

**Meeting:** Housing Sub Committee

**Date:** 25<sup>th</sup> July 2016

**Title:** Creating Sustainable Tenancies

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**Author:** Ian Rice, Welfare Reform and Income Manager

**Service:** Housing

**Directorate:** Environment, Housing and Leisure

**Wards affected:** All

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## **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1** To update members on the Tenancy Sustainment project and to identify an appropriate timescale for the sub-committee to look at the outcomes in greater detail.

## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1** To note the information provided and to agree to undertake a review of the Tenancy Sustainment project outcomes during quarter 4 of 2016-17 as part of the Housing sub-Committee scrutiny role.

## **3. Details**

- 3.1** We want our tenants to be able to live in their home for as long as they want to. To achieve this we need to ensure that we allocate our homes to people who:
- a) Need them
  - b) Can afford them
  - c) Are able to manage their bills and
  - d) Can they look after themselves, their household and their property
- 3.2** To help facilitate the above we developed new procedures to enable housing staff to identify applicants who may be potentially vulnerable (financially, socially, digitally etc.) at an earlier stage in the allocation process. Thus enabling staff to work with applicants prior to allocation and sign up to help then access support if required.
- 3.3** A new team, the Tenancy Sustainment Team was set up as part of the restructure of Housing Services in March 2015.

#### **4. Creating sustainable tenancies - Sustainable Tenancies Team**

- 4.1** The new team came together in April 2015 and the Tenancy Sustainment officers are responsible for carrying out the Sustainability Assessments. The team undertook a 12 week training and development programme starting in May 2015.
- 4.2** The key to the new approach is to ensure we are able to accurately assess the needs of customers. And, have a clear understanding of what we can and will do for each potential assessment outcome.
- 4.3** To ensure that we maximise staff resources and focus our efforts on those that need help the process requires an initial 'triage' assessment to be undertaken by the Homefinder Team. This assessment identifies those applicants that require a more in depth assessment of their needs.
- 4.4** A pilot of the new process was undertaken during October 2015 linked to the new build properties in Blandford Road.

#### **5. Blandford Road Pilot – Outcome**

- 5.1** During October 2015 the tenancy sustainment team carried out 33 Sustainability Assessments for applicants who were matched to the new built properties at Blandford Road.

Out of 33 completed assessments:

- 30 were assessed as being able to afford the property and able to sustain a tenancy.
- 3 were assessed as not being able to afford the property on the income they had coming in:
  - 1 was allowed to proceed as she was 36 weeks pregnant and her income was going to increase after the baby was born, plus the father of the baby worked away and said he was going to cover the rent until she was able to afford it.
  - 1 was allowed to proceed as he had £8000+ in a savings account and said he was going to make up the difference out of that.
  - 1 applicant was told we were withdrawing the offer on the basis that they could not afford to live in the property. The applicant accepted that this was in their best interest.

32 properties were let during October 2015; 31 of these are still tenants.

- 5.2** 1 tenant has terminated leaving £476 in Former Tenant Arrears. This tenant was assessed as being able to afford and sustain the tenancy. The rent account was maintained during the tenancy, however, after the termination form was submitted (the tenant wanted to move nearer work) the tenant stopped paying and therefore the arrears are associated with the termination period.
- 5.3** As at 1<sup>st</sup> June 2016 the total arrears for the Blandford Road tenants was £1875.49, this is an average of £60.49 per tenant which is significantly lower than the average arrears for all tenants who have started their tenancies since

October 2015 (£83.78) despite the average rent being higher as a result of these properties being affordable rent.

- 5.4** Since the completion of the Blandford Road Pilot there has been a further restructure in Housing which has impacted on the project plan and timescales for the roll out of the Tenancy Sustainment Process.

## **6. Current Position**

- 6.1** As part of the most recent Environment, Housing and Leisure restructure the Tenancy Sustainment Team were split and the Tenancy Sustainment Officer were incorporated into the new Neighbourhood Housing Team. This will enable closer working relationship and collaborative working with Neighbourhood Housing Officers to ensure that those tenants in most need of support are identified and provided with the help appropriate to their needs.
- 6.2** The starting point of the Tenancy Sustainment process, the triage assessment (carried out by Homefinder), is still work in progress.
- 6.3** The recent Environment, Housing and Leisure restructure has impacted on the implementation of the tenancy sustainment triage assessment process. During the restructure a number of officer's in Homefinder secured alternative employment. Unfortunately the service has not been able recruit until now. This is because the service agreed, in order to meet our obligations to try to minimise the need to make compulsory redundancies, to hold vacant posts unless they were classed as 'Specialist', so that these may be considered as redeployment opportunities. This is an obligation that an employer has when restructuring or making redundancies.
- 6.4** Members may be aware of the current backlog of housing applications in Homefinder and as a result, unfortunately, we have been unable to prioritise the implementation of the Tenancy Sustainment triage fully.
- 6.5** Although the Triage is not fully rolled out Tenancy Sustainment Officers continue to work with applicants to identify those who need help and support. They discuss the applicants financial circumstances, signposting them to support around the maximisation of welfare benefits, managing their budgets and accessing help and support with digital exclusion when appropriate.
- 6.6** During 2014-15 the proportion of tenancies that failed during the first 12 months accounted for 4.98% of all terminated tenancies. During 2015-16 as a result of the increased help and support provided this had reduced to 4.19%.

## **7. Next steps**

- 7.1** It is expected that the new Homefinder Officers will be in post by the end of July early August 16. Once these staff are in place, and trained, the team will have

the capacity to deliver the full processes and procedures. We expect the service to be fully up and running by the end of September 2016.

- 7.2** It is therefore proposed that Sub Committee agree to defer their review to determine the effectiveness of the Tenancy Sustainment process and procedures Until quarter 4 2016-17