persons have the power of persuasion, negotiation and conciliation. They do not have formal “powers” other than the right to refer complaints to the Ombudsman once the landlord’s complaints procedure has been exhausted. Their role is to assist in resolving complaints locally, and they will need to use appropriate diplomatic and conciliatory methods to do this, seeking to achieve consensus between tenants and landlord.

Q. If a designated person considers that a complaint is justified, does the provider have to complete the actions that they suggest? Can a designated person ‘over rule’ the organisation’s policies and procedures?

A. A designated person does not have power over an organisation’s policies and procedures, although they may suggest ways they could be improved. A designated person would not be expected to make a formal judgement about the merits of a complaint, but if they do, their judgement would not be binding. They are not a tribunal, they don’t carry out the role of the Ombudsman and they are not an additional bureaucratic stage in a complaints procedure.

Their role is to facilitate resolution of tenant complaints, which may involve them providing advice to tenants; advocating on their behalf; discussing

matters with the landlord; engaging with other designated persons; or carrying out other actions. It is envisaged that the role of the designated person will be bespoke and designed to achieve consensus between tenants and landlord.

Q. What is the process for a designated person to escalate a complaint to the Ombudsman? How will the Ombudsman know whether they are OK to proceed?

A. The complainant should always remain in control of their complaint, and a complaint can only be referred to the Ombudsman with the authorisation of the complainant. The Localism Act requires that the complaint is forwarded to the Ombudsman in writing, but the Ombudsman is anticipating that this could be done through their website.

Once a complaint has been referred to the Ombudsman by a designated person, they will handle it in the way they normally do – for example, they will check that it falls within their jurisdiction; that it has been authorised by the complainant and that the landlord's complaints procedure has been exhausted.

Q. Can complainants go to a designated person at any stage or do they have to exhaust the landlord's complaints procedure first?

A. As is the case now, complainants can approach MPs and councillors whenever they wish to, and tenants will be able to approach tenant panels in accordance with whatever arrangements tenants have agreed for their tenant panels. Tenant panels and councillors may already play a part in the landlord's complaints procedures.

Designated persons only take up their formal role once the landlord's complaints procedures have been exhausted although they may be the same people involved at an earlier stage.

Q. Do providers need to write the designated person into their complaints procedure? Or does it sit outside of their existing processes?

A. Landlords should provide information to tenants on the role of the designated person and appropriate contact details should be provided. This information should also be included in complaints procedures. However, it is not anticipated that the designated person is an additional stage in a landlord complaints procedure as the role is intended to ensure that more complaints are resolved at the local level.

Q. Can customers take their complaint to different designated people one after the other? Is there anything landlords can do to control this? How can landlords ensure that different designated people operate consistently? And that the same designated person operates consistently when dealing with different cases?

A. As is the case now, tenants may take complaints to councillors, MPs and tenant panels as they see fit, and the same applies in their role as designated persons. It would be inappropriate for landlords to “control” who a complainant should approach once the landlord’s internal complaints process has been exhausted.

However, in order for landlords to best respond to the same complaint being raised by multiple designated persons, they need to achieve consensus, particularly with their tenants, about designated persons, tenant panels and complaints handling. Where consensus has been achieved, it should mean that landlords can respond with minimum additional work to complaints referred by multiple designated persons (i.e. by referring to responses already given to other designated persons).

It is the designated person’s responsibility to ensure their effectiveness and consistency. The landlord can play a facilitatory role in helping tenant panels to achieve beneficial outcomes for tenants by ensuring they receive good quality training and support and through establishing a strong partnership relationship with them.

The establishment of designated persons is a new approach designed to help resolve problems locally. Developing successful and useful designated persons will require local imagination and vigour to come up with ways to make them effective. Advice is being prepared by the National Tenant Organisations to help designated persons work together effectively

Q. What is the role of local councillors/MPs who may have a conflict of interest? Can they represent a constituent, or make judgements concerning a constituent’s complaint? What about where designated people are part of a housing providers’ governance structure (eg: councillors where the local authority is the landlord, or tenant board members)?

A. It would be inappropriate for councillors or MPs not to be in a position to represent their constituents. The designated person’s role is not to make judgements about the merits of complaints, and it would have little bearing on the progress of the complaint if they chose to do so. Local authority and Parliamentary Codes of Conduct govern how councillors and MPs should handle conflicts of interest.

Internal landlord rules should determine whether those involved in landlord governance can play a role as a designated person. It may be difficult for someone responsible for landlord governance to be able to provide sufficiently independent perspective to make the designated person role effective, but this is for the landlord and their tenants to agree. In considering a complaint,

the Ombudsman may criticise a landlord if they conclude that, by virtue of the designated person being involved in landlord governance, their perspective on a complaint simply reiterates the landlord's opinion.

Q. What happens if a designated person stops being a designated person?

A. A tenant panel may choose that it no longer wishes to be a designated person, or a landlord may de-recognise a tenant panel (in accordance with a decision-making process agreed with its tenants). In these circumstances, the landlord has a responsibility to inform the Ombudsman that the tenant panel is no longer recognised and they will be removed from the register. Similarly, an MP or councillor may resign or lose their seat, and thereby cease to be a designated person.

A designated person who no longer has that status would not be in a position to refer complaints to the Ombudsman. If a designated person had referred a complaint to the Ombudsman prior to them ceasing to be a designated person, and if the complaint complies with the Ombudsman's other criteria for investigating a complaint, the Ombudsman will continue to investigate the complaint as normal. It will be up to tenants and landlords to choose whether there should be any ongoing role for a de-recognised tenant panel.

Q. Is an MP's representative (eg: their local office) eligible to act as a designated person?

A. It is for each designated person to determine how best to carry out their role. An MP's local office representatives may be used if they consider that this would help them in their designated person role of helping to resolve complaints locally. Clearly the MP would be responsible for any actions carried out in their name by their local office

Q. Is the onus on customers to decide they want a tenant panel set up? Or should providers look to set one up now? What happens if there is no appetite among tenants to form a tenant panel?

A. It is for tenants and the landlord to agree how tenant panels are set up for the purpose of being a designated person and for other purposes. Information on setting up tenant panels is set out in [Tenant panels: Options for accountability](#), which describes a range of potential options for tenant panels to get involved with decision-making in the landlord, to help to shape services, to be involved in monitoring and scrutinising landlord services and operations, and to be involved in complaints handling. It makes good business sense and is a regulatory requirement (within the Involvement & Empowerment Standard) that landlords support the formation and activities of tenant panels.

