



<b>Service Delivery Committee</b>	<b>Tuesday, 10 October 2017</b>	<b>Matter for Information and Decision</b>
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**Title: Community Services Update**

**Author(s): Stephen Glazebrook (Interim Head of Communities)**

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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. Recommendation(s)**

- 2.1. Members are asked to note the contents of the report.
- 2.2. Agree that Fire Risk Assessments are carried out on a 3 year cycle.
- 2.3. That subject to the successful completion of negotiations that delegated authority is given to the Interim Head of Community to enter into a new lease for the telecommunications aerial at Chartwell House.

## **3. Information**

### **3.1. Current Tenant Arrears**

The target for 2017/18 is to reduce the gross arrears to 2% of the annual rent debit by the end of the financial year ending 31 March 2018. The table below shows the performance to the end of August.

<b>April 2017</b>	<b>May 2017</b>	<b>June 2017</b>	<b>July 2017</b>	<b>August 2017</b>
£127 045	£145 582	£154 108	£161 092	£168 906
2.61%	2.98%	3.16%	3.3%	3.46%

Whilst the arrears have increased since the start of the financial year we are broadly where we would expect to be at this time of the year following the usual seasonable increase after the holiday season. The introduction of Universal Credit and the Benefit Cap is however starting to have an adverse impact on the arrears position.

We are informed by the DWP to expect the full rollout of Universal Credit by March 2018. Members should note that research published by the Association of Retained Council Housing and the National Federation of ALMOs in July 2017 showed that Universal Credit recipients were more likely to be in arrears and when in arrears, the amount owed was significantly higher than those not receiving Universal Credit.

The Welfare Benefit Cap continues to have an impact particularly on single parent families with 3 or more children. The Council has 8 tenants affected by the cap which has resulted in 4 having legal action initiated against them owing to persistent refusal to pay their rent.

We are still confident that we will hit the yearend target by March 2018 but the

situation is likely to be much more challenging in the future.

### 3.2. **Former Tenant Arrears**

The yearend target for 2017/18 is to reduce former tenant arrears to 2.5% as a percentage of the annual rent debit. The table below shows the performance to date.

<b>April 2017</b>	<b>May 2017</b>	<b>June 2017</b>	<b>July 2017</b>	<b>August 2017</b>
£124 496	£125 082	£130 557	£117 378	£116 563
2.55%	2.57%	2.68%	2.41%	2.39%

The first payments through our relationship with our appointed tracing and recovery agents Medina have been received. However, the majority of the decrease has resulted from irrecoverable debts being written off after tracing and collection efforts have failed.

We are confident that the Former Tenant Arrears target of 2.5 % will be achieved by the end of March 2018.

### 3.3. **Voids (Empty Properties)**

Between April and the end of August 2017, 21 empty properties were re-let at an average turnaround time of 16 days against a target of 20 days.

This is regarded as upper quartile performance and is a testament to the team work between housing options and the maintenance team to turn round properties quickly and to reduce rent loss.

### 3.4. **Housing Allocations Policy and Choice Based Lettings**

The new Choice Based Lettings system is on track to be implemented on time and expects to advertise its first property on 16 November 2017.

All existing housing applicants have received 3 letters about the new system including 2 invitations to register.

The new system will bring significant advantages for both customers and the Council.

### 3.5. **Homelessness Temporary Accommodation**

Unfortunately the incidence of homelessness has continued to increase and this coupled with a dearth of available properties to let has meant that a number of families with and expecting children have been accommodated at various times in Bed & Breakfast style hotel accommodation in Leicester. To replace the need for hotel accommodation, a temporary leasing of a hostel in Leicester is now in place. Families currently in hotel accommodation are being moved to the hostel. The leasing of the hostel will cost £50k per annum and whilst under the current benefit system approximately 75% of these costs can be recovered, with the introduction of Universal Credit next year, the recovery of costs will cause significant difficulties.

Strenuous efforts are being made to source self contained accommodation in both the Borough and in Leicester to meet the continuing increased demand.

An extra post has been created within the Housing Options Team to cope with the

greater workload.

### 3.6. **Supporting Leicestershire Families (SLF)**

A service update from Leicestershire County Council's SLF team as at September 2017 is attached at **Appendix A**.

### 3.7. **Gas Safety**

100% compliance has been achieved as at the end of September 2017 and good progress is being made on those due in October. Procedures have been amended to strengthen the Council's position should it at any point prove necessary to take legal action to gain access.

### 3.8. **Empty Homes - Private Sector**

#### **114 Uplands Road**

This property has now been sold and it is expected that the property will now be brought up to an acceptable standard and occupied in the near future.

#### **37 Newton Lane**

Despite numerous attempts by staff there has been no further contact with the owners of the property and it now proposed to take the appropriate legal action to bring the property back into use which could involve applying for a compulsory purchase order.

### 3.9. **Chartwell House, Oadby - Expiry of Lease for Rooftop Telecommunications Site**

The Council is now in receipt of draft heads of terms for renewal of the lease for the roof top site at Chartwell House which is used as an electronic communications base station. By appointing specialists in this area to act on the Council's behalf the proposed lease is a vast improvement when compared to the original 1996 version. The new lease provides an annual payment of £14,000 which will increase in line with the Retail Prices Index. Specialist legal advice is also to be taken prior to entering the lease.

