



**Service Delivery
Committee**

**Tuesday, 17 January
2017**

**Matter for Information
and Decision**

Title: Community Services 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 That a Compulsory Purchase Order in respect of 114 Uplands Road Oadby be pursued.
2.3 To approve the tendering of the proposed new Cleaning Contract.

3. Information

3.1 Current Tenant Arrears

The target is to reduce the gross arrears to 2.5% of the annual rent debit by the end of the current financial year. The table below shows the performance from September through to December.

| September 2016 | October 2016 | November 2016 | December 2016 |
|-----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| £163,840 | £153,551 | £144,713 | £131,614 |
| 3.29% | 3.08% | 2.90% | 2.64% |

The current arrears figure is on profile to meet the target despite the expected seasonal increase in the lead up to Christmas. It is confidently expected that we will meet and exceed the end of year target of 2.5%.

Arrears are being affected by the increase in Universal Credit cases which stood at 7 cases by the end of 2016. In all cases direct payments have been requested, however there is a built in minimum 6 week delay for payments. The introduction of Universal Credit is likely to have an increasingly adverse impact on arrears and a brief summary of the implications is given in paragraph 3.2 below.

3.2

Universal Credit

Universal Credit is a major part of the Governments Welfare Reform Programme. It aims to simplify the system, get more people into work and save money. Universal Credit will ultimately replace other working age benefits (Jobseekers Allowance, Tax Credits, Employment and Support Allowance, Income Support and Housing Benefit) with one single claim.

Universal Credit will be paid as a single monthly payment in arrears to a single, nominated household account. A key aspect of Universal Credit is that it should mimic work and receipt of a salary.

Alternative Payment Arrangements (APAs) are available for claimants who cannot manage the standard Universal Credit payment. There are three types of APA available:

- Direct payment of the housing cost element to landlords (known as managed payments)
- Splitting of payment between members of a couple
- More frequent payment of benefit

Universal Credit for new claims for single claimants was rolled out in Oadby and Wigston from 25 January 2016. To date around 20 claims have been made.

Universal Credit for all claimant types will start in Oadby and Wigston from March 2018; after the rollout process has completed for new claims, the DWP will then begin moving all remaining existing benefit claimants to the full Universal Credit service.

This is expected to be completed by 2022 according to the DWP timetable.

Pensioner claims for Housing Benefit will not be part of the Universal Credit programme and will remain the responsibility of the Local Authority along with some working age claims that are currently not part of the migration plan.

Likely impacts – resulting in rising rent arrears *(there is some evidence of this from landlords whose tenants have already moved onto UC)*

- Tenants already having difficulty with money management before going on to UC and/or using UC to pay off other debts rather than their rent making rent collection more difficult and increasing rent arrears
- Delays in DWP processing UC applications; UC payments not being made on time and/or correctly

Support for residents

Claimants in receipt of UC with housing costs for rent are eligible to apply for a Discretionary Housing Payment. These are short term awards and are awarded based on a comparison of a claimant's income and outgoings. The claimant is usually required to demonstrate that they are taking some action to remedy their situation i.e. moving into work, seeking debt advice, moving to a cheaper property.

The DHP fund is cash limited

As more claimants in the borough migrate to Universal Credit this is likely to increase the demand for support with debt management

(Continued overleaf)

3.3 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 | | | | |
|--|-----------|----------|----------|----------|
| August | September | October | November | December |
| £123,597 | £123,319 | £127,763 | £128,966 | £130,193 |
| 2.5% | 2.49% | 2.58% | 2.61% | 2.63% |

The agreement has been signed with Medina the Council's selected collection agency and the first batch of cases has been prepared and despatched to the company to take appropriate action.

Cases that are deemed to be irrecoverable will be submitted for write off.

3.4 Gas Safety

99.8% compliance was achieved as of the end of December 2016. This reflects two properties where the safety check and service fell due during December 2016 but were not completed as we were unable to get access despite extensive efforts to arrange this over a number of weeks leading up to the due date. At the time of writing, letters warning of court action have been sent and Housing Officers are making further attempts to gain access. A verbal update on the position will be given at the meeting.