It is a choice for tenants whether and how they set up tenant panels (rather than an "onus"), and, whilst the landlord should provide support and assistance, it should not be the landlord setting up tenant panels either now or in the future. If tenants do not wish to form a designated tenant panel, then tenants of their landlord or in their area would be able to access other

designated persons (possibly including designated tenant panels set up in other landlords operating in the same area).

Q. How many designated tenant panels can operate in the same area? Can they be made up of tenants from other landlords?

A. Tenants and landlords can agree to have as many designated tenant panels operating in the same area as makes sense to them. The Localism Act says that there can be more than one in each landlord.

Any group of tenants can request that the landlord recognise a tenant panel for the purposes of being a designated person. Tenants can ask for recognition of panels for tenants across a whole landlord, in a particular area for tenants of one particular landlord, and in a particular area for tenants of more than one landlord.

Tenant panels: Options for accountability sets out examples of “collaborative tenant panels” where tenants from different landlords are setting up area based panels. If such panels applied for recognition from a landlord in the area, such an application should only be rejected if it was considered that this would not produce beneficial outcomes for the landlord’s tenants (even if there was also a landlord based designated tenant panel).

It is expected that the Ombudsman will provide publicly available information and contact details for designated tenant panels (subject to ensuring that Data Protection requirements are met). This means that tenants from any landlord could approach any designated tenant panel operating in their area. Designated tenant panels will need to choose how to respond to complaints from tenants of other landlords. They may choose that they do not have the resources to provide any assistance or they may engage with the complainant, possibly providing them with useful information about regulatory standards and how they might go about progressing their complaint (although it may well be the case that they would not be able to engage with the complainant’s landlord). Designated tenant panels could not refer complaints to the Ombudsman relating to other landlords.

Q. Can landlords use customers who are already involved in other ways (eg: on area panels etc) for their tenant panel? Can tenant panels be made up of tenants from other landlords?

A. Tenants and the landlord may consider that designated tenant panels would benefit from the involvement of tenants involved in other ways, or they may consider other involvement to be a conflict of interest. The audit trail for how decisions were taken about designated tenant panels should show consideration of potential conflicts of interest and how tenants and the landlord made the decision.

We have retained the original phrasing of this question - “can landlords use” and the ambiguity about ownership of the tenant panel - to illustrate that some cultural shift may be required. It is not expected that tenant panels will be solely “owned” by the landlord or that how they will be set up will only be

decided by the landlord. The whole purpose of tenant panels is that they are tenant-led.

Q. What is the role of existing groups of tenants that are already involved in the complaints processes (eg: tenant board members)? Do they constitute a ‘tenant panel’, or does the landlord need to establish a separate panel? If it is a separate panel, could a tenant be part of both groups?

A. Tenants and the landlord may consider that it would be beneficial to involve tenants involved in the complaints process in other ways, or they may consider such involvement to be a conflict of interest. In some cases, earlier involvement in the complaints procedure (e.g. on a stage 3 review panel) may make it difficult for a designated tenant panel to provide fresh perspective that could help to resolve the problem.

The audit trail for how decisions were taken about designated tenant panels should show consideration of conflicts of interest and how tenants and the landlord made the decision.

Q. How should providers support tenant panels? Should landlords provide training and administrative support? What is the right balance between providing assistance to tenant panels and ensuring they maintain their independence?

A. Regulatory standards make it clear that landlords must support the setting up and ongoing activities of tenant panels. It is for landlords to agree with their tenants the ways that tenant panels are set up. The balance between providing support to tenant panels and enabling them to consider matters independently is discussed in [Tenant panels: Options for accountability](#), but there can be no one formula that determines the right balance. A tenant panel that is not facilitated and encouraged to think independently is unlikely to be able to make a useful contribution. This means that support to tenant panels needs to be provided in such a way that enables them to come to and state independent views.

The Ombudsman may criticise the landlord if it is felt that landlord support for the designated tenant panel is subject to them simply reiterating landlord views of complaints.

Landlords and tenants should discuss how support needs for tenant panels will be met in the process of agreeing how they will be set up. It makes good business sense for landlords to support tenant panels, recognising that landlords can deliver more efficient and effective services that meet tenants’ needs by providing opportunities for panels to scrutinise performance, shape services, take decisions and resolve complaints.

Suggestions for the support tenant panels need are set out in [Tenant panels: Options for accountability](#). They will need training – which should be provided by the landlord, but some of which could come from other sources to ensure access to independent support and a breadth of information. DCLG already

funds residential training at Trafford Hall and will shortly initiate a national tenant support programme for tenant panels.

Q. Will there be data protection issues? Do providers need to seek tenants' permission to share information about their complaint with the designated person? Do they need to ask members of tenant panels to sign confidentiality agreements?

A. There are data protection issues involved in complaints handling. Staff, tenants, designated persons and others involved in complaints handling need to be subject to appropriate codes of confidentiality that ensure good data management, and that those involved may only use information gathered for the purposes of handling the complaint.

In all cases, the complainant needs to remain in control of their complaint. The complainant should be asked by the designated person to authorise (through a written and signed agreement) that the designated person may engage with the landlord regarding their complaint and that information about the case can be released to the designated person. The landlord should be expected to ask the designated person for that written and signed agreement and should not engage with the designated person on the case without it.

Q. Will there be indemnity issues in circumstances where complaints are subsequently considered to be potentially litigious?

A. It is possible that there may be indemnity issues, but these may be limited if tenant panels restrict themselves to providing advice and support (and only provide accurate advice) rather than making formal judgements about the merits of complaints.

In making decisions about how tenant panels are set up, tenants and landlords should consider legal issues. This should include activities covered by the landlord's public liability insurance (e.g. does it cover a tenant panel meeting with a complainant in a landlord premises?) and professional indemnity insurance (e.g. does it cover a tenant panel giving advice to a complainant?).

TENANTS' AND LEASEHOLDERS' PANEL
6 February 2013

Lead Officer: Executive director of adult services, health and housing

Wards: All

Agenda Item: 9

Subject: - Housing Scrutiny Panel Report

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1 The Panel is asked to comment on the housing scrutiny panel report and action plan.

