

## Housing Services

### Tenancy & Estate Management

One of our strategic goals is to ensure our housing estates are and remain places where people want to live. We recognise that residents being and feeling safe is central to how they perceive the place that they live. This is why we endeavour to provide a pro-active tenancy and estate management service aimed at identifying and tackling risks to community safety at the earliest opportunity. The activities listed below summaries some of the main areas of work undertaken by Housing Managers in this regard.

- **Home Checks** – Our current target is to visit all of our tenants on a rolling 3 year programme of Home Checks. Introduced in 2006 Home Check is a well established method of tenancy management that provides an opportunity for customers who may not otherwise have reason to contact their Housing Manager an opportunity to let them know about any problems, concerns or issues relating to their tenancy or the wider estate. It also provides an opportunity for us as a landlord to ensure our property is being used for its intended purpose and is not being neglected or used for unlawful purposes. We are coming towards the end of the second cycle of Home Checks with 70% of all current tenants having received at least one home check in the last 3 years. When we last reported to this committee we had identified approximately 1300 tenancies that had not received a home check since they were introduced. These tenancies have been prioritised for visits during the last 12 months and there are now less than 400 tenancies that we have not yet visited.

Housing Managers are completing approximately 200 home checks each per month and collectively approximately 6500 each year however we continue to fall short of our intended target of a 3 year cycle across our stock. We are therefore currently reviewing the outcomes they achieve and how many we can realistically deliver with existing resources. Consideration is being given to developing a more targeted approach to ensure tenancies that are more problematic are given more intensive management than others.

- **Patch Inspections & Estate Walkabouts** – Patch Inspections/Walkabouts – Housing Managers continue to regularly inspect their patches (110 inspections during the current financial year) and where there is demand from within the community will also carry out estate walkabouts with residents and other partner agencies to address specific concerns (62 walkabouts completed in the current financial year). This pro-active approach to estate management ensures issues relating to environmental anti-social behaviour such as fly-tipping are identified and tackled. These methods of working also provide opportunities to identify and solve other community issues.

- **Environment and Community Safety Bids** – Housing Managers can bid for resources to carry out projects and capital works to address issues of crime and anti-social behaviour across their estates. A budget of £1.6m is available for this type of work over the next 5 years. The expenditure of this budget is prioritised and approved through consultation with elected members and tenant representatives on our Area Housing Panels. The types of work typically carried out include improvements to Security Doors, the erection of fencing to communal areas, the installation of security lighting and CCTV cameras. Some of the future year's budget will also be allocated to fire safety work.
  
- **Partnership Working** – We have a strong ethos of partnership working and embrace the opportunities that doing so can provide for improving the safety of our housing estates. In 2011 we committed significant staff resources to two Operation Team Work events as part of the Safe and Sound Partnership. These events took place across two of our housing estates in Lye and Kates Hill and involved a whole range of partner agencies targeting resources on tackling crime and disorder in the area. We contributed resources to carry out clean up events, to promote resident engagement and undertook a key fob exchange at a number of low rise blocks in Kates Hill to reduce the risks posed to the area by unauthorised persons accessing the flats. We have also recently entered into a partnership with the Princes Trust to allow them to use of one of our former estate offices in Netherton to run a training programme for young people. These programmes will provide opportunities to young people in the area who might otherwise engage in unlawful or anti-social behaviour.
  
- **Tenancy enforcement action** – Housing Managers will respond to complaints about anti-social behaviour and nuisance involving Council tenants. We will always challenge unacceptable behaviour but the nature of our response will be appropriate and proportionate to the problem that needs to be addressed. However in the most serious cases of anti-social behaviour it is necessary for legal enforcement action to be taken to provide a remedy to the problem. Listed below are the type and number of legal actions taken this financial year, as of the end of December 2011, regarding anti-social behaviour:
  - 18 Legal Notices (this is the first stage of any legal proceedings to recover possession of our property).
  - 10 Possession Proceedings issued (this is the application stage to the court for possession)
  - 6 Possession Orders (these are the orders of the court granting us possession of our property)
  - 2 Extended Introductory Tenancies (this is where we have extended the introductory tenancy period from 12 to 18 months)
  - 2 Injunctions (this is an order of the court, the breach of which can result in a fine or imprisonment)
  - 2 Committal Proceedings (this is action taken for breach of the terms of injunctions obtained)

- **Corporate Anti-Social Behaviour Review**

Housing Services have committed significant staff resources to the Corporate Review of Anti-Social Behaviour. We recognise that some of our customers who report ASB to us are dissatisfied with the response that we can currently provide. We are committed to improving the outcomes for customers who suffer ASB and will commit sufficient resources to deliver the outcomes and changes that the review is driving.

