

Title: Organisational Update to Board: April 2013	Meeting: Board	
Report authorised by:	Date of the meeting: 24 April 2013	Item No. 10
Report author: Gavin Cansfield, Chief Executive	Classification: Closed	Report type: Information
Our Vision: "By 2014 we will provide the best housing services in Tower Hamlets." We will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Achieve the highest rate of resident satisfaction ▪ Have the highest performance for the money we spend ▪ Ease overcrowding through reducing under-occupation and illegal sub-letting by a third ▪ Have a workforce that reflects the community we serve through creating opportunities for BME staff and Women staff to progress into more senior positions 		
Impact for Customer: This report addresses work to enhance services for customers by ensuring: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ delivery of Decent Homes Programme ▪ that appropriate steps are taken to mitigate effects of the welfare reform changes. ▪ best practice in a range of areas including older and vulnerable residents, and community language provision. 		
Diversity Impact: The report provides an update on work carried out by THH which impacts all sections of the community.		
Cost and Income Implications: The report addresses the Welfare Reform and its impact and work underway to mitigate effect of the main housing related changes and establish more secure rental payments.		
Risk Management: 3 – Making a difference – ensuring that achievements recognised internally or externally make a difference to residents. 5 – Organisational Coherence – ensuring what we say should happen actually does happen.		
Summary: This report updates Board members on:		

- Harford Centre
- External recognition
- Finance Update
- Welfare Reform
- Updated on Neighbourhoods and Caretaking Reviews
- Aging Inquiry
- Guardian translation Piece
- Engagement Update
- Community Regeneration projects

Recommendations:

That the Board note the contents of this report.

The Board asked for the report to be taken in open session with the exception of sections 1, 2 and 6.

1. Removed

2. Removed

3. Harford Centre

We have taken possession of a floor at the Harford Centre as part of our exit of Cheviot House. Staff will physically move there later this month. Property Services staff will also be located at this location. We were able to recycle some office furniture made available through the Council's exit of Anchorage House and the majority of the fit-out has been undertaken by the landlord.

In May 2013, our front counter in Cheviot House which serves the Stepney Wapping Area will move to the Council's new IDEA Store in Watney Market. This change will be publicised in the April edition of our residents newsletter, Open Door and through the website.

4. External recognition

At the last Board meeting I reported that THH had received Customer Services Excellence accreditation. In recent months we have received a range of other external accreditations and awards that enable us to share best practice across the sector. These include:

- Regional TPAS Award for Excellence in the Community. The winning project was the Multi-faith initiative that encouraged religious groups to organise celebrations for other faith groups. For example, a local church congregation organised Eid parties for the Muslim community.
- Regional TPAS Award for Excellence in Equality & Diversity. This award was in recognition of the Speak Your Language project – focusing on the language honorarium and our Bengali language welfare reform TV show.

- Regional TPAS Award for Excellence in Annual Reports. THH were highly commended in this category for the 2011/12 Annual Report.
- ISO 9001 accreditation for Environmental Services: the endorsement, which lasts until 2015, is for demonstrating quality management systems within the service including internal and external cleaning and refuse collection.
- Inmotion Project of the Year Award recognised the THH GIS maps system. This new feature allows residents to view available parking spaces and garages online, resulting in a 10% increase in revenue, 50% reduced waiting list, and 33% reduction in operational cost.
- Chartered Institute of Marketing Award – we were shortlisted for this award, in the not-for-profit category, for the recruitment campaign, jointly led by our Communications and HR teams, for apprentices in Autumn 2011.
- Plain English Award for the 2011/12 Annual Report, Decent Homes aftercare booklet, and Open Door. We were nominated for this by a resident.

5. Finance Update

Year end

The Council and the Company's year end is 31 March 2013. Work is progressing to meet with closure timetables. The key dates are that delegated accounts forming part of the Council's Statement of Accounts must be presented to LBTH Audit Committee by the end of June 2013. Draft financial statements for THH will be presented to the THH Finance & Audit Committee for its July 2013 meeting. The Board will need to approve the financial statements after the Finance & Audit Committee recommends the Board to do so. KPMG act as external auditors to both THH and the Council.

Financial systems

The Council went live with a new financial system called Agresso which we use. Agresso provides greater self-service options for budget managers than the existing system. This is a significant achievement for the Council and their ICT partner, Agilisys, having replaced three existing systems with one, in a timescale of approximately seven months. As with any new system, we are expecting some possible disruption and teething issues.

