

Committee	Date:
Housing Management & Almshouses Sub Committee	14 July 2015
Subject: Housing Update	Public
Report of: Director of Community & Children's Services	For Information

Summary

This six monthly update on Housing Service performance and management information, keeps Members up to date with progress against key areas of work. The report covers performance for the second half of the financial year (1 October 2014 to 31 March 2015).

Members may wish to note that:

- Performance on responsive repairs has generally met or exceeded targets, other than for post-inspection of completed repairs. This target was missed due to staff shortages, although the vacant posts have since been filled;
- Performance on rent collection is above target despite the impact of welfare benefit reforms. Furthermore, the rent collection work undertaken by the Estate Management team has been cited in a recent internal audit report as an example of good practice;
- Resident satisfaction with the appearance of estates has dropped significantly because most have not had external and communal areas redecorated for some years. This will be addressed through the Asset Management Plan.
- Housing staff volunteered their time during Poppy Week to collect for the Royal British Legion at Barbican Station. With this, plus a sponsored Poppy Walk, they raised nearly £2500 for the Royal British Legion.
- New housing schemes are being developed at a number of sites. If all of the opportunities are realised there will be in excess of 210 new affordable housing units constructed in the next 2-3 years.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report

Main Report

Background

1. This report is presented to the Housing Management & Almshouses Sub-Committee every six months. It provides Members with an overview of Housing Service performance and progress on key issues, plus some additional information of interest.
2. This report covers the period 1 October 2014 to 31 March 2015. It has been organised to give Members brief information on each of eight areas of work:
 - Repairs & Maintenance
 - Estate Management
 - Resident Engagement
 - Revenues
 - Allocations
 - Affordable Housing
 - Benefits
 - Complaints

Repairs & Maintenance

3. Performance information on our responsive repairs service is collected and reported quarterly. Indicators are reviewed annually to ensure they produce meaningful data that can be monitored effectively. Some of the indicators for 2014/15 have been combined. The service is delivered by our contractor, Wates Living Space.

Performance indicator	Target	End-year performance
'Immediate' repairs (complete within 2 hours)	100%	100%
'Emergency' repairs (complete within 24 hours)	95%	98.5%
'Routine' repairs	95%	97.75%
% of jobs for which post-work inspections were carried out	15%	9.75%

4. The new, higher target of 15% for post-work inspections was set this year (previously 10%). Unfortunately due to staff shortages this target was missed during the reporting period. Several vacancies have since been filled, which will ensure that more post-work inspections are completed.
5. Gas servicing is done by our contractor, Carillion, who work closely with City staff to gain access to properties and carry out the necessary checks. At year end, 99% of our properties have up to date CP12 gas safety certificates. Our target is 100%, but the performance this year maintains a significant improvement on the 2013/14 year end figure of 96.6%.

Estate Management & Resident Engagement

6. Satisfaction with estate services (cleaning, appearance of the estate and customer service) is measured annually by means of a questionnaire to all 2833 properties on our social housing estates – including leasehold and freehold homes.
7. In previous years, response rates have been around 5-6%. However, by combining the satisfaction survey with a questionnaire on the controversial subject of pets, we achieved an impressive response rate of 33%.
8. The findings demonstrate that overall satisfaction with our services remains high. We were particularly pleased that the percentage of residents who feel safe on their estate has risen by 10% in the last year. However, other results have dropped – mostly slightly, but, in one case, significantly.

Question	Findings	
	We asked	CoL overall findings
Overall, how satisfied are you with the services we provide on your estate?	82% Very satisfied or satisfied	↓ 1%
How satisfied are you with the cleanliness of your estate?	76% very satisfied or satisfied	↓ 3%
How satisfied are you with the appearance of your estate?	70% very satisfied or satisfied	↓ 14%
How safe do you feel on your estate?	69% feel very safe or safe	↑ 10%
How satisfied are you with the customer services provided by your estate staff?	82% very satisfied or satisfied	↓ 2%

9. Comments on the surveys showed a number of minor issues with cleanliness and customer service which accounted for the small drop in satisfaction. These have been addressed by staff in the Estate Plans, and improvements have been made on both fronts.
10. The large drop in satisfaction with the appearance of estates was shown by comments to relate, not to gardening or cleanliness, but because external redecorations, on most estates, have not been carried out for some years. Members will be aware that the Asset Management Plan includes redecoration programmes for our estates and it is expected that this will make a significant difference to satisfaction.
11. A total of 23 Right to Buy applications were made between 1 October and 31 March 2015. None of these completed during the reporting period. However, two applications received prior to 1 October completed during this time.
12. There were 30 incidents of Anti-Social Behaviour on our estates during the past six months. Only a small number of these were of a more serious nature, one of which involved verbal aggression against a member of staff. Legal action was taken against the tenant in that instance. We have since implemented regular

lone worker safety training and the Housing Service is taking part in a pilot programme of training regarding dealing with aggression/violence. We have a new Anti-social Behaviour policy which has been approved by the Sub-Committee and we are currently developing a suite of staff procedures to underpin this.

