

Spotlight

ON TENANTS' AND RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATIONS

Review of Leicester HomeChoice

Last year we started a review of Leicester HomeChoice – the Council's choice-based lettings scheme. The review is almost complete and we are now pulling together all the findings and making recommendations for improvements to the scheme.

The review specifically focused on Leicester HomeChoice and its' processes from initially advertising vacant properties, to the point where an offer of accommodation is made to an applicant on the Housing Register. The aims of the review were to assess areas such as transparency, choice and customer satisfaction with the service.

To ensure the review was customer led we established a project group made up of applicants, new tenants, tenant reps and front line officers. The group helped to plan the review and consultation activities which included:

- Analysis of statistical information relating to Leicester Homechoice use, for example, bids placed, access points, refusal rates
- Comparing ourselves with other housing providers using choice based lettings schemes
- Sending surveys to:
 - all new tenants since Leicester HomeChoice was launched
 - 500 randomly selected applicants on the Housing Register
 - Council and Housing Association Officers
 - Support agencies
 - All councillors
- General website consultation exercise for all applicants

We had a great response to both the new tenant and applicant surveys. We will feedback the results in the Summer edition of City Housing News, along with details of recommendations made for improvements to the service.

Free E-learning for Tenants

Learn

In the last 'Spotlight' newsletter, we told you about free online training for tenants. Sadly not many Leicester City Council tenants have taken up this offer, so we thought we tell you again about this fantastic opportunity.

The Housing e-Academy in collaboration with TAROE (Tenants and Residents Organisations of England) have launched a brand new range of online training courses developed specifically for tenants and residents of UK social housing. The courses are available free to anyone who lives in social housing accommodation.

The first 10 courses available for tenants to access are:

- Anti-Social Behaviour
- Cultural Awareness and Religion
- Getting Started on the Internet
- Hate Crime
- Internet Safety
- Introduction to Gypsies and Travellers
- Pest Awareness
- Preparing for Interviews
- Respects
- The Power of the Internet

To access the training, visit the Housing E-Academy/Virtual College site. You can do this via our site www.leicester.gov.uk/councilhousing. You will be asked to complete a short form to register, before being able to complete the courses.

This information will be published in the next edition of City Housing News, to encourage tenants to take up this offer.

Learn



The Construction Training Centre of Excellence

Our new training centre, located on Beaumont Leys Lane, has facilities for apprentices and trade operatives to undertake training in plastering, bricklaying, flooring, gas servicing, electrics, plumbing, carpentry, painting and decorating. On-going training will ensure we provide an excellent service when we carry out repairs and maintenance to your homes.

The Beaumont Leys Construction Training Centre officially opened on Monday 30th January 2012. The event was attended by the Assistant Mayor Cllr Dawood who praised the hard work of everyone involved. Refurbishment of the centre was carried out by our first year apprentices, under the expert supervision of Carpenter Dean Hoosein, Electrician Mark Chamberlain and Plumber Pete Tyers.



Leaseholders

The **Leaseholders' Handbook** has recently been updated. New leaseholders will receive a copy when they buy a leasehold property. It is also available to download at www.leicester.gov.uk/councilhousing.

The next leaseholders' drop-in session is taking place on 24th April 2012 from 5:00pm until 7:00pm at The Peepul Centre. Leaseholders can meet staff from a range of service areas including Right to Buy, Repairs and Housing Offices to discuss any issues or concerns.

If any leaseholders ask for more information about the event, they can contact Kala Parmar on (0116) 2526255.

Rent Collection

When we collect rent and rent arrears we have to make sure we follow the correct procedure. Our rent arrears policy ensures that we do this. We have recently started a review to make sure our policy is up to date and relevant. If you would like to be involved in this review, please contact Kala Parmar on (0116) 2526255 or kala.parmar@leicester.gov.uk.



PlayRangers

Play Rangers run free play sessions for 8-16 year olds in parks and open spaces. These are open access, meaning that children can come and leave when they want to. Activities include den building; dressing up, bug hunting, crafts and much more.