3.5 Void Performance

| Empty Council Properties - excluding properties requiring major works | | |
|---|------------------------|----------------------|
| Date | Number of normal voids | Average working days |
| Q3 2015/16 | 33 | 42 |
| Q4 2015/16 | 18 | 23 |
| Q1 2016/17 | 25 | 23 |
| Q2 2016/17 | 22 | 20 |
| Q3 2016/17 | 31 | 27 |

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

Performance for Q3 has been skewed by 2 hard to let sheltered properties which has distorted the overall void turnaround time.

A concerted effort to let a further 3 hard to let flats in Oadby is now underway involving writing to around 180 housing applicants and arranging group viewing sessions after the first bidding cycle of 2017.

However overall, voids performance has continued to improve notwithstanding the difficulties in letting certain types of property as described above.

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.

We have made further representations regarding this issue at a County wide level but have been informed that none of the Districts will receive the additional funding for 2016/17. None of the other Districts are prepared to pursue the matter further and in light of that it is felt that we have little option other than to reluctantly accept the decision.

However it has been confirmed that Districts will receive the full amount allocated by the Government for 2017/18.

3.7 Warden Call Monitoring and Housing Related Support

The transfer of the warden call monitoring to Charnwood Borough Council has now been completed and the arrangement with Service 24 has been terminated.

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

Specialist agents have now been appointed to negotiate a new lease on behalf of the Council. We have been advised that it is not unusual for these negotiations to take six months or more. However, rent has continued to be paid and this will continue during negotiations.

The telecoms company have indicated they are likely to meet the reasonable costs of our agents. Independent specialist legal advice will also be obtained once we receive draft terms of the lease.

Early indications from our agent are that there appears to be outdated and potentially redundant equipment on the site and that we should seek to negotiate its removal. This would reduce the visual impact of the site and may go some way to addressing members and residents concerns.

The telecoms company have indicated they wish to negotiate installing a back-up generator on site as they are now responsible for communications in the event of civil emergencies. If this were to be agreed we would need to ensure it would have minimal impact on residents with limits on when it could be used / tested etc.

3.9 Empty Homes - Private Sector

114 Uplands Road Oadby

Members will recall that a Section 125 Notice was served on the owner of the property in July 2016 requiring a number of improvements be carried out.

There has been no response to the order and extensive efforts have been made by staff to establish contact with the owner but to no avail. A letter was therefore sent to the owner on 29 December 2016 advising that it is the Council's intention to impose a forced sale.

Subject to agreement by this committee a Compulsory Purchase Order report will now be submitted to the next meeting of the Policy Finance and Development Committee for approval.

3.10 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 works to Boulter Crescent is now complete and an end of contract report is included as a separate agenda item.

Chartwell House: Phase 1 of the concrete repairs and external painting contract has been completed and the remaining blocks will be started in the next financial year.

Junction Road, Maromme Square and Burgess Street: Reduction of screen walls and amendments to play area.

Following consultation with residents details of the proposed scheme were sent out for further comment. As the ground outside the walled areas slopes away quite steeply, whilst being level inside, it is not possible to simply reduce the walls to ground level as this would result in dangerous drops in level.

The proposal is therefore to reduce the wall height and put railings on top. There were only a small number of responses but a common theme was that the suggested design would encourage climbing as too much of the wall was to be retained. The design has therefore been changed so that the wall is removed completely except where it retains higher ground and everything above ground level will be railings.

Suitable contractors have been identified and tenders went out week commencing 3 January 2017 seeking to commence work on site as soon as possible to ensure works are completed within the current financial year.

External Wall Insulation to 152 solid wall properties. This contract is progressing well with excellent customer feedback. As well as improving thermal efficiency it has also transformed the external appearance of the properties.

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

3.11 **The Lightbulb Project**

Further to the Committee's decision on 5 July 2016 to approve in principle joining the Lightbulb Project, discussions are currently ongoing with the Lightbulb Finance Team regarding queries on the Business Plan and a further report will be submitted to the next meeting of this committee for further consideration.

