
**ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITY AND SERVICES
PROVIDED BY THE HOUSING SERVICES TEAM**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide the Adults and Housing Scrutiny with an overview of the services provided by the Housing Services Team.

Summary

2. Within Housing Services there are a number of distinct teams each led by a Team Leader:-
 - (a) Housing Options;
 - (b) Asset Management,
 - (c) Tenancy Empowerment;
 - (d) Lifeline Services;
 - (e) Housing Tenancy;
 - (f) Housing Administration and Accounts
3. It is essential that services are delivered in a cohesive manner, mindful of each other's specialisms. Our role is:
 - (a) To operate and manage the housing waiting list;
 - (b) Provide a comprehensive Housing Option service
 - (c) Allocate and manage our stock and housing estates
 - (d) Provide money advice and tenancy support
 - (e) Collect rents and recover outstanding debts
 - (f) Support tenants to maintain their tenancy agreements and when necessary take enforcement action
 - (g) In addition we must make sure that the stock is properly maintained and that there are robust asset management and business plans for future investment.
 - (h) Lifeline Services provide services to all tenants in sheltered housing and good neighbour schemes and those in both Council and private housing connected to the Lifeline response services.

Recommendation

4. It is recommended that Members note and comment on the content of this report.

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

Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

Hazel Neasham : Extension 2535

S17 Crime and Disorder	Tenancy management and enforcement play a key role in crime and disorder prevention and individuals are much less likely to offend if they are not homeless.
Health and Well Being	It is universally acknowledged that good housing and good neighbourhoods have positive impacts on health and well-being.
Carbon Impact	There are no issues this report needs to address
Diversity	Housing accommodation and services need to be available that are able to meet the diverse needs of a range of individuals.
Wards Affected	Not all wards contain Council housing however people from all wards may use the service
Groups Affected	All groups are affected
Budget and Policy Framework	The issues contained within this report do not represent change to Council budget or the Council's policy framework.
Key Decision	This is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	For the purpose of the 'call in' procedure this does not represent an urgent decision
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	Housing Services play a key role in sustainable communities and improved health conditions
Efficiency	Every effort is made to ensure services are provided in the most efficient and effective way, maximising rental income.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

5. We need to be able to efficiently and effectively manage our stock whilst being able to work closely both strategically and operationally with individuals and various statutory and voluntary partners.
6. The present model of Housing Services has evolved over many years in response to previous Governments' agendas, the changes in our customer profile and to provide the best possible service to the Darlington residents and tenants.
7. Housing has a key strategic and operational role, for example being represented on the Children and Adult Safeguarding Boards, Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) and the Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) meetings. Officers can call and attend Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and strategy meetings where there are concerns for the well-being of children and adults. We also sit on working groups for Probation and Repeat

Offenders and Community Safety and are part of the Compass Tees Valley Sub Regional Choice Based Lettings Partnership. Housing Services plays a key role in supporting Adult Social Care through the provision of purpose-built or adapted property, Tenancy Support and Lifeline Services.

Service Provision

8. Details on each specific service area are provided as follows:-

(a) Housing Options

- (i) Homelessness - This is a statutory function that seeks to prevent homelessness and deal with those presenting as homeless. This team offers a Housing Option Service to applicants presenting to the Council for housing advice and accommodation. Each person is a unique individual and afforded a personal interview to identify their needs and possible housing options. Many have complex or challenging needs. Increasingly they have more than one need, such as, mental health, behavioural issues, substance misuse, domestic abuse or coming from institutional care. These cases are resource intensive and each person is assessed using a series of questions to identify their particular need. Some people only need housing advice and signposting with assistance to register on Compass. Where their housing needs cannot be met in the necessary timescale the team direct people to the private rented sector and have established strong links with local landlords and lettings agencies to meet the accommodation needs. A Bond Scheme has been developed with the 700 Club and Evolution and there are strong links to the Landlord Accreditation Scheme and the Housing Benefits Service to achieve this.
- (ii) Key Point of Access - Those identified to be in higher housing need or homeless are assigned a case worker who identifies the needs and risks and works with them to find accommodation. The team use the Key Point of Access (jointly run with First Stop) to secure accommodation and support.
- (iii) Temporary Accommodation - Those people presenting as Homeless are found temporary accommodation whilst the assessment is undertaken and the team manage access to a range of options, i.e. leased private sector housing, some temporary accommodation in the Council stock and Crash Pads specifically for young homeless people. Sometimes it is necessary to place people in bed and breakfast accommodation.
- (iv) MARAC/MAPPA Meetings - the team attend the meetings to deal with any housing need identified.
- (v) Rough Sleepers - During the winter months there are special provisions for winter weather provisions when the policies on 'No Second Night Out' apply.

