

Portfolio for Housing Councillor V C Smith

Report to Council – 9 October 2024

Private Sector Housing

Since the end June 2024 private sector housing have served:

- Two Notices under the Electrical Safety Standards in the Private Rented Sector (England) Regulations 2020.
- One Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Remedial notice.
- Three Civil Penalties totalling £15,000 – one in respect of breaches of HMO Management Regulations, one for failure to licence an HMO that is required to be licenced and one for breaching the permitted number of occupants in a licensed HMO.

A Formal Caution has been issued for failure to licence an HMO that is required to be licenced. An ongoing programme of compliance work is continuing in respect of some of our larger Licensed HMO providers.

The Caseworker and Housing Grants Officers have 55 on going cases and 9 on the waiting list. In addition, there are 5 cases on hold for various reasons beyond the team's control.

Nine Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) were completed in the last two months. The total spend for mandatory and discretionary DFGs for the year to 28.8.2024 includes £382,900 with an approved grant commitment of £270,337.

Empty Homes work continues to be a focus for the team, providing advice and guidance to owners and dealing with any complaints that arise and to date this has resulted in 7 properties being returned to use (as of 19/8/24) since the beginning of April 2024.

Income

Rent arrears are continuing to remain low. At the end of August, rent arrears were £347,348. At the end of August 23, rent arrears were £374,187, so there has been a decrease of over £26,000, even though rents were increased in April 24.

The Financial Inclusion team continue to support our tenants in financial hardship. The team have recently assisted a tenant who had over £2000 of Council Tax arrears. The team established that she was not claiming Council Tax Support and helped her make a claim and backdate the request. This reduced the debt to £463. A full benefit review was undertaken and the tenant's monthly income has now increased by £601 per month.

Independent Living

The Council's Independent Living Manager has recently started to attend the weekly 'Huddle Meetings' organised by the Primary Integrated Community Services (NHS). Other attendees include a Team Manager from a social services section, usually from the Broxtowe Ageing Well Team, the social prescribing team, community matrons and district nurses from around the borough. The meeting has a case list, which is discussed in turn. Health colleagues, social care, social prescribing and the Independent Living Manager work together to ensure the independent living team are aware of, and are working with that person. Often the work continues outside the meeting with colleagues, there is a need to discuss joint working in more detail. The meetings have been very successful in us obtaining the required support for our tenants from other agencies.

Historically, the Activities team have struggled to engage with residents who live at Cloverlands Court, Watnall and the surrounding areas. They would regularly advertise activities such as hobby clubs, coffee mornings and other activities that worked at other schemes. However, many tenants only wanted to attend lunch clubs and fitness classes sporadically. In an attempt to increase engagement, the Activities Coordinator decided to utilise different partners to offer new activities. One partner delivers activities to improve dexterity, such as origami, paper crafts, clay modelling and flower arranging. These have been very successful with 114 tenants attending activities at Cloverlands Court so far this year.

On 6 September 2024 we reopened the communal lounge at Templar Lodge following redecoration and delivery of new modern furniture. The mayor attended and gave a speech and cut the red ribbon. She spent time chatting to the 18 tenants who attended over coffee and cake. She discussed all of the activities that take place in the lounge with tenants, who were delighted with the new décor.

Housing Repairs

The team is now almost fully staffed, in both office based and operative roles. The increase in the number of operatives has led to improvements in the number of jobs we can deliver in house and the response times to complete repairs. Improvements made to the reporting within our housing management system ensures that we are able to monitor these areas on a daily basis.

The team has recently recruited a new Compliance Manager that is overseeing the compliance of gas, electrical, legionella and lifts in our housing stock. This manager will also be responsible for ensuring that fire safety actions are completed.

Housing Options

In August we received 56 applications from people who approached us as homeless or were at risk of homelessness. Some of these cases are still ongoing. However, we have managed successful early intervention in 21 cases resulting in these applicants not becoming homeless.

Rough sleeping, particularly people sleeping in tents, has increased nationally and local over recent months. In August we have worked with 8 rough sleepers in our borough. All of these were accommodated within either our own temporary accommodation or bed and breakfast accommodation, where our own accommodation was not available.

Allocations

We are continuing to see the benefit of our new Homechoice portal for applicant to apply to our housing register. The new portal is much more user friendly for residents and has additional functionality in comparison to our previous system which has reduced admin tasks and means that our team can spend more time supporting residents with their applications. Due to the success of the recent drop-in sessions to support applicants, we will be continuing to offer these on a regular basis. Since the new portal was launched we have received 1636 applications.

Tenancy Services

In August the team received 95 cases that required investigation. 17 of these were reports of anti-social behaviour and 78 were for other tenancy matters, such as abandoned properties or property condition. Our Tenancy Sustainment Officers are currently working with 22 tenants who require support to maintain their property to the required standard.

Over the summer months our Tenancy Services Team along with our Housing Engagement Team have completed a series of 'pop-up' events throughout the Borough. Areas that were identified as having higher levels of dissatisfaction in our annual survey were particularly chosen. The officers set up a stall close to our properties and spoke with tenants to answer any questions and obtain feedback on the housing service. Issues raised included queries regarding damp and mould, allocation banding, grounds maintenance and fly tipping.