HRA Outturn

The consolidated HRA outturn is forecast of circa. £1m which will be added to the HRA Balance at 31 March 2012 of £13.578m.

Company Outturn

We expect the company to report a surplus of circa £600k (before pension fund adjustments) in line with previous estimates.

Budget planning dates

The Finance & Audit Committee (F&AC) will approve a workplan at its next meeting. The following reports to F&AC will feed into the financial planning and budgeting process for 2014-15.

May 2013 - Preliminary Outturn Report for 2012-13

July 2013 - HRA 30 Year Business Plan/HRA MTFS

Oct 2013 - Housemark Benchmarking 2012-13

Jan 2014 - Budget 2013-14

In previous years a Finance & Audit Committee budget workshop has been held in December 2013 and this will be offered again this year.

6. Removed

7. Lakanal Inquest Update

We have been reviewing the recommendations made in the Coroner's letter to Southwark Council issued at the end of March, as we did the issues that emerged in press coverage during the course of the inquest. These focused on the fire advice provided to residents, signage in blocks, fire risk assessments, training for staff involved in maintenance and refurbishment works, access for emergency services and the potential fitting of sprinkler systems. We are discussing the recommendations with other organisations through the London & Southern ALMOs Health & Safety Group and our own Health & Safety Forum will be considering our current arrangements in relation to these key issues, and what steps we could take to improve the way we do things in the future, later this month. We will be keeping a close eye on the official responses to the coroner's recommendations from both Southwark Council and DCLG.

8. Welfare Reform

The March 2013 meeting of the Finance & Audit Committee reviewed a report and presentation on welfare reform which reviewed impacts and work underway to mitigate effect of the main housing related changes:

- Non-dependent deductions
- Bedroom Tax
- Welfare reform
- Universal credit

Phase 1 of our work to date has involved:

- Establishing a Welfare Reform Working Group to oversee a number of work streams set up to focus on housing benefit aspects of welfare reforms.
- Developing an action plan for targeted activities with the 'hardest hit' THH claimants.
- Raising THH claimants' awareness of the Welfare Reform changes via a multi channel information campaign. All tenants with rent arrears who are affected by the increases in non dependant deductions were invited to a number of surgeries.

The surgeries were delivered in English, Bengali and Somali. At these surgeries we worked with voluntary sector advice agencies to immediately respond to individual resident enquires. 169 residents attended the surgeries between October 2011 and June 2012.

- THH claimants who are likely to be affected by the Benefit Cap and Under Occupancy changes have received a letter outlining the changes and implications. Officers are also meeting with individual claimants, so far we have completed appointments with 444 THH claimants.
- A leaflet has been prepared for residents and staff and was distributed to all THH tenants with the July 2012 rent statements.
- Two members of the rents team appeared live on NTV, a Bengali TV channel to discuss welfare reform and its impact on residents. The changes were explained in both Sylheti dialect and standard Bengali.
- Raising organisational awareness of the Welfare Reform changes through briefings for front line staff.

Phase 2 is concerned with – Resourcing, Systems & Processes.

An overhaul of the rents service is underway with the principal aims of establishing more secure rental payments, including:

- Creation of a welfare benefit team within THH funded by growth agreed by the Board in the 2013-14 budget
- Refreshed approach to mutual exchanges as to reduce overcrowding and reduce underoccupancy
- Training for staff – financial inclusion, referrals to support pathways, pre-tenancy processes.
- Increasing levels of information held for each claimant – bank account, online access.
- Moving from the existing four payment dates per month to a facility to pay rent by direct debit any day of the month.
- Working with advice agencies and Job Centre Plus to help THH households gain the knowledge and skills to move into sustainable employment, budget assistance and advice, setting up bank accounts
- Reviewing monitoring systems to deliver a different recovery approach, intervening earlier where tenants get into difficulties.

9. Updates on Neighbourhoods and Caretaking Reviews

Reviews of the Environmental Services business area which covers the cleaner/caretaker services and the Neighbourhood Services area covering tenancy management are planned for this year.

For Environmental Services, the review will look at how cost and quality can be further improved and whether the satisfaction with the service is good; and whether the costs are higher than comparable ALMO's. An initial, high level, overview report will be complete by the end of April,

allowing an in-depth review to be undertaken following procurement of consultant support.

The Neighbourhood Services review will take a comprehensive first principles look at the existing front line functions at the Neighbourhood Office and what support for the front line is required for service delivery. Procurement of consultant support to undertake comparative analysis and to facilitate staff engagement in the review is underway.