#### Multi Agency Public Protection Panel (MAPPA)

Public protection legislation has emerged against a backdrop of increasing public concern regarding the management of dangerous offenders. It has highlighted the importance for those agencies involved in public protection to work together. Housing Services are represented on MAPPA and have an active role in the assessment and management of dangerous offenders in the community.

The Police are the lead agency for MAPPA and work closely with Probation Services, Adult and Children's Social Care, Prison Services, Mental Health and Housing.

#### Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)

This is a monthly meeting of partners to share information regarding the highest risk domestic abuse cases. Partners include the Police, Local Authority, Probation, Mental Health Services and specialists from other statutory and voluntary bodies. The main aim of the meeting is to safeguard the victim but links exist to other Forum to also safeguard children and manage the behaviour of the perpetrator. Once all information is shared by agencies on a particular case, representatives then discuss and agree options for increasing the safety of the victim through the formulation of a co-ordinated action plan. The meeting is organised and chaired by the Police.

#### Tenancy Support – Substance Abuse

The DACHS Housing Support team includes two Drugs Intervention Programme (DIP) Tenancy Sustainment Officers, who work alongside Atlantic House (Drug Assessment Centre) staff, supporting the accommodation needs of people with substance abuse issues. Their lives have often become chaotic, and include a history of tenancy failure and high risk behaviours. The two staff each provide housing related support to an average of twelve people at a time, assisting them to deal with housing issues which typically involve rent arrears and neighbour problems, but also supporting them in a holistic way to meet their individual needs in healthcare, benefits, training & employment opportunities, parenting where applicable and re-establishing family relationships. In the first three quarters of 2011/12, a total of 25 users of this service successful completed their programme of support to become independent, whilst there were no unplanned/negative case closures.

## Mediation Service

Also within the DACHS Housing Support team are two qualified Mediation Officers, who provide independent and impartial mediation services in community, family and neighbour disputes. Between April 2011 and January 2012, the officers have dealt with 42 neighbourhood and 29 family referrals. The neighbourhood cases seek to provide a resolution where otherwise the conflict would be tackled through court action, or would continue because the threshold for court action is not met. The family cases generally involve young people between the ages of 14 and 18, who through conflict within the family are at risk of becoming Looked After or homeless. The team has also developed an innovative Flashpoint service, delivering groupwork to teenagers and their parents, and is currently developing a volunteering scheme which will include training peer mediators.

## Homelessness Service

The Homelessness Prevention and Response team continues to reduce the number of statutory acceptances each year by increasing the number and range of preventative interventions. In 2010/11 there were 188 acceptances and 552 preventions, whilst in the first three quarters of 2011/12 there have been 117 acceptances and 485 preventions. Much of this success is due to a strong tradition of partnership working, for example working with the Youth Offending Service and Heantun Housing Association to provide the Crash Pad service for young people, and with CHADD (Churches Housing Association of Dudley and District) and Heantun to respond to Domestic Abuse. A proactive approach is taken to rough sleeping, with multi agency information-sharing to identify individuals and their locations, and to deliver a tailored solution to their housing and support needs. The aim of the team for all its customers is to find appropriate, sustainable, long term housing, and there have been no repeat homeless acceptances in the borough for several years.

## Housing Allocations

Over the last 18 months, DACHS has completed a lean systems thinking review of its housing voids and lettings service. One of the outcomes has been a more rigorous approach to dealing with applications for housing. Potential tenants now have to sign up to our terms & conditions of business prior to joining the waiting list, including the commitment that they will be able to comply with our Conditions of Tenancy. All customers are interviewed, so that any potential issues or support needs can be identified and addressed at an earlier stage. During 2011/12, we have also begun to develop Local Lettings Plans, where specific local issues can be taken into account when homes are allocated, and additional measures introduced. The Lettings Plans for the Council's new build homes included additional checks and home visits, to ensure that these new communities will be successful and sustainable, whilst Local Lettings Plans will also now be used as part of wider housing management initiatives to deal with anti social behaviour on estates.

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