

INCOME COLLECTION IMPROVEMENT DRAFT ACTION PLAN

Introduction

The purpose of this action plan is to drive our arrears strategy to ensure we have a well rounded efficient approach to arrears and income management. These actions are intended to accommodate the needs of the customer. This plan reflects the fact that our approach to arrears continues to evolve and therefore some of the actions have more of a project bias. The Housing Income Management KLOE is used as a framework for the plan. This meets the strategic objective in our Corporate Improvement Plan of “improving performance in rent collection and recovery of rent arrears close to Unitary Council’s median performance level.”

For 2008 / 09 we are aiming to continue to improve by achieving an arrears performance of 2.2% arrears as a percentage of the collectable debit.

Consultation

Internal customers in Housing Management and Housing Solutions have been involved with the development of this plan. Whilst no formal consultation specifically on arrears has taken place, feedback from external customers has influenced a number of key objectives in the plan. Anecdotal evidence from external customers such as not having enough flexibility on direct debit dates has influenced our strategy. We will be sharing this plan with customers at the Tenants Conference on 13th September 2008. Customers will have the opportunity to take the plan away with them and provide feedback to us by the end of October 2008. As the plan develops further discussion will be held via the Tenants Federation.

Joint working with Capita (our Housing Benefit provider) is ongoing and has already helped developed a Housing Benefit Service Level agreement.

Management and Monitoring of this Action Plan

This plan is jointly owned by the Housing Managers with Mike Carey (Neighbourhood Housing Manager), and David Little (Debt Recovery Manager) working as lead officers reviewing the plan monthly. Progress against the plan, along with new actions, are discussed at bi-monthly arrears meetings attended by the Housing Management Team.

Version Control

Version 1 July 2008

Objective		Actions		Benefits and measures of success	Timescales and milestones	Financial and other resource requirements	Responsible Officer
1	Ensure the organisation complies with the statutory requirements & adopt good practice methods in terms of rent & service charge setting.	1.1	Investigate ways of improving information on service costs to tenants.	Greater clarity for tenants. A reduction in the number of people who query this. Less time taken dealing with general enquiries.	Sep-08	Management resource	Sara Floody
		1.2	Continue to sustain an approach to the annual tenants conference of ensuring information sharing, and consultation on rent setting and service charging.	Information return form to be given to conference attendees and return response to be analysed. Numbers of residents attending event.	Annually every September. In 2008 this action plan will also be shared with tenants and leaseholders.	Management resource. Administration resource	Accounting Group Manager TPU Team
		1.3	Introduction of corporate debt policy with a clear policy of priorities.	This will create a joined up approach enabling corporate debts to be prioritised.	Policy now signed off.	Input from key stakeholders	Head of Housing Mgt. (for making sure this happens corporately)

		1.4	Have an identified Officer as lead for keeping the Housing Income management KLOE under review.	Ensuring that this action plan is up to date, that we are keeping up to date with best practice.	Six monthly review	Management resource	Mike Carey
2	Ensure the organisation minimises the loss of income by taking prompt & appropriate action to recover both current & former service user arrears & other debts.	2.1	Set and agree quarterly performance (current arrears) targets for each patch in the City and ensure regular monitoring carried out. Monitoring is carried out by: Weekly – DRM/LHM Monthly – DRM/LHM Quarterly – DRM/LHM/NHM & at performance meeting with Head of Service	This will enable us to monitor good / bad performance. We are aiming to achieve a year end figure of 2.2% in 2008 / 09. Weekly arrears graphs produced by the DRM - city wide - area - patch - splits	Ongoing throughout year. Figures are disseminated weekly to all staff to help create focus.	Statistics from HMIS team in IT.	Housing Mgt Team DRM LHMs NHMs Head of Service
		2.2	Diarise a programme of ret action days	This targets under achieving patches using pooled divisional resources in order to maximise rent income. (statistical information on patches is that produced by the DRM).	A programme of focus days are in place for each month. Patches in need of attention are identified prior to the day.	Management resource to oversee focus days and staff resource to run them.	DRM NHMs LHM's

		2.3	Evaluate feasibility of having a specialist Debt Recovery Team for all aspects of Council Rents including former tenant arrears. (If this approach is taken it will be part of a wider restructure of the housing service).	This would create a team with sole responsibility for arrears from beginning to end, streamlining the process, and focusing expertise.	To report on best practice by end of September.	Management resource	DL / MC to carry out initial research
		2.4	Evaluate reasons for arrears trends and propose options to enhance performance..	This will create understanding of why performance rises then falls and recommend a solution. Flattening our arrears profile will enable us to set more accurate arrears targets.	Initial report completed. Recommend outcome by October.	Management resource	DL / MC
		2.5	Review the rent free weeks	To look at best practice – assess whether the rent free weeks are at the right time of year – assess how they link in with arrears trends and performance (see 2.4)	By October.	Management resource	DL / MC
		2.6	Evaluate the advantages of having a specialist Welfare Advice Officer within the Debt Recovery Team.	This will create a specialist point of resource within the team.	To begin a pilot in August reporting outcome by December.	Management resource	DL / MC

