

MARCH 2023

Home*in*ing

The magazine for Harrow Council's tenants and leaseholders

RENTS ARE INCREASING P4

**DAMP AND MOULD
— HOW WE ARE
ADDRESSING THIS P9**

**WIN
£25**
See p15

**SUPPORT FOR
SHELTERED
HOUSING**

PLEASE COMPLETE THE SATISFACTION SURVEY P13

Join the Housing
Matters webinar
WEDNESDAY
15 MARCH 2023
at 6pm

*Harrow*COUNCIL
LONDON

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for every printed picture



Mark Crodden said "Burton is a very friendly 2 year old British Bulldog. He's well behaved in a pub"

Why not send in your favourite photo of Harrow or a photo of your pet to anthea.watkins@harrow.gov.uk and receive £10 shopping vouchers when printed



HELLO FROM CLLR MINA PARMAR

As you are aware from your recent Harrow Council rent letter, we are increasing the housing rent and service charges from 3rd April 2023. There is more information explaining the increase on pages 4-5.

If you want to talk to a housing officer in person about this, Resident Services are running a series of open drop-in sessions which you are welcome to attend (see page 5).

And for everyone concerned with the cost of living, there is information where to access help - see page 6.

We are very proud of the new first stage rough sleeper hub in Harrow. It is so important to provide all round support to deal with personal issues as soon as possible, and to provide safe and secure accommodation - see page 3.

I recently visited some of the Sheltered Schemes. It was a pleasure to meet and talk to many of the residents and hear your views about the service you receive. On the whole, many of you were delighted with your accommodation. It is clear that the new initiative of providing fresh surplus food once a week in several schemes seems to be much appreciated and we all hoping this can be rolled out to more schemes.

Cllr Mina Parmar
Portfolio Holder for Housing
✉ mina.parmar@harrow.gov.uk

HOUSING MATTERS WEBINAR

Please join us at the Housing Matters Webinar on Wednesday 15 March 2023 webinar at 6pm - 7.30pm via MS TEAMS. To get the meeting link contact: ✉ rinvolve@harrow.gov.uk



WEDNESDAY
15
MARCH

LAUNCH OF HARROW'S FIRST STAGE ROUGH SLEEPERS HUB

As part of a programme of initiatives to support rough sleepers in Harrow, offering them a route back to settled accommodation, we provide an outreach service where specialist council officers tour the borough twice a week, building rapport with rough sleepers and starting the conversations that may ultimately offer a way off the streets.

And in December, we opened a first stage Rough Sleeping Hub in Harrow. The Hub has five private bedrooms and gives service users a safe place to stay for 28 days - which gives time to provide intensive support for personal issues.

Cllr Mina Parmar, our Housing Portfolio Holder, said "Rough sleeping is a small but significant issue in our borough. I was delighted to support the opening of the Hub by providing some Welcome Hampers and meeting our outreach team, who work so hard to assist rough sleepers in Harrow".

Lto R David McNulty, Director of Housing, Cllr Mina Parmar, Housing Portfolio Holder, Brian Bekoe, Daljeet Puar and Richard Birikorang



TO REPORT SOMEONE SLEEPING ROUGH IN HARROW

Please give as much information as you can about the location of the person, description, and time you saw them.

Contact StreetLink via their app, website www.streetlink.london or helpline 0300 500 0914

YOUR STORIES, YOUR MAG

7

Sheltered Housing Christmas party photos

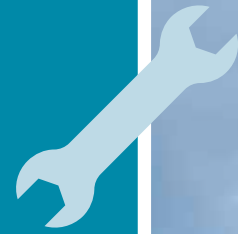
15

Puzzle

16

New customer facing offices as Civic Centre closes

CHANGES TO RENT AND SERVICE CHARGE FOR TENANTS



From 3 April 2023

Clearly costs have increased for all of us, and this includes delivering housing services. Indeed, many costs have increased above inflation. Council rents will increase by 7% from 3 April 2023 and sheltered housing tenants rent will increase in line with inflation +1%. Both these increases fall within the government guidelines for setting council rents.

