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**HOUSING PLUS SERVICE**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide an update and progress report of the development of the Housing Plus Service. This report sets out details of the needs that are being addressed and the success that is already being achieved.

**Summary**

2. In June 2014 Cabinet agreed to the launch of the Housing Plus service and it became operational in December 2014. This decision was made during a period when significant changes were made to support services including the closure of the Council's Tenancy Support service. The Housing Plus is an intensive housing management service and is therefore different to a support service and was not a direct replacement for the Tenancy Support service.
3. The service is entirely focused on helping Council tenants to keep their obligations under the tenancy agreement. The risks of tenancy failure have increased in recent years as a result of the economic recession and the introduction of the Welfare Reforms. This service identifies tenants who are vulnerable to tenancy failure and offers them access to an additional service.
4. The service is self-funding with no additional contribution being made from the Council. A service charge is made of £17.62 per week which is eligible for Housing Benefit. There are currently 103 tenants receiving this service and all of them have the cost of the service paid through Housing Benefit.
5. Those receiving this service have a mix of different types of needs and for different periods of time. On average it is expected that a tenant will need the service for up to a year.
6. 148 tenants and their families have taken advantage of the service since it became operational. Each tenant agreed to personal goals with a Housing Plus Officer, with the level of service reducing as their goals were achieved.

## **Recommendation**

7. It is recommended that Scrutiny Members note the content of the report.

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

## **Background Papers**

Cabinet Report June 2014 – Development Housing Plus Service

Veruta Barlow: Extension 5936

## **MAIN REPORT**

### **Information and Analysis**

8. In June 2014 Cabinet agreed to the introduction of Housing Plus, a new type of service based on providing intensive housing management to tenants who are vulnerable to the risk of losing their tenancy. A corporate review into housing related support service had resulted in a restructuring of the services and the loss of the Council's Tenancy Support service in order to deliver budget savings. This service had focused attention on the needs of more vulnerable tenants. A number of other housing organisations had already successfully introduced intensive housing management services under similar circumstances. This is a different type of service to housing support as it focuses on the tenancy.
9. Tenancy failure can have significant personal and social consequences with a statutory homeless case estimated to cost £2,500 and an eviction costing over £7,000. 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, such as:
  - (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 crisis.
  - (e) People with challenging behaviour.

10. The Housing Plus model is different to more costly tenancy support schemes which offer intensive support with a strong focus on life skills. It is a proactive service that aims to support our tenants to successfully manage their homes and tenancies, the types of support provided includes:

- (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 and advice on property maintenance.
- (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 complying with the necessary requirements for access, for example Gas Safety checks and essential repairs.
- (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 grants 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

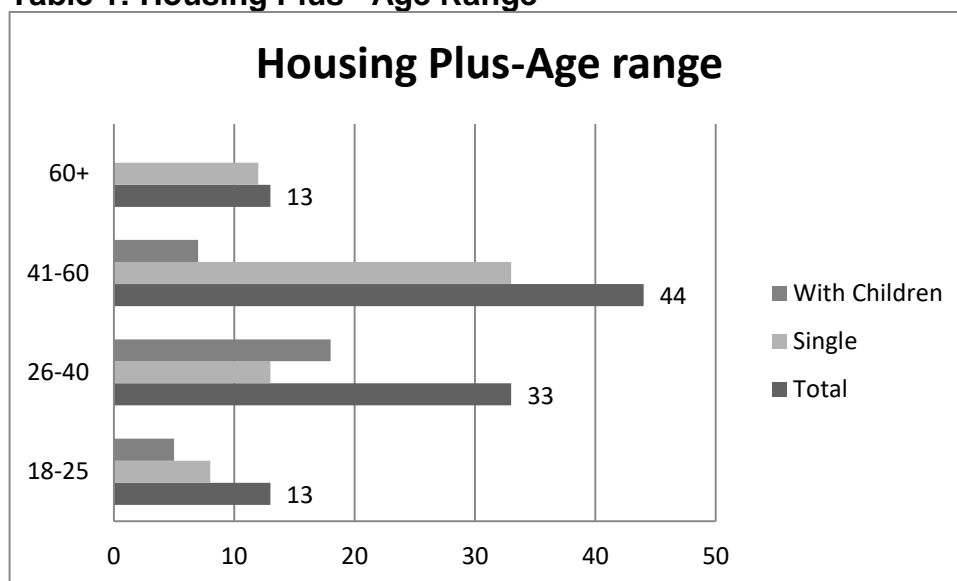
11. Tenants are identified for the service through a number of means. They can apply directly or they may be referred by a housing officer or another agency who is working with them. They will often be identified during the allocations process if they are a new tenant. An assessment is carried out with the tenant before the service can begin.

