

# Housing Annual Report

to Tenants and Leaseholders 2022/23

Harlow  
Council  
*Working together for Harlow*





# Welcome to your fourteenth Housing Annual Report from Harlow Council for the year 2022 to 2023



Whilst 2022 to 2023 was a year of great challenge for the service, as well as the impact the cost-of-living crisis has had on many of us, along with the increase in fuel and energy prices, we continued to support residents, with councillors and council officers working together.

Despite these challenges, I am optimistic for the future as we continue to secure government funding to support regeneration, guide development and growth to secure jobs, increase new council housing, along with further investment through our Corporate Strategy.

The council continues to work closely with our tenant and leaseholder representatives to help shape the way services are delivered, by monitoring and scrutinising how we are performing as a landlord.

The council continues to take fire safety, compliance, and energy efficiency seriously as we invest more resources into improving the energy efficiency of your homes.

The council is looking to move forward with the introduction of building regulation inspections, new tenant and leaseholder satisfaction measures, and a review of the Housing Regulators current consumer standards with an emphasis on empowering residents and working closely with the Regulator and the Housing Ombudsman.

The Housing Revenue Account Business Plan continues to outline our priorities within the resources available to ensure a sustainable future.

There continues to be a lot to be proud of, through our work during the pandemic, improving building and fire safety and our plans to deliver much-needed new council homes and create thriving estate communities, which is the foundation for good health, wellbeing and financial stability.



Councillor David Carter  
Portfolio Holder for Housing

In 2022/23, the council:

- Worked to reduce empty property turnaround times.
- Assisted tenants with financial difficulties through referral to available support services and agencies.
- Celebrated the partnership with Essex County Council and Agincare, providing a positive environment for tenants maintaining their independence.
- The Careline scheme continued to provide security to vulnerable residents and achieved national accreditation.
- Income recovery achieved a strong year end position by exceeding in the top quartile for performance.

The priorities for housing and what is important locally are:

- Making more council housing available.
- Tackling the growing need for supported housing.
- Improving choices for those in housing need.
- Improving housing standards, resident's health and wellbeing with energy efficiency, modern home facilities, tackling local priorities and statutory requirements.
- Continue to use the Engagement and Involvement service to promote awareness and provide opportunities to empower residents.

# Involvement

## How did we do in 2022/23?

The council continued to work with tenant and leaseholder representatives on crucial housing projects, gathering their feedback when making important decisions, and monitoring how Harlow Council is performing as a landlord.

We continue to work towards enhancing and modernising our approach to engagement through Housing's digital portal which provides tenants and leaseholders with instant access and flexibility to manage their accounts and 24/7 access to key digital services, including rent balances and payments.

We continue to strive to improve tenant and leaseholder satisfaction during a year of great challenge for the service.

We continue to be committed to engage with our residents, by empowering their voices to help improve our communities and services through a number of mechanisms including social media platforms and Tenancy and Property Panels.

## What is a Local Offer?

The Local Offers initiative was introduced as part of the Regulator of Social Housing Standards. This helps housing providers tailor their services to meet local priorities and needs.

### Level of complaints for 2022/23

In its role as a housing provider with over 9,000 properties, each year the council undertakes over 600,000 housing transactions.

#### Housing complaints

April 2021 to March 2022		April 2022 to March 2023	
Stage 1	249	Stage 1	263
Stage 2	58	Stage 2	58
Stage 3	27	Stage 3	0
Total	334	Total	321

#### HTS Housing complaints

April 2021 to March 2022		April 2022 to March 2023	
Stage 1	323	Stage 1	333
Stage 2	34	Stage 2	41
Stage 3	13	Stage 3	17
Total	370	Total	391

## Local offers for involvement

- We are keen to involve residents in shaping and improving our services. We are grateful to our tenant and leaseholder representatives who have contributed to our service so far, but we want to continue to put residents at the heart of what we do in line with our tenant and leaseholder engagement strategy.
- We are keen to continue to consult and engage during these challenging times, enabling residents to examine the performance of the Housing Service, which we hope will increase involvement in decision making and improve communications through a variety of different channels.
- Continue to provide easy-to-understand information for tenants and leaseholders, promoting awareness of the Housing Service.
- Continue to increase the number of involved residents, especially people from hard-to-reach groups, with the aim of establishing a successful and active tenant and leaseholder engagement model.
- Continue to nominate tenant and leaseholders from the Tenancy and Property panels on to the Housing Standards Board, which is the governing body for engagement linked to the council's cabinet structure.
- Continue to run training programmes for interested tenants and leaseholders on current and future challenges faced by the council.