		2.7	Carry out a review of all post-Court cases over £1000 and ensure an agreed plan of action against each case.	This will identify both strong and weak points ensuring cases are progressing consistently and to the correct standard. (Follow up checks are carried out).	Review cases to £1400 by end of Sept 08. By December 08 to ensure all cases over £1000 (including those actions previously agreed) have been reviewed.	Management resource	MC / DL
		2.8	Evaluate and report on twilight working pilot carried out by the Debt Recovery Team	This may help us reach tenants who are unavailable during the day. Aim is to achieve a minimum contact rate of 70% with tenants by phone during extended hours.	Report completed with recommendations. To agree these with key stakeholders by October	Management resource	DL / NHM's
		2.9	Regular liaison meetings to be held with HB including the monitoring of the Service Level Agreement.	This will achieve greater transparency and more joined up working.	Bi monthly meetings scheduled with Capita managers.	Management resource	MC / DL
		2.10	Pre-tenancy work to identify where it is already known that the new tenancy would benefit from support.	This will help make sure that there is less chance of new tenancies failing.	Meeting with Allocations in September to discuss how we can	Staff resource from Allocations	DL / MC / Allocations

			Homelessness pre-tenancy training for young homeless people, details to be included in the Allocations file.		achieve this.		
		2.11	For singles, the Next Of Kin to be given & signed permission sought for SCC to contact in circumstances where there is no response.	This will enable us to progress cases where the tenant is not engaging with us.	Sept '08	Management resource	DL/ MC
		2.12	Identification by Allocations of those at risk as a result of no bank account, age, former tenant debt, and to send case file to LHO.	This will enable the profiling and monitoring of higher risk accounts.	Discuss feasibility with Allocations in September.	Management resource plus Allocations staff resource if implemented	DL / MC / Allocations
		2.13	Consolidate ideas for new incentive scheme	To look at best practice and to introduce incentive schemes that will impact positively on increasing income.	Currently researching. Consolidate by end of August. Consultation with internal staff. Briefing to Executive member by September.	Management resource	SF/ DL
		2.14	Promote direct debits (possible link to 2.19 will	Increased number of direct debit payers by		Management resource.	SF / DL

			need to be explored)	400 by April 2010. Analysis of the numbers of direct debit payers taking up new payment dates.		Link to promotional campaigns – financial requirement.	
		2.15	Introduce red letters, to be used sparingly.	This will give correspondence greater impact with the addition of a red reminder bill (like a domestic household bill).	Mar '09 Software constraints currently prevent this, but is achievable with planned software releases.	Management / IT resource	DL
		2.16	Pilot Money Judgements on static and small arrears	A reduction in static arrears and smaller cases under £100.	Implement small pilot of 50 cases by October '08	Management resource to plan pilot then staff resource	DL
		2.17	Following the moving of the policy to the corporate debt dept, ensure full implementation of the former tenants policy, including close co-ordination, a clear outline of responsibilities, & the setting up & establishing of formal performance monitoring arrangements.	This will help to drive performance	Agree target framework by October '08, implementing by November '08.	Management resource	Head of Housing / DL/ MC / SF

		2.18	Refresher training on procedures	This will ensure staff are all working consistently with optimum approach.	Sept '08	Management / staff resource	DL / MC
		2.19	Instigate a seasonal poster campaign to dovetail with the annual Xmas campaign	This will help raise awareness of the importance of not having arrears.	Initial ideas collated by end of August '08 for implementation for an Xmas poster campaign.	Management resource and Communications resource	Steve Smith
		2.20	Attendance at Rent conferences and using Housemark quarterly as a resource to learn good practice	This will mean that we can learn success stories from others.	Ongoing	Management resource	DL / MC / SF
		2.21	Obtain sign off on arrears procedures	This will ensure procedures are technically correct with sign off being obtained from Legal.	Obtain sign off from Legal by mid August	Management / Legal resource	DL
3	Ensuring that service users receive effective welfare benefit & debt advice to maximise income & manage debt.	3.1	Allocations to send out a letter at offer time covering: charges & running costs, documents to bring up at sign up, & the offer of money advice.	This will better inform tenants of their responsibility in paying rent and other charges, and will aid a smoother transition at sign up.	Sept '08	Allocations resource	Allocations / DL / MC
		3.2	Set up a meeting with relevant agencies to agree a strategic	This will ensure a more joined up approach.	Oct '08	Management resource	Allocations / MC / DL

			approach on income maximisation, including benefit take-up campaigns & extending information packs & factsheets.				
		3.3	Ensure Housing Officers are adequately trained on use of Ferret.	This will help inform tenants of likely entitlement to Housing Benefits, and other welfare benefits.	Review quarterly	Local Manager resource	LHM's
4	Access – this is about communication with our service users and stakeholders.	4.1	Carry out a survey of Tenants and Leaseholders to seek views on payment methods & accessibility to services.	Ensure service is tailored to needs of Customers.	November '08	Management resource	SF