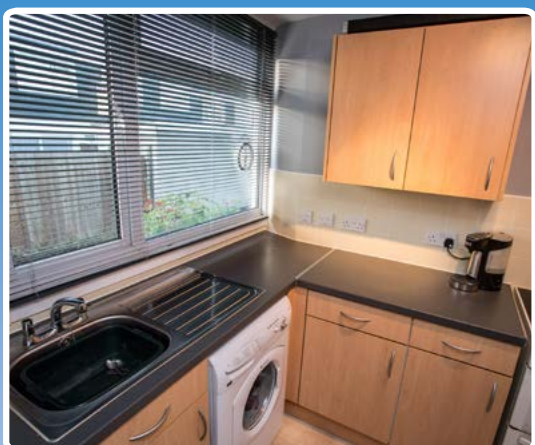


Harlow Council's Annual Report to Tenants and Leaseholders 2015/16





Welcome to your seventh Housing Annual Report from Harlow Council.

The report reviews what we did in 2015/16, what you can expect from us and what we are doing to meet the challenges and opportunities facing housing in Harlow.

More and better housing remains our top priority and we continue to work with you to ensure our priorities meet your needs.

It has been another year of challenges with less resources to tackle local priorities, but service performance has been good and history in Harlow has been made. The keys to the first new Council homes built in Harlow for more than 25 years were handed over to 18 local families, which has changed people's lives for the better.

Due to national changes that have affected how Council housing is financed, our house-building programme is currently on hold. We're looking at alternative financing and options to provide more housing, therefore our ambition to build homes for local people remains. Working with the private sector and a housing association, more affordable homes will be provided as part of the redevelopment of housing estates in Staple Tye.

Despite difficult financial circumstances we have:

- Continued strong performance collecting rent and service charges, turning round empty properties, and repairing your homes.
- Carried out 42,000 home improvements in over 8,000 homes to transform Council homes.
- Helped residents manage their financial circumstances by raising awareness of the support on offer.
- Celebrated for the third year running the partnership with Essex County Council and Manorcourt Homecare to provide extra care housing at Sumners Farm Close for the most elderly and vulnerable.
- Achieved a national accreditation award for our Careline scheme which offers security to our most vulnerable residents.

The Government's Planning and Housing Act 2016 will bring in additional significant changes to the provision and management of affordable housing, which will also affect social housing. We will continue to keep residents updated on what this all means for housing in Harlow.

Having less resources to meet our priorities will remain so we continue to plan ahead. Our priorities for housing and what is important locally are:

- Making more housing available in Harlow, with a wider choice of housing types which are genuinely affordable.
- Tackling the growing need for supported housing.
- Helping to improve choices for those in housing need.
- Improving residents' health and wellbeing by improving housing conditions.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Wilkinson', with a long, sweeping underline.

Councillor Mark Wilkinson
Portfolio Holder for Housing, Harlow Council

Involvement



How did we do in 2015/16?

The Council continues to work together with tenant representatives on crucial projects and gather their feedback when making important decisions. These projects include monitoring progress of the Modern Homes Programme, how money is spent on housing, assisting in how the annual Residents Initiative Budget is spent and helping to inspect empty homes before they are re-let.



Overall tenant satisfaction with Harlow Council. Taken from 2014 BMG independent survey.

Local offers for involvement

- Use the Housing Services tenant and leaseholder engagement strategy to strengthen the ability for tenants and leaseholders to examine the Council's performance. This will improve communication and increase your involvement in decision making.
- Provide information for tenants and leaseholders, which is easy to understand, promotes awareness of Housing Services and provides opportunities for you to be involved in participating and providing feedback on future services.
- Increase the number of involved residents in particular people from hard-to-reach groups.

- Improve performance and satisfaction levels for involvement by establishing a successful tenant and leaseholder engagement model.
- Continue to include residents on the Housing Standards Board, a body that is linked to the Council's decision-making structure.
- Run an annual training programme for interested tenants and leaseholders to gain a good understanding of the current and future challenges being faced by the Council.

