

Reform of Council Housing Finance

In July the Government published the long-awaited Consultation Paper on the Reform of Council Housing Finance

The paper considers two options for the future:

1. Improve the current subsidy system
2. Abolish the current system and instead give every housing authority the freedom to control its own finances

The Government proposes the second of these, although there are some difficulties to be overcome, mainly because across the country there is a total of £18bn of housing borrowing outstanding. Some boroughs have hundreds of millions of pounds of borrowing for past housing capital expenditure on their balance sheets, whereas others have none at all. The government will not write the debt off, but instead wants to



redistribute it amongst all Councils.

This change would bring major advantages to housing authorities through independence from Central Government and the ability to plan for the future. Planning is very difficult within the current system as there is a reliance on unpredictable annual subsidy.

The removal of the current subsidy system and the much criticised requirement to pay over a notional rent (approximately the same as the

total rent collected in exchange for allowance for management, maintenance and major repairs) is widely seen as a major advantage, not least because the allowances do not reflect spending needs.

If all local authorities with housing stock agreed to the proposals, the arrangements could be put into place next spring. If this proves impossible there will be a need for new government legislation, which would not be until 2012/13.

There is a possibility of an early move to self-financing for some authorities, as long as they work with the Government and reach agreements in line with the principles set out in the paper. Hounslow Homes and LBH are currently working on a joint response to the proposals.



Our thanks to Alf Chandler

Hounslow Homes is saluting our founding Chair who stands down from this role at the AGM in October

Alf Chandler has a long-standing involvement in Tenant Participation going back to 1946. Currently, he is the Chair

of Hounslow Homes Board and of the Housing Management Forum for the Central area. "I came on to the Board to enhance tenant participation

and to improve the quality of life of tenants and their families." Our warm thanks to Alf for all his service to Hounslow Homes.

New Build

Hounslow Homes new build project has received CLG consent allowing development to begin on the first of four schemes



The first of the four projects is Convent Way where work will begin later this autumn. This will be a year-long project involving the construction of 39 houses and flats in partnership with Lovell.

The mixed development includes 11 family-sized houses, four flats for affordable rent and four flats for affordable low cost home ownership through a shared ownership scheme.

'Greening' our housing stock

Hounslow Homes recently bid in competition for funding to refurbish our housing stock to improve standards of energy efficiency

We have had success with both submissions put forward:

Homes & Communities Agency: 'Social Housing Cavity Insulation Competition'

We have obtained just under £1m to install cavity wall insulation in 1,100 of the least energy efficient homes across our housing stock. This grant will greatly assist us in targeting those properties that are the most expensive to heat

and most susceptible to fuel poverty.

The Technology Strategy Board: 'Retrofit for the future competition'

We have successfully obtained funding for three feasibility studies. The funding will cover such things as an assessment of energy use and CO2 emissions, as well as detailed design proposals and planning reports on selected properties. The results of the feasibility

phase will then be assessed by expert assessors and a number of the most innovative and effective projects will be funded and taken forward to the building stage of the competition.



Gareth Taylor

Hounslow Homes welcomes its first Funding Initiatives Manager, Gareth Taylor

Gareth's role is researching and identifying potential funding for Hounslow Homes projects, whether service, tenant or leaseholder inspired. He will be working with staff and their teams taking them through the funding bid process and helping them manage specific

projects.

Gareth will also be looking at increasing levels of sponsorship across the organisation.

Gareth worked formerly for Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council and more recently chaired a regeneration company in South Wales.

He has been a fundraising consultant to a family mediation company and an HIV/AIDS respite centre in North Wales, and has also worked in the former Yugoslavia where he was responsible for the reconstruction of a respite house for disabled children.

Changing the way we respond to our customers



Hounslow Homes recently appointed the Vanguard Consultancy to help develop and implement a new 'systems approach' within the Anti-Social Behaviour and Tenancy Management team.

The aim was to deal with a backlog of work which had led to an increase in complaints and Councillor enquiries.