More transparent service charges

Service charges for council tenants have not significantly increased for many years in the borough. We have not charged for the full costs of delivering certain services such as communal cleaning, lighting and grounds maintenance. From 3 April 2023, we will charge the actual cost of delivering the services, together with pest control and tree pruning, which currently are not recharged. At present we are NOT charging for lift maintenance and door entry system which other boroughs charge for.

■ **The proposal is for the Council to increase the average weekly service charge to £9.61**

■ The average service charge billed in 2022-23 was £3.36

■ This will bring in £1.4m per annum as income to the Housing Revenue Account, matching the costs for the

services provided

■ We didn't recover over £1m service charge costs in 2022/23

■ Even with the proposed increase, Harrow still has one of the lowest service charges in London, the next lowest comparable SC is £14.33 per week (22/23)

Wates repairs team at work



Grounds maintenance team



HELP AND ADVICE

Drop in sessions

Resident Services are running a series of open drop-in sessions where you can talk to housing officers:

■ **Grange Farm Community Hall**

Grange Farm Close
Harrow, HA2 0QF
13 March 2023, 4pm to 7pm
30 March 2023, 11am to 2pm

■ **Julie Cook Hall**

Augustine Road
Harrow, HA3 5NW
15 March 2023, 11am to 2pm
27 March 2023, 4pm to 7pm
Feel free to drop in with your queries.

Service charge income can be fully covered by Housing Benefit/Universal Credit, subject to meeting the eligibility criteria.

If you are concerned about paying your rent or service charge, please speak to your housing officer.

■ Service charge costs can now be broken down accurately per estate/block/flat providing more transparency

■ Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is now faced with significant financial challenges due to increases in utility costs and the requirement

for compliance with regulation, especially in respect of mould and damp

■ These service charge increases are offset by cost increases so there is no net financial benefit to the HRA

■ Landlords may not charge more than the actual cost of the service.

67% of tenants due to pay an increase won't be affected by the increase, as they will be covered by Housing Benefit or Universal Credit and for sheltered tenants this is 88%



COST OF LIVING SUPPORT

Here is a range of help and support with the cost of living

Warm Hubs

Warm hubs are safe places where residents can come along and meet others for a hot drink.

List of warm hubs:

📍 harrowgiving.org.uk/warmhubs/

Healthy Start Card

Young children may not get enough vitamin A and D. If a resident is receiving a qualifying benefit they can apply for a Healthy Start Card to get these vitamins for free.

📍 www.healthystart.nhs.uk/getting-vitamins/

HOT TIP

Sainsbury's is providing a £2 coupon every week until 11 April to customers using a Healthy Start card – i.e. an extra £8 per month on top of the minimum £17 you will already receive per month and this coupon can be spent on fresh, frozen and tinned fruit and veg.

Winter Homelessness Prevention Grant

Residents at risk of homelessness because of rent arrears may be eligible for help from Harrow Council.

You can apply here

📍 www.harrow.gov.uk/winterfund

or by contacting the Homelessness Prevention & Solutions Team

☎ 0208 424 1093 (option 1).

Seasonal Health Intervention Network

SHINE London offers a dedicated helpline and affordable warmth interventions. SHINE accepts referrals for households of any tenure with an income below £16,480, receives means tested benefits or where a household's member falls under a SHINE target group.

📍 shine-london.org.uk/contact-us/

☎ 0300 555 0195

Help Harrow

Food, support and advice service. Harrow Council along with a number of local voluntary sector organisations have come together to form a partnership to support Harrow residents through financial difficulties and other difficulties caused by the pandemic.

📍 helpharrow.org/

Government cost of living payments 2023/24

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is launching a new round of support for low income families in 2023/24 where you might be eligible for £900 from the Government to help with the cost of living.

If you are eligible, these payments will be paid direct to your bank account in three payments over

the financial year. In addition, there will be a separate £150 for disabled people and £300 for pensioners on top of their Winter Fuel Payments.

