

Agenda Item 8

Report of: Janet Sharpe, Interim Director, Housing and Neighbourhoods Service

Subject: The Housing+ model and its implementation

Author of Report: Richard Cookson, Project Officer, Future of Council Housing Team.
Richard.cookson@sheffield.gov.uk – x53908

Summary:

The report helps the scrutiny committee understand more about the Housing+ model of council housing management and the potential benefits for tenants, their households and their communities. It covers

- What is Housing+?
 - What are its aims?
 - The implementation of the model
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Type of item: The report author should tick the appropriate box

Reviewing of existing policy	
Informing the development of new policy	
Statutory consultation	
Performance / budget monitoring report	
Cabinet request for scrutiny	
Full Council request for scrutiny	
Community Assembly request for scrutiny	
Call-in of Cabinet decision	
Briefing paper for the Scrutiny Committee	✓
Other	

The Scrutiny Committee is asked to understand the progress that has been made and provide views and comments.

Background Papers:

Future of Council Housing, Housing+ proposals, March 2014 Cabinet meeting [Sheffield City Council - Agenda for Cabinet on Wednesday 19 March 2014, 2.00 pm](#)

Category of Report: OPEN

Report of the Director of Housing and neighbourhood Service

The Housing+ model and its implementation

Introduction/Context

- 1.1 Cabinet approved the Housing+ proposals in March 2014. This report gives a summary of the Housing+ model of Council Housing management and a progress update on its implementation.

2 What is Housing+?

- 2.1 Housing+ is a new model of Council Housing management. It is based around Housing+ officers with responsibility for all the households in a defined 'patch' within local neighbourhoods. They deal with most aspects of the housing service, including rent, Anti-social behaviour (ASB) and supporting vulnerable tenants.
- 2.2 The emphasis is on more contact with customers in their own homes. Households will be offered an annual visit to discuss their tenancy, and support or advice will be drawn-in from the relevant specialists for those households who need it.
- 2.3 They will work in Neighbourhood Management Teams, which will also include a Neighbourhood Support Team whose role includes customer service and support to Housing+ officers.
- 2.4 As well as delivering front-line services, the Teams will work with other providers and local people to help strengthen the local community. They will be supported by a number of consolidated teams providing specialist advice, developing city-wide policies and delivering operational services.
- 2.5 The customer service function, including the Housing Call centre, remain in place and continue to be the main point of contact for customers.

3 What are the aims

- 3.1 The Housing+ model is a key way in which we realise the ambitions our tenants and their households have for their housing service. The development of the model can be seen as a thread running through the ballot to bring the housing service under direct Council control, through the 'It's Your Shout' consultation and the joint staff and customer Service Design groups.
- 3.2 At every stage customers have told us they wanted a housing service that provides;
 - 3.3 **Quality housing services.** Our customers want relevant, good quality housing services delivered in a way that recognises the differing needs of our customers. Housing+ officers will be a visible, local, responsive presence.

- 3.4 **Effective decision-making, control and influence.** There will be eight Neighbourhood Management Teams, their boundaries based on electoral ward boundaries to improve links with Councillors and with other Council services and partners.
- 3.5 **Strong partnership working.** The Council Housing Service will work with other services and organisations to achieve the best possible outcomes for tenants and their families. Neighbourhood Management Teams have a remit to continue to develop effective working relationships with council services and other agencies to the benefit of tenants and their households.
- 3.6 **Provide services beyond housing management.** Housing+ Officers (HPOs) will take a holistic approach to managing tenancies and liaise with tenants on a variety of issues including home skills, employment, education and health. They will focus on prevention, dealing with low level issues directly and signposting people to resources within the local community to help prevent problems escalating.
- 3.7 **Achieve value for money.** Tenants more easily accessing the support they need to live in their homes should reduce tenancy turnover and the significant costs this generates.
- 3.8 Housing+ will also achieve savings for the HRA through pre-emptive budgeting and rent advice, reduced demand for office-based customer contact by focussing on more home appointments and increased staff efficiency through streamlined working practices.
- 3.9 The new model could also achieve benefits for other Council services. By providing advice and low-level preventative work in disciplines outside the 'traditional' housing boundaries, the Council Housing Service will help tenants maintain their tenancy and reduce their need for more costly interventions. This will in turn achieve savings for both the Housing Revenue Account and for other Council services.

