

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to Health and Housing Policy Development and Review Panel

Date **09 March 2017**

Report of: **Director of Operations**

Subject: **TENANCY MANAGEMENT REPORT**

SUMMARY

This report provides Panel members with an update on performance in regard to current tenant rent arrears, management of empty homes, anti-social behaviour, estates services and tenant involvement.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Panel notes the information contained within the report.

INTRODUCTION

1. Tenancy Management covers a range of housing service functions which include rent collection and arrears recovery, managing empty homes, dealing with anti-social behaviour, housing estate management and tenant involvement.
2. This report provides Panel Members with an update on performance and highlights any key service issues Officers are dealing with.

CURRENT TENANT ARREARS

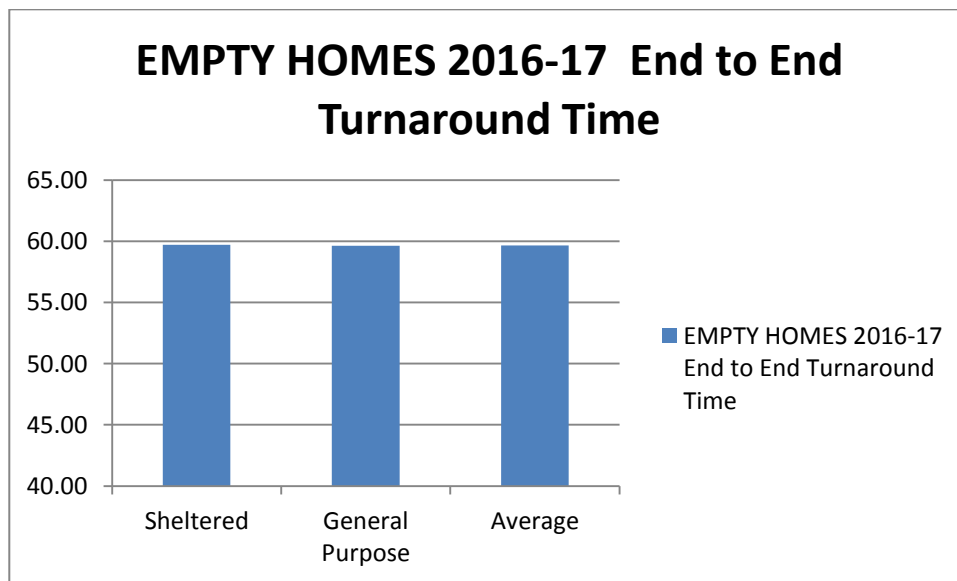
3. Current tenant arrears as at 5th February 2017 stood at £287,280. This is an increase on the previously reported figure. Arrears increased more significantly over the Christmas and New Year period compared to previous years, however they have begun to slowly decrease in line with previous trends.
4. The table below shows performance for a similar period over the past three years for comparison purposes.

Dates	Arrears Total	No of Cases
22/02/15	£254,819	604
21/02/16	£250,348	656
05/02/17	£287,280	611

5. Further analysis of arrears cases shows that a number of tenants with higher level of arrears are struggling to maintain repayment arrangements including cases that are subject to a court order. Officers continue to work with tenants to try and get payments under control and avoid possible eviction.
6. As part of the arrears recovery process it is necessary to refer some cases to the County Court. Since the last report, for the period August 2016 to January 2017, there have been 10 hearings in court.
7. In the majority of court hearings the case was either adjourned for further information or a court order was granted on payment terms. Two homes have been repossessed in the past 6 months despite much effort from Officers to engage and support the tenants facing eviction. The properties repossessed were both upper floor bedsitters and the tenants were single males without any dependants.
8. A recent Vanguard Intervention identified an area where changes could be made to improve on current practice. It became very evident that many tenants would choose to pay their rent by direct debit if they could pay on different days of the month and more frequently than calendar monthly. Clearly, the advantages of this are that tenants paying by this method have money taken automatically and do not have to remember to make a payment. By working with an external organisation, Tenancy Services are working towards providing this improved facility to our tenants. It is anticipated that all tenants will have this facility available to them within the next few months.

MANAGEMENT OF EMPTY HOMES

9. The way in which empty homes are managed has changed with emphasis on matching the right person to the right property and carrying out works to empty homes that have been identified and agreed with the new tenant, rather than reinstating the property to a prescribed standard.
10. In a number of cases this financial year it has been necessary to carry out kitchen/bathroom modernisation work, electrical rewiring and adaptations to meet the needs of a disabled tenant or member of their household. This in turn has increased the time taken to relet the property and the loss in rental income.
11. In terms of performance we measure the total void period. The start of the void period is the date when keys are returned by the outgoing tenant and the end of the period is the date when the incoming tenant's tenancy begins.
12. The chart below shows the average turnaround time for general needs and sheltered properties for the period April 2016 to end of December 2016. In this period a total of 152 homes were relet, 91 general purpose and 61 sheltered lettings.