## Our plans for the future

- Further strengthening of tenant and leaseholder engagement and awareness through the tenant and leaseholder engagement strategy. Use social media to build stronger and more effective means of communication.
- Continue to publish performance information showing how we get more people involved and promote awareness of the Housing Service.
- Continue to implement initiatives to help promote council engagement with tenants and leaseholders.
- Conduct a landlord survey in accordance with new requirements set by national government, in line with the new tenant satisfaction measures relating to satisfaction and performance.

# Tenancy

## Local offers for involvement

- Provide tenants with options through the Choice-Based Lettings scheme.
- Make best use of available housing through our allocations policy. Operate a clear housing application process including decisions and appeals.
- Offer financial incentives and other support to tenants wishing to move to a smaller home.
- Visit all new tenants within 21 days of the start of their tenancy.
- Assess the type of support needed by new tenants and provide relevant advice and information.
- Work within the regulatory framework when setting rents.
- Write to all tenants and leaseholders before increases in rents and/or service charges.
- Assess all new supported housing tenants within 24 hours of an application.
- Offer and issue the most secure form of tenancy compatible with housing and the sustainability of the community.
- Meet all statutory requirements within the tenancy agreement, ensuring that antisocial behaviour and conditions of tenancy are managed and investigated efficiently and effectively.
- To treat everyone equally so that the rights of secure and introductory tenants are made as similar as possible.
- Publish the rents of properties at a point of advert so that any prospective tenants can budget responsibly.
- Provide support to vulnerable tenants.

- Make sure the council has all the information about rent, service charges and any benefits residents may be entitled to when signing their tenancy agreement.
- Provide debt advice and make sure any action the council takes is fair and reasonable. Where there is persistent non-payment the council will take enforcement action through the courts, in line with the council's 'can't pay won't pay' policy.

## Our plans for the future

- Conduct tenancy audits of our properties to ensure that they are occupied and maintained in line with tenancy conditions, and to collect customer insight information to assist in providing support and improving future housing services.
- Continue to let our homes in a fair, open and efficient manner.

- Maintain good performance in income recovery in line with the council's 'can't pay won't pay' ethos, by providing support to those tenants suffering general financial difficulty. Take robust proportionate action to deal with tenants that have the means to pay rent but choose not to.
- We will continue to provide help and support to tenants experiencing financial difficulties in dealing with cost-of-living increases.
- We will continue to implement improvements in customer access via the digital tenancy service, allowing tenants to access their rent account details and report repairs.
- We will continue to implement the Rough Sleeper Initiative, through a raft of interventions and partnership working.

The percentage of rent collected for 2022/23 was **98.21%**,

## How did we do in 2022/23?

Between April 2022 and March 2023 the council housed a total of **515** households compared to 696 in 2021/22.

**314** applicants were home seekers (415 in 2021/22), **147** were transfers (previously 191) and **54** were homeless (down from 90).

**355** of these were placed in general needs properties (down from 429), **67** in supported housing (down from 80) and **93** in housing association properties down from 187).

Housing	2021/22	2022/23
Band 1	134	84
Band 2	433	305

## Tenancy enforcement

During the year the council continued to work with and provide support to those tenants suffering financial difficulty affecting payment of rent, while taking appropriate action to deal with those tenants who persistently failed to maintain payments.

124 possession orders for non-payment of rent were issued, and 13 tenants were evicted for non-payment of rent.

Housing	2021/22	2022/23
Band 3	108	93
Band 4	21	33



# Leaseholder

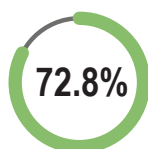
## Local offers for involvement

- Focused on controlling costs to leaseholders, while achieving and maintaining high standards of service.
- To ensure that the major works process meets the needs of leaseholders and complies with all legislation.
- Improve the standard of information supplied to leaseholders about major works and communal repairs.
- Seek to improve the council's engagement with leaseholders through the Standards Panel, Forums or by other means of communication that suit our leaseholders.
- To deal with leaseholder enquiries, including acting on any concerns.
- Carry out scrutiny of services provided by the council, and its subsidiary organisations, that impact our leaseholders.



