



Service Delivery Committee	Tuesday, 19 January 2016	Matter for Information and Decision
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Title: **Community Services Update**

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1. Introduction

This report is to provide an update to the Service Delivery Committee regarding the delivery of landlord Services and related community activities.

2. Recommendations

Members are asked to note the contents contained within the report.

3. Rent Arrears - Situation Quarters 2 & 3 (2015-16)

3.1. Quarter 2

Rent arrears peaked during July in Quarter 2, at which point the Gross Arrears stood at **£252,167.69** and the Net Arrears were **£203,032.39**. Since this point both debt levels have fallen and a summary of the situation at the close of the period (Wk 26) complete with comparisons to both Q1 2015-16 and Q2 last year (2014-15) is set out below:

Period	Gross Arrears	Net Arrears (Net of prepaid)	Comparison to <u>Q1 2015-16</u> (Gross Arrears)	Comparison <u>Q1 2015-16</u> (Net Arrears)
Quarter 2 2015-16 (Wk 26)	£213,895.74	£147,578.02	Decrease £2,466.31 ↓1.13%	Decrease £12,422.81 ↓7.76%
			Comparison to <u>Q2 2014-15</u> (Gross Arrears)	Comparison <u>Q2 2014-15</u> (Net Arrears)
			Increase £35,744.24 ↑20.06%	Increase £31,581.21 ↑27.2%
Comparator Information				
Q1 2015-16	£216,362.05	£160,000.83		
Q2 2014-15	£178,151.50	£115,996.81		

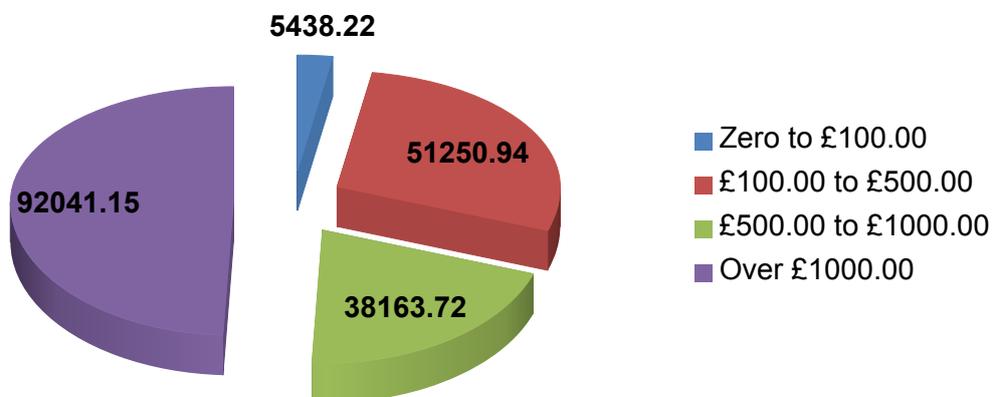
3.2. Quarter 3

Rent arrears have continued to fall during Quarter 3 and a summary of the situation at the close of the period (Wk 39) complete with comparisons to both Q2 2015-16 and Q3 last year (2014-15) is set out below:

Period	Gross Arrears	Net Arrears (Net of prepaid)	Comparison to Q2 2015-16 (Gross Arrears)	Comparison Q2 2015-16 (Net Arrears)
Quarter 3 2015-16 (Wk 39)	£186,894.03	£106,970.99	Decrease £27,001.71 ↓12.6%	Decrease £40,607.03 ↓27.5%
			Comparison to Q3 2014-15 (Gross Arrears)	Comparison Q3 2014-15 (Net Arrears)
			Increase £11,576.18 ↑6.6%	Increase £36,458.17 ↑51.7%
Comparator Information				
Q2 2015-16	£213,895.74	£147,578.02		
Q3 2014-15	£175,317.85	£70,512.82		

The breakdown of the debt in terms of value bandings at the close of Q3 is set out below:

Current Arrears by Value Close Quarter 3



These figures show that the areas of most concern lie at the top end of the Value range, (Cases over £500), in particular over £1000, which is where the main thrust of the income officers' efforts have been directed and will continue to be so.

As part of a number of basic monitoring measures recently introduced, the number of cases in arrears has been recorded since 24th August 2015. Whilst this is variable week to week, overall the number of cases has dropped during the course of both Q2 & Q3.

