

Agenda Item 8

DECENT & AFFORDABLE HOMES PDG

9 SEPTEMBER 2014

BRIEFING PAPER: Prepared by the Housing Services Manager

SUBJECT: TENANCY HOME CHECKS

Introduction

The PDG approved the policy relating to Tenancy Inspections at the meeting on 22 July 2012.

Following that, Officers drafted an information leaflet (shown at appendix one) which set out the rationale for the policy and explained how the policy would be implemented. Members will recall that this policy was brought forward for a number of reasons. These included:

- To ensure that the Housing Service was making best use of the housing stock
- To identify housing fraud
- To check the property condition
- To enable the Neighbourhood teams to identify any support needs

Information on the policy is now included in the tenancy handbook which is given to new tenants when they complete the formalities associated with the start of their tenancies.

The Tenant Involvement Co-ordinator initially piloted the approach over a period of several months until the end of 2012. During this period, she was able to devise a standard set of questions and to draft a form for use during the visits.

Legal advice has been sought in connection with the collection of evidence relating to tenant damage to properties. As a result of this, Officers have now been instructed to attempt to take photos of any such damage; obviously, they must undertake a dynamic risk assessment before doing so and are not expected to take photos if to do so would put them at risk.

The programme of visits

In accordance with the policy, Officers are expected to adopt a risk-based approach to the selection of property for tenancy audit. Criteria for inclusion may be tenancies where there is a concern that the property may have been obtained using fraudulent information or where there is evidence to suggest that it may have been sub-let.

Relevant indicators include:

- There has been no recent contact with the tenant
- There has been difficulty gaining access for the annual gas servicing or safety check
- There have been no recent repairs requests

Initially, those people who were likely to be affected by the removal of the spare bedroom deduction were targeted. The visits gave Officers an opportunity to make people aware of the forthcoming changes and to give them appropriate advice.

Staffing issues impacted upon the ability of the Neighbourhood teams to complete these visits during 2013 and into 2014 but these teams are now fully staffed and each member has been instructed to undertake 2 visits each week in order to ensure that the target is met and every tenant is visited at least once every 5 years.

As at the end of July 2014, a total of 343 homes had been visited, or over 11% of those properties in the management of the Housing Service.

Outcomes

Following a Tenancy Home Check, Officers are expected to update Orchard Housing, the integrated housing management system, to note any improvements or changes to the household and also to report any repairs. They are expected to keep a record of the property condition and to cross-reference all information to ensure that everything is in order.

On the basis of the properties visited so far, it would appear that a majority are being kept in good order. In relation to a recent visit, a Neighbourhood Officer told her line manager the following:

“As soon as I took a step through the door I instantly felt overwhelmed at how lovely the house was. My first comments were how amazing their garden was as it was the first thing I saw right through the kitchen window and I was quite taken aback. It was absolutely huge and kept in an immaculate condition. We went through to the lounge to commence the Home Check and to explain why I was visiting. I couldn't help but keep commenting on how nicely decorated and what a lovely house they had. The husband joked how his wife keeps him busy with jobs around the house. The lounge had such a lovely warming feel to it, close to show home appearance, but the lady said to me she it was the next room to be decorated as it had been like it for 3 years now and it's time for a change (this included changing the carpets which, to me, looked fairly new). When we went upstairs, there were a couple of rooms which were prepped to be decorated as well and she showed me the beautiful wallpaper, blinds, etc. that they had bought to do it”

However, some visits have identified the need for some intensive housing management. During one visit, it became clear that the female tenant had left the property some four years earlier following some domestic abuse. This had never

been reported. It transpired that she had moved in with relatives. Both tenants were elderly. The Neighbourhood team then tracked down the female tenant and were able to obtain her agreement to assign the joint tenancy to her former partner who became the sole tenant. This was useful because there could have been an issue if one or other of the joint tenants had died before such formalities had been completed.

During another Tenancy Home Check, an Officer noticed that someone was living in the garage attached to a property and was able to commence further investigation in order to find out whether or not this had been approved by the Planning Service or Building Control.

Tenancy Home Checks



*Making sure
you get the help,
support and
services you need*

Every 3 years we will be carrying out a Tenancy Home Check with all our tenants to make sure you are receiving the help you need to maintain your tenancy.



For further details please contact the Housing Services,
telephone 01884 255255 or 07977928071



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Tenancy Home Checks

We are doing this to:

Identify who are most in need of our support and assistance

Provide information on the services we provide and other issues such as welfare reform

Give you the chance to report repairs or raise any other concerns

Check that the tenant is living in the property

Ensure that you are complying with the terms and conditions of your tenancy

When we visit you we will:

- > Ask you a range of questions and carry out a brief inspection of the inside and outside of your home.
- > Ask you for two forms of identification so that we have proof that you are the legal tenant of the property. One will be a document with your photograph such as your:

Current Passport

Photo driving licence or bus pass

Citizen photo ID card

In addition, proof that you live at the property for example:

A recent bank statement

A recent electricity, gas or water bill

A recent benefit letter