Each year the Council undertakes more than 600,000 transactions in its roll as a housing provider managing over 9,000 properties.

Complaints:	Stage1	Stage2	Stage 3	Total
Housing	241	55	16	312
Kier Housing	323	45	19	387

Our plans for the future

- To fully implement the new Model of Engagement to identify further improvement and increase tenant and leaseholder involvement.
- Publish performance information which shows "how well we do" in getting more people involved and promoting awareness of the Housing Service.
- To continue to implement initiatives to help promote how the Council engages with all tenants and leaseholders.



Tenancy

How did we do in 2015/16?

Homes allocated by property band (468)

Band 1	171	Band 2	242
Band 3	48	Band 4	7

Properties

General Needs	329
Sheltered Accommodation	61
Housing Association	78

Where they came from

Homefinder	270
Transfer	143
Homeless	55

Types of Antisocial Behaviour Reported

Critical - threats to kill, actual bodily harm 0

Urgent - violence or threats of violence, drug dealing 16

Non-urgent - minor breaches of the tenancy agreement 211

There were 40 evictions in 2015/16. Of these, 38 were due to rent arrears and two for antisocial behaviour.



The total amount of rent collected for 2015/16.

Local offers for tenancy

- Provide tenants with options through the Choice-Based Lettings scheme.
- Make the best use of housing available via the 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 our rents.
- Write to all tenants and leaseholders before any increases in rents and/or service charges.

- Provide a tenant handbook and regularly review to provide information that tenants say they want.
- Assess all new tenants of supported housing within 24 hours of application.
- Offer and issue the most secure form of tenancy compatible with housing and the sustainability of the community.
- Meet all statutory requirements relating to the use of tenancy agreements. Ensuring antisocial behaviour and conditions of tenancy are managed and investigated in an efficient, effective and impartial manner.
- To treat everyone equally - the rights of our secure and introductory tenants are made as similar as possible.
- Publish the rents of properties so that any prospective tenants can budget responsibly.
- Provide support to help vulnerable tenants.
- To make sure we have 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 that any action the Council takes is fair and reasonable. Only where there is persistent non-payment will the Council proceed with enforcement action through the courts, in line with the 'can't pay won't pay' policy.

Our plans for the future

- We will implement any changes as part of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 once guidance has been received from the Government.
- We will continue to let our homes in a fair, open and efficient manner.
- We will continue to maintain a good performance in income recovery.
- We will continue to help tenants manage their financial circumstances in line with the Welfare Reform Act.

Leaseholders

How did we do in 2015/16?

73.83% Of leaseholders paid by direct debit

11 Complaints were received

16 Compliments were received

77% Overall satisfaction with the Council's Home Ownership Team

85% Leaseholder satisfaction (being kept informed of issues that affect them)

£752.64 The average cost of major works for 337 leaseholders

137 Leaseholders took advantage of the Council's prompt payment discount

510 Major works notices were served

157 Leaseholders have applied for a loan from Harlow Council since the introduction of improved payment options

99.56% The total amount of annual service charge collected for 2015/16.