2. SUMMARY

2.1 The attached report details the findings and recommendations for service improvements of the scrutiny of the Housing Customer Contact Service carried out by the housing scrutiny panel.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The Resident Involvement Team has developed a group of tenants who have been trained to scrutinise housing services and make recommendations for service improvements.

3.2 The scrutiny panel carried out a detailed scrutiny of the housing customer contact service which included the contact centre and access Croydon during the summer of 2012.

4. DETAIL

4.1 The methodology, findings and recommendations are detailed in the panel's report (appendix A).

4.2 The scrutiny panel has presented its report and recommendations to the service directors, Graham Cadle, Dave Sutherland and Peter Brown who have agreed to the attached action plan (appendix B)

4.3 The implementation of the action plan will be monitored by the scrutiny panel.

Report Author: Chris Stock, Resident Involvement & Scrutiny Manager, Ext. 62864

Contact Person: As above

Croydon

Housing Scrutiny Panel



Scrutiny of the Housing Customer Contact Service (Including the Contact Centre and Access Croydon) November 2012

Housing Scrutiny Panel: Riki Clarke, Carol Bennet, Caroline Stembridge, Guy Pile-Grey, Chris Crossdale, Sheryl Read, Ruth Alladice

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1. Introduction

1.1 In April 2012 the social housing regulator, the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), introduced revisions to its regulatory standards. There is now a greater emphasis on local mechanisms to involve tenants in scrutinising landlord performance and resolving problems with housing services. The regulations state that

“tenants should have the ability to scrutinise their provider’s performance, identify areas for improvement and influence future delivery”

1.2 In response to these regulations Croydon Council, in partnership with its tenants developed a framework for tenant scrutiny. This included the establishment of and recruitment to, a tenant scrutiny panel. During early 2012 the panel members received a range of training to prepare them to conduct effective scrutiny exercises.

1.3 Following consultation with other council tenants and a review of performance data, the scrutiny panel decided that their first scrutiny exercise would be the housing customer contact service. Seven scrutiny panel members took part.

1.4 This report details the findings and recommendations of this scrutiny exercise, which took place during July, August and September 2012. The exercise included scrutiny of the telephone contact centre, email contact and the housing reception at Taberner House (Access Croydon). The customer contact service deals with all aspects of housing advice, housing management and repairs, while Access Croydon provide face-to-face customer appointments, dealing with all housing issues apart from repairs.

2. Scope and Methodology

2.1 The panel received full co-operation from both management and front line officers which greatly aided the scrutiny process.

2.2 The panel was mentored throughout the exercise by an independent consultant. They met for a facilitated workshop on the exercise where they agreed the scrutiny process, their activities and identified key areas for scrutiny.

2.3 The Panel also received a presentation on the work of the Housing Specialist Team at the Contact Centre from Graham Cadle (Director of Customer Services and Communications), Karen Sullivan (Head of Customer Contact Centre) and Natasa Patterson (Team Manager) at the beginning of the Review. The Panel were provided with the following information:

- Performance Reports
- Team Structure

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- Staff Training Modules
- Customer Charter/ Performance Agreement
- Service Level Agreement between DASHH, Contact centre & Repairs
- Sample of complaints schedule
- Personal Development and Competency Schemes (PDCS) for front line officers
- Contact centre social housing support manual
- Benchmarking reports
- Sickness/staffing levels
- Access Croydon 2012 target tables including customer satisfaction statistics

2.4 To support their work, the Panel used lines of enquiry and some illustrative questions for the Customer Service Manager and Customer Service staff to ensure there was a structured approach in interviews. These were developed further during the course of the exercise. Likewise there was a standard set of five questions for the exit surveys covering time waited and satisfactions with various aspects of the service offered.

2.5 The exercise involved a substantial range of activities and meetings including:

- Thirty five exit surveys for residents leaving Access Croydon (Annex 1)
- Mystery shopping with 32 shops by telephone, 6 shops by visit and 5 shops by email (Annex 2)
- Thirteen interviews with Customer Contact managers and staff
- Eight work shadowing exercises with the Contact Centre and Access Croydon including observation of a team meeting

2.6 Individual panel members recorded the key points from their range of scrutiny activities then came together in another facilitated workshop to agree on their key findings and initial recommendations.

2.7 Before writing this report, some members of the panel met again with Graham Cadle to share their findings and seek his feedback on some of their proposed recommendations.

3. Findings & Recommendations

APPROACH OF CALL CENTRE STAFF

3.1 The Panel was impressed with the approach of the Call Centre staff. They saw examples of where residents contacted the Centre to thank staff for their work and during the mystery shopping, there was positive feedback about how the call had been handled. They also felt that the majority of the staff were committed to providing customers with an excellent service and tried their best to resolve all issues raised by the customer. They noted that the task of staff was sometimes hindered by the volume of calls they were required to handle, the aggressive nature of some customers, the vulnerability of some others and the failure by some back office staff to take ownership of the calls. There were concerns during the work shadowing about the support given by 'back office' staff to the Call Centre staff. This includes information not being completed and deflection of calls.

3.2 Some staff said that they sometimes felt frustrated when they thought that their ideas to improve services were not listened to and that there were few opportunities to influence service delivery. One of the service's pledges states 'We recognise the value of our people and we engage and empower them through coaching, development and talent management.' During the exercise, some staff stated they did not feel this pledge was being applied in practice.

3.3 The panel felt that the work environment was a depersonalised area to work in and the atmosphere very target driven and felt almost intimidating. The constant pressure to meet targets appears to cause a great deal of stress and some of the agents felt demoralised and undervalued. It appeared that there was little or no flexibility e.g 'if you get caught with a longer call you could miss your break'.

3.4 Panel members conducting interviews and work shadowing felt that staff did not have a full understanding of the purpose of the scrutiny exercise which in some cases panel members felt made open and frank discussion with them difficult.

3.5 It was felt by a number of panel members who interviewed staff that some were reluctant to make any negative comments about the service or their job. A number were fearful of their comments being fed back to management, thereby possibly putting their job in jeopardy.