📍 [search government low income support](https://www.gov.uk/search-government-low-income-support)

Support and Wellbeing Information Service Harrow (SWISH)

Offers information or advice about a range of local services, including where to keep fit and well, manage finances, join social groups, look for work, start a course, access help with housing or welfare benefits or apply for a personal budget.

📍 www.mindinharrow.org.uk/our-services/information-services/swish/

Mental Health Single Point of Access

Open all day, all year for support in a mental health crisis.

☎ 0800 0234 650 or

✉ cnw-tr.spa@nhs.net

📍 www.harrow.gov.uk/costofliving



RESIDENTS' WALL



Elsie Smith, speaking on behalf of the residents of John Lamb Court, expressed her appreciation of the massive effort put in by Sid Adni, Scheme Coordinator, to organise a marvellous event, adding "it would not have happened otherwise. He inspired us all to get involved in the preparation. Most of the residents attended. We look forward to many such events in 2023.



Asmik Shahrenian, Scheme Co-ordinator said, "I was just an observer, the residents of Alma Court and Grange Court organised the whole Christmas party, including the decorations. Special thanks to Mr Kardar, Mrs Lynn Chandrasiri, Mrs Elizabeth Joyce and everyone who helped"



Rose Tallon sent in this lovely photo of the wisteria at St Luke's hospice

PLEASE SEND ANY NEWS ARTICLES, PHOTOS, OR JOKES TO

✉ ANTHEA.WATKINS@HARROW.GOV.UK

AND IF IT IS PRINTED, WE'LL SEND YOU A £10 SHOPPING VOUCHER.

Your home



The 5 year Asset Management Strategy (2022-27) was approved by Cabinet in January 2023. This sets out Harrow Council's approach to Decent Homes which must meet the requirements of the Decent Homes Standard.

And from April, performance against the Decent Homes Standard will be reported to the UK Government and the Regulator on an annual basis.

What does this mean for you?

Well for 2023, it means we can steam ahead with three of our commitments.

Homesafe 3 programme

434 flats within 65 blocks will be getting the full fire safety makeover. This continues the programme which commenced in 2018. It means that during 2023 434 households will benefit from:

- A new fire safe door to their flat
- A new alarm detection system in their flat
- Low energy emergency lighting in communal areas
- Video-entry door system to the block (so you can see who is buzzing your flat)