## How did we do in 2022/23?

**66** leaseholders took advantage of the council's prompt payment discount (compared to 59 in 2021/22).



of leaseholders paid by direct debit (compared to 75.65% in 2021/22).

**26** compliments were received.

**3,371**

formal notices for major works were served.

**274** leaseholders applied for a loan from Harlow Council since the introduction of improved payment options (248 in 2021/22).

**11** complaints were received. **2** of these complaints were upheld and **9** were not.

A survey was carried out with 250 council leaseholders in June 2023.

**82%** of respondents found the Home Ownership Team to be helpful.

**84%** were satisfied with the outcome of their enquiry

**96%** were satisfied with the service they received from the Home Ownership section.

## Our plans for the future

- To continue to improve value for money by annually reviewing the management fee, achieving savings where possible.
- To encourage more leaseholders to pay by direct debit and increase the 72.8% that currently pay by this method.
- To scrutinise the services provided by HTS and continue to review customer satisfaction on repairs and communal cleaning.
- To review all leaseholder information to ensure any changes in legislation are included.
- To improve access to more information on the council's website and create the ability for more lease matters to be managed online.
- To assess the feasibility of HTS providing gas servicing, other safety checks and general maintenance for leaseholders, through the Leasehold Standards Panel.

The total amount of annual service charge collected for 2022/23 **98.49%** compared to 98.63% in 2021/22.

# Property

## Local offers for involvement

- Start a rolling programme of stock condition surveys to ensure all stock remains compliant and decent.
- Continued commitment through the HRA Business Plan process to deliver a comprehensive programme of works to support the principles within the Asset Management Strategy and delivery of the council's Housing Investment Programme.
- Continue to improve the energy efficiency and sustainability of council homes by building on the council's climate change declaration, delivering innovation through our capital housing and maintenance programmes. Enhancing the efficiency of stock and maximising opportunities to support the use of more renewable energy sources.
- Continue to provide a comprehensive and efficient repairs service by working closely with residents, that delivers high levels of customer satisfaction.
- Continue to reduce timescales for repairs and offer a flexible appointment system.
- Meet statutory and regulatory requirements for all compliance activities such as gas, water and electricity.
- Continue to develop and improve environmental services, including mobile cleaning and caretaking.
- Building safety – ensure all stock remains safe, decent, and compliant. All changes in regulations for building safety/ fire safety are acted upon.

The amount of time taken to turn around void properties is **23** days, compared to 38 days in 2021/22.

## Our plans for the future

- Continue to develop and deliver a sustainable council house building programme.
- Deliver a comprehensive Housing Investment Programme of works through continued investment in the Modern Homes programme, which improves the quality of homes and ensures council stock complies with government Decent Homes Standards.
- On-going investment and commitment to annual programme of external works, delivering a comprehensive range of improvement works to properties across Harlow.
- Continue to tackle fuel poverty with an on-going commitment to the energy efficiency programme. Improving the thermal insulation of properties, installation of heat meters and refurbishment of council owned communal and district heating systems. Explore funding opportunities to undertake retrofit works to existing stock.
- Refurbish and redevelop garage sites to improve parking and ease congestion within estates. Redevelopment of low demand sites to create opportunities for additional off-street parking.
- Continue to deliver extensive fire safety works to ensure properties remain safe.
- Continue to work with and support independent living needs tenants, providing a range of housing options supported by installation of aids and adaptations.
- Continue to work towards reducing the turnaround time for responsive repairs.
- Continue to improve turnaround times of void properties.

## Council home improvements

**2021/22**

\*Excludes void properties

Number of properties: **1,349**  
Tenants who refused work: **15**

Additional WC	<b>18</b>	Gas boilers	<b>370</b>
Bathrooms	<b>348</b>	Heating	
Doors	<b>38</b>	distribution	<b>271*</b>
Electric safety inspections	<b>1,846*</b>	Kitchens	<b>167</b>
		Windows	<b>371</b>

**2022/23**

\*Excludes void properties

Number of properties: **1071**  
Tenants who refused work: **100**

Additional WC	<b>32</b>	Gas boilers	<b>307</b>
Bathrooms	<b>134</b>	Heating	
Doors	<b>443</b>	distribution	<b>39*</b>
Electric safety inspections	<b>1803*</b>	Kitchens	<b>256</b>
		Windows	<b>163</b>

