

Item No.	Classification: Open	Date: 9 July 2012	Meeting Name: Housing, Environment, Transport and Community Safety Scrutiny Sub- Committee
Report title:		TRA Community halls	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Stephen Douglass, Head of Community Engagement	

Purpose

1. This report sets out the current arrangements for the management of Tenants' and Residents' Association (TRA) community halls, the work carried out in the last twelve months to review the way that we manage TRA community halls and the next steps in this work.

Background

2. There are some 112 TRA halls and community facilities within the housing portfolio ranging from converted small rooms on estates to large purpose built facilities. The portfolio is made up of about fifty larger halls and sixty small halls/meeting rooms. The figure includes four Tenants Management Organisation (TMO) offices, six halls that are closed and two on the Heygate Estate that have temporary uses pending demolition.
3. A number of reviews of TRA halls have been carried out over the last ten years which have considered the management arrangements, rent policy, usage and value of the asset to the wider community.
4. Despite this work the management of the portfolio is inconsistent and in some cases facilities are in a poor state of repair due to the lack of investment and a strategic approach to managing the portfolio.
5. Over the last twelve months significant work has been undertaken on compliance and Fire Risk assessment to ensure that these are fully addressed.
6. Most of the properties are in exclusive occupation of TRA committees and other community groups with a wide range of arrangements in place including licenses, leases (where these exist they are with incorporated bodies), tenancies at will, sub-lets and in some cases no formal arrangement in place. In the past there was no comprehensive picture of the financial value of the support the council gives the TRAs managing the halls and the wider

community through its property estate, or of the suitability and upkeep of the properties.

7. Currently rent is charged on 53 of the 112 halls. In 2010/2011 the income generated equated to £47k. Where rent is charged this would normally be reviewed annually as part of the fees and charges report to the Cabinet Member for Housing.
8. In the past procedures for managing the portfolio have been inadequate. Collection and maintenance of management information has been poor with inadequate arrangements for checks on aspects of their management and condition. At times this has been over-reliant on voluntary submission of information rather than proactive checking by the council.
9. In the majority of cases TRAs have the responsibility for day-to-day management of the properties. While some are clearly well managed others need support in ensuring that premises are accessible and their management is accountable. Work has therefore started with the halls working party to agree a model set of terms of hire. Other key documents will also be developed, backed with training for halls managers.
10. The distribution of the facilities across the borough is not even. Not every estate has a hall.
11. A very small number of TRAs make a profit by operating a bar. Opinions are mixed on whether this is appropriate at all. The key issue is that bars should not deter other users of what are community premises and public money should not subsidise them. Where bars are in place there should be proper arrangements in place for their management.

Activities in the Last Year

12. There has been significant activity in the past twelve months to address the current weaknesses in the way TRA community halls have been managed with work across the Housing Department to bring a better co-ordinated management strategy to the portfolio. This is being co-ordinated centrally by the Resident Involvement Team.
13. Engineering Services will manage a compliance regime for the key services and utilities including electrical testing, gas checks, water system management and asbestos management.
14. The compliance team plans to work to provide tailored training and advice for TRAs and management committees on their responsibilities in managing health and safety.
15. The Repairs Team will manage day to day repairs of the halls.
16. The Investment team will manage planned preventative maintenance and capital investment.

17. A comprehensive database of halls with their contact details for lettings has been developed and the resident involvement team are working on new governance and strategic management arrangements to ensure effective and consistent management across the portfolio. There are plans to link this information with the 'in my area' part of the council website, allowing residents to identify halls for hire in their area.
18. A capital sum of £2.1 million has been established for the hall portfolio within the Housing Investment five-year programme. A dedicated repairs and maintenance budget of £500k per annum has also been set up. £200k of this has been added to the capital sum over the next five years to address the history of lack of investment more quickly. This gives a total capital investment of £3.1 million over the next five years.
19. A stock condition survey has been commissioned and ninety-six halls have now been surveyed. No access was available to three halls and is currently being arranged and the remainder are not in use.
20. The purpose of the survey was to:
 - Assess each building and recommend the works required to meet current fire standards.
 - Assess each building and recommend works required to meet current Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) standards.
 - Assess the general level of dilapidation within each building and recommend works to rectify any defects noted.
21. This survey will inform investment priorities and options appraisal. The main issues this has highlighted are:
 - In many cases access arrangements are poor and there are difficulties with improving access for people with disabilities.
 - In a few cases there are difficult and expensive works required in relation to Fire Risk
 - High levels of investment are required to make all the properties fit for purpose.
 - There is an uneven geographical spread and variations in actual and potential community use.
 - The total estimated cost of works in the survey is manageable within the £3.1million of capital investment that is available over the next five years. 48.6% of this cost is for general building works, 13.07% for mechanical/electrical works, 9.8% for fire risk assessment related works and 28.5% for access improvements.
22. A compliance regime is in place and more detail on this is set out in Appendix 1.
23. A benchmarking exercise has been carried out with other local authorities that demonstrates that:

