



**Service Delivery
Committee**

**Tuesday, 11 October
2016**

**Matter for Information
and Decision**

Title: Community Service Update

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1. Introduction

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

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to note the contents of the report.
2.2 Members are asked to adopt the Homelessness Strategy.
2.3 That the Chair of this Committee write to the Minister of State for Housing and Planning requesting the re-introduction of a fair rent scheme for new tenancies in the private sector.
2.4 That Officers be given authority to negotiate a new lease in respect of the telecommunications equipment at Chartwell House.

3. Information

3.1 Current Tenant Arrears

The target for 2016/17 is to reduce gross rent arrears to 2.5% as a percentage of Annual Rent Debit – as agreed by this committee in July 2016.

Gross Arrears as Percentage of Annual Rent Debit					
March	April	May	June	July	August
£136 623.28	£159 557.32	£140 009.01	£145 700.70	£158 758.01	£143 983.45
2.7%	3.2%	2.8%	2.92%	3.2%	2.9%

The Income Team now comprises 2 full time officers since June. Training of the new permanent member of staff has been completed and targeted actions of rent arrears are now up to full capacity.

The current arrears figure is on profile following the expected seasonal increase due to the holiday season and it is confidently expected that we will meet or exceed the end of year target.

(Continued overleaf)

3.2 Former Tenant Arrears

The target for 2016/17 is to reduce former tenant arrears to 1.5% as a percentage of Annual Rent Debit – as agreed by this committee in July 2016.

Former Tenant Arrears As Percentage Of Annual Rent Debit					
March	April	May	June	July	August
£108 330.96	£117 878.09	£118 363.99	£121 089.48	£122 039.59	£123 597.02
2.2%	2.4%	2.4%	2.4%	2.5%	2.5%

Members are advised that every effort is made to collect the rent lawfully due whilst tenancies are in force and that eviction is always seen as a last resort. Collection post tenancy is significantly more difficult and it is proposed to employ a specialist tracing and collection agency to pursue former tenant debt.

Following Committee approval in July 2016 a procurement exercise has taken place and a third party tracing and collections agency has been identified to assist in meeting this target. Talks with this company are progressing at the time of writing this report.

Where a debt is deemed to be irrecoverable it will be submitted for write off in accordance with the Council's financial regulations.

3.3 Gas Safety

100% compliance has been achieved as of the end of August 2016.

3.4 Voids Performance

The target for voids requiring a normal amount of re-let works for 2016/17 was set at 20 working days.

Void Performance (empty Council properties) - Excluding Properties Requiring Major Works		
Date	Number of normal lets	Average working days
Q3 2015/16	33	42
Q4 2015/16	18	23
Q1 2016/17	25	23
Q2 2016/17 to date	11	21

Progress has slowed due in part to the nature of the Council's remaining stock and the types of vacancies which arise. All sheltered flats and bedsits remain difficult to let along with family sized flats and maisonettes in certain central Wigston Magna locations. 4 of the lettings in Q1 2016/17 had multiple refusals which in certain cases added to the delay in letting.

Overall, voids performance has continued to improve as a result of the measures put in place at the start of this calendar year and notwithstanding the difficulties in letting certain types of property as described above we expect to meet or be very close to the target by the end of the current financial year.

3.5 Homelessness Strategy

Further to the approval of the draft homelessness strategy by Committee in July 2016 consultation has now been completed with all Registered Providers with whom the Council maintains nomination arrangements along with as many partner agencies as practicably possible including all the Leicestershire boroughs and districts. A page was created on the Council's website which was available for 3 weeks to all residents and other interested parties.

2 responses were received, neither of which raised any issues with the draft strategy. One response supported moving forward to achieve the 'gold standard' and the other highlighted that single homeless people could be referred to certain Leicester City located projects.

In light of the above Members are asked to formally adopt the strategy.