13. The average turnaround time compared to the figure previously reported has reduced by 6 calendar days.
14. In terms of void rent loss; at the end of January 2017, this totalled £158,194 which is equivalent to 1.75% of the total rent due in the financial year to date. This is a reduction on the figure previously reported.

DEALING WITH ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

15. The table below provides information of reported incidents of Anti-social Behaviour (ASB) where officers took some form of action against the perpetrators. This action could have been anything from sending a letter to carrying out visits with Community Safety and Police. Currently there are 2 tenants on Acceptable Behaviour Contacts. One secure tenant has been served notice due to on-going ASB problems and one secure tenant now has possession proceedings being taken against them.

Period	Reported Incidents	Serious cases
Aug '16 to Jan '17	6	3

16. Over the past year, although the number of ASB cases has reduced, the cases which are being dealt with are more serious and are involving far more officer time. There has been a sharp increase in joint visits with Police and Community Safety and also far more time spent liaising with Legal Services and preparing court paperwork.
17. The case involving possession proceedings is now going to trial and officers and Police will attend Winchester Crown Court over a 2-day period. There are 2 independent witnesses also attending and giving evidence in support of the Council. As an example of the officer time involved in preparing for Court, it took around 8 weeks to put together the legal paperwork to meet the prescribed timescales laid down by the Court.
18. A past case involving serious and prolonged ASB went to Court and the Council were awarded possession of the property. A defence solicitor for the tenant decided to challenge this back in Court and a new Judge overturned the previous ruling and threw the case out of Court. The Council applied for, and was awarded, leave to appeal this and the case was heard at the Royal Courts of Justice. The Council won the appeal and the tenant was subsequently evicted.

HOUSING ESTATE MANAGEMENT

19. The cleaning of housing blocks forms part of a corporate cleaning contract and the contractor providing this service is Hi-Spec Cleaning Services.
20. The communal areas of the Council's blocks of flats and maisonettes are cleaned on a weekly basis. Windows to the communal areas and individual units within sheltered housing blocks are cleaned on a 3-6 monthly basis. Feedback is obtained from tenant and leaseholder representatives and housing staff and is collated to give an overall satisfaction rate.
21. The satisfaction level for Block Cleaning for the period August 2016 to January 2017 inclusive stood at 88%.
22. Quarterly Performance meetings are held with the service provider. The last meeting was held on 8 February 2017. The main issues discussed were several areas not having been cleaned to the required standard and several bin areas not having been cleaned for some time.
23. The external areas around housing blocks and general needs areas, including garage service areas, are maintained by the Council's Streetscene team. This includes grass-cutting, weed treatment, litter-picking, and sweeping of hard surfaces. Feedback is again obtained from tenant and leaseholder representatives and housing staff and is collated to give an overall % satisfaction rate.
24. The satisfaction level of Grounds maintenance for the period August 2016 to January 2017 inclusive stood at 95%.
25. Quarterly meetings are held with officers from the Council's Streetscene team and the last meeting was held on 12 December 2016 with a further meeting scheduled for 23 March 2017. No main issues or concerns were identified.

26. Estate inspections are carried out in areas which have been highlighted by either tenants or officers as having problems. For the period 1 August 2016 to 31 January 2017, 4 inspections have taken place. Where issues were noted, action has been taken to remedy these.

27. The main issues arising from the recent inspections were the dumping of fly-tipped waste to communal areas of the flats and maisonette blocks and vehicles parked on hatched areas, resulting in non-access to emergency vehicles and refuse lorries. At the time of writing this report these issues have been addressed to the satisfaction of all concerned.

TENANT INVOLVEMENT

28. Since the last Performance Monitoring Report in September 2016, tenants and leaseholders have been involved in the following events:

- **South Coast Training** (Up to 10 tenants/leaseholders attend a training event held twice a year which helps improve knowledge and understanding across a range of housing issues)
- **Tenant and Leaseholder Forum** (An open forum for tenant/leaseholder representatives who meet to discuss housing issues of interest with council officers)
- **Editorial Panel Meeting** (Tenants and officers meet to discuss articles for inclusion in tenant and leasehold newsletters)
- **Estate Monitors Meeting** (A twice-yearly event for tenant and leaseholder volunteers who help monitor block cleaning and grounds maintenance work)
- **Quarterly Review Meetings (Communal Cleaning, Grounds Maintenance and Gas Servicing)** (To discuss and review the service provided to tenants).

RISK ASSESSMENT

29. There are no significant risk considerations in relation to this report.

CONCLUSION

30. This report has provided panel members with an update on performance across a range of housing management services

Background Papers: None

Reference Papers: None

Enquiries:

For further information on this report please contact Jane Cresdee. (Ext 4483)