The debt level for the year to date, number of cases in arrears and analysis of the current tenant arrears on a monthly basis is set out in Appendix 1.

The team has now settled in terms of staffing and the Income Officers and have begun to come to terms with the highest level arrears cases resulting in an increase in the service of Notices of Intention to Seek Possession, new applications to court for possession and also in warrants for eviction. In addition as at the end of December the majority of cases that had accrued zero to £500 during the month had been contacted and suitable actions taken or arrangements for repayment made.

Performance is now improving month on month and a set of measures have been put into place to try and ensure that arrears levels continue to improve through to the end of the financial year, these include:

- Monthly One to One monitoring sessions with both of the Income Officers during which progress of all cases is examined.
- At least 3 intensive campaigns on outstanding current tenant debt to be carried out between October 2015 and the end of the financial year, two of which will be targeting the “Non Collectable” weeks that occur during December 2015 (Christmas) and at the last two weeks of the financial year in March 2016. The third will be targeted at Monthly and Fortnightly payers during January & early February. The campaigns include as far as possible all Housing Management staff.

The first of these has been carried out during December 2015 and the success of this is reflected in a reduction of 13% in the Gross Arrears total and 33% in the Net Arrears total.

- A thorough review of the Orchard System - Rent Arrears Module set up; in particular the Arrears Case Progression element is to be carried out during Q4 (January to March 2016) as this currently presents a risk to further improvement in respect of arrears collection. Several glitches have been identified to date with the system since the total update went live in October 2014.

In addition to this it is our intention to arrange regular meetings between the Housing Benefit Team Leader, the Income Officers and the Community Housing Team Leader to ensure prompt processing of HB claims, resolution of any outstanding issues and also that suitable submissions for Discretionary Housing Payment are made promptly and followed up. Also it is planned to carry out a review of the current methods of payment available to tenants and an assessment made of additional ways to pay i.e. the introduction of All Pay will be considered during Q4 with a view to making changes to current practices and introducing new payment options for the new financial year.

4. Voids

The average void turnaround time for the period October/November was 50 working days. This includes long term voids where major works were necessary which has distorted the figures and increased the overall void period. The average void covers the period from the date that the property becomes empty until the date that the new tenant moves in. Good practice dictates that Social Landlords should minimise the time that properties are empty between each letting. A number of factors will affect performance including demand, stock condition and the type of stock. However upper quartile performance for the average number of days to re-let a general needs

property is 20 days and a key priority going forward is to achieve that target.

5. Gas Safety

Compliance as at 31 December 2015 was 99.9% due to one outstanding safety check where the previous safety certificate expired on 23 October 2015. Access was subsequently gained after extensive efforts by staff and currently compliance is back to 100%.

Going forward, as a disproportionate number of services fall in the first quarter of the calendar year (January to March), the busiest period for repairs and heating breakdowns we are making earlier appointments to bring forward anniversary dates and improve the profile over the year.

As a result 143 safety checks/services scheduled in January 2016, 139 had already been completed by the end of December and 195 due in February have also been completed. Work will shortly start on 158 safety checks/services due in March.

Detail of the Gas Safety Performance is set out in the table below:

Gas Safety Compliance Date	31 December 2015
Oldest case CP12 expired (CP12 = Gas Safety Certificate)	23 October 2015
% CP12's compliant	99%

6. Update on Capital Programme 2014/15

6.1. Customer Contact Centre - Bell Street - Building Works

This project is now complete and operational, subject to the usual 12 months defects liability period.

6.2. Huts Demolition

A planning application is in preparation to replace the final section of fencing and this should be erected in the spring to conclude this project.

6.3. Boulter Crescent – Full Strip Out and Refurbishment – 136 Homes

It was reported in October that this contract continued to run well and to budget but was subject to some slippage against the original programme. This has now been addressed by increasing the number of blocks being worked on from three to five in the current phase. Having taken this action we continue to work to the original contract completion date of June 2016.

Defect inspections are now being carried out and the contractor has allocated a specific resource to follow up any works identified.

6.4. Boulter Crescent - Community Flat

This project is now on site with the structural works completed and fitting out now started. Due to unforeseen circumstances we were not able to conclude the final

specification and complete works before Christmas. Completion of internal works is now due mid-February. Hopefully seeing this work on site will have addressed residents concerns that this project may not go ahead.