12. The service operates on an agreed set of goals between the tenant and the service. The aim is to start with an intensive level of contact with the tenant and gradually withdraw the service as the goals are achieved:



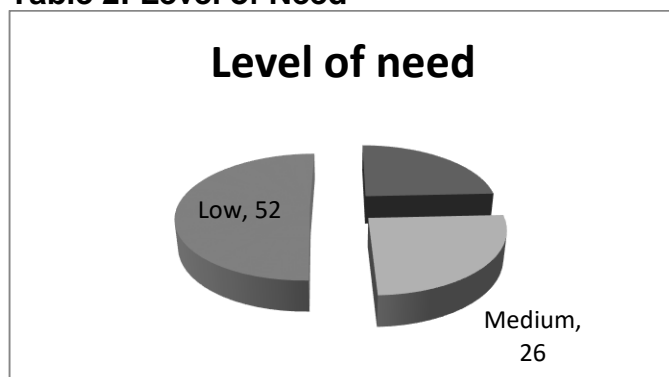
13. For the service to succeed it needs the commitment of the individual. The service is additional to normal housing management service hence the term "Housing Plus". The cost of the service is met from a charge to the tenant. The current charge is £17.62 per week. The charge is eligible for Housing Benefit and all of those currently receiving the service are receiving Housing Benefit.
14. The service became operational in December 2014 with an intended capacity of 100 tenancies. However, the service quickly reached its capacity and with a growing waiting list approval was given to recruit an additional officer to increase capacity.
15. There are currently 103 open cases and it can be seen from Table 1 below that 43% of the open cases are for people aged 41 to 60 years, whilst 30 of the tenants have children and 66 are single:

**Table 1: Housing Plus –Age Range**



16. The needs of tenants vary with most starting the service with high needs. About 25% of all current cases are identified as high needs cases. The length of time each tenant takes at each stage of the service also varies. Although the service is still in the early stages the spread of needs shown in Table 2 reflect the pattern of needs that were found with other providers.

**Table 2: Level of Need**



17. Set out below is a matrix of needs which provides a useful insight into the types of cases that are being managed. The matrix shows the number of cases in each category (highlighted) with the remainder of the line showing the other associated needs. For example mental health is a key issue in 26 cases and in 12 of these cases literacy problems are an issue, 8 have issues with anti-social behaviour, 8 have moved more than three times in recent years and 8 have problems with rent arrears. It shows that a majority of cases have more than one need and that for a small minority there are multiple needs:

**Table 3: Matrix of needs**

	Problem maintaining tenancy	Evicted in past	First tenancy	Mental/phys/learning	Literacy issues	ASB	Care leaver	Moved more than 3 times	Substance misuse	Domestic abuse	Property conditions	Rent arrears - DBC
Problem maintaining tenancy	12	1	1	7	4	5	0	1	0	2	7	7
Evicted in the past	1	5	2	2	3	0	0	2	0	1	1	1
First Tenancy	1	2	11	3	5	2	2	2	1	1	1	2
Mental/Physical/Learning	7	2	3	26	12	8	0	8	3	3	7	8
Literacy issues	4	3	5	12	17	5	1	5	2	3	3	5
ASB	5	0	2	8	5	14	1	3	1	3	4	5
Care Leaver	0	0	1	0	1	1	3	1	0	1	1	0
Moved more than 3 times	1	2	2	8	5	3	1	9	2	2	0	1
Substance misuse	0	0	1	3	2	1	0	2	5	1	1	2
Domestic abuse	2	1	1	3	3	3	1	2	1	5	1	3
Property condition	7	1	1	7	3	4	1	0	1	1	16	9
Rent Arrears-DBC	7	1	2	8	5	5	0	1	2	3	9	16

18. The table provides a flavour of the complexity that some cases present. There are many issues hidden within each of these categories. For example, hoarding is an increasing problem that put both the tenant and property at risk. Self-neglect is another issues which is monitored as part of the service.
19. About 30% of the cases involve tenants with children. The work the service does often directly relates to the children, for example, their behaviour and the impact on neighbours and the community. A third of these cases involve safeguarding issues with multi-agency involvement. The actions to ensure that that there are no breaches of the tenancy agreement therefore can form part of wider interventions to ensure the wellbeing of children.

20. Since the service started 45 cases have been closed and the outcomes are detailed at table 4. All cases continue to be monitored after they are closed in order to evaluate the impact of the service on the longer term.

**Table 4: Closed Cases**

<b>Cases</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
30	Successfully closed
10	Closed recently. Too soon to judge
3	Service was withdrawn as the tenants were not engaging
1	Left the area
1	Asked for further help from the service

21. The success in ensuring that someone is able to retain their tenancy has very significant wider implications. The intervention should lead to a more stable lifestyle with knock on benefits in terms of the wellbeing of the tenant and their family, building resilience and personal capacity. This in turn reduces the dependency on Health and Social Care service as well as Housing Services and other organisations. They are less likely to commit crime or get involved in anti-social behaviour and they stand a better chance of getting a job and maintaining employment. Research has shown that living in stable accommodation has significant benefits including better health outcomes and life prospects