

Select Committee on Environment – November 2009

Report of the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services

Tenancy and Estate Management

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to update Members on Tenancy and Estate Management in Housing Services.

Background

2. Housing Management's vision for Dudley's Housing Service is:

“To be recognised by customers and other stakeholders as a landlord of choice because we offer excellent services that represent value for money and homes that are affordable and in places where people want to live both now and in the future”

3. To achieve this vision Housing Management has identified 7 strategic priorities for the service. These are:
 - The delivery of a professional and pro-active housing management service.
 - Sustainability of tenancies and communities.
 - Continuous improvement in levels of customer satisfaction.
 - Continuous improvement in income and debt collection.
 - Continuous improvement in the management of void properties.
 - Continuous improvement of homeless and housing advice services.
 - Workforce development and wellbeing.
4. To deliver on these strategic priorities it is essential that continuous improvement is achieved in the way we manage our tenancies and estates and this reports outlines performance in this area of work since the last report to this committee in March 2009.
5. In April this year a number of organisational changes were made within the Housing Management Division. The purpose of these changes was to refocus activity on functions that will help deliver our strategic aims and vision for the service.
6. This report outlines the changes that were made in April 2009 to the delivery of Tenancy and Estate Management Services and the impact this has had on the services delivered to date.

Organisational Structure

7. Two Heads of Service have overall responsibility for the delivery of all Tenancy and Estate Management functions with responsibility split across a geographical North / South split of the Borough.
8. They are supported by 4 Tenancy and Estate Management Team Managers, 2 Income Team Managers, 2 Customer Services Team Managers and 3 Assistant Team Managers who manage the specialist teams delivering front line tenancy and estate management services.

Tenancy & Estate Management

9. There are 4 Tenancy and Estate Management Teams across the Borough which include Assistant Team Managers, Housing Managers, Estate Assistants and Concierge.
10. Each Assistant Team Manager and Housing Manager manage a patch of approximately 800 Council and 30 Leaseholder Tenancies.
11. The focus of their work is on the pro-active management of tenancies from sign up of new tenants to termination of tenancies when tenants leave. Their pro-active work includes visits to new tenants during the first 6 weeks of their tenancy to check tenants have moved in and settled in their new home, home check visits to all tenants on a 3 year rolling programme to identify any requirements for tenancy enforcement or tenancy support and visits to tenants before they leave their tenancy during the notice period to make ensure the tenancy is ended correctly, to understand why the tenant is leaving and to undertake a final check on the property to highlight any actions the tenant needs to undertake before they leave.
12. Housing Managers also focus their time on pro-active management of the wider housing estates. Their pro-active work here includes undertaking estate inspections of their whole patch every 8 weeks to identify and action problems such as fly-tipping, abandoned vehicles and communal repairs and to monitor the effectiveness of contracted cleaning and grounds maintenance. Housing Managers will also undertake estate walkabouts with partner agencies, residents and elected members to find solutions to specific problems on their patches. This may include submitting bids for community safety and environmental improvement works.
13. The 3 Assistant Team Managers also manage a team of Estate Assistants who help to keep our flatted estates safe and tidy. Their pro-active work includes daily inspections of all our high rise blocks to ensure there are no risks of fire, reporting any repairs identified or other fire risks such as unauthorised items on landings to the Housing Managers for action. Similar inspections are also undertaken on low rise flats with the frequency of these visits determined by a risk assessment of the blocks.
14. Whilst being as pro-active as possible Housing Managers do still need to respond to service requests from our customers. Up to the end of August 2009 Dudley Council Plus had passed 12,327 service requests through to Housing Managers which represents approximately 80 service requests for each Housing Manager to respond to each month.

15. Whilst the pro-active work undertaken by Housing Managers aims to reduce the likelihood of anti-social behaviour occurring on our estates it is not possible to eradicate the occurrence of these problems. We do however aim to ensure that when these problems arise we are pro-active in resolving them. So far this year Housing Managers have opened 179 new cases of Anti-Social Behaviour or Nuisance and have closed 357 cases.
16. A comprehensive performance management framework is used to monitor and drive continuous improvement in the Tenancy and Estate Management Service. Challenging targets have been set for the Tenancy & Estate Management Team against a set of key performance indicators (KPIs).
17. It is too early following the refocus of the service to make any firm judgements on its success or otherwise, however, the performance indicators show some encouraging signs.
18. Included in Appendix A is a comparison of performance for Tenancy and Estate Management KPIs at the end of Quarter 2 for this financial year against performance at the same time in 2008/09. Included in Appendix B are some examples of positive interventions undertaken by Housing Managers this year that have contributed towards the sustainability of our tenancies and estates.