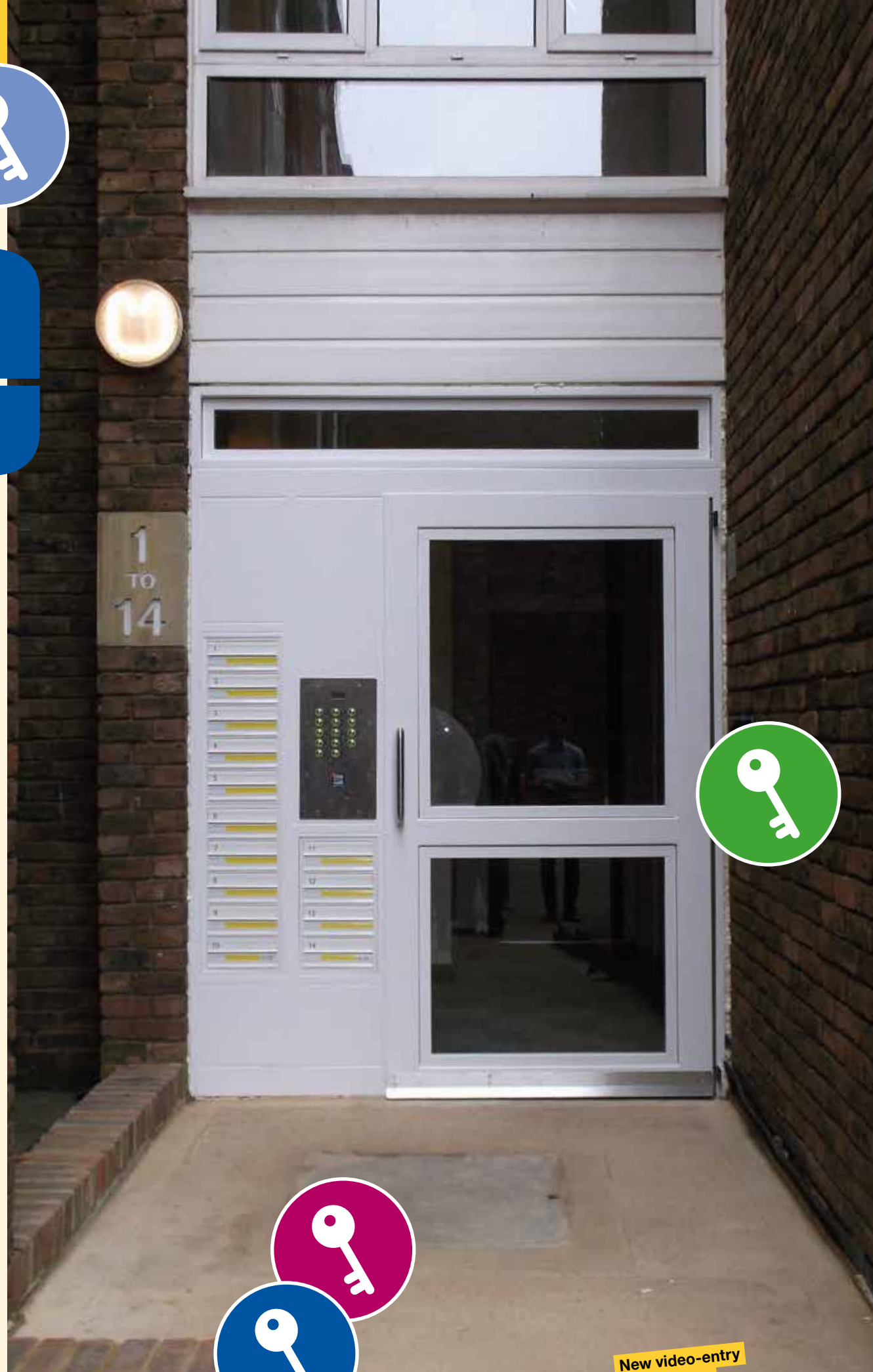
And alongside this we will be carrying out electrical checks across the borough.

3 year capital programme

On the back of the Strategy we will be starting works in April to deliver the 3 year capital programme. This means updating kitchens and bathrooms, windows and doors and carrying out estate improvement works.

Decarbonisation programme

We have succeeded in obtaining a substantial grant to commence work this year on installing 'net zero' carbon measures, (such as improving insulation), in homes that most need it.



New video-entry door system

TACKLING DAMP AND MOULD

You may have heard or read about the tragic death in Rochdale of toddler Awaab Ishak in 2020. He died due to a severe respiratory condition caused by prolonged exposure to mould in his home environment.

What is mould?

Mould can be caused by condensation and damp.

Patches can occur on cold surfaces where there is little movement of air due to poor ventilation, with visible black dots. Mould can damage clothes, furniture, decorations and carpets and often will occur in kitchens and bathrooms.

You can remove some mould using soap and water or a mould remover spray or a mixture of a spoonful of baking soda mixed with a litre of water or diluted white vinegar. Sometimes opening a window or a vent to let fresh air in can help to reduce moisture.

Mould can be caused due to penetrating damp, condensation, a leak or due to poor ventilation, lack of sunlight, or rising damp. It's about controlling the amount of moisture or humidity in the room.

Even letting in a small amount of fresh air helps reduce moisture



What are we doing?

1. We prioritise reports of damp and mould (particularly if it's in the bedroom) and we investigate the cause through an inspection. We may use a specialist contractor in some cases. We will carry out repairs that we are responsible for.
2. We have created a new category of repairs works on our computer database (Northgate) to record condensation, damp and mould works, to make it easier to identify the number of reports and their status.
3. We have started a new strategic Cross-Council Damp and Mould Working Group with representatives from Housing Services, Environmental Health, Children's Service, Business Intelligence Unit (BIU), Public Health, Communication, and Adult Social Care.