These FREE play sessions are happening in an area near you!

Play Ranger, Jenny Smith, said: "The sessions get children outside, away from computers and televisions. They give children opportunities to make friends, build confidence and learn".

A child who attended a play session stated: "I really enjoyed today. At first I thought it was just sports but when I got here we could make things as well. We will definitely come again".

For further information on upcoming events and about the service, contact the Play Rangers on 0116 222 2603 or email play.rangers@leicester.gov.uk.

Senior Staff Moves

You may have noticed that some area managers have recently changed. There has been a slight move around of some senior members of staff, so here is an up to date chart of who's who:

Head of Service	Area Manager	Estate Areas
Chris Burgin	Ellen Watts	Braunstone
Ian Craig	Marie Murray	New Parks
	Ela Krychowska	Beaumont Leys / Mowmacre
Suki Supria	Chrissie Field	Humberstone / Rowlatts Hill
	Ian Stapleton	Eyres Monsell / Saffron
	John Thomson	Centre

Proposed Tenants' Meetings 2012

Here are details of all the strategic tenants' meetings from March until the end of this year:

Month	Meeting	Topic
Mar	TARAs Together workshop	The role of the Estate Management Officer (EMO)
Apr	Performance Panel	Improvement Plan Update; Action Log; Closure of the Panel
	TARAs Together workshop	Service self-assessment
May	TARAs Together workshop	Developing the Housing Services Improvement Plan
Jun	TARAs Together workshop	Producing the Annual Report
	TARAs Together workshop	Communal area service charges
Jul	Tenants' Forum	Introductory meeting
Sep	TARAs Together workshop	HRA budget and Capital Programme – preparation for 2013/2014
Oct	Tenants' Forum	Monitor the Improvement Plan; Action Log; topic to be decided by panel
Nov	TARAs Together workshop	The impact of the Universal Credit
Dec	Tenants' Forum	HRA budget and Capital Programme consultation; Action Log

Invites will be sent out nearer each meeting.



Performance Panel Feedback

Tenant and leaseholder representatives have been busy over the last few months attending a series of meetings. The Panel has:

- Helped develop proposals for the Housing Capital Programme
- Monitored the Housing Services improvement plan
- Considered arrangements for the English Defence League march in February
- Been consulted on the annual rent increase
- Been consulted on the overall Council budget proposals
- Met with the City Mayor for a question and answer session

With the setting up of the Tenants' Forum, the last meeting of the Performance Panel will take place at the end of April. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all our tenant and leaseholder panel representatives for all their hard work over the last few years.

Tenants' Forum

As you may already know, we are improving the way we involve tenants and leaseholders by setting up a Tenants' Forum. This group will be made up of 14 tenants and 1 leaseholder representative from across the city.

The role of the Forum will be to examine housing services, monitor how well we are doing, carry out inspections of specific services, respond to consultations related to housing and make recommendations for improvements.

We are now looking for tenants and leaseholders who might be interested in being part of the Forum. As a member, you would be expected to attend about four meetings a year and be involved in inspecting services when the need is identified. In return, we will provide training opportunities and pay expenses (transport, child care).

If you are interested in being a Tenants' Forum representative, please contact Claire McAteer on (0116) 2526267 or email siu@leicester.gov.uk. The deadline to express an interest is April 27th 2012. The first meeting of the Forum will take place in July 2012.

Survey

We would like to know if you find these newsletters interesting and whether you would like us to continue producing them. Please take a few minutes to answer a few questions about 'Spotlight on TARAs' and either email your responses to siu@leicester.gov.uk or detach this part of the newsletter and return it in the pre-paid envelope (included with paper copies).

Do you find these newsletters useful? Yes No

Do you still want us to continue publishing copies of this newsletter? Yes No

If you answered 'yes', how many times a year would you like the newsletter to be published:

Quarterly Bi-annually Annually