

Portfolio for Housing Councillor V C Smith

Report to Council – 10 July 2024

Homelessness

During the last six months our Housing Options team have undertaken 385 housing advice interviews with those that are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

Of the 385 interviews, 141 resulted in a homeless application being taken. 60 of these were from applicants that were already homeless and 81 were from people who had come to the team for advice before they became homeless. The team were able to prevent homelessness in 46 (57%) of these cases. The team strive to prevent people becoming homeless wherever possible and to be able to support so many people remain in their homes is a significant achievement.

One of the most common reasons for people to approach the Council is when their family and friends are no longer willing to accommodate them. The team can assist the applicant to negotiate with family and friends. This can include supporting them to maximise their household income; offering food vouchers and other financial support and facilitating discussions between occupants around reasonable household rules.

Financial Inclusion Service

Since April the Financial Inclusion Service has received 56 new referrals from Council tenants that are seeking financial support. The team has assisted 23 tenants to make benefit claims and have made 38 referrals to the Household Support Fund. The work of the team can be life changing for our tenants. Recently the team were asked to help a resident of Stapleford. They had contacted us as their Housing Benefit had stopped. After completing a full benefit check the team realised that the tenant was also eligible for state pension and pension credit that they were not currently receiving. After supporting the tenant to make applications, they are now receiving £364 per week and they also received a backdate of £3,486.

All of our Income team are trained to identify when someone may require support. A resident of Bramcote recently contacted the team to enquire about rent free weeks. They explained that they had recently lost their job, and it was clear to the Income Officer that they were not aware of the assistance they may be able to receive. The officer made a referral to the Financial Inclusion Service and the team assisted them to apply for Universal Credit and Council Tax Support, over £730 per month that they had not realised they could claim.

Repairs

After a recruitment drive earlier this year, we are now seeing the benefits of an increased Housing Repairs team. We have significantly reduced our use of external contractors, with work now being completed by our in-house team. We continue to

use external contractors for specialist and larger works, and are building our relationships with these to ensure that they meet our high standards. This includes ensuring that contractors keep comprehensive notes of the work completed and always keep our tenant informed of progress.

We are consistently achieving our target of over 98% of repairs appointments being kept. We will only cancel appointments where absolutely necessary, such as due to weather conditions, and we always contact the tenant to rearrange for another day.

Independent Living

Our team of Activities Co-ordinators continue to make a positive impact at our Independent Living schemes, by encouraging people to remain active and socialise with others. Since April the team have delivered over 180 activities at our Independent Living schemes. They have also supported tenants to deliver over 40 coffee mornings and arranged over 50 sessions to be delivered by external organisations.

New tenants are encouraged to join in activities, and our Activities Co-ordinators regularly speak with tenants regarding introducing new activities. Recent new activities include crafts, gardening clubs, film clubs and British Sign Language lessons. Over 98% of new tenants that participate in activities at Independent Living schemes are still attending after six months.

Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement

Engagement with our tenants and leaseholders has always been important to our housing service. Recently the way that we involve our tenants and leaseholders, and how we keep them informed, has become even more of a focus with the Housing Regulator and the introduction of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures.

There are a range of ways that people can get involved with the housing service, and we will match these with the areas of interest and time commitment available. We offer digital ways that people can get involved and make their views known, such as through our Facebook group, and surveys and consultations. We make it as easy as possible for people to attend face to face meetings by holding these at a variety of times, including in the evening, and by holding meetings in different parts of the borough. Over the last few months we have held evening meetings in Chilwell and Brinsley, and a daytime meeting in Beeston.

The housing service also attends events, such as Hemlock Happening and the Senior Citizens Fair to give people an opportunity to come and talk to us. In response to requests from tenants we will soon be reintroducing our Tenants Newsletter, to provide another way for tenants to receive information from us and get involved.

Private Sector Housing

Since the start of 2024 Private Sector Housing have served:

- Two Emergency Prohibition Orders and one Prohibition Order.
- One Improvement Notice.
- One Remedial Notice in relation to Electrical Safety.
- Two Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Remedial Notices.
- Two Civil Penalties totalling £5,500– one in respect of failing to licence a House in Multiple Occupation (HMO) and another for failing to comply with a remedial notice served in relation to the Electrical Safety Regulations.

An ongoing programme of compliance work is taking place in respect of some of our larger Licensed HMO providers.

The Caseworker and Housing Grants officers have been working well to reduce the backlog of cases on the waiting list which has now seeing a notable reduction. At the beginning of October there were 35 cases on the waiting list now this has reduced to 13 cases.

- 11 DFG Grants were completed in the last three months

The total spend for mandatory and discretionary DFG's for the year to date £202,750 (as of 7 June 2024) with an approved grant commitment of £219,733 (since April).

Empty Homes work continues to be a focus for the team, providing advice and guidance to owners and dealing with any complaints that arise.