Recommendations

R1 There should be an improvement in communication between managers and staff of the back office and the contact centre, to enable any call handling issues to be raised and solutions agreed. It is suggested that this be achieved by holding monthly meetings, which should be attended by staff and managers from both front and back office, where open but positive discussions can take place.

R2 The profile of senior management should be raised through regular floor walking and 'back to the floor' events.

R3 Management should encourage staff to raise issues and suggest service improvements. Perhaps an 'idea of the month' award for staff should be introduced. This should be a standard agenda item at all team meetings, where staff are asked to suggest any ideas for improvement to the service. In addition, senior managers should agree a rota to attend all team meetings on a regular basis. Team building activities, including the involvement of managers should be organised. It is felt that this would increase staff morale and make staff feel valued.

PERFORMANCE

3.6 One of the main findings of the panel was that the delay between the telephones being answered and speaking to an agent is too long. The benchmarking results from Housemark (Annex 3) show that last year Croydon were at the bottom of the benchmarking club. Whilst there has been an improvement this year, the benchmarking scores show that Croydon remains below average and missing the current target. (Average handling time was 124 secs for 11/12 – target 80% within 20 secs).

3.7 The mystery shopping covered four standard areas – repairs, tenancy, anti social behaviour and complaints. The results revealed overall satisfaction with the courtesy and professionalism of advisors, but weaknesses in providing full information for all four areas. This was across all methods of approach - phones, emails and visits. See Annex 2

3.8 The weekly performance reports for the period ending 01.06.12 show the service level 19% below the 80% target and average handling times of 306 minutes being 94 seconds above the target of 210 seconds.

3.9 The monthly report for the year to date 11/12 (March) shows there has been a small increase in performance over the past 2 years, i.e. compared with YTD 10/11 (March) with a 1% fall in abandoned calls and a 5% improvement in the overall service level. It was also noted in the same period there has been approx. 6% increase in the base number of calls. Whilst these improvements are welcome, they leave a fair amount of room for further improvement.

3.10 The Exit Surveys from the reception area show over 1 in 3 customers waiting for more than 10 minutes.

3.11 Graham Cadle expressed his concern to the panel about whether the current targets were measuring the right outcomes. The most common complaint the panel

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heard in relation to the contact centre, was the time customers had to wait to speak to an agent.

3.12 The 2010/15 Customer Service Strategy refers to the piloting of 'Croydon Champions' to improve customer services. However the panel could find no information regarding the outcome of this pilot.

Recommendations

R4 Provide staff and managers with regular training to ensure that they are able to provide customers with detailed and timely information.

R5 Management to commission quarterly mystery shops (using tenant mystery shoppers) to test the service and publish the results and resultant action plans.

R6 Review all response time targets to ensure that they are meaningful, realistic and can be benchmarked with similar organisations. Establish a joint officer/tenant steering group to develop these.

R7 Management to produce a report explaining why the majority of similar organisations appear to achieve significantly faster call answering times. The report to set out what can we learn from these organisations and what steps we are taking to improve performance. This report to be considered by the Tenant & Leaseholder Panel.

R8 Subject to receiving information regarding the outcome of the 'Croydon Champions' pilot extend this to include some 'Tenant Champions' to focus on housing services.

R9 The panel to explore with the Tenant & Leaseholder Panel if it would support additional HRA funding being diverted to the Housing Customer Contact Service to increase staff resources.

R10 Customer expectations can be high and some can be overly reliant on the housing service. Greater education is really an issue. More information should be given to the customer to reduce the need for some to contact the service. However, the panel would remind the council that many tenants are vulnerable and will continue to rely on regular contact with the council by phone.

RECEPTION AREA

3.13 The exit survey showed that the main areas of concern of those interviewed were about privacy and the lack of information provided. Customers may need to discuss confidential or sensitive issues with housing officers but private areas were not offered and conversations could be overheard by others in the reception area.

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Other customers felt that the officer was unable to provide them with the detailed information that they were requesting.

3.14 Whilst conducting the exit survey, panel members noticed the lack of provision for young children, which resulted in some of them running around the reception area uncontrolled.

3.15 Concern was also raised regarding the requirement for homeless people to wait in the reception area with their baggage whilst their allocation of bed and breakfast accommodation was being organised. This is not ideal for customers as it may feel humiliating and embarrassing for them. In addition, large bags and suitcases can clutter the reception area and create trip hazards etc.

3.16 The Mystery shopping revealed that only 50% of staff were wearing name badges that could be clearly seen.

3.17 It was noted that the security personnel on duty during the time that the various elements of the scrutiny exercise were undertaken, were well informed, helpful and responded to 'security issues' swiftly and appropriately.

Recommendations

R11 That a customer steering group be formed to work in partnership with officers to develop the new reception space at Bernard Weatherill House.

R12 That a play area and private interview rooms are provided as part of the new reception area at Bernard Weatherill House and offered to customers who require privacy.

R13 That a storage area be provided for the baggage of homeless people awaiting bed and breakfast accommodation, so that they can be offered a choice to either remain in the reception area with an improved level of dignity, or leave the reception area and return when details of their accommodation have been confirmed.

R14 That all reception staff wear name badges that are visible and regular checks are made to ensure this is happening.

INTERNET AND COMMUNICATION

3.18 During the course of the exercise the panel became aware of the intention to complete more enquiries through the internet rather than through the Call Centre. Given the 'high' proportion of Croydon residents with access to the internet then the panel understands the shift to the internet for some services. However, for the 49% of council tenants who do not have access to the internet and who lack the necessary IT skills, additional support and resources should be available to them to

Housing Scrutiny Panel

ensure their needs remain catered for and that they are given the same priority as other customers.

3.19 The panel was also concerned that the council may lose sight of the fact that the housing customer, in particular, is more likely to be vulnerable and have complex, sensitive or multiple issues, which require face to face contact, or the need to speak to an agent at some length.

3.20 The panel recognised the importance of communicating with tenants about how best to use the Call Centre and its changing role.

Recommendations

R15 That resources are made available in the self servicing area of the new reception area to ensure that those customers who require support are able to access this.

R16 To ensure that customers who are unable to access the internet or the self service area have suitable alternative choices to access the housing service and are not discriminated against in any way.

R17 Ensure that housing customers are regularly provided with up to date information on the choices for accessing housing services, including office and contact centre opening times, web site and email addresses, social media sites and texting options. This should include information in Open House, Your Croydon, the web site and on new tenant sign ups.

