

Performance Monitoring Report

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Summary and Recommendation:

A report outlining performance was discussed at the Strategic Housing Panel in June of this year. It was agreed that reports would be presented bi-annually. This report informs the Panel of operational activity during the first six months of 2013.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Housing Services Team cover several key areas regarding housing across the Borough. This includes but is not limited to; disabled facilities grants, unfit housing, empty properties, immigration inspections, overcrowding, developing the landlord forum, homeless applications, housing advice, rent deposits, homeless prevention and domestic violence

2. Housing Advice

- 2.1 Between the 1 April 2013 and 30 September 2013 there were 260 requests for housing advice, this is a small increase on the same period last year. The majority of people contacting the team are seeking accommodation, but have no priority need. These are all cases where customers have been into the Copeland Centre and have been interviewed. The figure does not take into account the number of telephone enquiries made to the housing options team, which can range anywhere between 15 and 40 calls per day.
- 2.2 When a resident is threatened with homelessness because their property is due to be reposed by the mortgage lender due to arrears the lender must inform us. Since the 1 April 2013 there have been 15 such letters which is a reduction on last year's figures. A member of the housing options team contacts the homeowner by letter to let them know that there may be options available to them which will enable them to remain in their home.

3. **Rent Deposits**

- 3.1 When a resident is homeless or threatened with homelessness we can help with a deposit for a private tenancy. The property is inspected by a technical officer under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System and as long as there are no hazards and the landlord has provided all the certificates then the deposit is paid. This is claimed back from the customer at an affordable amount each month. There were 15 rent deposits provided between 1 April and 30 September 2013. This is on a par with last year.

4. **Full Homeless Applications**

- 4.1 The number of full homeless investigations carried out has reduced significantly from 119 during the first six months of 2012 to 34 during the first six months of this year. This is almost certainly due to the increased prevention work being undertaken by the team.
- 4.2 The majority of presentations are made by lone women who are either pregnant or already have children, and families with two parents and one child or pregnancy.

5. **Prevention**

- 5.1 Homelessness has been prevented on 40 occasions so far this year, an increase of 50% based on last year's figures.
- 5.2 Prevention measures include amongst other things, helping residents clear small amounts of rent arrears; helping residents if they are threatened with illegal eviction; referring residents to support agencies etc.

6. **MARAC – Domestic Violence**

- 6.1 Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) are held monthly and attended by a member of the housing options team. During the MARAC, high risk victims of domestic violence are discussed and partners who include social services, the police and probation make sure measures are in place to protect the victims and their families.
- 6.2 Two officers have undertaken training and are 'Domestic Violence Champions' for Copeland. The 'Champions' are involved in improving community and organisational responses to domestic violence and providing training and assistance to enable front line staff to support the lower and medium risk cases not picked up by MARAC.

7. Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG's)

- 7.1 Residents of the borough whether owner occupiers, tenants of a Registered Provider or private landlord can apply for a DFG. The resident is assessed by an Occupational Therapist and if adaptations are required they are referred to the Council for a grant. An application is then made and a means test carried out to see if the applicant qualifies, if the applicant is a child under 19 years there is no means test.
- 7.2 Between 1 April and 30 September there have been 95 referrals for DFG's an increase of 50%; of these, the majority are owner occupiers although we have seen a slight increase in the number of tenants who apply. The number of referrals for DFG's is increasing year on year and this may be due to the increase in the elderly population in Copeland, we are currently working closely with Adult Social Care to establish new procedures and guidelines so only the minimal and essential works are referred to us.
- 7.3 Technical officers have to visit a property at least twice when a DFG is applied for, firstly to assess with an Occupational Therapist what work is required, secondly to make sure the work has been carried out to the standards expected. Where more extensive works are required such as shower rooms, extensions to properties etc many more visits may be required, payments are only made to contractors when an inspection has been made and the work signed off so for example when an extension is being built several visits will be made. The number of referrals therefore does not adequately reflect the number of visits to a property.
- 7.4 There have been monthly meetings throughout the year with adult social care to discuss cases that are on-going or pending.

8. Empty properties

- 8.1 During the first six months of this year visits have been made to 5 empty properties; the majority of the owners have been identified and written to. In addition to this, properties identified last year are in the process of being refurbished due to the efforts of the team. Again, several visits can be made to ensure work has commenced etc. Funding has been awarded by the Home and Communities Agency (HCA) to help to bring empty properties back into use in the Frizington area, a survey of owners has been undertaken and the results clearly show that owners do not want the funding to be used as loans to undertake works required. Officers are currently renegotiating with the HCA to see if the funding can be used to give owners grants to renovate the properties.

9. Unfit Properties

9.1 The council has a statutory duty to inspect tenancies where the tenant reports that the property is unfit. The property is inspected and contact is made with the landlord outlining a schedule of works required to bring the property up to a decent standard. This involves at least two inspections, there have been 6 inspections since April 2013, this is a reduction on last year's figure. We have yet to prosecute a landlord (although we have served Notice on one landlord) as they have complied with legislation due to our involvement.

10. Overcrowding and Immigration Inspections

10.1 The team are responsible for inspecting properties if the tenant thinks they are overcrowded, there have been two requests for an inspection during the first half of this year, and neither was statutorily overcrowded.

10.2 If a resident wished to sponsor a person from abroad and they are to live in Copeland, an inspection needs to take place to make sure the property in which they are to live is of a decent standard and will not become overcrowded. This is then given to the customer and sent to the British High Commission. There has been one inspection so far this year.

11 Rent Deposit Property Inspections

11.1 When a resident threatened with homelessness or is homeless and a deposit is required from the council an inspection must be made of the property to ensure it is of a decent standard and that the appropriate certificates are available from the landlord. Between 1st April and 30 September 18 inspections have been undertaken, three properties failed inspection, the landlords were given advice regarding works that had to be carried out to ensure there were no hazards and these works are on-going. If a property fails an inspection the rent deposit is not given until the landlord has brought the property up to a decent standard.

Conclusion

The above report does not take into consideration all the activity that takes place but gives an overview of the section involved in front line services. Among other things this year a review of homelessness in Copeland has been undertaken and the new Homelessness Strategy 2013 – 2018 has been approved. All team members have undertaken level 1 training safeguarding children and two members of staff have progressed to level 3 and are now designated officers for safeguarding children within the Council. The team have also had refresher training on homelessness and unfit properties. It is proposed that a further report is brought to the Panel when figures are available for the full year 2013/14.