
REVIEW OF TENANCY SIGN UP PROCESS

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. The Tenant's Scrutiny Panel has conducted a review of the way that tenants sign up for their tenancy. This report sets out the issues raised and recommendations for change.

Summary

2. Tenant's Scrutiny is a regulatory requirement and is carried out in this Council by a panel of tenants. They decide on a programme of reviews each year. As part of this year's programme a review of the "sign up" process has been undertaken.
3. The sign up process for a Council tenancy has changed considerably in recent years. Although the signing of the Tenancy Agreement is the focal point of the process a number of other important tasks have become part of the process including, for example, identity checks. More recently affordability has become a very important issue. Changes in benefits as a result of the Welfare Reforms have introduced new risks for those taking up tenancies. As a result affordability checks are now carried out and advice provided as required as part of a plan to help tenants to sustain their tenancies in the long term. Some new tenants may need additional help from the Housing Plus service that provides help to those who may have difficulty managing their tenancy and this is an opportunity to arrange this. Some may need a white goods package to help set up a home and this is the point when the content of the package and payment are finalised. There is also a range of information provided on the basic running of a home, for example, gas servicing.
4. The changes have made the sign up process a much more complex process particularly the last stage where the Applicant usually visits the Town Hall to sign the Tenancy Agreement and make final arrangement for taking up the tenancy. The Tenant's Scrutiny Panel wanted to review the process to see how effective it was and if this provided the best support to tenants.
5. The review found that all of the information that was being made available to tenants was important but that by making changes to the point at which some information was gathered the pressure on the sign up appointment could be reduced. They also suggested number of ways that the provision of information could be improved.

6. In total seven recommendations were made which included a review of the resources needed to cope with the impact of the roll out of Universal Credit, changes to the flow of information through the process and how the information is delivered.

Recommendation

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

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S17 Crime and Disorder	The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is not considered that the contents of this report have any such effect.
Health and Well Being	There are no issues relating to health and well-being which this report needs to address
Carbon Impact	There are no carbon impact implications in this report
Diversity	There are no diversity issues
Wards Affected	All wards with Council tenancies
Groups Affected	Anyone who is signing up for a Council tenancy
Budget and Policy Framework	There is no particular impact
Key Decision	This is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	The report has no particular implications for the Sustainable Community Strategy.
Efficiency	The changes proposed should help tenants to maintain their tenancies
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	No impact

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

8. The sign up process forms part of one of the most stressful experiences people go through- moving home. It is with this as the background that the Tenant's Scrutiny Panel undertook a review of the sign up process. They wanted to see how helpful the process was and how efficiently it was delivered. The attached report **(Appendix1)** sets out the way they went about conducting the review, its findings and recommendations.
9. The sign up process now forms part of the way that the Council helps tenants to manage and sustain their tenancy. The start of the tenancy, particularly for who have never had a tenancy before, is the most likely time that tenants will get into difficulties. The sign up process has changed to take account of this providing a range of advice and information. As the home and the equipment in it has advanced so has the need to provide tenants with information. There is now a significant amount of information exchanged during the sign up. This has been further complicated in recent years by the need to focus on affordability issues related to the Welfare Reforms.
10. The review project therefore needed to be very focused in the scope of its work to ensure that it was effective. Consequently a detailed review of the information supplied in the Tenants Handbook is the subject of a second complementary review that will take place during the winter of 2017/18.
11. The review work is supported by Officers and various Officers make themselves available to provide advice and for interview. The review took approximately six months to complete.

Outcome of Consultation

12. Although the review was conducted by tenants the results of the review were also reported to the tenant Customer Panel who monitor performance on the business plan.
13. The results of the review will be reported to tenants as part of the Annual Report to Tenants published in the Housing Connect Magazine and on the Council's Website.