A planning application is being prepared to cover continued change of use from residential to community facility and for some changes to the external areas to provide a buggy shelter and revised access ramps/paths.

6.5. King Street – Whole Home Refurbishment of 19 Homes and Estate Works

Work to tenant's homes was completed in December. Contractors are now working on refurbishment of the final flat which is vacant having been used for partial decanting of tenants of both this project and Queen Street. The work will be completed by the end of January.

While this contract has run beyond what was originally intended in the main relates to piloting whole home improvements without full decanting of tenants. This has not resulted in financial penalty either for the contract or OWBC when agreeing extensions to the contract.

It is expected to contract let the second phase of works at this estate (to rebuild and landscape drying areas) by end of February for work to start in March.

6.6. Queen Street – Balance of Decent Homes Work, Improved Layouts and External Insulation – 11 Homes

This project started in August 2015 and is due to be completed by March 2016. Work is progressing well with 7 homes completed

A second phase to provide external insulation is still to go out to tender.

6.7. William Peardon Court – Kitchen Replacements 36 homes

Works commenced on 28 September with a contract period of three months. In view of the start date the aim was to finish by Christmas. The contract has run slightly beyond this with the final 3 kitchens going on site in January.

Kitchen replacement for Kings Drive and Gibson Close (part of the same overall development) is due to go out to tender in January.

7. Works to Properties with Major Structural Defects

7.1. Falmouth Drive

Structural works (full piled foundation introduced), internal reconstruction to new layout with fourth bedroom and fit out completed. Property let, in defects period.

7.2. Bungalows at St Peters Path

Structural works to two homes (sleeved pile foundations introduced), internal reconstruction to new layout that is adaptable to full mobility standards with the addition of external ramping. One home is tenanted and the decanted tenant has returned. The second home has been allocated and external ramping is currently being provided. Both properties are now in defects period.

The second pair of Bungalows at this site are both occupied following letting of the decant property and will be subject to ongoing periodic monitoring of the structure as reported previously.

A programme of reduction / removal of poplar trees that has contributed the structural damage is to be established over a number of years.

8. Structural Survey of Properties at Churchill Close, Oadby

Works arising from the survey (which was reported in summary at the last meeting) will be programmed in future years looking to start in 2016/17 with works which will enable repainting of the concrete above the walkways.

9. Junction Road – Requiring Full Refurbishment and Feasibility Study to Convert to Two Flats

Following the preliminary designs reported at the last meeting Western Power (responsible for the electrical supply infrastructure) has visited to assess the feasibility and cost of providing separate supplies. We are currently awaiting feedback and prices following which it will be possible to decide if we move forward with full designs to progress the conversion or refurbish as a single dwelling.

10. Ravensthorpe Drive

This house is the Council's first purchase under the commitment made to replace houses sold under the Right to Buy. Works are now on site to carry out further adaptations to the property and to bring it up to decent homes standard.

11. Future Development and Purchase Opportunities

There are a number of possible development and purchase opportunities at present which are currently being pursued namely:

- Canal Street South Wigston
- Chartwell House Oadby
- Kirkdale Road South Wigston
- Station Road Wigston

A full progress report will be presented to the next meeting.