Repairs	2021/22	2022/23
Bricklaying	485	250
Carpentry	3,821	3,612
Damp	172	68
Door entry	135	118
Double glazing	342	367
Drainage	798	666
Electrical	4,387	4,024
Fencing	643	553
Garage repairs	1,112	1,001
Garage roofing	66	33
Gas breakdown	7,760	7,430
Glazing	133	94
Minor adaptations	66	198
Plastering	517	596
Plumbing	7,054	6,461
Roofing	1,183	890
UPVc windows	1,017	929
<b>Total</b>	<b>29,691</b>	<b>27,290</b>

## How did we do in 2022/23?

The responses to this year's satisfaction survey told us:

**97%** are satisfied with repairs.

**99.96%** are satisfied with gas services.

**86%** are satisfied with communal repairs.

**92%** are satisfied with street cleaning.

**93%** are satisfied with grounds maintenance.

Satisfaction is higher than 2021/22.

# Finance and Value for money



## Local offers for finance

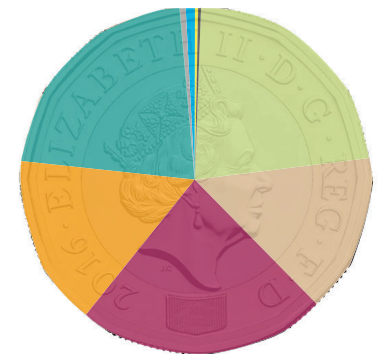
- Continue to improve services and ensure value for money by learning from other housing providers and developing ways of comparing performance.
- Carry out quarterly progress reviews on the council's performance.
- Continue to provide an annual report to tenants and leaseholders.
- Continue to provide information for tenants and leaseholders in Harlow Times magazine.

## Our plans for the future

- Continue to monitor the quarterly performance and financial housing reports at the Housing Standards Board with tenant and leaseholder representatives.
- To continue monitoring the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan to ensure it is sustainable and fit for purpose.

## HRA year-end figures

Expenditure	2021/22	2022/23
	£	£
Debt management expenses	6,448	6,883
General management	10,161,874	11,368,068
Interest charges	6,793,960	7,282,296
Major repairs reserve (net depreciation)	10,651,155	12,110,526
Provision for bad and doubtful debts	215,413	226,928
Repairs inc. insurance appropriations	11,975,899	11,215,801
Rents rates taxes and other charges	206,672	154,386
Revenue contribution to capital expenditure	4,880,857	0
Special management	7,866,479	8,111,304
Supporting people transitional arrangements	2,380	1,245
<b>Total</b>	<b>52,761,137</b>	<b>50,477,437</b>



**Expenditure  
2022/23**

Income	2021/22	2022/23
	£	£
Charges for services and facilities	4,831,231	5,584,709
Dwelling rents	43,524,397	45,110,013
Garage rents	932,544	976,198
Interest receivable	109,640	548,396
Other rents	88,682	79,439
Balance in hand at 1 April	16,243,042	16,243,042
Surplus / (deficit) for year	(3,274,643)	1,821,318
<b>Balance in hand at 31 March</b>	<b>12,968,399</b>	<b>18,064,360</b>



**Income  
2022/23**

# Give us your feedback...

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Your feedback is always welcome. Please complete the form below and return it to Zulfi Kiani-Mackintosh, Community Engagement Co-ordinator, Harlow Council, Civic Centre, The Water Gardens, Harlow, Essex CM20 1WG.

Alternatively, you can call Zulfi on 01279 446330 or fill in an online feedback form at: [www.harlow.gov.uk/housing-and-garages/tenant-and-leaseholder-engagement/annual-report-tenants-and-leaseholders](http://www.harlow.gov.uk/housing-and-garages/tenant-and-leaseholder-engagement/annual-report-tenants-and-leaseholders). This document is also available in large print.

Did you find the information in this annual report useful?     Yes     No

Do you like the way it is presented?     Yes     No

- What would you like to see next year?
- More information about how the Housing Service is performing
  - More comments from tenants and leaseholders
  - Comparisons with other councils/housing associations
  - Different layout

What did you find useful?

What would you like to see next year?