

HOMES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP 14 SEPTEMBER 2021

HOUSING SERVICE DELIVERY REPORT

Cabinet Member(s): Councillor Bob Evans
Responsible Officer: Mrs Claire Fry, Operations Manager for Housing Services

Reason for Report and Recommendation: To provide an update to Members on enforcement and other activity undertaken by Officers in the Housing Service

Recommendation: Members are asked to note the report

Financial Implications: The activity of the landlord service spans both General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The HRA is ring fenced and subject to specific financial controls.

Budget and Policy Framework: Policies agreed by the Homes Policy Development Group govern the work of the landlord service. The HRA is funded in large part by rental income and therefore maintaining the revenue stream must be a key priority for the Housing Service.

Legal Implications: Tenancy management is funded through the HRA. The tenancy agreement defines the Council's relationship with tenants and sets out the rights and responsibilities of both parties. This takes account of legal and regulatory requirements. The Housing Act 1985, the Localism Act 2011 and the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 contain many provisions which must be taken into account by the Housing Service.

Risk Assessment: The landlord service has approximately 3,000 homes in management which represents a huge investment. Failure to provide an effective tenancy management service has the potential to result in failure to meet legal and statutory obligations including those relating to health and safety issues, tenancy fraud, and potential negative publicity in the event of, for example, a serious fire or anti-social behaviour leading to residents on an estate feeling stigmatised. Failure to collect rental income could impact the ability to fund necessary management and maintenance activities.

Equality Impact Assessment: There is a suite of housing related policies. The use of these helps to ensure that service delivery is consistent and fair. There is a regulatory requirement for registered providers of social housing to tailor their service to meet the needs of the tenants and the Housing Service requests diversity data from tenants to enable compliance to be monitored.

Relationship to Corporate Plan: Homes and the environment are a priority for the Council and this includes increasing the supply of affordable homes in the District and also supporting and growing active tenant engagement.

Impact on Climate Change: We recognise that the provision of sustainable communities is important. As part of our commitment to meeting the provisions of the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard within the Regulatory Framework for Social Housing, the Council offers a menu of involvement which

provides opportunities for tenants to get involved in service delivery. We use social media to promote sustainability and publish information relating to a variety of topics including fuel efficiency, recycling and healthy living.

With regard to the homes in our management, our repairs and improvements strategies are informed by the need to reduce carbon emissions; and the need to reduce fuel poverty is also a key consideration.

Officers sometimes have to respond to emergencies such as those arising from serious incidents of anti-social behaviour. In such cases, safeguarding concerns will take priority in order to minimise risk and it is accepted that the ability to manage such issues effectively may have an environmental impact which would not occur if work can be planned in advance and managed in a more co-ordinated way.

1.0 Introduction/Background

1.1 The Housing Service has certain responsibilities associated with tenancy management and safeguarding. The discharge of these duties can be resource-intensive and involve significant enforcement activity. The aim of this report is to show the range of action taken over the first quarter of 2021/22 which covered the period from 1 April 2021 until 30 June 2021.

1.2 Appendix 1 shows a summary of enforcement and other related activity and Appendix 2 shows a summary of safeguarding activity undertaken in connection with the wellbeing of tenants, members of their households or anyone else, regardless of whether they live on our estates, where a concern has been identified.

1.3 The report differs from that seen last year because it no longer contains data relating to the Council's statutory obligations with regard to the prevention and management of homelessness. The work associated with these obligations is funded through the General Fund. Following the recent restructure, the Officers responsible for strategic housing work now report to the Operations Manager with responsibility for Public Health and Housing Options. For this reason, this particular report will remain focused on activity funded through the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) as undertaken by the Neighbourhood teams responsible for managing our own housing stock.

2.0 Enforcement Activity

2.1 The Regulator for Social Housing (RSH) operates the regulatory framework which contains a number of standards which set out the required outcomes and specific expectations associated with the performance of registered social landlords (RPs).

2.2 The Neighbourhood and Community Standard contains provisions relating to the management of anti-social behaviour and in line with these, RPs are expected to work in partnership with other agencies to prevent and tackle anti-social behaviour in the neighbourhoods where they own homes

2.3 Neighbourhood Officers in the HRA Estates team are responsible for managing nuisance and anti-social behaviour. Due to two Officers leaving the

employment of the Housing Service, the team has been quite short-staffed over recent months. Another Neighbourhood Officer moved over from the Income team to provide support and the Neighbourhood Team Leaders also prioritised frontline work in order to maintain an acceptable standard of service delivery. However, during the first quarter of the year, the team was instructed to focus on the key priorities which were identified as being the management of serious anti-social behaviour, safeguarding issues and health and safety in order to minimise risk.