3.12 **Borough Wide Cleaning Contract.**

The cleaning of Council buildings and the communal areas of its housing stock is a mixture of direct labour and external contractors. Many of the arrangements are ad hoc or a temporary nature which should ideally be consolidated into a single long term contract.

Due to the monetary value a contract for the cleaning of all Council owned buildings has been advertised through the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU). Initial expressions of interest were received on 2 January 2017 and a shortlist of suitable companies is being compiled who may be invited to tender for the work.

A detailed specification of works for each building has been prepared and effective monitoring of the contract would be incorporated into the new arrangements to

ensure that the contract is delivered to a high standard and in accordance with the specification.

Members are asked to approve the tendering of a borough wide cleaning contract and to note that the feasibility of an in house bid is also being considered.

3.13 **Corporate Enforcement**

Asbestos Case - Marstown Avenue

Clearance of the site was organised by the Site Owner in regular dialogue with the Environmental Health Officer (EHO) leading on this case. This negated the need for formal action by the EH Team by virtue of the service of any statutory notices. The owner engaged the services of Aspect Solutions Limited to undertake the work as identified in the survey conducted by ICE Asbestos in July 2016.

The site clearance took place during week commencing 26th September 2016 under close supervision of the lead EHO. Since then we have been seeking a suitable site status report that confirms the site has been cleared to an acceptable level based on scientific analysis. This has not been forthcoming to date. Similarly we are also awaiting a site status report from Public Health England (PHE) so as to advise the residents on how they can use their outdoor garden areas following the clearance. Both pieces of information are actively being pursued by the EHTeam.

Residents were provided with a written update on Thursday 22nd December 2016 and will be advised of the feedback from the owner (or his contractors) and PHE once the relevant information has been provided.

The Lead officer has also helpfully provided a statement at the request of colleagues in the Health and Safety Executive who are taking their own formal action against the owner for breaches under the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012.

Dog Fouling

Over the last three months the main focus of activity has been the provision of advice and proactively stencilling and placing additional signage where necessary across the Borough. Regular monitoring is still being done in the parks and open spaces across the Borough and in the Horsewell Lane area in particular.

There were 25 dog related cases initiated in this time. Over half were connected with advice, stencilling and signage. Five cases related to reports of dangerous dogs which were jointly responded to with the Police and progressed in line with the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014.

Pest Control

52 initial requests in respect of pest complaints in domestic settings were received in the period 30 September - 31 December 2016.

| Pest Type | Numbers |
|------------------|----------------|
| Rats | 31 |
| Mice | 15 |
| Cockroaches | 0 |
| Squirrels | 3 |
| Fleas | 3 |
| Birds | 0 |

| | |
|--------------|-----------|
| TOTAL | 52 |
|--------------|-----------|

A report regarding the future of the Pest Control Service will be submitted to the next meeting of this committee.

Fly-Tipping

We received 18 reports of fly tipping which were investigated and progressed within the stipulated response times. In addition to this the Borough is regularly monitored for any nuisances in line with the requirements of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, section 79(1).

Three statutory notices were served:

| Legislation | Type | Served on |
|---|-------------|------------------|
| Anti Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014 s.43-58 | CPW | 28/09/16 |
| Anti Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014 s.43-58 | CPW | 19/10/16 |
| Environmental Protection Act 1990 s.88 (as amended)* | FPN | 14/11/16 |

CPW – Community Protection Warning

FPN – Fixed Penalty Notice

*Amended by The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005, section 19

Another two cases are being considered for the administration of a Formal Caution and advice and guidance is being sought from the legal team at North West Leicestershire DC.

Abandoned Vehicles

There have been 32 reports received of abandoned vehicles, all of which were investigated and progressed. In several cases, the reported vehicle did not meet the criteria for an abandoned vehicle so no formal action could be taken. In all such cases, the complainant was advised of the outcome of our investigation.

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. |
| Legal (AC) | CR 5 Effective utilisation of Assets/Buildings – Tackling the issue of empty homes in the Borough and the relevant enforcement action. . |
| 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 – . . |
| Equalities (SG) | No significant implications. |
| | Equality Assessment:- |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Initial Screening <input type="checkbox"/> Full Assessment <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable |