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH CUSTOMERS

3.21 One of the service's pledges is 'We will consult you regularly, welcome your involvement and act on your comments wherever possible'. The panel found no evidence of this happening in practice.

3.22 The panel found that communication with customers regarding the service and service standards was poor. The customer charter states 'We will review the Charter regularly and publish it and performance information on the council website' No performance information could be found on the web site or in the reception area.

Recommendation

R18 That a customer steering group be established to work in partnership with the council to review the charter and monitor performance.

4. Conclusion & Next Steps

4.1 The panel is very impressed with the attitude and commitment of staff. They were also pleased with the commitment expressed by Graham Cadle to work in partnership with residents to improve the service.

4.2 The panel is particularly keen that tenants are provided with the opportunity to work in partnership with the council to develop new performance targets, be involved with future plans for self servicing and the development of the new reception area in Bernard Weatherill House.

4.3 The panel also want to thank the staff and managers of the contact centre for their full co-operation during this exercise and acknowledge the significant contribution made by them. The panel would welcome staff playing a role in developing and implementing the recommendations.

4.4 The panel hope that the council will welcome this report and agree an action plan to deliver the recommendations.

Housing Scrutiny Panel - Riki Clarke, Carol Bennet, Caroline Stenbridge, Guy Pile-Grey, Chris Crossdale, Sheryl Read, Ruth Alladice

November 2012

Annex 1 – Summary of exit surveys

Annex 2 – Summary of mystery shopping

Annex 3 - Benchmarking results from Housemark

Ref.	Item / issue summary	Ref No. / Suggested Recommendation	Proposed action	Who by	When by	How monitored	RAG	Comments on progress
3.1	Issues with ownership of calls and liaison between back and front office.	R1. There should be an improvement in communication between managers and staff of the back office and the contact centre, to enable any call handling issues to be raised and solutions agreed. It is suggested that this be achieved by holding monthly meetings, which should be attended by staff and managers from both front and back office, where open but positive discussions can take place	Establish schedule for officers and managers from front and back office to attend team meetings of the other teams, to exchange views and ideas.	Karen Sullivan/Dave Sutherland/Peter Brown	Jan-13	Schedule to be produced for scrutiny panel every six months		
3.2	Staff feel undervalued and not confident that management listen to their views / concerns.	R2. The profile of senior management should be raised through regular floor walking and 'back to the floor' events.	Establish schedule for senior managers to participate in floor walking and 'back to the floor' events.	Graham Cadle/Dave Sutherland/Peter Brown	Jan-13	6 monthly feedback report to scrutiny panel		
		R3. Management should encourage staff to raise issues and suggest service improvements. Perhaps an 'idea of the month' award for staff should be introduced. This should be a standard agenda item at all team meetings, where staff are asked to suggest any ideas for improvement to the service. In addition, senior managers should agree a rota to attend all team meetings on a regular basis. Team building activities, including the involvement of managers should be organised. It is felt that this would increase staff morale and make staff feel valued.	Ensure that standard agenda items are included on all team meeting agendas to encourage staff to raise issues and ideas for service improvements. Establish a programme for team building activities	Graham Cadle	Jan-13	6 monthly feedback report to scrutiny panel		
3.7	Staff were not always able to provide full answers to queries related to 4 service areas, repairs, tenancy, ASB and complaints. This was across all methods of approach - phone, email and face to face	R4. Provide staff and managers with regular training to ensure that they are able to provide customers with detailed and timely information.	Annual assessment of staff training needs and delivery of training programme	Karen Sullivan	Apr-13	Annual training programme to scrutiny panel		
		R5. Management to commission quarterly mystery shops (using tenant mystery shoppers) to test the service and publish the results and resultant action plans.	Shops organised with the resident involvement team and results and action plans published on council web site	Karen Sullivan	From April 13 ongoing	Results and action plans to scrutiny panel		
3.6, 3.8, 3.9 & 3.11	A key concern was the delay before calls were answered by an agent and this base target was consistently below that of other similar providers	R6 Review all response time targets to ensure that they are meaningful, realistic and can be benchmarked with similar organisations. Establish a joint officer/tenant steering group to develop these.	Steering group to be established to review targets	Karen Sullivan/Chris Stock	Apr-13	New performance targets published		
		R7 Management to <i>review with other organisations in the benchmark group why the majority appear to achieve significantly faster call answering times. The report to set out what can we learn from these organisations and what steps we are taking to improve performance. This report to be considered by the Tenant & Leaseholder Panel. as i explained in the meeting, we need the contacts for the other organisations in the bechmarking to understand, demand, resources etc. can you provide this or above will be impossible.</i>	Report to Tenant & Leaseholder Panel	Graham Cadle/Karen Sullivan	Apr-13	Report received by TLP		