10. Ageing Inquiry

20% of our residents are over 65 - well above the borough average of 6% and the London average of 11%. This segment is also predicted to grow rapidly over the next decade. In order to provide the best services and quality of life – whilst recognising the limits of our general needs stock - we need to be proactive and innovative in addressing their needs. There has been significant national interest in this issue, with a number of high profile reports being published. Most recently, the House of Lords Public Services Committee published a report, '[Ready for Ageing?](#)', in March 2013. This warned that all public services are "woefully unprepared" for the increasing pressures of an ageing population.

Last year THH set up an Ageing Inquiry to consider these issues and propose some solutions. This Inquiry spoke to over 300 older residents and experts working in the borough. Its report, 'Homes for Life', outlines the findings of our research and what we are going to do next. [You can read it here](#). These findings have been developed in collaboration with LBTH and Heads of Service from across the organisation. A Priority Board – Extra Support for Residents - has been established to oversee our delivery of the report's commitments and our work on vulnerability more generally.

We have also produced a film that looks at the work that we have done and talks to older residents about their experiences. You can view it [here](#).

This Inquiry report will be officially launched by Cllr Khan and Cllr Asad on 29th April. However, it has already received significant press coverage. Cllr Khan (who wrote the foreword to the report) has had an article on the Inquiry published by 24 Housing. I wrote an article outlining some of the innovative ideas generated by the Inquiry and this was published by the Guardian. You can read both articles on the Guardian website, Housing section or [here](#).

It's taken a year but our Ageing Inquiry is the beginning of a conversation, not the end. A seminar for housing, health, and social care professionals in Tower Hamlets is being organised in collaboration with Gateway Housing and LBTH, taking place in June. This will highlight the findings of our Inquiry and include workshops to explore best practice in a range of areas.

11. Guardian Translation Piece

Following our success in the TPAS Southern Region Excellence in Equality and Diversity award for our sector-leading work around Community Language provision, I wrote an article for the Guardian that explained the importance of community language provision, some of the great work that we are doing, and the money that is saved in the process. This article can be read on the Guardian website or [here](#).

12. Engagement Update

THH Residents Panel

The Residents' Panel have been joined by 4 new members who have been selected for their experience and knowledge of local issues, following an open recruitment process. This includes one THH youth ambassador.

The Residents Panel having completed the ASB Scrutiny Project are now pursuing the following service reviews:

- THH Resident Engagement Service – In-Depth.
- Estate Inspections and Grading System – Light Touch.

They also review and scrutinise THH performance data on a regular basis.

Local Resident Conference

Two of the three planned conferences have been held. They took place in the Stepney & Wapping and Bethnal Green Housing areas. The next one is planned for the Bow & Poplar area and taking place on the 4th May.

Attendance numbers for the two conferences held was around 100 residents. The conferences were used by the resident's panel to feedback to residents on the ASB Scrutiny Project and other service areas planned for scrutiny.

Other Engagement Initiatives

Tenants and residents association verification project

The project is almost complete and involved mapping out all the tenants and residents associations that exist and ensuring that they are following the THH recognition criteria.

Residents training programme: The program was run in partnership with the Federation of TRAs and was a great success, with 32 individual residents taking part in the 11 different training programmes.

Implementing the Equalities Action Plan:

- Increasing LGBT satisfaction project.
- Increasing engagement with eastern European residents.
- Increasing our knowledge of residents on the getting involved register (GIR).

Increasing youth participation

Over the last year we have been increasing the number of youth engagement opportunities, these include holding workshops, recruiting young people on the resident's panel and working with ELBA and Nomura bank to provide our Youth Ambassadors with mentoring.

13. Community Regeneration projects

Childcare training – With the availability of affordable childcare an active barrier to employment for many of our residents and an issue that has received much publicity in the media; we delivered a training programme in partnership with the Limehouse Project to train up seven residents from the Ocean Estate to become Childminders. Most of students who qualified are mothers themselves and have experienced the many barriers to employment including finding childcare. All seven are now being supported to become registered childminders, giving them employment but also they providing affordable childcare for other parents.

Community Champions training – We will be delivering a 6 weeks training programme starting in May to provide our residents with knowledge and skills to become active citizens in their neighbourhoods, to both champion local issues but also work in partnership with THH and other agencies in identifying and implementing solutions to local issues.