

Select Committee on Environment – March 2009

Report of the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services

Tenancy and Estate Management (Patch-Working)

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to update Members on Tenancy and Estate Management Services, more commonly referred to as 'patch-working' in Housing Services.

Background

2. Housing Services currently manages its 23,000 tenancies and estates where these properties are located through a dedicated team of Housing Managers who each have responsibility for a 'patch' of approximately 550 Council Tenancies.
3. Housing Managers currently provide a generic service managing all aspects of a tenancy from commencement to termination as well as management of the wider environment of their estates.
4. 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"
5. To achieve this vision Housing Management have identified 7 strategic priorities for the service, which includes the delivery of a professional and pro-active housing management service.
6. To deliver on this strategic priority it is essential that continuous improvement is achieved in the way we manage our tenancies and estates and this reports outlines recent and future changes to the service to achieve this outcome.

Service Development

Home Checks

7. The most significant change to Tenancy and Estate Management took place with the introduction of Home Checks in April 2006.
8. Home Checks are a visit carried out by the Housing Manager to individual tenants in their homes. The purpose of the visit is to carry out an inspection of the

property, to identify any breaches of tenancy conditions or other issues that may affect the sustainability of the person's tenancy.

- 9 Housing Managers were set a challenging target of visiting each tenancy at least once every 3 years to undertake a Home Check. We are now coming towards the end of the first of these 3 year cycles.
10. At the end of January this year 20'504 home checks had been completed with 80% of current tenants having benefited from this service.
11. Manual records have been kept on the outcome of each of the home checks undertaken but this data cannot currently be collated and reported on to demonstrate the outcomes from home checks. A successful pilot has however been carried out in 2008 which allows Housing Managers to record the outcome of their Home Checks on their blackberries which will allow more detailed scrutiny of their outcomes when rolled out to all Housing Managers in 2009.
12. Despite the lack of statistical data there are ample case examples available from Housing Managers of positive outcomes from Home Checks that demonstrates their value. Some example case studies are attached in appendix A.

Dudley Council Plus and Mobile Technology

13. In order for Housing Managers to deliver the professional and pro-active service we desire it is important that they are able to prioritise their time so that they are dealing with or preventing problems from arising on their estates. Two significant changes introduced in the last 12 months to release housing managers from their desks and ensure they are spending more time on the patch that they are managing has been the issue of blackberries to all Housing Managers and the use of Dudley Council Plus to handle all initial telephone enquires for Housing Management.
14. In April 2008 Dudley Council Plus became the first point of contact for all Housing Management enquires. Detailed service lines and scripts have been developed with Dudley Council Plus that enables their advisors to answer many routine enquires that would otherwise be put through to the Housing Manager to respond to and where necessary they are able to make appointments for customers to see their Housing Manager.
15. Customers who contact Dudley Council Plus and who require the services of a Housing Manager will either be given an appointment or details of their enquiry will be taken and passed to the Housing Manager to investigate and make contact with the customer within set service standards. All customer contacts with Dudley Council Plus are recorded so that any repeat contact about the same enquiry are captured and reported on.
16. The use of Dudley Council Plus has enable us to review the duty line arrangements in place for Housing Managers freeing up more of their time to concentrate on management issues on their own patch rather than taking messages and giving advice to customers of colleagues patches on a rota basis. A duty line is still maintained but for emergency contact with Housing Managers only.
17. Housing Managers have also been issued with blackberry intelligent phones in

the last 12 months. This allows the Housing Manager access to a range of ICT services when working away from their office again allowing more time to be spent on the patch dealing with customers rather than going back to the office to look up information on the computer.

18. Further development using the blackberries is proposed to build on the pilot for home checks to enable data to be captured on site without the need for data inputting on return to the office. This will further reduce the time spent carrying out administrative tasks in the office by Housing Managers.

Partnerships

19. The delivery of an effective tenancy and estate management service cannot be done without the support of partners and other stakeholders. Housing Managers continue to work effectively with colleagues within the Authority and external partners. Some examples of recent successful partnership initiatives are outlined below.
20. Housing Managers worked in partnership with the police and other agencies on a project co-ordinated by the Community Safety Team to help residents security mark personal belongings whilst undertaking Home Checks in the area as part of a burglary prevention initiative in Kates Hill.
21. Housing Managers and the Fire Service have worked together to undertake joint visits for tenancy home checks and Home Fire Safety Checks in parts of Dudley and North Dudley. This has improved access rates for the fire service and ensured our tenants have benefited from fire prevention advice.
22. Housing Managers worked on the multi agency beat sweep' initiative' in Lye
23. Housing Managers in Darby End, Holly Hall and Saltwells have worked with tenants and residents to organise 'big clean up events' to improve the general environment of the estates they manage.

Refocus of Housing Management

24. The refocus of the Housing Management service is anticipated to bring further improvement to our patch-work service by removing the responsibility of income collection from the Housing Managers so their time is dedicated to tenancy and estate management issues.
25. The changes will take effect from April 2009 and will continue to be reviewed following implementation to ensure we are providing the best possible tenancy and estate management service to our customers with the resources at our disposal.

Finance

33. There are no financial implications from this report

Law

35. 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

36. 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

37. It is recommended that:-
- Member note the contents of this report.



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List of Background Papers