

Briefing report to the Decent & Affordable Homes PDG on the work of the Community Support & Initiatives team

Prepared by the Housing Services Manager for the meeting of the PDG to be held on 6 October 2015

Background

Devon County Council (DCC) previously funded support to elderly and vulnerable tenants using the Supporting People budget. This enabled the Council to provide a floating support service to those of our tenants living in accommodation designated for the elderly. Sheltered Housing Officers would visit them once or twice a week and undertake welfare checks using Lifelines. DCC withdrew funding for this service at the end of 2014/15 in order to make savings and the Housing Service created a new team to work with elderly and vulnerable people in a different way.

Several Officers were transferred over from Care Services to work within the Housing Revenue Account. Two Lifeline Officers, who job-share, and two Community Housing Support Officers (CHSOs) now work alongside the Neighbourhood teams at Phoenix House. They report to the Community Support & Initiatives Team Leader.

Lifelines

The Council provides a chargeable lifeline alarm service. In most cases, we supply the units but we can also monitor those units owned by individual householders. Currently, the alarms which we monitor are linked to the Taunton Deane Helpline, which is available for tenants to call in an emergency, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Previously, those properties designated as being specifically for elderly people had lifeline units hardwired in. As a result of changes in technology, these units were no longer compatible with the BT connections and therefore we moved away from this arrangement. Now, all the Lifeline units we use are mobile and can be recycled if no longer required. This has resulted in only those tenants who want the service subscribing to it.

We currently have 224 tenants who subscribe to the Lifeline service and 1,096 customers overall. We charge £30 for the installation of each unit and £45.12 per quarter, or £3.76 per week, for the service for new customers.

Tenancy Sustainment

The two CHSOs work alongside the Neighbourhood teams and have been assisting them with Tenancy Home Checks. They have completed 158 of these visits, seeing older or more vulnerable people in their homes.

They also make courtesy calls to every elderly or vulnerable tenant who has made an out of hours call to the Standby Officer to request an emergency repair. During the call, they check the tenant's issue has been or will be dealt with efficiently and also assess if the tenant needs any additional support to maintain their tenancy.

They are also working to support elderly or more vulnerable tenants. Cases are referred to them by the Neighbourhood Officers if they feel that someone needs some targeted help to enable them to sustain their tenancy. Currently, the two CHSOs are working with 29 tenants and there have been a number of positive outcomes. Due to the intensive nature of the work, we would not anticipate that they would be able to work with many more tenants at any one time.

There have been some very positive outcomes and to demonstrate this, we have provided more information on some individual cases.

One of the CHSOs is currently working with an elderly tenant who is depressed, following a recent robbery. The CHSO is offering her support to get her "back on her feet" after this experience by offering her security advice, ensuring that she is eating sufficiently and that she generally looking after herself.

Another tenant, who is vulnerable, has been targeted with postal scams and has lost money by sending cheques to some bogus companies. The CHSO has liaised with their support worker and, together, they monitor the tenant's post and deal with any unsolicited mail to ensure that no further cheques are being written to these companies.

Another case involves a very vulnerable tenant who was befriending undesirable individuals in the community who took advantage of her by taking her money. The tenant was very lonely, with little family support locally. The CHSO is in the process of getting this tenant a landline installed so that she can have a lifeline fitted for emergencies, as she is also prone to falls. She has also secured a place at a local day care centre on a weekly basis to help the tenant to overcome her loneliness.

One of the CHSOs has been helping a vulnerable tenant whose property had deteriorated due to the tenant having a large number of pets. There were welfare concerns relating to these animals and complaints from neighbours. The CHSO offered support and advice on how to look after some of the pets and also encouraged the tenant to allow the RSPCA to take away some of them that needed medical attention. Since the CHSO's intervention, the RSPCA are now satisfied with the care of the remaining pets, and they have closed their case and are not taking any further action. The property is much cleaner and the tenant feels more in control with his situation as he was not coping well with so many animals.

A CHSO is working with two vulnerable siblings who had reported on-going issues with their neighbour. The CHSO now visits regularly offering solutions to help

resolve the neighbour complaints. She is also helping them with making an application to move to more suitable accommodation and reviewing their housing options.

In addition, a CHSO is working with an elderly and vulnerable tenant who is a hoarder. She is visiting the tenant on a weekly basis and has agreed an action plan with her to start clearing her property on a room by room basis.

A CHSO is also working with an elderly depressed tenant who felt they could not cope with having the upheaval of having a new kitchen fitted. The CHSO has encouraged the tenant to agree to having a new fitted kitchen installed and has agreed to support her during the installation.

It was always envisaged that the Officers working in the CHSO role would work with tenants for a specific period of time whilst they were experiencing a particular difficulty. They are there to enable the tenant to continue living independently and to signpost or refer to other agencies, as appropriate. These case studies demonstrate that the CHSOs are able to provide more support than the Neighbourhood teams and that they are able to promote greater tenancy sustainment.

For further information, please contact Claire Fry, Housing Services Manager, on 01884 234920