

## HOUSING PORTFOLIO COUNCILLOR V C SMITH

### Report to Council – 12 July 2023

#### **Discounted Market Sale Properties**

The Council's first four Discounted Market Sale properties have been successfully allocated at the Old Mill Farm site in Brinsley, with the new occupiers moving in imminently. This is a low-cost homeownership product that allows local people who are experiencing issues with housing costs, mortgage deposits and income to get onto the property ladder. The new occupiers are all from Eastwood or Kimberley and were previously privately renting or living with parents. The Housing Services and Strategy team have been working closely with the developer to ensure that these properties are correctly allocated to local residents in housing need.

#### **Homelessness**

The Housing Options team continue to see a rise in the number of landlords serving notices on their tenants, which has led to more approaches from people at risk of homelessness. The team are starting to see the impact of the cost of living crisis, with properties becoming unaffordable for tenants and landlords issuing notices as they have to sell their properties due to their own financial situation. The team have also seen an increase in male domestic abuse approaches.

The team focus as much of their time as possible on early intervention and prevention work to try and reduce the numbers approaching when they are homeless and without accommodation. During March, April and May the team have successfully intervened or prevented 132 households from becoming homeless.

The increase in early intervention work has meant that fewer households have required temporary accommodation, this has given us the opportunity to redecorate a number of properties and replace worn items. We strive to ensure that when people are faced with homelessness we can offer them a welcoming place to stay. The Council's use bed and breakfast is continuing to reduce. In May 2023 there were only four bed and breakfast placements, and none of these were for more than seven days.

#### **Allocations**

The Council currently has 1438 active applications on our Housing Register. In the last three months, we have received 601 new applications. The team pro-actively contact those that have not placed a bid in over 90 days and also completed annual renewals. This ensures that our Housing Register is accurate and that we are working with applicants in the greatest housing need. Some excellent work by the Lettings Officers has resulted in there being no long term empty properties that have been classified as 'difficult to let'.

Over the past 12 months our average relet time has not been within target, however with the changes to the structure of the Housing Repairs team we are already seeing the positive impact on turnaround times.

### **Repairs**

The Repairs Review continues to progress. A number of key vacancies, including two manager vacancies, have now been filled and projects to improve the service have begun. This includes work to improve the average time taken to resolve an issue; our first time fix rate to prevent tenants waiting at home for multiple visits; our processes for communication with tenants when there are delays and our processes for booking and rearranging appointments. We are confident that we can improve our current delivery service and increase the satisfaction amongst our tenants.

We are also in the process of a recruitment drive for additional trade operatives, to support our aim to provide as much of the repairs service in-house as possible. A dedicated repairs call centre is taking shape and should be in a position to start taking all repairs calls in the near future.

### **Income Management**

The Income Management team are continuing their hard work to ensure that tenants are feeling supported during the cost of living crisis. Our Financial Inclusion Officers are working closely with Citizens Advice and continue to process applications for the Housing Support Fund, which is being delivered in partnership with Nottinghamshire County Council.

The team have also been working hard to ensure that all tenants claiming Universal Credit have had their rent increase verified, so that the payment of their housing entitlement is correct. This is key to ensuring that tenants claiming Universal Credit do not build up arrears on their rent account. Only 0.44% of tenants claiming Universal Credit have over 8 weeks of arrears.

### **Activities at Independent Living Schemes**

The addition of a third Activities Coordinator has increased our capacity to extend the activities programme offered to tenants at Independent Living Schemes. We are now able to offer one-to-one activities to those who are housebound, and tailor activities to the tenants' needs. The Activities Coordinators are providing on average 29 activities each per month. New activities include a singing group at Greenwood Court, and a sign language class at Phoenix Court. This work is invaluable in combating loneliness and improving engagement.

### **Houses in Multiple Occupation**

We are continuing to process applications for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HiMO) licences and disabled facilities grants to progress adaptations which allow people to stay in their own homes for longer.

Three Grants under the Warm Homes on Prescription Scheme have been offered to enable improvements to be made where the occupier has a health condition made worse by cold – such as replacement boilers where old boilers have failed etc. Inspections of properties on the homes for Ukraine Scheme and Asylum Seekers are continuing. Inspection of private rented properties to ensure standards are maintained and identifying formal action where timely resolution is not achieved.