- Southwark has an average ratio of facilities for residents but this is unevenly distributed so in some areas (for example Walworth and Camberwell) there is very generous provision.
- Westminster and Enfield have fully complied with good practice in disabled access requirements while other authorities have work yet to do on this but have costed strategies in place.
- No authority yet charges market rents although some are currently considering this approach.
- Sheffield and Islington have charging guidelines for third party users.
- Arrangements for paying insurance, utilities, costs of caretaking and opening and closing vary widely between authorities.
- Not all authorities have done work on maximising community use of the portfolio.
- Some authorities are more proactive in tackling obstacles to increased use. Islington for example pay for insurance and staff work with hall committees to obtain funding and negotiate on behalf of groups to wider access to premises.
- Sheffield, Islington and Westminster regularly monitor levels and types of use and users and financial accounts.
- In most authorities TRAs retain income raised. Enfield and Islington require a contribution back to the HRA.
- Islington has joint management boards made up of mixed groups of users (not just TRAs) for each of their premises depending on location and suitability for general usage.
- Direct management of premises by councils has been universally rejected mainly because this is a very expensive option.
- It took Westminster and Islington between eighteen months and two years to deliver changes to the overall management of their premises.
- Strong management and member support is critical for change.

24. A working party of tenants and leaseholders has been established that is meeting regularly as a consultative body on the management arrangements and to set future aims, priorities and policy objectives. The council has agreed to appoint a Tenants' Friend to provide advice and support to this group to build its capacity and provide training for the group on legal, health and safety responsibilities and to negotiate/develop standard service level or management agreements for the portfolio.

25. The intention is also that the halls are placed into a wider context of community engagement by making the most of opportunities to expand their use by community organisations. This will include supporting TRAs to advertise and market their halls and build relationships with local community organisations

26. The working party will continue to meet to:

- Have an overview of the hall portfolio
- Discuss current issues/problems and resolve these
- Exchange information
- Support training on good practice for hall management committees
- Give advice on lettings and activities permitted in halls

27. Last year Community Action Southwark ran a three-session course on halls management and elements of this can be continued as this work progresses.

Next steps

28. Working with the Tenants Halls Working Party the proposed next step for the council is to develop a consistent legal basis for all properties in the portfolio. This should include:
- A new standard license/lease and model management agreement. This is likely to be a license for the smaller facilities and a lease for the larger ones. Bodies entering into a lease should be incorporated and this will therefore require training and later legal advice. Work is ongoing to look at potential suitable models.
 - A new protocol on operational and financial management issues.
 - A clear arrangement on liability for utilities and non domestic rates.
 - Where TRAs do not have access to legal advice appointment of a firm of solicitors as independent advisers.
 - Standard procedures on public liability insurance with an arrangement of regular checking of compliance.
 - The terms of a hall management agreement.
 - An affordable, fair and rational lettings and charging policy that is consistently applied.
 - Looking for opportunities to share premises.
 - Consider whether there are benefits to rationalising the portfolio where there are other suitable premises available or they are clearly under-used and where they are beyond economical repair and/or cannot be made to be DDA compliant.
 - A review of arrangements for operating bars in TRA community halls.
 - A review of income generation opportunities through the portfolio to move towards the position where the portfolio generates sufficient income to meet its revenue costs and that could potentially support other community activities. This policy will need to recognise community benefit and that the smaller halls are generally small meeting rooms for TRAs and have limited income generation potential
29. Consultation will continue with the working party and then Tenants' Council, Home Owners' Council, Area Forums and TRAs with the intention that a comprehensive set of policies and procedures are in place by the beginning of the 2013/14 financial year with the full set of training and guidance required for TRAs to be available thereafter. Some elements of this will be developed earlier as a priority for example on Health & Safety, finance and booking procedures.

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	HRA Community Halls Compliance Regime

Appendix 1

HRA Community Halls Compliance Regime

Activity	Current Arrangements
Water Management	
Survey of water systems & immediate high priority remedial works	Works complete. Annual inspection and maintenance now incorporated into existing R&M contract.
Water system flushing	Sites subject to flushing regime reduced as water works carried out.
Electrical	
PAT testing asset register of all portable appliances.	Complete with asset register. Contract procured for future PAT and electrical installation testing.
Testing of electrical installations	Complete with asset register. Contract procured for future PAT and electrical installation testing.
Fire	
Equipment – extinguishers, blankets, signage etc.	Complete and annual inspection and maintenance incorporated into existing contract
Fire alarms, emergency lighting systems	Fire risk assessments currently under annual review. Resulting works to be progressed through major works contract.
Fire doors - renewal	Incorporated into major works contract
Fire risk assessments	Annual review taking place
Gas	
Gas safety checks (annual servicing)	Annual inspection completed with halls having current gas certificates. Contract in place for annual inspection and maintenance.