How to report damp and mould

It is usually the tenant's responsibility to prevent condensation and to remove mould when it appears, including taking steps to ventilate and heat your home adequately.

If problems with condensation, damp and mould continue after you have taken basic steps to address them, please report the problem.

Harrow council tenants can report damp and mould online
🌐 www.harrow.gov.uk/housing-property/request-repair-council-home or by telephone ☎ 020 8901 2630.

Cllr Parmar meets residents at William Allen House



Sheltered Housing News

Surplus food market pilot in council sheltered schemes

The local charity MyYard has partnered with Harrow Council to provide a weekly surplus food market to residents living in council sheltered housing schemes.

The trial was launched during the final quarter of 2022 in a third of the schemes and Harrow Council officers support the weekly markets. This is partly funded through a MyYard Neighbourly grant.

The weekly food markets are stocked with donated food collected from local stores such as Lidl, as well as surplus food from local food hubs, supermarkets and outlets such as Matty's Kitchen in Bushey.

Currently food markets are held at William Allen House, Grange Court (plus Alma Court residents), Thomas Hewlett

House, Mead Field (plus Cornell House residents). They are held in the community lounges, enabling residents to choose what they need, have a chat, enjoy refreshments and maybe even have a game of table tennis!

The scheme now serves over 100 residents, compared to the 40 or so that had weekly deliveries to the door, from My Yard.



Mrs Santaben Hirani, Mrs Ranjan Chudgar and Mrs Amrathen enjoy the fresh surplus food provided by MyYard



2023 Resident meetings

Housing Matters webinars at 6 – 7.30pm

- Weds 15 March
- Weds 17 May
- Weds 19 July
- Weds 20 September
- Weds 15 November

Leasehold Improvement Group(LIG) – online at 6pm

- Tues 21 March
- Tues 23 May
- Tues 11 July
- Tues 12 September
- Tues 21 November

Residents' Board hybrid meetings at 6-7.30pm

- Thurs 16 March
- Thurs 18 May
- Thurs 20 July
- Thurs 21 September
- Thurs 16 November

For further details please contact:
✉ rinvolve@harrow.gov.uk



How are we doing?



We are looking for volunteers to help monitor how we are performing

Complaints Scrutiny Group
A Complaints Scrutiny Group has recently been set up – it will meet several times a year – the terms of reference are being agreed by the group. Their role is to look at the complaints process and anonymised cases to see how well these have been dealt with and what lessons have been learnt.

Repairs and Major Works Group

We are launching a new resident group this month that will meet quarterly to:

- Monitor outcomes from the Asset Management Strategy and 3 Year Capital Programme
- Support the procurement process for a new repairs contractor(s)
- Review the Repairs Charter
- Monitor the repairs service

If you are interested and would like more information, please contact the Resident Engagement Team:
✉ rinvolve@harrow.gov.uk

Stage 1 complaints process

The Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code sets out requirements for us to respond to complaints fairly and effectively. It provides guidelines for us to adopt and comply with. One of these guidelines, which we are not currently following, is that stage 1 complaints must be responded

to within 10 working days. We are currently responding in 15 working days (corporate complaints standard).
From the 3rd April 2023, all stage 1 complaints must be responded to within 10 working days, to reflect the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman.

HOW TO MAKE A COMPLAINT

If you have a complaint with Harrow Council you can do this in several ways:

- 🔍 search Harrow Council complaint
- 📍 Harrow Council, Housing Services - Complaints, PO BOX 1367, Forward Drive, HARROW, HA3 3QT
- ✉ housing.customerservices@harrow.gov.uk

The Housing Ombudsman is independent of the council and can advise you on your complaint. You have the right to copy in the Ombudsman should you wish at any stage:

- 🌐 www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk
- ✉ info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk
- 📍 Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 152, Liverpool L33 7WQ

A DEEP DIVE INTO ONE COMPLAINTS AREA DAMP AND MOULD

429

429 repairs requests relating to damp, condensation and/or mould (in the last 12 months)

