

DERBY HOMES BOARD
28 MAY 2009

ITEM B5

NEW TENANTS SUPPORT SERVICE

Report of the Director of Housing & Customer Service

1. SUMMARY OF REPORT

This report provides Board Members with the detail on our proposal to create a new housing management support team to work with new tenants.

2. RECOMMENDATION

The Board is requested to give outline approval to the proposal and delegate authority to the Chief Executive to progress negotiations with the City Council and present a costed business case to the Resources and Remuneration Committee in July 2009 with a view to introducing the new service from October 2009.

3. MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION

- 3.1 For some time now we have been giving consideration to the emerging support needs of new tenants and the impact that these increasing needs are having on our ability to provide the required levels of support within existing resources.
- 3.2 We have been using introductory tenancies for all 'new' tenants since 2004. Introduced under the Housing Act 1996 introductory tenants are essentially on probation and have less rights than secure tenants. Ending an introductory tenancy where the tenant fails to pay the rent or causes anti-social behaviour is less complex for the landlord.
- 3.3 Analysis of new tenants shows us that for many it is the first time that they have independently held a tenancy and therefore they lack the skills and experience in claiming benefits, managing household accounts and generally living independently within a community.
- 3.4 It therefore should come as no surprise that high numbers of new tenants fall into arrears during their introductory tenancy at some point. Analysis of introductory tenancies created during 2008/09 shows that of the 710 tenancies created, 372 of them (52%) fell behind with their rent by more than £100.00 at a given point during the period, usually whilst waiting for benefit to be processed. During the financial year, the total amount owed by 'new' tenants exceeded £200,000, which amounts to around 20% of the current arrears figure. The vast majority of arrears cases are resolved, with only 6 cases resulting in notice being served and 1 case progressing to eviction.

- 3.5 Similarly, due to the inexperience of independent living, a high number of 'new' tenants are the subject of complaints from their neighbours. Our records for 2008/09 show that at any given time around 10% of all live anti-social behaviour cases involve an introductory tenant. Again, as with rent arrears, most complaints are resolved at an early stage with only two cases resulting in notice being served and no evictions taking place.
- 3.6 At the moment the management of introductory tenancies is done by the local housing teams. On average, each Housing Officer has a patch of around 500 properties and the responsibility to provide a range of tenancy and estate related services.
- 3.7 The proposal to create the new housing management support service for 'new tenants' will require all new tenants to engage with the support service as a condition of the introductory tenancy.
- 3.8 The current management process for introductory tenancies involves a 3, 6 and 9 monthly review. We will build into this existing review an assessment of the tenant's ability to independently manage their tenancy and, dependant on outcomes, there will be the flexibility to exit the support service at these milestones within the tenancy.
- 3.9 It is envisaged that the support service will engage with tenants prior to the commencement of the tenancy to provide pre-tenancy advice on benefit entitlement and the responsibilities of entering into the conditions of tenancy. We will also provide advice on household budgeting and general guidance on moving into a new home. At this point, we will make an assessment of the level of support an individual will require to enable them to successfully sustain their tenancy. Visiting frequencies will be flexible based on individuals needs and will either be weekly, fortnightly or monthly for the duration of the required support period.
- 3.10 Initial planning based on the numbers of introductory tenancies created in 2007/08 and 2008/09 indicate a team in the region of 10-12 support officers supported by a team leader will be required. Management of the team will be incorporated within existing structures.

4. CONSULTATION IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The new conditions of tenancy will only apply to new introductory tenancies created after a given date, say 1 October 2009. We do not therefore need to formally consult with all existing tenants, nor will we need to issue formal variation notices.
- 4.2 As a matter of good practice, we will seek the views of residents on these proposals and this will be done at Housing Focus Groups in July 2009.
- 4.3 We will also seek feedback from current introductory tenants on their experiences during the early stages of their tenancies. This feedback will enable us to tailor the new service to best meet the needs of future tenants.

5. FINANCIAL AND BUSINESS PLAN IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 A full structure and budget for the proposals will be presented to the Resources and Remuneration Committee in July 2009. This will reflect the costs of providing the service which will be met by a 'charge' to the rent and covered by Housing Benefit.
- 5.2 We have already sought initial advice from Derby City Council Resources Department who have confirmed that the service as proposed is related to the provision of adequate accommodation it can be eligible for Housing Benefit.
- 5.3 Further discussions will be held with Derby City Council Resources Department as the proposal is developed.

6. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

Recruitment to the positions within the new team will be by competitive interview. New job descriptions will be subject to job evaluation procedures.

7. EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

This will be incorporated during the development of the detailed proposal.

8. HEALTH & SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

Derby Homes already operates two floating support services and full health and safety policies and procedures have already been developed. These procedures will transfer and apply to the new service.

The areas listed below have no implications directly arising from this report

- Legal and Confidentiality
- Environmental
- Risk

If Board members or others would like to discuss this report ahead of the meeting please contact the author, or the Chief Executive, phil.davies@derbyhomes.org - Tel 01332 711010

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Background Information: None.

Supporting Information: None.