- (vi) Mortgage Difficulties - Where people present as having mortgage difficulties the team work with lenders to maintain their accommodation and if this is not possible support the household to secure alternative accommodation.
- (vii) Prison Releases - Housing Options are often required to visit prisoners due for release and if the sentence is short give support to sustain the prisoner's accommodation. For those serving longer sentences they work with other agencies to secure accommodation prior to the prisoners' release as there is clear evidence that this prevents reoffending.
- (viii) Illegal Tenancy Terminations - The team take action against ill-informed private landlords who attempt to terminate tenancies illegally.
- (ix) Multi Chaotic/Hospital Discharges - Key work is on-going with First-stop on Multi Chaotic need clients and a Hospital Discharge Protocol. We are working with the Change programme to increase knowledge and capacity within Children and Adult Social Care so that at the first point of need housing issues are addressed.
- (x) Self-Help Opportunities - In the coming months we will be developing self-help opportunities within the new Customer Services Centre to try and reduce the demand for interventions by Housing Options Advisors thereby freeing up time to build stronger and improved working relations with, for example, the MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub).
- (xi) Table 1 below gives an indication of the volume of households supported and the relatively small number who become physically housed as a result of pro-active preventative work.

Table 1: Tees Valley Sub-Regional Homeless Group Statistics 1st April 2011 to 31st March 2013

Tees Valley Sub Regional Homeless Group Statistics					
Performance Monitoring	1st April 2011 to 31st March 2013				
Authority	Middlesbrough	Stockton	Redcar & Cleveland	Hartlepool	Darlington
New client casework	1780	3010	1580	1430	1430
Accepted Homeless	63	49	11	9	27
Intentionally Homeless	27	4	10	2	19
Non-Priority	192	77	12	2	1
Homeless Prevention + Relief	510	768	465	384	1080
Households in TA 31.03.13	9	33	19	0	0
Homeless Priority - Dependants	37	30	4	6	11

(b) Housing Asset Management

- (i) Capital Programme -The team are responsible for the delivery of the capital programme, which is currently £6m per annum and revenue repairs and cyclical maintenance which currently cost around £4m per annum. They manage and maintain an Asset Management Database for all of the Council housing stock, homes, garages, communal facilities and open spaces. Using this information, as well as, the criteria in the Decent Homes Standard and tenants' priorities, they prepare the 30-year Business Plan.
- (ii) Procurement - Once the capital funding is allocated they prepare contracts and procure the work from a range of partners, in addition to Building Services.
- (iii) Two Customer Liaison Officers visit tenants in their homes and provide support to prepare for major work such as new kitchens, bathrooms, central heating and rewiring. They will also visit during and at the end of the work and inspect the quality of the work and issue a decoration allowance. Many of our tenants are elderly and vulnerable and it is necessary to make arrangements for temporary relocation. Recent projects have included the regeneration work at Cockerton, new gas heating installations at various locations, the replacement door and window programme at Hundens Lane, as well as, fencing, roofing and footpath replacement programmes.
- (iv) Adaptations - Close collaboration takes place with the Occupational Therapy Team and minor or major alterations are arranged such as ramps, handrails, stair-lifts, flat floor showers or the complete redesign of buildings. In the current year they have completed the redesign of a two bedroom ground floor flat to meet the needs of a new tenant with both physical and learning difficulties and completed an extension for a family with a child with significant disabilities.
- (v) Cyclical Maintenance -This team manage the cyclical maintenance programmes for gas servicing, water maintenance and electrical maintenance.
- (vi) Future Workload – This includes the regeneration of Redhall, new build projects and the necessary changes to operating practices and procedures with the new stores procurement and ICT projects such as mobile working that cut across Building Services and Housing.

(c) Tenancy Empowerment

Two Officers support our tenants and leaseholders to ensure that they are empowered and have a strong voice in the design and delivery of the Housing Service. They champion and support the Tenants Board, an elected group of tenants, who meet monthly and the various task and finish groups including a Readers Panel which helps produce 'Hotnews' a quarterly newsletter for tenants and leaseholders. They

work with tenants who are trained mystery shoppers, attend community meetings, empower tenants to challenge performance and regularly review and update the housing web pages. They have helped train the tenants who will deal with complaints in the new Complaints process and are presently supporting the Tenant Scrutiny Group to undertake their first ever scrutiny which is the void process. Their findings will be presented to the Adults and Housing Scrutiny meeting in June.

(d) Lifeline Services

- (i) This service provides a 24/7 service to 3,500 older and disabled people within the Borough. This includes 22 sites of sheltered housing and scheme managers to provide good neighbourly day-to-day support in 860 properties throughout the Borough. Sites have excellent communal facilities and promote social interaction and a varied range of social activities including exercise and healthy lifestyle classes for the tenants and the wider older community. Some schemes have hair salons and, there are three Extra Care sites, Dalkeith House, Oban Court and Rosemary Court which provide a daily lunchtime meal. There are also 1200 Council and Housing Association properties with a hardwired link to 24/7 emergency response.
- (ii) Assistive Technology is installed into 1000 people's homes linked to 24/7 support from the Council's Control Centre with mobile emergency response officers to attend as required. Lifeline gives peace of mind at the touch of a button and consists of a small box similar in size to a telephone and a pendant or wristband, each with a red button alert which can be worn around people's home and garden.
- (iii) Telecare – The team install, on referral from either Adult Social Care or personal referral, the latest generation of technology which is able to send automatic alerts should assistance be identified. There is a demonstration facility at Rosemary Court for prospective users, their families and professionals.
- (iv) Complex Issues - Lifeline Services is seeing an increase in service users with more complex issues. There are some younger users with complex health needs, more users with alcohol related issues and an increase in dementia. At the core of the service is the Adult Safeguarding agenda and significant time and resources have been invested in this area. Recent training was delivered by the Fire Brigade so that the whole team can identify and refer cases of concern.
- (v) Challenges for the service in the coming months are to:-
 - a) Respond to the findings of the Lifeline review
 - b) Continue to work with partners in Health/Adult Social Care to take forward the Telecare agenda and how it can support users with physical, learning and mental health to live independently in their homes and complement, and where appropriate, reduce the

need for on-site care provision.