Partners were also asked to complete a short survey regarding 'fair rents'

Question	Responses	
	Yes	No
Would you like to see a return to a 'Fair Rent' system for all private tenancies in England?	3	0
If you answered 'yes' would you support Oadby & Wigston Borough Council advancing this with government?	3	0

It is recommended therefore that the Chair of this Committee write to the Minister of State for Housing and Planning requesting the re-introduction of a fair rent scheme for new tenancies in the private sector.

3.6 Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG's)

Members are reminded of the government's decision to increase funding for Disabled Facilities Grants for Leicestershire by £1.7 million for 2016-17 and the Leicestershire County Council decision to initially and arbitrarily assign this increased funding to the Better Care Fund to meet an unexpected shortfall elsewhere in the budget.

Dialogue is continuing and an update will be provided to members when this fluid situation reaches a conclusion.

3.7 Warden Call Monitoring and Housing Related Support

A Service Level Agreement has been signed with Charnwood Borough Council with a provisional commencement date of 3 October 2016. This service allows for tenants of sheltered accommodation and dispersed properties to request assistance in summoning friends, relatives or the emergency services at the point of crisis. It does not replace existing arrangements for repairs or other 'out of hours' issues which remain with the existing provider ASRA Service24.

The warden call monitoring arrangement provides reassurance at nil cost to individual tenants with the cost being borne by the Housing Revenue Account. Tenants in dispersed properties will need to maintain a telephone landline in order to access this service.

3.8 Chartwell House – Expiry of Lease for Rooftop Telecommunications Site

Members resolved at its meeting on 5 July 2016 not to renew the lease with the site operator (EE Limited).

However, after taking further legal advice, it has subsequently transpired that EE are protected by the Telecommunications Code which makes it very difficult for the landowner to require the removal of the equipment unless the operator agrees. In addition, the operator enjoys further statutory protection under part 2 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954. That being the case it is clear that this Council has little option but to renegotiate a new lease and it is proposed to appoint an external company experienced in these matters to act on the Council's behalf to secure the best possible terms and members are asked to approve this course of action.

3.9 Update on Work to Assess Viability of Reintroduction of Terraced House Refurbishment Grants

The potential scope of the proposal to re-introduce terraced house refurbishment is actively being examined with a view to establishing the viability of such a scheme.

Government funding for this initiative was withdrawn some time ago and it is clear that funding for such a scheme would have to be sought from additional borrowing by the General Fund which would have an impact on other priorities.

A further update will be submitted to Members once officers have completed their investigations.

3.10 Update on Liaison with MOD on Empty Properties Located on Namur Road

A letter to the Ministry enquiring about the possibility of leasing empty properties has gone unanswered and an approach has now been made to the national managing agents, Carillion Amey.

3.11 Empty Homes

A notice has now been served on 114 Uplands Road requiring the owner to:

- 1.** Cut down all vegetation in both the front and rear garden areas to ground level.
- 2.** Remove all cut vegetation to an authorised place of disposal.
- 3.** Remove all fly tipped rubbish on the site to an authorised place of disposal.
- 4.** Secure all ground and first floor windows and doors on all elevations by way of replacement of the glazing or by boarding up.

The owner has 1 month within the date of the notice to have completed items 1 2 and 3 above and 2 months from the date of the notice to complete item 4. The notice was served on 26 August 2016 and further action will be considered by way of compulsory purchase which would require approval by Council at a future date.

3.12 Update on Capital Programme

Details of the capital programme are attached at Appendix 1 of this report.

Some of the key highlights of the programme are as follows

Boulter Crescent: The final block of four properties in the refurbishment programme was completed on 9th September and the last group of decanted tenants returned to their homes on 13th, 14th and 15th September. The contractor will reduce the size of their site compound but will maintain a presence until around the end of October. This will facilitate carrying out remaining works to common areas, the externals of the community flat and minor works identified through snagging and defects inspections.

