



**Agenda item:**

**Summary**

<b>Report for:</b>	<b>Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	<b>27 January 2016</b>
<b>Part:</b>	1
If Part II, reason:	

<b>Title of report:</b>	<b>TENANCY SUSTAINMENT TEAM UPDATE</b>
<b>Contact:</b>	Cllr Margaret Griffiths – Portfolio Holder for Housing Fiona Williamson - Property and Place Group Manager Layna Carman - Tenancy Sustainment Team Leader
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To update the committee on the progress of the Tenancy Sustainment Team since introduction in November 2014</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For information only</li> </ul>
<b>Corporate objectives:</b>	Affordable Housing
<b>Implications:</b>	<u>Financial</u> There are no financial implications on this report
<b>'Value for money' implications</b>	<u>Value for money</u> Value for money opportunities can be found through support of the Tenancy Sustainment team
<b>Risk implications</b>	This report is for information only
<b>Community Impact Assessment</b>	This report is for information only

Health and safety Implications	There are no health and safety implications associated with this report
Consultees:	This report is for information only
Background papers:	Housing Strategy 2013 - 2018 Vulnerable Persons' Strategy 2014 - 17
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	TST – Tenancy Sustainment Team TSO – Tenancy Sustainment Officer

## 1. Background

- 1.1. The Tenancy Sustainment Team was established at the end of 2014, alongside the introduction of the Vulnerable Person Strategy. A new Team Leader post was created and brought 4 officer and 2 surveyor roles together in one team which sits in Property and Place.
- 1.2. The aim of the team is to meet some of the challenges experienced by the various Housing teams when dealing with complex households. This includes targeting those who are at most risk of failing their tenancy, have multiple issues in the home and are particularly vulnerable – so unable to protect themselves from harm or disadvantage.
- 1.3. The TST take a holistic approach to look at the whole home and household to get to the bottom of issues and create a support plan based around the needs of the tenant. This often includes working with external agencies and partners to access any resources that may be available.
- 1.4. The objectives of the team include:
- Reduce risk of eviction or people wanting to leave their home
  - Increase payment of rent
  - Improve condition of our homes
  - Improve our tenants health and wellbeing
  - Encourage increase in employment and education
  - Build sustainable communities

## 2. Team Update

- 2.1. Following recruitment of the Tenancy Sustainment Team Leader it was quickly identified that a Lead officer was required to manage the referral process and support team members. The sensitive nature of cases and workload has enabled the Team Leader to focus on introducing necessary processes and the strategic direction of the team while ensuring support and guidance was still given to the officers and surveyors.
- 2.2. The demand on the service and number of cases referred to the team has continued to increase over the past 12 months. The vacancy of a Tenancy Sustainment Surveyor post in mid 2015 was filled by a Tenancy Sustainment

Officer on a secondment basis. This is to review the resources required before considering the long term service need.

### 3. Performance Outcomes

3.1. 4 Key Performance Indicators have been recorded for the team from April 2015. These look at total cases managed every month, case closure reasons, level of arrears at end of support and if someone is still sustaining tenancy 6 months after case closure.

- Currently 105 households are being supported by the TST. Over 160 tenants in total have been supported since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015
- 28 out of 29 cases that have been closed since April 2015 are still managing their tenancy 6 months after case closure, with only one leading to an eviction. Each eviction can cost DBC up to £5000, as identified by Shelter, leading to a significant saving by helping tenants to sustain their homes.
- From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015, rent arrears of those supported by the TST have reduced by £17,525 between the period when tenants started and finished support from the team.

3.2. Tenants have been given guidance on entitlement to unclaimed benefits which has led to over £7000 of additional income for tenants. Additionally over £10,000 of debt has been cleared through support to challenge unfair fines, charges and applications of Debt Relief Orders. Increased funds have enabled tenants to pay for household bills and reducing stress and anxiety.

3.3. Tenancy Sustainment Surveyors have been involved in 93 cases since the introduction of team. Carrying out full property inspections and acting as one point of contact for tenants, ensures that the person and the property are jointly considered which has improved outcomes.

- Many major works including kitchen and bathroom upgrades, disabled adaptations, electrical upgrades and energy efficiency works have been completed where tenants have refused access previously.
- Joint visits with Housing Officers has encouraged other officers and tenants to report and chase up repairs reducing longer term damage to homes
- Coordinating with contractors on behalf of tenants with mental health and other complex needs has ensured works are tailored to their needs to cause less disruption and anxiety to tenants, ensuring successful completion
- Follow up visits to those supported by the team who are experiencing damp and condensation has enabled better understanding and longer improvements to the condition of the property.

3.4. Support has been given tenants to encourage them to downsize or move to more suitable properties. Additionally officers have liaised with GPs to get

confirmation of overnight carers in line with Housing Benefit policy to remove single person subsidy (bedroom tax)

3.5. A local company has been identified who provide support and clearance for tenants with hoarding disorder. So far with the use of grant funding we have engaged them with one tenant where over 20 bags have already been cleared from the property.

3.6. Tenants who had been supported by the team were invited to take part in a consultation to gather feedback about the service. Overall tenants were very positive about support they were provided and some of the quotes are below:

*"They got me out of depression & helped me get the flat in a liveable state. They helped get to doctors etc, did more than I expected. I've got my life back on track"*

*"I didn't think to contact Council within housing service until she knocked due to not paying rent, I feel completely supported"*

*"I needed a kick up the back side. They are compassionate, understanding and personable skills are next to none"*

*"At the start it was near impossible as I find it difficult to open up about things. They made me feel comfortable & now I find it much easier to open up"*

*"She has helped me, talks to me and listens to me. If she wasn't for her I wouldn't be here now"*

3.7. These tenants also offered to hold a social gathering to share their experience with others that might be going through the same issues. Going forward a peer support system will be introduced to further promote independence of those who have been supported by the team.