Resident Engagement

13. The 'Remembering Yesterday, Celebrating Today' programme of events has continued across City of London Estates. Highlights include a First World War Centenary themed Residents' Celebration Day on 18 October 2014, tea dances, parties, a Christmas remembrance dinner and lots of fundraising. Housing staff volunteered their time during Poppy Week to collect for the Royal British Legion at Barbican Station, and a team of staff also completed the Poppy Walk. In total, almost £2500 was raised by staff, who also raised funds during the year for Breast Cancer Care and Prostate Cancer.
14. The next Residents' Celebration Day will take place in the Livery Hall, Guildhall on Saturday 17 October 2015. This is a wonderful event for residents to get together and join us to celebrate the achievements of the past year and look ahead to any upcoming challenges. This year we are working to the theme of 'Health Homes, Happy People' and we are putting together a varied programme. This includes presentations, entertainment, awards and workshops.
15. Residents are giving more time to support community engagement on their estates. During this period 1,548 hours of time was given by individuals earning Time Credits on their estates. Ways in which time was given include consultation through the Housing Users Board, becoming a Good Neighbour, supporting the City to shape services and organising a wide range of events. These have included gardening, walking, Halloween, Christmas, health days, jobs fairs, clean ups, and many more. Residents and staff from the Avondale Estate were recognised by the Bermondsey partnership for the volunteering they are doing and were invited to a prestigious award ceremony where they won an astonishing 10 out of 17 awards. One resident was also given a Southwark 'Housing Hero' Award and is now studying to complete a Community Development qualification.

Revenues

16. Our team of Income Recovery Officers, Rent Officers and Estate Managers have exceeded expectations by returning a HRA rent collection rate during 2014/15 of 98.7%, exceeding the already stretching target of 98.5%. By adopting a range of communication measures including letters, emails, texts, personal visits etc the Estate Management team were able to apply prompt, remedial action whenever arrears accrued on accounts resolving many issues swiftly. Given the ongoing financial climate an achievement of this nature should not be underestimated. Furthermore, the rent collection work undertaken by the estate management team has been cited in a recent internal audit report as an example of good practice.

Allocations

17. The number of people on our waiting list reduced from 990 to 692 during the reporting period. This continuing reduction comes following the introduction of the Localism Act and our new Allocations Policy in 2013. Under this policy we now only accept applications from people with a current connection to the City of London through residence or employment or by being the son or daughter of a City Corporation tenant.
18. The Housing Needs Team is also auditing all current applications, ensuring they remain eligible to remain on the Register. They are also working with the Fraud Team to target any potentially fraudulent applications. This has resulted in a number of individuals being removed from the Register. We currently receive approximately 80 applications a month, not all of which are eligible for the Register.
19. There were 20 vacant properties as of 31 March 2015. The average time taken to re-let a property from the day the keys are handed back to the day they are given to a new tenant during this period was 25.5 days. The target is 24 days. The target was missed due to two properties being left in a poor condition by the outgoing tenant, so deep cleaning and significant maintenance work was required before re-letting was possible.

Affordable Housing

20. Members will be aware that affordable housing schemes are being developed in a number of areas. If all of the opportunities are realised there will be in excess of 210 new affordable housing units constructed in the next 2-3 years.
21. One such scheme is 43 units (14 one bed, 15 two bed, 14 three bed) at Horace Jones House, situated at One Tower Bridge. The first residents moved in during June 2015.
22. Construction commenced in January 2015 at Avondale Square Estate and we are scheduled to complete 18 new homes in May 2016 (4 one bed, 5 two bed, 5 three bed and 4 four bed) on the site of the former Avondale Community Centre/estate office. This will include new community facilities for residents and a new estate office.
23. We have planning permission for further 13 homes (4 one bed, 7 two bed, and 2 three bed) at Avondale at George Ellison/Eric Wilkins and 1 three bed wheelchair-adapted unit at Dron House. The work to Dron House will also include the redevelopment of the existing community hall.
24. Planning applications have been submitted at Isleden House for 3 three bed units and a new community space, as well as at Islington Arts Factory for 20 units. We are also working closely with the London Borough of Islington to provide a new double entry primary school and up to 70 new socially rented homes on the Richard Cloudesley site, which has a target completion date of September 2017. A target of 200 new homes by March 2018 fits in with the Mayor's Housing covenant programme 2015-18.

Benefits

25. There are currently (as of 31 March 2015) 1069 households in the City and on our housing estates claiming benefits. Performance on our indicators is as follows:

Performance indicator	Target	End-year performance
Average time taken to process new benefit claims	<26 days	19 days
% New claims decided within 14 days	>90%	95%
Average number of days taken to process notification of changes of circumstance	10 days	9 days

Complaints

26. We received a total of 14 formal complaints during the reporting period. The broad subject areas of the complaints received can be broken down as follows:

	Number received in reporting period
Responsive repairs	4
Parking	3
Service charge/rent	1
Customer Service	3
Estate management	3

27. Of the 14 complaints received, all were addressed at Stage 1 within the agreed ten working day deadline, except one. The one case where this was not possible was due to the complexity of the complaint and a later deadline was agreed with the complainant, and was met. Six of these complaints were escalated to Stage 2.

28. Four complaints then went on to be escalated to Stage 3. These related to:

- 2 x parking charges & enforcement
- 1 x customer service
- 1 x estate management

29. Our internal complaints process terminates at Stage 3. Of the four complaints escalated to Stage 3, one was referred to the Local Government Ombudsman and to the Housing Ombudsman. This was from the same complainant and related to allegations of poor customer service - that we were not providing information in a format the complainant required, that he was left behind during an estate walkabout and felt the Housing Service was trying to ostracise him. In both cases, the Ombudsmen dismissed the complaints.

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