4 Rollout and initial indicators of its success

- 4.1 Implementation began by rolling out the Housing+ approach as a 'test phase' in the South East of the city in June. This gives the opportunity to test the policies and procedures introduced to support the new way of working. This will be evaluated during September and October and learning used to fine-tune the model.
- 4.2 All tenants and Leaseholders in the Area were informed of the changes and drop-in 'meet the team' sessions held in each ward.
- 4.3 Full roll-out is planned to begin on an area-by-area basis in April 2015, though this timescale may prove challenging.
- 4.4 Changes to the service include

- 4.5 Housing+ officers make earlier contact with customers in rent arrears. They are able to discuss affordability, debt, employment, where to access support and maximising household income
- 4.6 Housing+ officers are responsible for viewing properties with prospective tenants, the 'sign up' and visiting them early in their tenancy. This gives more consistency for customers and helps the relationship with the Housing+ officer develop at the start of the tenancy. Officers find customers are more receptive to difficult conversations if that relationship is already established.
- 4.7 Staff are taking on some responsibility for additional functions which go beyond our core housing work – this is the area of the role that we have called "Plus". An example is the 'Healthy Chat'. Public health staff have delivered training on this, and as a result the initiative can reach more people in the South East of the city through housing staff.
- 4.8 Housing+ officers will make close links with the TARAs on their patch, while the management team will lead on area wide community engagement.
- 4.9 The call centre and in-person customer service at Crystal Peaks First Point are largely unchanged. There are no plans to alter these services and they are still the main way in which customers contact the Housing service.
- 4.10 All households will be offered a visit from their Housing+ officer each year, the opportunity to discuss all aspects of their tenancy, other issues relevant to their tenancy such as health or employment and to agree a 'plan' for what they want to achieve in their tenancy.
- 4.11 Changes to the service were implemented gradually; both to allow staff time to get used to unfamiliar aspects of the role and to reduce the risk of disruption to services. For instance the annual visits began in August. Therefore we do not yet have the information on which to base a comprehensive assessment of the impact of the changes. However early signs are encouraging.
- 4.12 Performance in the South East against key Housing indicators such as arrears and relet times has remained steady.
- 4.13 We are also beginning to see evidence of the benefits the Housing+ model will bring in terms of early intervention and the development of good relationships between Housing+ officers and households in their patch. For example;
- 4.14 One tenant had lost benefits. He had no food, no money and was in poor health. His Housing+ officer helped to reinstate benefits, access support from a food bank and arrange a home visit from his GP. The Housing+ model meant we were aware of the situation earlier, were able to spend time with the customer and early intervention meant rent arrears did not escalate. The officer remains in regular contact.

- 4.15 Officers now ask tenants informally to tidy their gardens where this is necessary, without opening a formal Tenancy Management case in every instance. They find that in most cases tenants are responding to this, so saving the administration time previously spent on recording the details.
- 4.16 Housing+ officers find they are recognised and acknowledged when they are on their patch.
- 4.17 There are challenges. In order to fully realise the benefits of the model there is a clear need to streamline some systems and procedures and to identify where mobile technology may help staff work more efficiently. We are in the process of identifying a resource to take this work forward.

5 What does this mean for the people of Sheffield?

- 5.1 Council housing represents almost a fifth of all Sheffield's housing, with over 48,000 tenants living in around 41,000 homes. A more tailored and locality-based approach to delivering council housing services has huge potential to make a real difference to people in the city.

6 Recommendation

- 6.1 The Scrutiny Committee is asked to understand the progress that has been made and provide views and Comments.

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