

---

**DEVELOPMENT OF HOUSING PLUS SERVICE**

---

**Responsible Cabinet Member – Councillor Veronica Copeland  
Adults and Housing Portfolio**

**Responsible Director – Paul Wildsmith,  
Director of Neighbourhood Services and Resources**

---

**Purpose of Report**

1. This report seeks approval for the proposed charges in respect of a new self-funded Housing Management Service to support those tenants who may be at risk of losing their tenancy.

**Summary**

2. The economic recession has increased the number of tenants suffering from financial hardship and together with changing patterns of employment and lifestyles we are seeing increasing evidence of tenants being faced with more complex and difficult challenges. We have therefore explored opportunities for providing ways of helping people to sustain their Council tenancies by creating a Housing Plus Service for Council tenants who are identified as benefitting from such a service.
3. Analysis of current need has identified that over 100 tenants would be at risk of losing their tenancy at any one time without this service and working on full cost recovery we would need to charge £17.02 per week per service user. The service would be funded from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and the change to tenants eligible for Housing Benefit.

**Recommendations**

4. It is recommended that the Housing Plus Service be introduced from July 2014 and that a charge of £17.02 per week be made for the service.

## Reason

5. Social Housing Landlords have a responsibility to provide accommodation and support to vulnerable people and those with complex lifestyles. A Housing Plus Service will help more people sustain a housing tenancy and improve community cohesion but it is reasonable to expect the service user to be charged for the service rather than pooling the costs in the HRA.

**Paul Wildsmith,  
Director of Neighbourhood Services and Resources**

## Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report

Pauline Mitchell- Extension 2505

<b>S17 Crime and Disorder</b>	The service will reduce the risk of ASB and in the long term may help to reduce reoffending
<b>Health and Well Being</b>	The service will help vulnerable tenants to maintain their tenancy and this will include those who are making the transition from various support services
<b>Carbon Impact</b>	None
<b>Diversity</b>	Will support a range of vulnerable tenants
<b>Wards Affected</b>	All wards with Council Tenancies
<b>Groups Affected</b>	Anyone who may be at risk of losing their Council Tenancy
<b>Budget and Policy Framework</b>	The service will be self-funding and will be contained within the Housing Revenue Account
<b>Key Decision</b>	No
<b>Urgent Decision</b>	No
<b>One Darlington: Perfectly Placed</b>	The service will be different to the current support service but it will also offer help to vulnerable tenants to make the transition to independent living and therefore help to achieve the strategic aims of building community resilience
<b>Efficiency</b>	The service's aim is to prevent tenants breaching the terms of their tenancy and therefore avoids the costs of taking Court action and potential homeless costs. It also has the potential to reduce the need for and therefore costs to other services

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

6. Tenancy failure can have significant personal and social consequences with a statutory homeless case estimated to cost £2,500 and an eviction costing £7,095. The economic recession has increased the number of tenants suffering from financial hardship and together with changing patterns of employment and lifestyles we are seeing increasing evidence of tenants being faced with more complex and difficult challenges. The situation has been exacerbated by on-going Welfare Reforms and despite Housing Services providing a number of preventative approaches to increase the prospect of a successful tenancy, additional support services have been identified as being beneficial to a proportion of Council tenants. These may be:
  - (a) Young people who have taken up a tenancy for the first time and have no-one to help them;
  - (b) People with financial problems;
  - (c) Vulnerable people with support needs;
  - (d) People experiencing a temporary crises in their lives;
  - (e) People with challenging behaviour
7. In 2013/14 around 200 tenants in the first year of their Council tenancy reached the stage where possession proceedings were started. Offering structured support at the start of a tenancy may prevent some tenants putting their tenancy at risk and the primary focus of Housing Plus will be on this group of people. However our experience shows that some existing tenants would benefit also.
8. The model is different to more costly tenancy support schemes which offer intensive support with a strong focus on life skills. The types of support we would provide will include:
  - (a) Advice on paying the rent including setting up a bank or other suitable account
  - (b) Advice on rent payments where the Welfare Reforms have an impact
  - (c) Advice on Money Advice services and where necessary arrange referrals
  - (d) Provide information on the council's repair service
  - (e) Assistance with aids and adaptations if required
  - (f) Make referrals to specialised support agencies where a need is identified with the tenant and there is a risk to the tenancy
  - (g) Ensure that the tenant is maintaining the property and complying with the necessary requirements for access, for example Gas Safety checks.
  - (h) Practical assistance and reminders for filling in forms related to maintaining the tenancy, for example benefit claims
  - (i) Provide information on how to get involved in consultation on the management of Council Housing
  - (j) Making sure the tenant understands the need to respect other tenants and the neighbourhood to successfully maintain a tenancy.
  - (k) Advice on safety and security issues within the home.
  - (l) Highlighting any housing related funding or grant applications to help sustain the tenancy
  - (m) Caring for pets to comply with the tenancy agreement
  - (n) Help to deal with any anti-social behaviour

9. Analysis undertaken into the needs of those registered on the Choice Based Lettings scheme and of existing tenants' profiles, suggests that we can expect to support about 100 tenants at any one time. An assessment will be introduced that will begin for prospective tenants when they first apply for accommodation and for those who are existing tenants through a referral including self-referral. A detailed discussion with a Housing Plus Officer about the need for the service and the implications of the charge will form the final stage before a service begins.
10. The charge for the Housing Plus service will be introduced as a variation of the tenancy agreement. Tenants will be expected to sign an agreement that creates a charge that will be added to the service charge. This process is widely used. The service can be terminated by the provision of 4 weeks' notice by either the Council or the tenant or when there is a mutual agreement that the goals for providing the service have been agreed. The service will be based on an agreed set of goals and the pattern of the service will depend on the needs of the tenant. The service is designed to be more intensive at the beginning and to taper off as the tenant achieves various goals until the service is no longer required. Information from other providers suggests that that on average the service will last for between 6 and 12 months.

## **Finance**

11. Staffing costs have been estimated to be £101,204 based on two support workers plus one administration support and management support from an existing Team Leader. Making a charge for each service user of £17.02 per week will allow full cost recovery and as the service is being managed in the Housing Revenue Fund there are no General Fund implications.

## **Outcome of Consultation**

12. Information has been gathered from other housing providers regarding the various models of a tenancy sustainment service. This has been used to inform decisions on caseloads and costs. Consultation has also taken place with the Tenants Board who is supportive of the proposals.