#### **4. Case Studies**

4.1. *Support was given to a tenant who, following a relationship break down, had a serious accident and sustained injuries so was no longer able to work. He was very depressed and had attempted to end his life. He was supported to access his GP and regularly attend appointments at a pain clinic to reduce dependence on pain medication. He was assisted to apply for disability benefits which increased his weekly income allowing him to improve his home, increase heating use, pay for taxi's to get to appointments and increase social activities making him feel less isolated. He was also encouraged to make contact with family and while he still has difficult days he has said that the support of the officer has made a huge impact on his life.*

4.2. *Following the death of a tenant, an ex-partner moved back into the home to look after their children plus hold the tenancy on behalf of her eldest son who was under 18. The home was in a very poor condition and the case officer liaised with external agencies to support the children with their bereavement.*

*Additionally they completed urgent repairs, applied for Housing Benefit and gave budgeting assistance. When the eldest son turned 18 he was abandoned in the property and the officer assisted him to move to a supported housing scheme rather than take on a general needs tenancy that he would struggle to sustain. Since this move he has already made friends and started an apprenticeship and is gaining life skills to manage a tenancy.*

4.3. *Following a leak into a neighbouring property, a serious hoarding case was identified. No repairs or major works had been completed for a number of years and every room of the 1 bed flat was full from floor to ceiling with items. While very reluctant initially, over 10 months trust was built and he was supported to sort through and clear items. The fire risk was considerably reduced and major works were completed including balcony and door improvements, removal of polystyrene tiles from the ceiling, an electrical rewire and new bathroom. We are now working to ensure the clutter does not increase again and get support from the Community Mental Health Team before continue with further improvements to his windows and kitchen.*

## **5. Additional Projects**

5.1. Alongside the daily case work of the Tenancy Sustainment Team, pre-tenancy training sessions are run by Tenancy Sustainment and Welfare Support Officers. Over 108 home seekers have attended since this was introduced. This helps prospective tenants prepare for moving into a council home so they can be prepared and understand their tenancy responsibilities as well as manage their expectations of what they get with the home and time scales in moving in. These sessions are currently being reviewed with input from various housing teams and new outcomes for attendees will be recorded.

5.2. Following from research for the Young Persons Housing Strategy, an application was made for funding from the Public Health District Officer. A provisional award has been made for over £32,000 for a project to target tenants in high deprivation and poverty areas that meet certain triggers we know have an impact on ability to sustain a tenancy. Once formally approved this will fund 2 posts for 9 months starting in April 2016.

## **6. Challenges faced**

6.1. Officers joining the team from existing posts were very unsure of the remit of the TST and how they fitted into the wider housing service. This was echoed by other departments and this had a negative impact on morale for the initial few months. Regular team meetings, an away day, introducing procedures and a team plan were crucial to bringing the team together and making officers feel confident in their new posts. A coffee morning was held at the Civic centre and in the Osborne offices and this was followed by attendance at various team meetings, encouraging joint visits and shadowing. Overall the team has established itself well within the housing service and will continue to identify any uncertainty through lead officer catch ups and team meetings.

6.2. The need for increased training was immediately identified with officers who had previous focused purely on debt/money advice, having to wider their knowledge base. Additionally the whole breadth of support issues from drug/alcohol, mental health, self-harm, hoarding, family interventions etc has

required a base knowledge of some of the complex issues tenants will experience. Training courses have been accessed from Herts County Council or joint working with community groups to reduce financial implications of this. Where this has not been possible, partnerships with other teams have helped share costs and resources.

- 6.3. There was concern from some teams that establishing the TST in Property and Place would create too much distance from the Tenancy and Leasehold teams. Integration with all teams under all 3 Group Managers has insured that the TST are involved in all processes across the life of a tenant and equally work with all teams irrelevant of group. There have been considerable benefits to this approach with the TST having a wider focus on the physical attributes of the home as much as the tenant inside bringing a more holistic approach to their work.
- 6.4. It has been very difficult to record and evidence outcomes of the team. This was expected as standard KPI's can only capture limited information and can't identify what changes were directly as a consequence of the support and not from other teams or agencies. The IT system used for support planning has made recording case work and outcomes difficult and an upgrade has been delayed by almost a year. Implementation is in partnership with all supporting teams in Housing so more effective outcomes will be captured from April 2016.
- 6.5. The main contractors Osborne and Sun Realm regularly were visiting homes where they felt the tenant may need some support. While these were often fed through to an officer of the council no formal process was in place. Concern Cards were introduced and since October 2015 over 21 have been received and dealt with by a combination of teams. Feedback is provided to the contractors where appropriate to encourage further reports. These have helped us be more proactive and allow earlier contact to be made.

## **7. Summary**

- 7.1. The introduction of the TST has enabled the Housing Service to have designated case workers for the most complex households. The initial months proved challenging to clearly establish the role and remit of the team within the existing housing structure, however the service has quickly adapted and very few referrals are refused with officers understanding how the team can support tenants.
- 7.2. Clear improvements can be demonstrated of tenants who have engaged with the team with tenants helped to increase their income, reduce rent arrears and overall sustain their tenancies. However, more robust outcome monitoring needs to be introduced to evidence the wider benefit of this service.
- 7.3. There will continue to be further challenges over the coming years with more tenants housed with vulnerabilities and an increase of existing tenants adjusting to welfare benefit changes. The remit of the team will be monitored to ensure the resources are focussed where the most benefit can be provided.