Chartwell House: the concrete repairs and external painting contract has been tendered and let. Pre contract meetings have been held and all necessary arrangements put in place for works to commence with access equipment going on site on Monday 12th September. This is a 6 week contract but could be affected if there are adverse weather conditions affecting either working at height or the materials being used.

King Street: the external works contract to replace defective retaining walls and extend dry and a yard area has now been completed. There were delays on this contact as contrary to what we had been advised when we consulted with utility companies prior to works services did run through the areas of excavation. Very positive feedback has been received from residents about the enhanced facilities now provided.

William Peardon Court, Kings Drive and Gibson Close: the replacement kitchen programme has now been completed and the first phase of the bathroom replacements (William Peardon Court) started on site on 13 September with provision of level access shower rooms to all flats.

External Wall Insulation to 152 homes: this contract has been tendered and preliminary works are starting on site under a letter of intent pending signing of the formal contract. The contractor commenced detailed surveys of homes on 6 September and will be setting up welfare and storage facilities with the first insulation expected to be fitted around the end of the month. The programme will start in Oadby (where EWI had been planned in Queen Street in a smaller one off project) before moving to Wigston and then South Wigston. The properties in South Wigston are all located in an area wide conservation area which means obtaining certain planning consents and a longer lead in time.

A small number of the homes still require boiler upgrades which will be carried in conjunction with the EWI works out and top ups of loft insulation will be completed where needed. All affected tenants have been notified and invited to a drop in event on the afternoon and evening of 21 September. All work is scheduled to be completed in the current financial year.

The projected spend of the planned works for 2016/17 including carry over from previous year is £4.6 Million.

3.13

Update on Asbestos Incident at Garages in Kenilworth Drive, South Wigston Affecting Marstown Avenue and Kenilworth Road Residents.

In early April 2016, the roofs of a garage block in Kenilworth Road South Wigston were jet washed. Material from the jet washing process was deposited on some of the gardens of adjoining houses, open ground around the site and railway property.

Investigations confirmed that some of the material was Asbestos containing material

(ACM) i.e containing fibrous chrysotile asbestos. The garages belonged to two trustees of a Personal Injury Compensation Trust with one beneficiary all of the same family. We have information that the beneficiary was involved in the task of jet washing of the roofs .

Since this time the beneficiary and owners have been approached and have agreed in principle to clear the asbestos contamination. Extensive sampling of all gardens affected has been undertaken identifying the extent of the contamination. Network Rail has arranged clearance of the railway land. We have informed the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) as this was apparently a construction work activity and they are investigating with a view to prosecution. Other relevant agencies were also contacted and advice sought from our legal advisers and Public Health England (PHE). Remediation work commence week commencing 26 September and the HSE are happy with the work completed so far.

3.14 Lightbulb

Further to the Committee’s decision on 5 July 2016 to approve in principle joining the Lightbulb project, we are awaiting sight of the final business case which is due at the end of September and a further report will be submitted to the next meeting of this Committee for further consideration.

Background Documents:-

Appendix 1 – Capital Programme

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Implications	
Financial (CR)	Efficient housing void and debt management is essential to keeping income streams in this service on target. Cost of the Asbestos cleanup works and recovery action.
Legal (AC)	CR 5 Effective utilisation of Assets/Buildings – Tackling the issue of empty homes in the Borough and the relevant enforcement action. Taking action against the garage owners in accordance with Environmental Protection Act 1990.
Risk (SG)	CR1 Decreasing Financial Resources - The level of arrears and void turnaround times will affect both the Council’s income streams and its net current assets position on its balance sheet. Both these areas need intensive management. Progress on the capital programme. CR4 Reputation Damage – failure to manage homelessness could lead to loss of public confidence and adverse publicity. Failure to take action to address the asbestos contamination issue.
Equalities (SG)	An initial screening of the draft homelessness strategy has been carried out and is attached.
	Equality Assessment:- <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Initial Screening <input type="checkbox"/> Full Assessment Not Applicable