The current position is that as part of the lease negotiations detailed plans have been submitted requesting permission to install a back-up generator at ground level. This would be sited near the boundary fence at the end the building that faces the two story car park. A small fenced compound would secure this and hide it from sight at ground level.

We are currently awaiting information as to why a back-up generator is now necessary to run the site; the level of noise it will generate and in what circumstances and likely frequency it would be used and tested. We are also seeking information as to whether any of the existing equipment on the roof is redundant and can be removed.

It is not considered the generator would cause any significant loss of amenity to residents given the large size of the gardens so are minded to approve this request provided we receive assurances it will not cause nuisance to residents. It is likely the installation will require planning permission.

### 3.10. **Update on Capital Programme**

All capital projects carried over from 2016/17 financial year have now been completed. A full schedule of 2017/18 projects is attached at **Appendix B**.

Following the Grenfell Tower tragedy, fire risk assessments have been checked and reviewed on all Council owned buildings. There were no major areas of concern, however it is felt that the assessments should be carried out more regularly, every 3 years instead of every 5 years and these will be consolidated within the ongoing maintenance plan. An update on fire risk assessments as at September 2017 is attached at **Appendix C**.

### 3.11 **Borough Wide Cleaning Contract**

The Borough wide cleaning contract commenced on Monday 11 September 2017.

All four Council staff transferred to the new contractor on their existing terms and conditions and a further four of the previous contractor's staff also transferred.

### 3.12. **Local Housing Company**

Following the approval of the new housing company, Bushloe Developments, all of the administrative arrangements have now been put in place and the company is now open for business.

Currently the company is looking at the feasibility of developing a small number of development sites in the Borough as well as buying a number of properties on the open sales market.

A detailed progress report will be submitted to the Council's Advisory Board in due course.

### 3.13. **Lightbulb Project Update**

At the time of writing this report the Lightbulb transformational project is now nearing completion and is due to go live on 2 October.

Lightbulb will, under the new arrangements, be responsible for the administration of the Council's Disabled Facilities. This Council's officers through the Lightbulb Steering Group and Programme Board have played an active part in the progress of the project and we are pleased to report that Lightbulb has won a national award as the Best Collaborative Working Initiative with other public sector or third sector.

Members at the last meeting asked for a breakdown of how the transformational budget has been spent and this is attached at **Appendix D**.

### 3.14. **Pest Control**

A plan has been devised for commercialisation of the Pest Control Service and as well as advertising the new service on the Council's website and in the Letterbox magazine, all non food businesses in the Borough have been written to, making them aware of the Council's services. So far there has been a limited response and it is likely to take some time to realise its full potential.

Consideration is also actively being given to offer our pest control services to food related businesses. There could possibly be a conflict of interest if the Council were taking enforcement action where it is also acting as the contractor providing the pest control service. However, providing certain safeguards are put in place i.e. there is a proper client/contractor split this should not be a problem. Legal advice is also being sought on the issue.

Members at the last meeting asked for a statement of the income and expenditure for pest control and this is attached at ***Appendix E***.

**Background Documents:**

None.

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<b>Implications</b>   Community Services Update	
<b>Finance</b>	Efficient housing and void management is essential in maintaining income streams.
<b>Chris Raymakers</b> (Head of Finance, Revenues and Benefits)	
<b>Legal</b>	The Council's lawyers have confirmed that it has the power to set up the Local Housing Company. The Contract for the new cleaning contract has been completed and signed by all parties.
<b>Anne Court</b> (Director of Services / Monitoring Officer)	
<b>Corporate Risk(s) (CR)</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Other Corporate Risk(s)</b>
<b>Stephen Glazebrook</b> (Interim Head of Communities)	A full risk assessment has been carried out in relation to the new Local Housing Company.
<b>Corporate Priorities (CP)</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>An Inclusive and Engaged Borough (CP1)</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Effective Service Provision (CP2)</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Balanced Economic Development (CP3)</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Green &amp; Safe Places (CP4)</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Wellbeing for All (CP5)</b> <p>The new Housing Company will seek to address the Council's Corporate priorities by using modern methods of construction including the highest levels of Energy Conservation providing green and safe places to live.</p>
<b>Stephen Glazebrook</b> (Interim Head of Communities)	
<b>Vision &amp; Values (V)</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>"A Strong Borough Together" (Vision)</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Accountability (V1)</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Respect (V2)</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Teamwork (V3)</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Innovation (V4)</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Customer Focus (V5)</b> <p>The new Housing Company will seek to work with the Council's chosen Vision and Values and will adopt innovative solutions to provide new housing in the Borough.</p>
<b>Stephen Glazebrook</b> (Interim Head of Communities)	
<b>Equalities &amp; Equality Assessment(s) (EA)</b>	An initial Equality Assessment in respect of the new Housing Company was submitted in the report to full Council.
<b>Stephen Glazebrook</b> (Interim Head of Communities)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Not Applicable (EA)</b>