Local offers for leaseholders

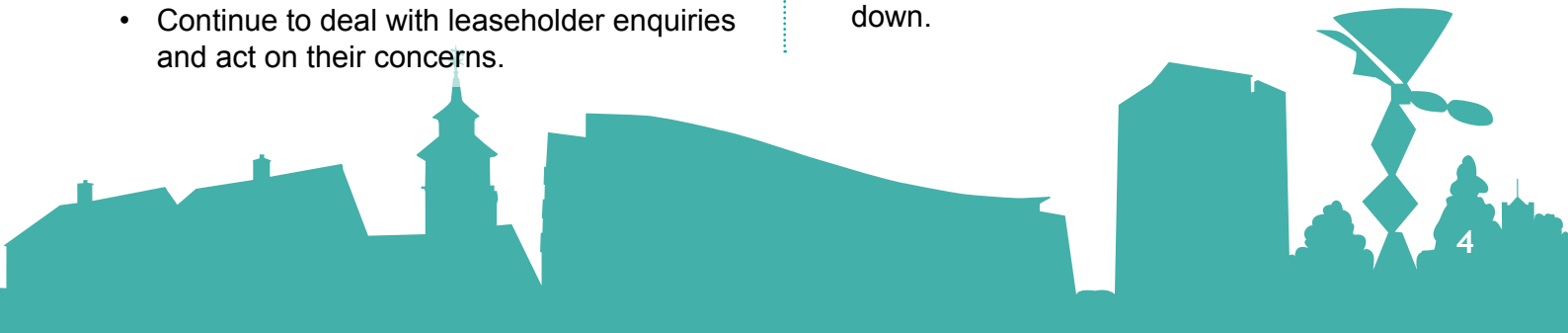
- Maintain a focus on controlling costs to leaseholders, while achieving and maintaining high standards of service.
- Continue to ensure that the major works process meets the needs of leaseholders.
- Improve the standard of information supplied to leaseholders about major works and monitoring communal repairs.
- Continue and improve two-way communication with leaseholders through the Standards Panels, the Leasehold Forums, Harlow Times and other channels of communication.
- Continue to deal with leaseholder enquiries and act on their concerns.

- Carry out scrutiny on areas within the Council and its subsidiary organisations that affect leaseholders.



Our plans for the future

- To continue to improve value for money by annually reviewing the management fee, making savings where possible.
- To encourage more leaseholders to pay by direct debit above the 73 per cent who don't already, in order to keep costs low for all leaseholders.
- To conclude the biennial Leaseholder Management Policy review with the Leaseholder Standards Panel to ensure all the contents are relevant.
- To ensure charges for services that are not directly related to leaseholders are offset against the management fee to keep costs down.



Property

How did we do in 2015/16?

- 96.36%** Satisfied with repairs
- 100%** Annual gas services completed
- 98.36%** Satisfied with communal repairs
- 88.76%** Satisfied with street cleaning
- 89.21%** Satisfied with ground maintenance

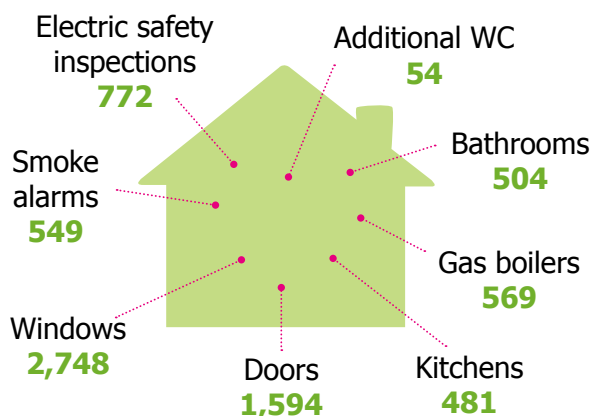


Amount of time taken to turnaround void properties.

Repairs 2015/16	amount	Repairs 2015/16	amount
Gas breakdown	8,067	Plastering	687
Plumbing	6,451	Bricklaying	459
Electrical	4,728	Glazing	410
Carpentry	2,718	Fencing	462
Roofing	1,840	Minor adaptations	155
Drainage	995	Door entry systems	135
Garage repairs	1,085	Lift breakdown	149
Total			28,341

Council home improvements

Total properties with work completed: 2,285.
Tenants who refused work: 249.



Other achievements:

The level of customer satisfaction for 2015/16.



- Formal tenant complaints **39**.
- MP or Councillor queries **7**.
- Pilot external programme completed **443** components replaced/repaired.
- Energy efficiency review identifying those most at risk of fuel poverty.
- **£21.79m** capital budget expended.
- Barley Croft and Lower Meadow internal programme completed.
- Summers Farm and Morris House lifts refurbished.
- **£1.1m** Disabled Adaptations carried out.
- Garage updates totalling **£703,000**.

