

CAPITAL REPAIRS – TENANTS IN RENT ARREARS

Report of the Director of Housing and Customer Service

1. SUMMARY

Each year a high number of tenants benefit from the replacement of kitchens and bathrooms through the capital programme. This report discusses the issue of deferring such works for tenants in rent arrears.

2. RECOMMENDATION

The City Board are asked approve the proposal to defer works for tenants in rent arrears who do not come to an agreement to clear the arrears or maintain agreed arrangements to reduce arrears.

3. MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION

- 3.1 A group of staff recently visited Irwell Valley Housing Association. One of the areas of discussion was a culture of zero tolerance in relation to rent arrears. At Irwell Valley tenants only receive a very basic repair service if their rent account is not up to date. This proposal is not intended to affect our responsive repairs service but considers deferring improvement work.
- 3.2 At the present time over 4,500 rent accounts are showing arrears of some kind. Of course a high number of these accounts will be held by tenants who make regular payments by direct debit or other means and their accounts do clear at the point of payment. In addition, there are many cases where arrears are inflated by delays in processing housing benefit claims. This proposal is not intended to affect tenants whose arrears are caused by this.
- 3.3 During the next financial year we anticipate installing around 500 new kitchens and 350 new bathrooms, the majority of these works will be carried out in the Allenton, Cowsley and Osmaston areas of the City. Most of this improvement work will be an enhancement on the Government's Decent Homes Standard and will be to the new 'Derby Standard'.
- 3.4 If approved we intend to write to tenants who are included within the programme whose rent accounts are in arrears and not being reduced by regular payments. We will advise them that the work will be deferred unless a payment arrangement is agreed and maintained for a minimum of 13 weeks to reduce the arrears.
- 3.5 If approved by the City Board, a similar approach will be taken in future years as the capital programme continues to work in other areas around the City. Work that is essential to maintain Health and Safety requirements will be carried out and we will continue to maintain the Decent Homes Standard.

- 3.6 We believe that this could have a major impact on reducing many low level arrears cases where tenants at the present time may feel that little or no action can be taken against them.
- 3.7 It will be necessary to use discretion in deferring such work, especially regarding any housing benefit claims. Approval of deferral will be made by a senior manager after input from arrears and maintenance staff. Any tenant who is dissatisfied with this decision will have a right to complain and the matter will be reviewed by a more senior officer.

4. CONSULTATION

Previous consultation with tenants and leaseholders led to the introduction of a reward scheme which recognises the value of tenants who comply with their conditions of tenancy and affords them certain benefits and access to competitions. This proposal further recognises that tenants should maintain regular rent payments and comply with their conditions of tenancy to benefit from improvements to their home.

5 LEGAL & CONFIDENTIALITY

- 5.1 The City Council Legal Section has been consulted on these proposals. Improvement works are discretionary, within cautionary limits, unlike repairs which are statutory obligations of the landlord.
- 5.2 Tenants will have a formal right to complain against decisions to defer works and decisions will be reviewed by a more senior officer.

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

Financial and Business Plan
Council
Personnel
Environmental
Equalities Impact Assessment
Health & Safety
Risk
Policy Review

If Board members or others would like to discuss this report ahead of the meeting please contact the author, or Phil Davies, Chief Executive, phil.davies@derbyhomes.org – Phone: 01332 888528

Author: Maria Murphy. Director of Housing & Customer Service
maria.murphy@derbyhomes.org Tele Derby 01332 888522

Background Information: None
Supporting Information: None