Income Management

19. There are 2 Income Management Teams, one for the North and one for the South. They include Income Management Officers and Housing Management Assistants.
20. The focus of the Income Teams work is on maximising the collection rate on housing income. This includes debt collection of current and former tenant arrears, administration of invoices for tenant and leaseholder charges, administration of 'right to buy' applications and debt prevention work.
21. The creation of Income Management Teams during the refocus has allowed us to develop further our pro-active approach to debt collection and prevention. The pro-active work of the team includes the development of a marketing campaign designed to remind tenants of the importance of rent payments as a priority debt, the promotion of different payment methods so tenants know how they can pay their rent, and greater emphasis being placed on personal contact with customers in debt to reach agreements for re-payment, including increased numbers of visits and evening telephone calls.
22. The Income Teams are still relatively new and have been set up during a difficult economic climate, making their role more challenging but even more important. Included in Appendix A is a comparison of performance for Income Collection at the end of Quarter 2 for this financial year against performance at the same time in 2008/09. Included in Appendix B are some examples of positive interventions undertaken by Income Management Officers this year that have contributed towards the sustainability of our tenancies and estates.

Customer Services

23. There are 2 Customer Services Teams, one for the North and one for the South. They include Customer Service Assistants and Housing Management Assistants.
24. The focus of the Customer Service Team is the provision of a first point of contact for customers visiting our reception areas and cash payment desks at 4 Area Housing Offices.
25. Dudley Council Plus provides a similar service for customers contacting our service by telephone and for face to face enquires for customers in Central Dudley.
26. Our Customer Service Team Managers are focused on improving customer satisfaction with our service. We currently measure satisfaction with our service by undertaking a tenant satisfaction survey every two years. The results of the last survey carried out demonstrated an overall improvement in satisfaction with 76% of tenants indicating they were satisfied with the service they received.
27. In order to contribute to our strategic objective of increasing customer satisfaction our Customer Services Team Managers are regularly reviewing feedback on services received via our complaints and compliments system. They are also pro-actively reviewing service lines in partnership with Dudley Council Plus to ensure the most appropriate advice is given to customers at the first point of contact and that service requests are sent to the most appropriate officer to action.

Partnerships

28. Housing Services cannot deliver its strategic objectives without the assistance of partner agencies.
29. A very effective partnership is in place with the CAB which allows Income Management Officers and Housing Managers to refer tenants for debt management advice. This helps contribute to our aims of maximising our income and sustaining tenancies.
30. Housing Managers also work effectively with colleagues from the fire service and have referred over 300 tenants for a Home Fire Safety Check. This has helped the fire service to significantly reduce the number of accidental dwelling fires which in turn has helped us to sustain people's tenancies.
31. Housing Managers also work effectively with colleagues from West Midlands Police. The sharing of information and intelligence at a local level is helping to address issues such as anti-social behaviour. Housing Managers and Police Officers working in partnership has also contributed towards a reduction in reports of criminal damage to our housing stock helping the Police to achieve their targets and improving the sustainability of our estates.

Future Service Developments

32. This report comes relatively early following the refocus of Housing Management and at a time when the new teams are still adjusting to their new focused roles. However this does not mean that opportunities for further improvement will be missed.
33. Work has already started on the development of ICT solutions that will reduce the volume of data inputting and paper filing that can take up Housing Managers, Income Officers and Customer Services time. Work is quite advanced on implementing mobile technology for home checks and options for electronic data records are currently been explored which should reduce the need for paper files.
34. Team Managers are also currently working with their teams to develop local team service plans that will deliver further improvements to the service.

Finance

35. There are no financial implications from this report

Law

36. The Council may do anything incidental to, conducive to or which facilitates the discharge of its functions under Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972. This would include anything incidental to the Council's housing powers and duties under the various Housing Acts.

Equality Impact

37. This report has no direct Equality Implications. The provision of the housing management service complies with the Council's policy on Equality and Diversity.

Recommendation

38. It is recommended that:-
 - Members note the contents of this report.



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List of Background Papers