Local offers for property

- Continue to invest in the Modern Homes Programme to ensure homes continue to be maintained at a decent level.
- Continue to improve the energy efficiency and sustainability of Council homes.
- Continue to provide a good service of repair and maintenance. Work with contractors and residents to improve customer satisfaction.
- Continue to offer appointments for repairs.
- Meet all statutory and regulatory requirements relating to gas, electricity and water.
- Continue to focus on the services provided by Environmental Services, which include mobile cleaning, street scene, caretaking and ground maintenance.

Our plans for the future

- The Council's Modern Homes Programme will continue to improve homes, tackling local priorities and the Government's Decent Homes Standard.
- The energy efficiency of Council homes will continue to be assessed as part of an extensive programme of external works.
- From 1 February 2017 HTS (Property & Environment) Limited will be responsible for providing responsive repairs and environmental services for the Council.

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 our performance.
- Carry out a quarterly progress review 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.

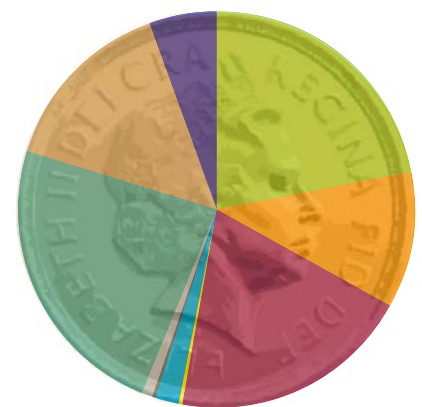
Our plans for the future

- To continue monitoring 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

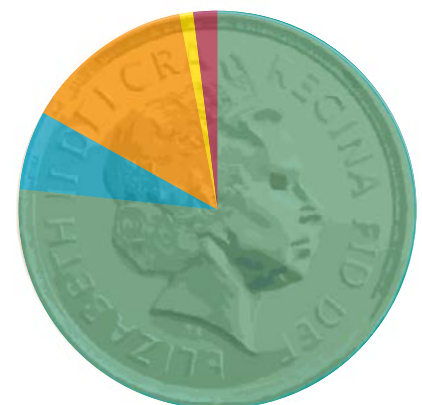
Expenditure 2015/16

General management	£10,729	
Special management	5,277	
Repairs inc. insurance appropriations	9,004	
Rents rates taxes and other charges	22	
Provision for bad and doubtful debts	123	
Supporting people transitional arrangements	6	
Major repairs reserve (net depreciation)	11,105	
Interest charges	6,740	
Debt management expenses	7	
Revenue contribution to Capital Expenditure	6,426	
Total	49,439	



Income

Dwelling rents	£46,226	
Garage rents	992	
Other rents	20	
Charges for services and facilities	3,555	
Interest receivable	74	
Total	50,867	



Balance in hand at 1 April 2015	10,870
Surplus / (deficit) for year	1,428
Balance in hand at 31 March 2016	12,298



Give us your feedback...

Your feedback is always welcome. Please complete the form below and return it to Zulfi Kiani, Community Engagement Co-ordinator, Harlow Council, Civic Centre, The Water Gardens, Harlow, Essex CM20 1WG. Alternatively, you can fill in an online feedback form at www.harlow.gov.uk/tenant-leaseholder-annual-report or call Zulfi on 01279 446330. 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 Council 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?

Name

Address

Telephone:

.....postcode

Email:

Harlow Council understands that your privacy is important to you. The details you provide on this feedback form will be used by the Council and its tenant and leaseholder representatives to assist in the production of next year's Annual Report. Your personal details will be kept strictly private and confidential. The returned forms will not be retained for more than 12 months from the date of return. Some information may be used to compile statistics for use by Harlow Council: this will not include information that will identify you as an individual.

For further information please see the Council's Data Protection statement at www.harlow.gov.uk/data-protection