Ref.	Item / issue summary	Ref No. / Suggested Recommendation	Proposed action	Who by	When by	How monitored	RAG	Comments on progress
3.12	The 2010/15 Customer Service Strategy refers to the piloting of 'Croydon Champions' to improve customer services but no details of this scheme could be found.	R8. Subject to receiving information regarding the outcome of the 'Croydon Champions' pilot extend this to include some 'Tenant Champions' to focus on housing services.	Respond to scrutiny panel on the viability of establishing 'tenant champions'	Hayley Lewis	Feb-13	Response to scrutiny panel		
3.6 - 3.10	The panel wondered if additional resources were to be funded that this may lead to improvements in the service	R9. The panel to explore with the Tenant & Leaseholder Panel if it would support additional HRA funding being diverted to the Housing Customer Contact Service to increase staff resources.	Conduct benchmarking exercise to explore resources employed by similar housing organisations and response times achieved	Dave Sutherland	Mar-13	Report to scrutiny panel Apr 13		
n/a	During discussions with managers it was noted that the council expect an increase in the number of customers carrying out transactions electronically. However, many customers remain unwilling and some continue to be unable to use this method of contact.	R10. Customer expectations can be high and some can be overly reliant on the housing service. Greater education is really an issue. More information should be given to the customer to reduce the need for some to contact the service. However, the panel would remind the council that many tenants are vulnerable and will continue to rely on regular contact with the council by phone.	Officers will be spending more time on estates and tenants will be encouraged to become more self servicing and help themselves. There will always be support for less able tenants to access services. The council would welcome greater feedback from tenants on what information is required and through what channels	Dave Sutherland/Peter Brown	Jan-13	6 monthly feedback to scrutiny panel		
3.13 - 3.15	A number of issues were noted with the present reception facilities and the area generally and it was felt these could be designed out in the new building.	R11 That a customer steering group be formed to work in partnership with officers to develop the new reception space at Bernard Weatherill House.	This group has already been established	Graham Cadle	Dec-12	6 monthly feedback to scrutiny panel		
3.13 and 3.14	In particular, lack of play facilities for young children and the lack of privacy for customers was raised as an issue.	R12 That a play area and private interview rooms are provided as part of the new reception area at Bernard Weatherill House and offered to customers who require privacy.	To be provided	Graham Cadle	Apr-13	6 monthly feedback to scrutiny panel		
3.15	Homeless people had to wait in the reception area with their baggage whilst their allocation of bed and breakfast accommodation was being organised, which was felt to be humiliating and bags etc. created a safety risk.	R13 That a storage area be provided for the baggage of homeless people awaiting bed and breakfast accommodation, so that they can be offered a choice to either remain in the reception area with an improved level of dignity, or leave the reception area and return when details of their accommodation have been confirmed.	To be provided	Graham Cadle	Apr-13	6 monthly feedback to scrutiny panel		
3.16	Not all staff wore name badges that were visible	R14 That all reception staff wear name badges that are visible and regular checks are made to ensure this is happening.	Reminders to staff	Karen Sullivan	Jan-13	Spot checks by scrutiny panel		
3.18 & 3.19	A significant number of customers particularly for housing services - may have no or limited understanding of how to use IT equipment due to be installed in	R15 That resources are made available in the self servicing area of the new reception area to ensure that those customers who require support are able to access this.	Support staff will be made available	Graham Cadle	Sep-13	6 monthly feedback to scrutiny panel		
3.18	It was noted that around half of housing customers do not have access to the internet and the council must offer alternate methods to allow customers equal access to services.	R16 To ensure that customers who are unable to access the internet or the self service area have suitable alternative choices to access the housing service and are not discriminated against in any way.	A range of alternative methods of accessing housing services will be continue to be provided	Graham Cadle	Ongoing	6 monthly feedback to scrutiny panel on numbers of tenants accessing housing service and the methods they are using		

Ref.	Item / issue summary	Ref No. / Suggested Recommendation	Proposed action	Who by	When by	How monitored	RAG	Comments on progress
3.20	It is important that customers are kept up to date with the changing methods of contacting the council.	R17 Ensure that housing customers are regularly provided with up to date information on the choices for accessing housing services, including office and contact centre opening times, web site and email addresses, social media sites and texting options. This should include information in Open House, Your Croydon, the web site and on new tenant sign ups	1) The RI team will provide residents with advice and relevant signposting about the full range of contact centre options at meetings, surgeries and events. 2) The Communications team will liaise with Contact Centre managers to ensure timely and accurate provision of information in publications, website etc.	1) Chris Stock 2) Sandra O'Connor	Ongoing	6 monthly feedback to scrutiny panel		
3.21 & 3.22	There was little evidence of the council working in partnership with residents in relation to developing or monitoring the contact centre service.	R18 That a customer steering group be established to work in partnership with the council to review the charter and monitor performance.	Steering group to be established to monitor targets and review charter. <i>The charter has now been replaced with the customer commitment which is just about to be launched. Hayley Lewis is currently working on how we monitor going forward.</i>	Chris Stock/Hayley Lewis	Apr-13	6 monthly feedback to scrutiny panel		

TENANTS' AND LEASEHOLDERS' PANEL
6 February 2013

Lead Officer: Executive director of adult services, health and housing

Wards: All

Agenda Item: 10

Subject: - Annual Benchmarking and STAR survey reports

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 The Panel is asked to note the availability of these reports and the summary of the highlights attached as appendix A.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The attached appendix provides some of the highlights of our annual benchmarking report and tenant satisfaction report.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Croydon are members of HouseMark, a national benchmarking organisation that allows us to benchmark our performance, costs and satisfaction levels against the majority of social housing landlords across England. Every year HouseMark provides Croydon with a detailed report which benchmarks Croydon's housing service against other similar social housing landlords in London.
- 3.2 Previously the Government required all social housing landlords to conduct regular customer satisfaction surveys. This was known as the Status Survey. This is no longer a requirement but HouseMark, in partnership with national tenants' groups, produced an alternative, the STAR survey. This is voluntary but the majority of social housing landlords have decided to conduct this survey.

4. DETAIL

- 4.1 During the summer of 2012 the council submitted data to HouseMark in relation to its housing services. This data is verified by HouseMark and they produce an annual report. This is available for download from the council's website. Full details are available from the HouseMark web site. Details regarding access to this site can be obtained from the Resident involvement team.
- 4.2 The council employed Feedback Services to carry out the STAR survey in the

summer of 2012. They have also provided the council with a detailed report and is available on the council's website. Feedback Services has delivered workshops to both officers and tenants' representatives to assist with the interpretation of the results.

- 4.3 Overall both reports are positive with improvements in most service areas. Officers will use these reports to review service areas where performance or satisfaction is not increasing. Highlights of both reports are available in the attached appendix A.

Report Author: Chris Stock, Resident Involvement & Scrutiny Manager, Ext. 62864

Contact Person: As above

Our performance, costs and what you told us

We measure ourselves against a range of performance indicators, compare the costs of your housing services and ask you through surveys what you think of your housing services.

We present this information to a number of residents' panels who make recommendations on how services can be improved. Here is a snap shot of last year's performance and what tenants said to us in a postal survey of tenants in summer 2012.

The council employed Feedback Services to carry out a tenant satisfaction survey. Just under 4,000 tenants were invited to take part in the survey and 1,524 responded (39%).

Overall satisfaction with the housing service **77%** up 3% 😊

This figure is based on the survey which was carried out in the summer of 2012 and is up on the previous survey carried out in 2011.

How we compare with other outer London boroughs whose data is available...

Hounslow Homes	83%
LB Croydon	77%
LB Harrow	75%
LB Barking & Dagenham	73%
Enfield Homes	69%
Lewisham Homes	69%
Haringey Homes	62%

This is good news. We have been working hard to listen to your views and improving your housing services.