14

14 MP enquiries and 11 Councillor enquiries relating to damp and mould (in the last 12 months)

18

18 complaints from residents that make reference to damp and/or mould (in the last 12 months)

After looking into the mould and damp complaints received over the last 12 months, these were the most common actions taken to deal with the issue:

- 1 Applied fungicidal wall wash
- 2 Heating system tested / advice given
- 3 Advice given on how to deal with mould
- 4 Replaced trickle vent
- 5 Resealed windows
- 6 Replaced extractor
- 7 Surveyor visited and a Works Order was raised
- 8 Specialist damp contractor visited

Changes to the regulation in social housing

All registered providers of social housing must meet standards set by the Regulator of Social Housing.

The regulator makes sure that tenants get quality accommodation, have choice and protection, and can hold their landlord to account and this includes Harrow Council as your landlord.

The 4 consumer standards are:

1. Home
2. Tenancy
3. Neighbourhood and Community
4. Tenant Involvement and Empowerment

In 2020, the government published the Social Housing White Paper, which set out ways to improve things for people living in social housing.

From this, a new system is being created to assess how well social housing landlords are doing at providing good quality homes and services called Consumer Standards. There will be a set of tenant satisfaction measures that we must report on.

There are 22 tenant satisfaction measures, covering four themes. Ten of these will be measured by landlords directly, and 12 will be measured by landlords carrying out tenant perception surveys.

This will cover:

- Overall satisfaction
- Keeping properties in good repair
- Maintaining building safety
- Safety checks
- Respectful and helpful engagement
- Effective handling of complaints
- Responsible neighbourhood management



Timetable

1 April 2023: The new requirements come into force and landlords start collecting data for tenant satisfaction measures.

Summer 2024: Landlords with 1000 or more homes will send the Regulator their first year of tenant satisfaction measures data.

Autumn 2024: First year of tenant satisfaction measures data is published

How Harrow Council is doing against Consumer Standards

We recently worked with a company called Housemark to review our services against the Regulator's 4 Consumer Standards. They looked at our data, documents and website, and they spoke to residents and staff. The assessment identified areas of good performance and areas where we can improve.

We have turned the recommendations into an action plan, and we are working to implement these actions over the next 6 months. We will report on the outcomes in the next issue.



New Housing Satisfaction Survey

We haven't carried out a resident wide survey since the end of 2019 so it is really important that you complete the survey and we hear what you think works well and what is not working well, as well as what you would like us to do in the future.

We have asked Acuity, an independent market research agency, to carry out our next housing satisfaction survey during February and March 2023, by email, text or post.

Erosh are commissioned to carry out the surveys in Sheltered Schemes.

How will you be contacted?

Acuity will email or text any tenant/leaseholder where we have an email address or a mobile telephone number, asking you to complete the survey online if you prefer. The

following week Acuity will send out a postal questionnaire to those who have not completed the survey. There will also be a QR code printed on the questionnaire and the letter will contain details of how to fill in the survey online.

Are the surveys confidential and anonymous?

The surveys are strictly confidential and if you request it, the results can be given back anonymously without your name attached if you wish to remain anonymous.

Are the surveys in line with data protection and what about quality standards?

Yes. Acuity and Erosh are a company partner member of the Market Research Society and are registered with the Information Commissionaires Office.

HOUSING REPAIRS SURVEY

The Housing Service carries out regular surveys in order to understand what you think about the recent repair made to your property, so that future decisions about repairs and maintenance services can take your views into account. Please can you complete the survey after each repair to your home.

 Harrow Council repairs survey



Two new places for council services FROM MARCH

Greenhill Library Perceval Square, HA1 1GX

If you cannot access housing services online or over the phone, you will be able to do so at Greenhill Library, where there will be a meeting room for private conversations and sensitive cases.



6 Gayton Road HA1 2FB

For complex and urgent homelessness and social care enquiries only.

The Civic Centre has now closed.

You can read more about it here: www.harrow.gov.uk/closingthecivic