

Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Panel: Housing+ Update, March 2017

1. Implementing Housing+

- 1.1. Housing+, and the associated restructure of the Housing & Neighbourhoods Service (H&NS), was launched on **3rd October 2016**. This MER was one of the biggest, if not the biggest, restructure the Council has undertaken. Around 970 staff were in scope of the MER - approx. 220 of which were 'slotted' into the new structure as their roles were not changing.
- 1.2. The remaining 750 went through a selection process and moved onto a new JD and into a new role. The degree of change this meant for individuals varied, but for a huge number of staff this meant a significantly different - in many cases completely new role.
- 1.3. Training programmes have been developed and are being delivered, and the new service is 'up and running'. However, it does need to be acknowledged that such a massive change will take time to 'bed in' properly, and many teams are still in a transitional period and learning their new roles and functions.

2. The journey so far

- 2.1. Since October last year, the service has so far completed around 2000 home visits to tenants. In addition there are around 850 cases that are currently being managed by Neighbourhood Officers (NOs) – these have varying degrees of complexity, with the majority of cases having being open for a number of months due to the support needs identified.
- 2.2. During this first 6-month period staff have been keen to undertake the full breadth of the NO role and have embraced the Housing+ approach. We expect to see the numbers of visits increase significantly as staff vacancies are filled (currently 177 Neighbourhood Officers in post within Neighbourhood Teams across the city) and staff are becoming trained and more confident in their role.
- 2.3. The following 'real life' case studies from the last few months are examples of what can be achieved through Housing+:

Case study 1 - Hoarding & infestations

Issue: The NO visited a tenant's property to carry out an annual visit. There was a rat infestation and the tenant was clearly hoarding and he had a dog and the property was infested with fleas.

Actions taken: The NO arranged for a clean and clear, and supported the tenant through the process. The kitchen had been severely damaged by rats and so he liaised with the Repairs and Maintenance Service to have the kitchen replaced.

The NO also arranged for SOAR (a social enterprise / community regeneration charity in Parson Cross) to support the tenant with looking after his property, and

contacted Shelter to help organise his finances for him. He also arranged for his rent to be paid via a direct debit.

The NO is continuing to make regular visits to the tenant to ensure sure everything is ok.

Case study 2 - Rent arrears

Issue: A tenant with no history of not paying her rent suddenly fell into arrears, so the NO arranged to visit her at home. The NO discovered that the tenant's relationship had broken down and her husband had moved out with the children. She was feeling unable to cope on her own.

Actions taken: The tenant was affected by bedroom tax, so the NO arranged for her to be given a priority to move to a smaller property. This saved the tenant money and freed up her larger accommodation for another tenant who needed it.

The tenant viewed a Housing Association (HA) property but was not offered a tenancy due to the level of her arrears, the NO contacted the HA and explained on behalf of the tenant the reason for the arrears, and that arrears had never been an issue for this tenant before. As a result the HA were willing to offer her a tenancy and she was able to move into a more affordable home.

The NO also successfully applied for Discretionary Housing Payments on behalf of the tenant to help her with the rent arrears.

3. Next steps

- 3.1. In April / early May we will be undertaking a 6-month review of the restructure. Each team are to hold a review session (with the Trade Unions also invited to each one), led by the relevant Head of Service. These sessions will look at how well the new approach is working so far, and what else remains to be done to further improve service delivery and outcomes for our tenants. The outcomes of the review will be shared with the TUs and staff during May, and any resulting changes (eg. to processes, handover points, etc) implemented over the subsequent weeks / months (dependent on what those changes are).
- 3.2. The journey towards full implementation of Housing+ will continue over the coming months. As staff become more comfortable with the 'core' housing-related elements of their roles we will begin to broaden their remit in a planned way, and with support and training in place where needed.
- 3.3. We are also working in partnership with the University of Sheffield to understand the Health & Wellbeing impact of Housing+. We have secured external funding for a 2 year study which is being delivered by the School of Health & Related Research. Initial feedback from tenants is currently being analysed by the University and we should have some baseline data during April. The study will then continue until March 2018, to understand if the health and wellbeing of those tenants has changed, and if so if there is any link between this change and the Housing+ service they have been receiving.

4. Feedback from Scrutiny Panel Members

- 4.1. We are keen to learn from the feedback which Members have from their recent 'shadowing' of / visits to Neighbourhood Teams. What did you see which is working well? What did you see which you think we could have done better? We can then use this information as part of the 6-month review.
- 4.2. We are also keen to understand how we can better promote Housing+ in our Neighbourhoods - with both Members and local service partners / organisations. So any input from Scrutiny Panel on how we could approach that would also be very welcome.

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