

Committee(s): Ordinary Council	Date: 13 th December 2023
Subject: Chairs Report for Housing, health and Communities Committee	
Committee Chair: Cllr Dr Barrett	

Housing Grounds Maintenance Review

Grounds Maintenance services to the Housing Stock has historically been provided by the depot. However, the last known service level agreement (SLA) was drawn up in 1991, over 30 years ago.

Being that the service level agreement is dated, it has become difficult to accurately note the time and activity on site and the original requirements have somewhat changed.

This means, at present, we are unable to recharge the service charge to Leaseholders which is impacting on the income to the Housing Revenue Account.

As such, a decision was taken to review the specification of works to all housing sites, including garages, amenity greens and communal gardens.

In order to price against the specification, the depot requested a bill of quantities that housing was unable to provide due to a lack of mapping on site.

An external mapping company has since been appointed to conduct an exercise to log all boundaries of HRA land as well as note the number and size of greens, hedges, and shrubs etc.

Once this is received, the depot will be in a position to reprice for the whole HRA contract and importantly break it down site by site to allow Housing to charge the correct service charges to both leaseholders and Tenants.

Brentwood Health and Wellbeing Strategy

The Brentwood Health and Wellbeing Strategy sets out the five-year plan to improve the health and wellbeing of residents in Brentwood and reduce the health inequalities at every stage of residents' lives.

The Strategy sets out the partnership approach to influence the wider determinants of health to make the biggest difference in our communities. The Strategy has been co-produced by board members, those with lived experience and informed by what the relevant data is telling us.

In developing the Strategy, the Health and Wellbeing Board considered the Health and wellbeing outcomes it would want to see in Brentwood, how it links to other local strategies and plans, data and insight from partners and feedback from residents

and those with lived experience. It is also important to recognise the needs that emerged from the COVID 19 pandemic.

Housing Debt Write Off

In July 2023 the Council introduced a new Former Tenant Debt Recovery Agency to assist with the collection of all former tenant debts. This triggered a review of all outstanding debts.

Following this review, a number of accounts have been identified as requiring write offs for debts where all avenues of recovery have been exhausted, the debt is statute barred (6 year old debt) rendering it unrecoverable for legal action or the debtor has passed away and there is no money in the estate to cover the debts.

Leasehold Major Works Payment Options

In 2023, we saw an increase in section 20 notification of works to leaseholders and some of these were anticipating bills in excess of £20,000. Although we reviewed the Leasehold payment options policy in 2022, we have come to realise that due to the level of bills, the timescales attached to some of the payment options, may not be viable for a high number of leaseholders.

In addition to the above, we have also been approached by a higher than expected numbers of leaseholders asking if we will buy their property back due to financial concerns further highlighting that residents are struggling with the cost of living.

In order to assist with the financial pressures, we are proposing to review the payment options policy one year early to include additional options which we hope will ease the pressure.

Rent Setting 2024 / 2025

A report will seek the committee to approve recommendations on the proposed rent and service charge levels for 2024/2025.

The recommendations will be considered by Finance, Assets, Investment & Recovery Committee when the final recommendation will be made as part of the budget setting process. The final decision will be made by Ordinary Council on 28th February 2024.