Satisfaction with the overall quality of your Home **75%** up 4%



This figure is based on the survey which was carried out in the summer of 2012 and is up on the previous survey carried out in 2011.

How we compare with other outer London boroughs...

Hounslow Homes	78%
LB Croydon	75%
LB Harrow	75%
LB Barking & Dagenham	74%
Haringey Homes	65%
Enfield Homes	64%
Lewisham Homes	63%

Satisfaction with your neighbourhood as a place to live **74%**

up 3%

This figure is based on the survey which was carried out in the summer of 2012 and is up on the previous survey carried out in 2011.

Hounslow Homes	78%
LB Harrow	78%
Lewisham Homes	75%
LB Croydon	74%
LB Barking & Dagenham	74%
Haringey Homes	64%
Enfield Homes	64%

Satisfaction with Repairs 75% up 3% 😊

This figure is based on the survey which was carried out in the summer of 2012 and is up on the previous survey carried out in 2008.

We have been working hard to improve repairs service – this seen as priority by residents. New initiatives have been introduced eg appointment times etc

How we compare with other outer London boroughs...

LB Croydon	75%
Enfield Homes	74%
Hounslow Homes	74%
LB Harrow	73%
LB Barking & Dagenham	66%
Lewisham Homes	63%
Haringey Homes	61%

Empty properties 25 days (up from 23 in 2010/11) 😞

These figures show how long it takes us to relet our empty homes. The time includes time to advertise empty homes, carry out viewings and sign-ups, while ensuring our contractors bring the property up to a standard for new tenants to move in. This figure has increased as a result of problems with hard to let sheltered homes. We are looking at how to make best use of some of our sheltered housing. Our current performance on empty properties is very good and meeting targets

LB Harrow	20 days
Lewisham Homes	23 days
LB Croydon	25 Days
Haringey Homes	31days
Enfield Homes	39 Days
LB Barking & Dagenham	42 Days
Hounslow Homes	65 Days

Current Arrears **1.8%** (down from 2.0% in 2010/11) 😊

This shows the total rent arrears owed by current tenants as a percentage of one year's worth of rental income. In general, if the percentage is coming down we are collecting all the rent due for the last year plus some of the arrears. If it is going up then we haven't collected all of the rent due last year.

How we compare with other outer London boroughs...

LB Harrow	1.6%
LB Croydon	1.8%
Enfield Homes	2.8%
Hounslow Homes	3.2%
LB Barking & Dagenham	3.6%
Lewisham Homes	4.2%
Haringey Homes	7.0%

Housing Management Costs **£483** per property (down from £486 in 2010/11) 😊

This shows the total costs of your housing management service including staffing & overhead costs and includes the following services; rent collection, anti social behaviour, tenancy management & lettings and resident involvement expressed as a cost per property.

Hounslow Homes	£273
Enfield Homes	£309
Lewisham Homes	£327
LB Barking & Dagenham	£338
LB Harrow	£350
LB Croydon	£483
Haringey Homes	£506

Repairs Costs **£880** per property (down from £884 in 2010/11)



This shows the total costs of your repair service including staffing & overheads costs and includes day to day repairs, repairs to empty properties and supervision of the council's contractors expressed as a cost per property.

LB Barking & Dagenham	£716
Hounslow Homes	£729
LB Croydon	£880
Enfield Homes	£919
Lewisham Homes	£958
LB Harrow	£1,015
Haringey Homes	£1,162

Major works and cyclical maintenance costs **£1,134** (down from £1226 in 2010/11)

This shows the total cost of major works (e.g new kitchens and bathrooms, windows and central heating) and cyclical maintenance (e.g external decoration, boiler servicing) expressed as a cost per property.

LB Barking & Dagenham	£1,041
LB Croydon	£1,134
LB Harrow	£1,517
Hounslow Homes	£2,012
Lewisham Homes	£2,068
Enfield Homes	£2,444
Haringey Homes	£2,621

Add in overall budget increased so can do more improvements etc

Percentage of homes failing to meet the decent homes standard **1%** up from 0% 😊

The decent homes standard is a key indicator. It is government policy that all social rented homes should meet this standard by 2010 and should thereafter continue to be maintained to that standard. We did meet the 2010 target and aim to increase our budget to ensure that all our homes continue to meet the standard

Hounslow Homes	0%
LB Croydon	1%
LB Harrow	16%
Haringey Homes	30%
LB Barking & Dagenham	39%
Enfield Homes	47%
Lewisham Homes	51%

76% of tenants would recommend the council to family and friends.

Copies of the survey and annual performance report can be found on the council's website www.croydon.gov.uk/housing

We wish to thank all tenants who gave their time to complete the survey. The results help us to identify areas residents feel are priorities, are areas of concern which we will focus on working with them in a bid to improve housing services.

Lead Officer: Director of Housing

Wards: All

Agenda Item: 11

Subject:- Your Housing, Your Questions

1. SUMMARY

This report provides feedback on the two recent pilot of the Your Housing, Your Questions sessions that were arranged by the resident involvement team. The events were developed to provide an opportunity for residents to have direct contact with decision-makers to discuss issues which are important to them.

2. RECOMMENDATION

The Panel is asked to share their views about the pilot scheme and agree that the Resident Involvement Group (RIG) develop a proposal for future events which will be presented to the next meeting of this Panel.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Croydon Council has an excellent track record in involving its tenants and leaseholders in the monitoring and management of their homes and estates.
- 3.2 The revised regulatory framework for social housing introduced by the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) in April 2010 requires all housing providers to develop arrangements for co-regulation where the landlord and the tenant work to assess the landlord's performance and develop plans for service improvements.
- 3.3 In response to these regulatory changes the council reviewed its tenant involvement framework with tenants and the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Panel received a report in July 2012 setting out revisions to the resident involvement framework. One of the proposals was to pilot the introduction of housing question time events run along similar lines to the successful Council Question Time events.
- 3.4 The purpose of these question time events is to provide an alternative method for residents to engage with the decision makers in the housing service. It was felt this may prove more attractive to a range of residents who either wish to raise their issue at a higher level, as well as to those who do not engage in the existing framework.