12. Providers of Housing Related Advice Services

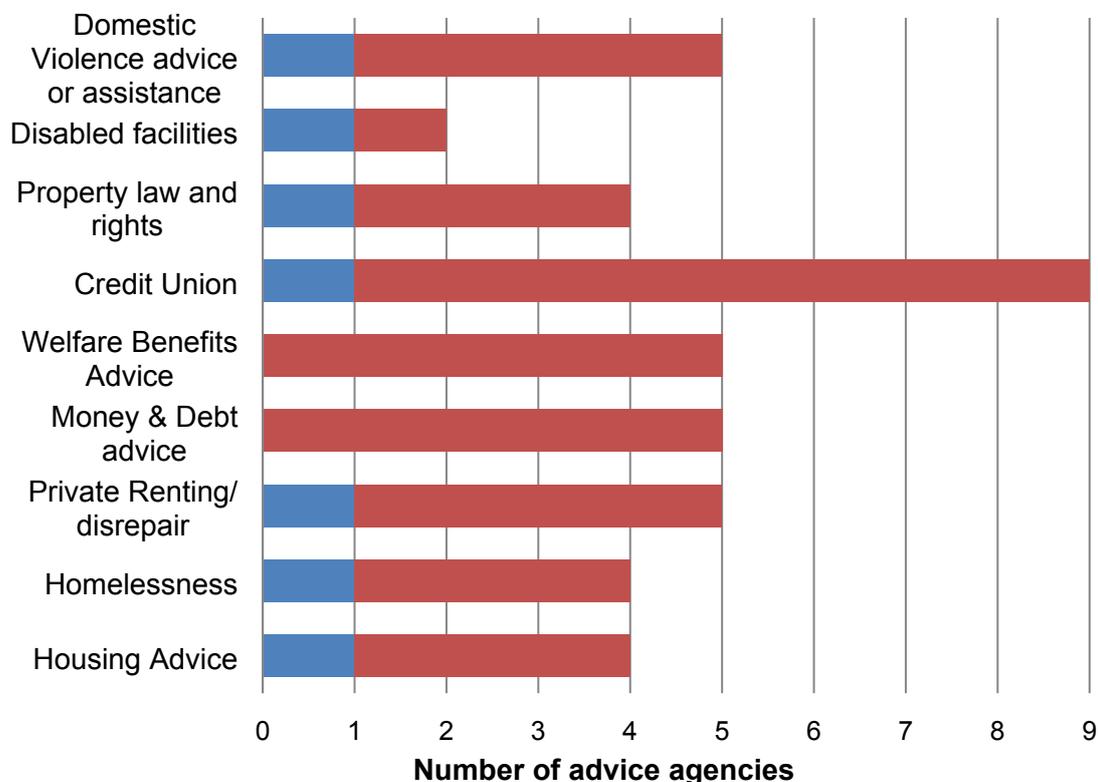
Members asked for a gap analysis of advice services within the Borough and the table below shows that there are 2 providers for each of the areas in question.

The sections in blue show the areas covered by the Council and those in red show those provided by voluntary agencies some of which are provided in Leicester e.g. Shelter provide services to Oadby and Wigston residents from their Advice Centre in Leicester.

Members will note that all of the key areas are covered to some degree either in-house or externally. More detailed information could be supplied if necessary to a future meeting.

(Continued overleaf)

Providers of Advice



13. CBL Statutory Consultation

Further to the report submitted to this committee in October 2015 regarding the review of the Housing Allocation Policy the statutory consultation process has commenced.

We have contacted the other registered providers who are part of Choice Based Lettings Consortium, placed an on line survey on the Council's web site and are consulting with the Resident Forums.

The results of the consultation will be reported to the next meeting.

14. Disabled Facility Grants (DFG's)

It was agreed at the last meeting that options be explored for the Council to join the Lightbulb Project as a means of delivering DFG's and adaptations for disabled tenants.

We have recently received further information from the Lightbulb Project as to how it would deliver the service and it has been agreed that an initial informal arrangement for the project to deliver 2-3 applications on behalf of this Council on a trial. The outcome of this trial will be reported to a future committee. An initial consideration of the Public Contract Regulations 2006 is that where there is informal joint working/co-operation among contracting authorities in the carrying out of public functions,

European procurement rules do not apply however this has to be kept under review. Further consideration will be given to the legal position following the trial.

15. Kennedy House Hostel

Following the update report given to the last meeting regarding the closure of the Kennedy House Hostel there have been no further developments at this stage as to its future use.

Members will be kept informed as and when there is something to report.

16. Warden Services

Following the decision to restructure the Housing and Community Support Services consultation with the affected staff is ongoing and a further report will be brought to the next meeting of the Committee.

In the meantime we are in the process of identifying those residents who are considered to be the most vulnerable and finalising the new arrangements for the revised service.

17. Community Payback Schemes

Following the successful completion of the previous schemes further projects are being planned for the spring of 2016.

18. Energy Conservation

Members have asked for a position statement regarding climate change and carbon reduction. A report addressing these issues with a view to devising a comprehensive energy conservation strategy will be brought to a future meeting of this committee.

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Implications	
Financial	The levels of arrears will affect the Council's net current assets position on its balance sheet and needs intensive management. Progress on the Capital schemes will affect the projected out-turn position.
Legal	No significant implications.
Risk	CR1 - Decreasing financial resources. CR4 - Damage to reputation regarding the change to warden services and changes to residential qualification. CR9 - Economy.
Equalities	Subject to the outcome of the consultation regarding the change to the residential qualification an equalities impact assessment will be carried out.