

Strategic Housing Panel
Performance Monitoring Report

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Councillor Geoff Garrity
LEAD OFFICER: Julie Betteridge
REPORT AUTHOR: Debbie Cochrane

Summary and Recommendation:

A report outlining performance was discussed at the Strategic Housing Panel in April 2013 which covered the year 12/13. This report informs the Panel of operational activity during 2013/14.

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 31 March 2014 there were 479 requests for housing advice, an increase again on the previous year. 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. During the year there have been 55 such letters this is a decrease of 18% from last year. 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. There is very little contact from homeowners who may be facing eviction, the recently approved repossession toolkit will be widely advertised which may encourage applications.

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 29 rent deposits provided during 2013/14

4. **Full Homeless Applications**

- 4.1 The number of full homeless applications taken decreased again last year which is in line with government recommendations and is due to the prevention work the team are undertaking. The total number of full homeless applications taken during 2013/14 was 68 compared to 184 during 12/13 this is not in line with national trends the majority of local authorities are experiencing an increase.
- 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 was prevented on 97 occasions during 2013/14. This is a 30% increase on last year's figures.
- 5.2 Prevention measures include amongst other things, helping residents clear small amounts of rent arrears; providing rent deposits; helping residents if they are threatened with illegal eviction; referring residents to support agencies etc.
- 5.3 The number given above does not include preventions due to advice and assistance given by the team, for example, signposting to other agencies for support such as CAB 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, is the applicant is a child under 19 years there is no means test.
- 7.2 During 2013/14 there were 152 referrals for DFG's; of these, the majority are owner occupiers although we have seen a slight increase in the number of tenants who apply. This is the third consecutive year applications have increased.
- 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 year visits have been made to 12 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. The HCA cluster funding has been used to bring 6 properties back into use, these properties are to be sold or let to provide affordable accommodation.

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 were 35 inspections during 2013/14 this is a small reduction on last year. 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 several requests for inspections during the year, and none were 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 have been three inspections 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. 53 inspections have been undertaken, which is double those for last year. 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. It is proposed that a further report is brought to the Panel in November which will cover the first six months of this financial year.