With support from Vanguard, a Core Team of four front line staff reviewed their systems and presented the findings at staff briefings and to the HFTRA Executive, so that everyone could understand the project and see how it was progressing.

The Core Team then tested the new approach on new live cases working with residents in the East of the borough from the Brentford Office. Processes were redesigned to cut out waste in the system, concentrate on what matters to the customer and give more power to those doing the work. Initial customer feedback indicates that the approach has greatly improved the service to residents.

Rainbow Project Success

Over the past six months residents associations and community groups across the borough have been working hard to develop projects to improve services and facilities in their communities

Over the next two years the Rainbow Project will provide almost £1.5 million to fund successful resident-led projects. So far seven projects have been awarded funding and a further 19 projects will have their applications assessed by the end of October 2009.

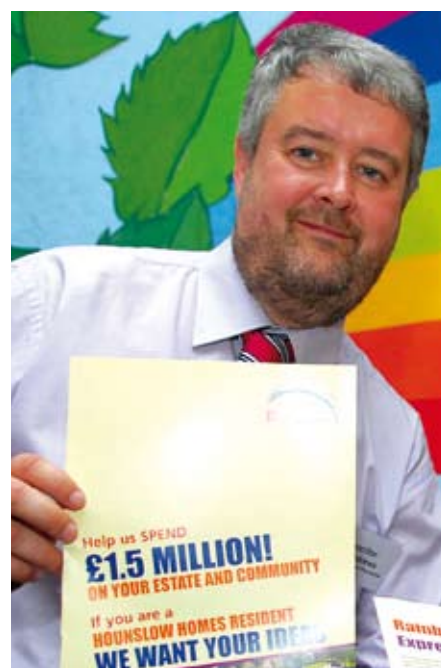
Successful projects

- Bedfont Lane Community Association, Feltham: improvements to the community centre and a year-long programme of activities for young people and older residents
- Brabazon Estate Residents' Association, Heston: refurbish an unoccupied house for use as a temporary community building
- Haverfield Residents' Association, Brentford: extend and refurbish the Mission Hall kitchen and fund a play club and a locally based money advice service
- Lavender Court sheltered scheme, Feltham: build a conservatory to provide a long-awaited communal area for residents
- Oriel Residents' Association, Hanworth: a year-long programme of activities for residents
- TW4 Community Development Trust, Hounslow: employ a

community development worker to support and encourage resident involvement in initiatives to improve their local areas

- United Residents' Association of Ivybridge, Isleworth: refurbish a disused playground and provide sport and other activities for young residents

All the Rainbow Project funding has now been provisionally allocated; however, a further funding round may be announced. For more information visit www.hounslow.gov.uk/rainbowproject, email community.development@hounslow.gov.uk or call Áine Hayes on 020 8583 4813.



Councillor Phil Andrews launches the Rainbow Project

Teenagers 2 Work

Hounslow Homes recently participated in 'Teenagers 2 Work', an apprenticeship scheme run by Futures Hounslow Leaving Care Services. Futures works with 16-21 year-olds who are, or who have been, in care in Hounslow



Riann Hector with Tenant Participation Officer Eileen Gladwell

The scheme provides opportunities for looked after young people to take up a work placement. Hounslow Homes placed two teenagers: Mamadoo Barry, 18 from Feltham and Riann Hector, 17 from Hounslow.

Futures matched Mamadoo with Hounslow Homes Incomes Department for two weeks where he learned how to deal with paying rent and handling refunds.

Riann joined Hounslow Homes Tenant Participation Team where she worked on resident involvement and

community initiatives, providing lots of creative ideas about how best to get young residents involved.

Teenagers 2 Work aims to increase the awareness amongst statutory bodies, service providers and employers, of the specific disadvantages faced by care leavers when seeking employment opportunities. Hounslow Homes plans to continue to support the scheme in the future.

Looking ahead

Board meeting

7.40pm
8 October 2009
Civic Centre (after AGM)

Board meeting

7.00pm
29 October 2009
St Catherine's House

Board meeting

7.00pm
17 December 2009
St Catherine's House

Key contacts

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