- 3.5 To enable those residents who wish to raise personal housing issues through a face to face meeting to do so, a surgery is organised for 30 minutes prior to the start of the question time session, where tenants can talk one to one with representatives from the housing service.
- 3.6 Tenants and leaseholders were keen that these events were resident led i.e. residents would chair, and be involved in selecting venues and agreeing the make up of the panel. The resident involvement team would promote and service the events.
- 3.7 The Tenants' and Leaseholders' Panel agreed to pilot two events, one in the evening at Longheath Gardens, Ashburton and the other during an afternoon at the Town Hall. This report evaluates the Longheath Gardens event which took place on 7 November 2012 and the Town Hall event which took place on 16 January 2013.

4. DETAILS OF EVENTS

- 4.1 The timing of the Longheath event enabled it to be promoted through an article in Open House. Two or three days prior to the event, members of staff from the resident involvement team visited key locations in the area, such as tramstops, primary schools, etc., to distribute flyers and speak to people about the event, explaining what it was about and encouraging them to attend.
- 4.2 Both events were also heavily promoted by articles on the councils website and posters were used in various blocks across the borough. In addition, invitation letters were sent in advance, to around 130 residents on the councils database of people who regularly take part in activities provided by the resident involvement team, such as meetings and events.
- 4.3 In addition, following the event:
- Each resident who attended the YHYQ events for whom we have contact details, was sent an individual response thanking them and outlining action that has either been taken or will be taken, as noted at the event.
 - Notes and the action plan from the YHYQ events were published on the housing section of the council website after the events.
 - Key outcomes and actions that have taken place as a result of questions, concerns and feedback from residents who attended the YHYQ event will be promoted in future editions of the Open House newsletter and the resident involvement team e. newsletter.
- 4.4 The panel for both the events was made up of Councillor Dudley Mead, Cabinet member for housing, Dave Sutherland, managing director of Croydon landlord services and Peter Brown, divisional director for Housing needs and strategy.
- 4.5 Members of the audience were able to submit questions written in advance on

a card, which they could read out themselves or ask the chair to read out on their behalf. Alternately members of the audience had an opportunity to ask direct questions when invited to do so. In addition, questions could be submitted in advance of the event, by post or email.

4.6 Attendance at events

	Longheath	Town Hall
Number attending	29	32
Those who had pre registered	6	17
From local estate / area	14	12
Nearby (approx. 2 mile radius)	7	5
Across the borough	8	15

4.7 Feedback on the events

1. How did you hear about the event (could be more than one per person)

	Longheath	Town Hall
Letter	7	3
Leaflet / poster	7	7
Open House	4	4
Canvassing	6	N/A
Other	2	3

2 Results of exit (meeting effectiveness) survey

	Longheath	Town Hall
How many surveys completed	14	14
Did you find the event useful	86%	71%
Would you attend a future event	100%	85%
Did you think the event was well run	71%	64%
Did people listen to what others had to say	100%	93%

5. QUESTIONS AND ISSUES RAISED

5.1 A pre meeting surgery session was held for 30 minutes, immediately prior to each meeting. Residents were provided with an opportunity to raise personal issues or concerns with senior managers in attendance from three key service areas:

- responsive repairs
- tenancy and neighbourhood services
- housing solutions

These staff spoke with residents on a 1:1 basis and recorded a variety of issues which they either responded to directly at the event, or will feed back to the resident concerned in due course.

This was generally felt to be a useful service although a number of attendees were keen to see stock investment or planned maintenance, who did not attend either event.

5.2 During the open question and answer sessions, the panel heard 16 questions

at the Longheath event and 18 questions from the Town Hall event. These were direct from the floor or asked via the pre written question cards. A high level overview of the categories of questions is given in the table below.

Subject	Number of questions	
	L / heath	Town hall
Community Safety (anti-social behaviour, CCTV, lighting)	5	8
Supply and allocation of housing	4	5
Planned maintenance works (security doors, kitchen / bathroom, supported decoration scheme)	3	3
Responsive repairs (damp/condensation, guttering)	2	1
External grounds maintenance	2	0
Leasehold charges	1	0
Other / misc	2	1

Within this, the top three issues during both YHYQ events were:

1. Community safety and ASB
2. Housing supply and allocations
3. Planned maintenance and improvements

5.3 A significant amount of discussion took place at both meetings around issues that did not require specific / direct action but residents were seeking information or clarity. Key topics included the provision of council / social housing and management of the allocations process, issues around antisocial behaviour, including people gathering and behaving in an anti social manner, dog fouling and poor lighting which may make people feel insecure and the recent changes to the benefits system.

5.4 Whilst many questions and issues were dealt with during the sessions, there were some issues which require further action. At the time of producing this report, full information about the progress of actions from the Town Hall event is not available. However, of the 7 issues captured at the Longheath event, the agreed action was completed within 3 weeks of the event in 4 cases and all actions have now been completed, including putting some detailed plans in place, relating to preventing ASB on an estate.

5.5 Examples, from both events, of items that required action include:

1. A resident from a special sheltered housing unit reported that the communal gardens are not well maintained and need urgent attention. It was agreed that the neighbourhood services manager will be asked to visit the tenant and follow up required action with colleagues who manage the contract with Continental Landscapes.
2. A number of tenants from one estate reported a recent increase in the number and scale of incidents of ASB. The head of tenancy and neighbourhood services will meet residents, investigate the matter and come up with some realistic options to improve the situation in that area.
3. A resident from a block reported that a fallen tree in the communal

gardens had been there for some time. The Tenancy Officer will visit and if necessary arrange for the tree to be taken away.

- 4 Residents of Belgrave Road are experiencing difficulty parking in the bays that are provided for their use. It was noted this is not currently a controlled parking zone and it was agreed that contact would be made with parking services to establish if a controlled parking zone can be set up in this location.
- 5 The issue of repeat fly-tipping on the Fieldway estate was reported and it was agreed that Yvonne Murray would liaise with the resident about setting up a task group to address the situation and devise a solution.
- 6 A resident reported he and his family had been rehoused in a heavily adapted ground floor property and he is keen to move to another property. It was agreed that an officer would visit the property to note the adaptations provided. Senior officers will then agree if a Management Transfer is warranted, in order to release the property for use by a disabled resident.

Report Author: Tim Nash, Resident Involvement and Scrutiny Co-ordinator,
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