



<b>Report for:</b>	Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	<b>4th July 2018</b>
<b>Part:</b>	<b>1</b>
If Part II, reason:	

Title of report:	Sustainable Tenancies Strategy
Contact:	Cllr Margaret Griffiths – Portfolio Holder for Housing Mandy Peters – Tenancy Sustainment Team Leader
Purpose of report:	For members to be informed about the development of the Sustainable Tenancies Strategy and the key commitments.
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. For members to review and approve the proposed strategy</li> <li>2. To review the commitments set out within the strategy to ensure they cover the service</li> <li>3. To offer feedback on the proposed approach to sustainment across the service</li> <li>4. To accept a yearly update to the committee on outcomes of the Tenancy Sustainment Team and suggest any other particular areas of scrutiny</li> </ol>
Corporate objectives:	<p>Sustaining tenancies contributes to the following corporate objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working in partnership to create a borough that enables Dacorum’s communities to thrive and prosper</li> <li>• A clean, safe and enjoyable environment</li> <li>• Building strong and vibrant communities</li> </ul>
Implications:	<p><u>Financial</u></p> <p>This report will offer an overview of the financial implications related to the sustainment of tenancies, such as universal credit and the costs associated with taking enforcement action.</p>
‘Value for money’ implications	<p><u>Value for money</u></p> <p>By working closely with households and ensuring that the service has effective early intervention strategies in place, this will have a positive impact on the service in terms of reducing the debit on the rent roll, preventing enforcement action and homelessness.</p>
Risk implications	Housing Risk Assessment is presented to the committee on a quarterly basis.

Health and safety Implications	There are no direct Health and Safety implications arising from the strategy.
Consultees:	<p>Cllr Margaret Griffiths – Portfolio Holder for Housing  Fiona Williamson – Assistant Director Housing  Layna Warden – Group Manager, Tenants &amp; Leaseholders  Emily-Rae Maxwell – Strategy Improvement &amp; Engagement Team Leader</p> <p>Tenant &amp; Leaseholder Committee (TLC)</p>
Background papers:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vulnerable Person Strategy</li> </ul>
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	<p>DBC – Dacorum Borough Council  TST – The Tenancy Sustainment Team</p>

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1. The Sustainable Tenancies Strategy is a four year strategy that has provided an opportunity for tenants, staff and members to review the Councils approach to tenancy management. It replaces the current Vulnerable Person Strategy and has been developed in response to the changing needs and challenges faced in social housing.
- 1.2. This report outlines the key elements of the strategy and gives members an overview of the approach taken by the tenancy team when managing tenancies within our general needs stock.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1. Through working with families in rent arrears it was recognised that some of the households that were struggling very often had issues in other areas that were impacting on their ability to sustain their tenancies. It is important to recognise that each and every case is different and being able to adapt the support we provide has been key to our success. Moving on, it has been further recognised that sustainment is the responsibility of the entire Housing service which form this overarching strategy and its commitments.
- 2.2. Tenancy Sustainment is a golden thread that runs through the service. It is important that tenants succeed in their tenancies, both for their health and wellbeing but also from a business perspective in terms of value of money, rent collection and timely reporting of repairs. In the last financial year, of the 79 cases closed by the Tenants Sustainment Team, 76 have gone on to sustain their tenancies and avoid eviction. Using very conservative figures of £5,000 each, this has saved the housing service £380,000 this year alone.
- 2.3. The vision for delivering a great housing service is to 'empower our tenants to maintain a good standard of living and make informed choices on their lifestyle so they can fulfil their tenancy agreement and have a positive impact within their home and community'.
- 2.4. This strategy supports the councils corporate vision and commitments and works to provide good quality and affordable homes, particularly to those most in need. Promoting independence through employment contributes to the economic growth and prosperity of our borough. As a landlord we will also work with our tenants to achieve efficient and modern services.

## **3. The Local Context**

- 3.1. The Housing Service manage 10,400 homes, with a further 1700 leasehold properties managed by Dacorum Borough Council (DBC). With a growing number of applicants joining the housing register for social housing the demand is by fair outweighing supply.
- 3.2. There have been changes in demand locally and this had meant a higher need for accommodation for an aging population, a rise in homelessness, it's never been more important to manage the balance between under occupancy and overcrowding.

#### **4. The National Context**

4.1. Social Housing Nationally is facing some challenges, with changes in legislation and Welfare Reforms. This strategy has been developed so our services minimise the impact as much as possible. Universal Credit is being rolled out across the country and will be replacing six means tested benefits. The main impact is the change to monthly payments made in arrears along with the risk of sanctions causing stress especially to our more vulnerable tenants.

#### **5. Commitment 1: Every tenant has the best possible start**

5.1. In partnership with a number of departments a key focus has been on developing a Pre-Tenancy Assessment Project. This involves analysing our start of tenancy process, looking at the customer journey to see what this looks like and what changes can be made to give applicants more information at an earlier stage in the application process, this manages expectations and enable applicants to make a more informed decision about their housing situation getting the right person in the right home.