- 2.4 The management of serious anti-social behaviour can be time-consuming given the need to gather evidence, work with witnesses and liaise with other partner agencies. Officers may also need to provide reassurance to members of the local community.
- 2.5 The work can also be challenging given the issues which may be presented and the conflicting accounts about what is happening.
- 2.6 The report in Appendix 1 shows the range of work associated with the management of anti-social behaviour under the heading: "Neighbourhood and Community Standard".
- 2.7 The report shows that during the three months the Estates team used community based means of resolution to address anti-social behaviour with the aim of making those engaged in disputes take responsibility for moving things forward. Acceptable Behaviour Agreements and Good Neighbourhood Agreements involve perpetrators agreeing to abide by some conditions. These conditions can be both positive and negative. The Agreements can be monitored and if those who have signed up to them fail to behave as expected then the case will be escalated.
- 2.8 During the quarter, the Estates team was also involved in the twice yearly Neighbourhood Walkabouts. This first tranche this year led to a lot of additional work due to the fact that the restrictions on movement last year had impacted the ability of staff to visit our estates as frequently as they have done in the past.
- 2.9 As a result of the pandemic, the pause on evictions continued until 31 May 2021.
- 2.10 The HRA Income Team worked differently during 2020/21 in an effort to support those households who may have been experiencing financial difficulty to sustain their tenancies. This new way of engaging with tenants continued into 2021/22. The team makes contact with those who owe rent to discuss their circumstances and to offer advice and information as appropriate. The Officers work closely with the Council's Customer Welfare Officer and other agencies, including the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to maximise incomes. The approach is one which is more collaborative and involves having open and honest conversations with those who may have multiple debts. The team has been signposting and referring tenants to other agencies which can help, as appropriate.

2.11 However, Officers were able to serve Notices of Seeking Possession during the quarter in order to protect the interests of the Council and it can be seen that 35 were served. It should be noted that the notice required in respect of anything but the most urgent and serious cases was increased as a result of the pandemic. This is being reduced as time goes on but it does mean that Officers may not be able to refer cases for hearing by the County Court for some months.

2.12 There were no cases during the quarter which resulted in possession of a property being awarded to the Council. The Courts have started hearing cases now and are currently prioritising the most serious cases

3.0 **Safeguarding Activities**

3.1 Every Officer of the Council is required to undertake safeguarding training on a periodic basis. Safeguarding activity is given a very high priority and it can be noted that during the quarter, housing management staff opened one domestic abuse case and made two safeguarding referrals as a result of concerns.

4.0 **Recommendation**

4.1 Members are asked to note the report.

Contact for more Information: Mrs Claire Fry, Group Manager for Housing Services, telephone: 01884 255255 (and request a call-back), email: cfry@middevon.gov.uk

Circulation of the Report: Councillor Bob Deed, Leader of the Council; Councillor Bob Evans, Cabinet Member for Housing; other Members of the Cabinet & Leadership Team; Corporate Management Team & other relevant Managers

List of Background Papers:

The Regulatory framework for social housing:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/regulatory-standards>

Appendix 1

Service Delivery – Enforcement Activities

Neighbourhood & Community Standard – Housing Revenue Account – Estates Team						
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	YTD	Comments
Fraud cases opened	0					
Fraud cases referred to an external investigator	0					
Acceptable Behaviour Agreements signed	2					
Good Neighbourhood Agreements signed	2					
Community Protection Notice warnings issued	0					
Community Protection Notices issued	0					
Possession Actions commenced on grounds of ASB	0					
Closure Orders – obtained	0					
Injunctions sought	0					
Evictions on grounds of anti-social behaviour/ other tenancy breach	0					

Income Recovery – Housing Revenue Account – Income Team						
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	YTD	Comments
Notice of Seeking possession served	35					
Judgement obtained	0					
Warrants issued	0					
Evictions on grounds of rent arrears	0					

Appendix 2

Service Delivery – Safeguarding Activities

Neighbourhood & Community Standard – Housing Revenue Account						
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	YTD	Comments
Domestic abuse cases opened	1					
Domestic abuse cases referred to Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)	0					
Safeguarding referrals made (to all agencies)	2					