c) Work with Making Space, the new Homecare Provider.

(e) Tenancy Team

- (i) We currently have 5445 homes and 1115 garages. The team work with tenants to encourage them to abide by their terms of tenancy. This includes a lot of 1:1 contact (office and home based). Where appropriate Housing Officers make referrals to Children and Adult Services. They work closely with the Specialist Family Support Team and individual Care Managers. Housing Officers will make all reasonable efforts and include as many partners as possible to sustain tenancies.
- (ii) As properties are vacated the Tenancy Team visit and work with the outgoing tenant to ensure that the property is left clean and tidy. If it is not then they will arrange for the clearance of contents and cleaning and repair to get the property ready for re-let. Outgoing tenants are held responsible for the costs associated with this.
- (iii) Once a new tenant is identified they will monitor the tenancy to ensure that the rent is paid, taking the appropriate enforcement action when payments are not made. They liaise with Housing Benefits, Adults and Children's Services as necessary and other agencies working with the tenant.
- (iv) They ensure that properties are appropriately maintained to a satisfactory housekeeping standard and the common parts and gardens are looked after. Home visits are undertaken as necessary to deal with low level repair and maintenance matters.
- (v) They carry out initial investigations where there are complaints of nuisance and anti-social behaviour and also carry out Estate visits with local residents, Councillors, Police and Streetscene, in order to monitor the upkeep of the area and highlight areas of concern.
- (vi) Two tenancy enforcement posts were created at the request of tenants who identified that they wanted a specific resource to work with those tenants who are particularly challenging as well as complex individuals and families that create difficulties. There are a range of enforcement actions and an escalation process for those who do not work with them to change and live and behave responsibly. In recent months we have adopted a 'talk down' approach using mediation and restorative justice and this has seen a reduction in the number of cases escalating to be more resource intensive. As necessary they will take court action and ultimately look to repossess the property when all other avenues such as intensive support and joint working with other agencies and partners have failed to modify the tenant's behaviour. They also ensure that all tenants comply with the need to have their gas appliances serviced

annually and use the legislation appropriate to this.

- (vii) Floating Tenancy Support - This small team provide low level floating support to 40 people. They work with the person both pre and post allocation for up to 2 years. Their remit is to help the person establish a tenancy, claim the right benefits and grants, access furniture and establish good links in the community: all with the aim of sustaining tenancies. All of the people have been identified using the KPA (referred to earlier) as vulnerable or at risk. Some of the people will present during tenancy in situations such as rent arrears, ill health, with poor housekeeping, nuisance and anti-social behaviour present. The team have a large network of links to other Council teams and voluntary and statutory agencies
 - (viii) Furnished Tenancy/Leasehold Properties – We offer furnished tenancy packages and also lease a number of properties in the private rented sector to provide temporary accommodation. As a result of the Social Fund, there has been an increase in demand for the furnished packages, but we are mindful of the affordability issues for tenants who are unlikely to remain on housing benefit and explore all other alternatives, such as, the King’s Church, FRADE, Smarterbuys and save with the Credit Union.
 - (ix) Money Advice – There are two specialist Money Advice Workers who are able to give tenants and applicants advice on Welfare Benefits, Income and Expenditure budgeting and Energy Cost advice. In the last year they have produced information and guidance leaflets that were distributed to all tenants and used in training sessions with other Council Officers and partners, written material for Hotnews and supported tenants impacted by the Welfare Reform to apply for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) and for more complex matters signposted tenants to the CAB, Credit Union and the Department for Works and Pensions (DWP).
- (f) Housing Administration and Accounts
- (i) Housing Administration and Accounts – This team balances the weekly rent debit for homes and garages, the various service charges, deals with direct debits, standing orders, rent refunds and the recovery of former tenant arrears. In addition, they also deal with applications for the purchase of Council homes and leasehold properties and the service charges levied. They recover sundry debts for the recovery of costs for damage to terminated properties and recharges for repairs that are tenant’s responsibilities.

Future Challenges

9. The Welfare Reform agenda continues to impact on the Housing Service and the current issues of increased rent arrears and reductions in household formats will be further exacerbated when Universal Credit is rolled out. Demand for smaller units of accommodation from those under pensionable age and the tendency for more older

people to remain in their own home rather than move into a more sheltered environment will require us to closer monitor future needs.

10. Both Lifeline and Homeless Services are currently under review to identify budget savings.