5.2. Tenancy Sustainment Information Sessions are available to housing applicants. These sessions enable applicants to learn more about holding a tenancy with Dacorum Borough Council, it is interactive, attendees are encouraged to get involved in conversation and exercises relating to holding a tenancy, considering subjects like affordability, responsibilities and what is involved in setting up home and avoiding debt.

#### **6. Commitment 2: We have the right support in place for people that need it**

6.1. As a housing service it is recognised that all of our tenant's needs can't be met by the council but it is important to know what is locally available and how to access it. Many of the Councils tenants have greater needs than can be provided by the Housing Service and the ability to access re that the tenant is able to access statutory services and support services outside of the housing service. This could be the Community Mental Health team or an advisory service like Citizens Advice Dacorum.

6.2. Hoarding is a particular issue in relation to the condition of a property, we have recently secured £10,000 funding from Public Health to pilot a project in partnership with MIND in Dacorum. Practical support with a Sustainment Officer in the home and up to 12 counselling sessions to explore the triggers or core reasons for hoarding/collecting items. These will enable the tenant to address and work through these to prevent the problems reoccurring. The Housing Service has also led on developing a multi-agency hoarding protocol alongside the fire service and environmental protection as well as a number of statutory agencies. With a grant of £2,500 from Herts County Council, this has been match funded by the Housing Service and so £5,000 can be used to fund the removal of items from properties as part of a support plan.

6.3. Each case that is referred to the Tenancy Sustainment Team is carefully assessed and a Needs and Risk assessment is carried out. A personalised plan is put in place for the tenant to focus on key areas of managing their tenancy including paying rent, maintaining the condition of the home and garden, improving relationships with neighbours and accessing volunteering, employment and training.

## **7. Commitment 3: Our tenants take responsibility for themselves and their tenancy**

7.1. At the heart of the service provided is tenants taking responsibility. This is encouraged by providing help, support and guidance. Along with the tenant Officers work hard to identify the areas of support needed and put together a plan of action to enable the tenant to work on the skills needed to not only sustain their tenancy but attain life skills that could also help them back into employment or contribute to their community.

7.2. A number of courses have been introduced through the Tenant Academy to access skills for tenants on a number of different subjects. These include training on areas in the home that tenants are responsible for such as unblocking sinks, putting up shelves and decorating, digital technology sessions, money advice sessions and wellbeing coaching into volunteering and employment.

7.3. The Tenancy team are proactive with tenancy audits to identify issues at an earlier stage and work is being undertaken in the area of tenancy management to identify situations where neighbours can be encouraged to communicate with each other over disputes to prevent them escalating.

7.4. Tenants are encouraged to get involved, to have their voices heard and influence change in the service. The Get Involved Strategy enables tenants and leaseholders to take ownership and feel that they can make a difference.

## **8. Commitment 4: We take an informed approach to manage tenancies**

8.1. Knowledge, skills and experience of our officers are combined with data to make informed decisions. At all times the Council is working towards the new GDPR regulations and only collecting information that are genuinely need for specific purposes that are relevant.

8.2. Tenant consultation groups support the council to review and improve the service, developing a better understanding of why some properties need more repairs than others and ensure the approach to health and safety, compliance and safeguarding is at the forefront of decisions made.

8.3. Evaluating current ways of working to investing in improvements and building our knowledge can streamline our approach to managing tenancies and provide better value for money. Improvements have already been seen by moving the team that work with those in Temporary Accommodation underneath the Team Leader for Tenancy Sustainment. This has allowed a consistent approach from pre to post tenancy and going forward will allow us to share resources if workloads differ across the two teams.

## **9. Commitment 5 - Our tenants make positive choices for themselves and their homes**

9.1. Introduction of new service standards and a campaign to raise awareness of expectations of tenants will instil the understanding of tenants and housing staff members to embed this approach. Support will be given to tenants to encourage them to downsize or move to more suitable accommodation and where they are making positive decisions.

## **10. Conclusion**

10.1. If approved the Sustainable Tenancies Strategy 2018 – 2022 will work in conjunction with the Older Persons Strategy 2018 – 2022 and replace the current Vulnerable Persons Strategy.

10.2. Through consultation with tenants and partners this strategy sets out five commitments that focus on the housing service approach to providing a service to tenants, promoting independence, responsibility, choice and knowledge. A service to meet individual needs. It will ensure that vulnerable tenants will be identified and supported at all stages throughout the Housing Service and enable more tenants to succeed in sustaining their tenancy.

## **11. Recommendations**

11.1. For members to review and agree the proposed strategy

11.2. To review the commitments set out within the strategy to ensure they cover the service

11.3. To offer feedback on the proposed approach to sustainment across the service

11.4. To accept a yearly update to the committee on outcomes of the Tenancy Sustainment Team and suggest any other particular areas of scrutiny