



Tenancy Audits

To:

Cllr Bird, Executive Councillor for Housing
Housing Scrutiny Committee, 22nd September 2022

Report by:

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Wards affected:

All Wards

Key Decision

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides a background to Tenancy Audit visits pilot to date, which commenced in April 2022, and seeks approval to permanently adopt this function within City Homes.
- 1.2 337 Tenancy Audit visits have been carried out and this report will provide details of the outcome of these visits. This highlights the value in carrying out such work to ensure that our tenants are supported in a variety of ways, that our systems are up to date with the correct household information and our properties are being looked after and used for the intended purpose.

2. Recommendations

The Executive Councillor is recommended to:

- 2.1 Note the report detailing the findings of the Tenancy Audit visits pilot to date.
- 2.2 Approve the adoption of a permanent tenancy audit function by City Homes.
- 2.3 Agree to incorporate a budget bid into the 2023/24 HRA budget process for the addition of a permanent, full time equivalent, housing officer to support this work, to be considered alongside other spending priorities.

3. Background

Page: 2

- 3.3 Approval was given by the Housing Scrutiny Committee on the 15th January 2020 to pilot Tenancy Audit visits and fund 1 FTE fixed-term 12 month post to complete this work.
- 3.4 Tenancy Audits are necessary to:
 - Update the household information.
 - Help us to deliver quality and timely services that are tailored to individual needs.
 - Ensure the best use of resources and value for money.
 - Check the condition of the properties and take the appropriate action where necessary.
 - Help identify any customer support needs and to refer them onto specialist agencies for individual support.
 - Identify tenancy fraud and other breaches of tenancy.
 - Identify households who are under-occupying properties and provide support if they wish to move to smaller properties.
 - Identify Housing Need and signpost to the appropriate service area.
 - Ward profiling/social value to feed into the wider projects across the Council.
- 3.5 Following an internal review, a decision was made for this work to be split between the Housing Officers to ensure that the work generated because of these visits was clear to the member of staff who would be following up on the work. This would also mean that the communication with the tenant would be clear and consistent, with them knowing who their point of contact is. By taking ownership of this task for their relevant patch, the Housing Officer would be able

to plan their workload more efficiently. Therefore, five patches were created to accommodate the new fixed term post.

- 3.6 Due to the restrictions around Covid-19, this pilot was delayed. The work commenced on 13th April 2022. The data used within this report is for the work completed between 13th April and 12th August 2022.
- 3.7 It is our aim to visit at least 15% of our housing stock by the end of March 2023, and subject to approval being granted, continue beyond that so that we eventually visit all of our properties. Officers may need to review our target in this respect because, as this report outlines, tenancy audits can create a significant amount of follow-up work.
- 3.8 **Appendix B** provides a summary of the work that has been identified because of the 337 visits that have been completed to date. This is 4.79% of the Council's housing stock.
- 3.9 In total, 403 visits (5.72%) have been attempted but access has not yet been gained in 66 properties.

The outputs show that tenancy audits are a worthwhile and valuable task to complete, however, they are very resource intensive.

- Average time taken per visit – 35 minutes
- Average time taken for post visit actions (per action) – 50 minutes

Based on these averages, we can estimate that to complete the tenancy audits across the remainder of our general needs and sheltered properties (7,040 properties) will take a minimum of 9,706 hours or 1,312 days of work. This does not factor in the time taken per refused access, or for return visits, and is therefore an optimistic estimate.

If this workload is split between five Housing Officers, it will require 1,941 hours or 262 days of work each. If it is split between four Housing Officers, it will require 2,426 hours or 328 days of work each.

We did not hold accurate household information for almost half of those properties we have carried out audits for to date. These have now been updated as a direct result of the Tenancy Audit visit.

Actions required relating to tenancy/property issues or support needs have been identified in 86% of the properties that have had a tenancy audit completed. On average, there are two issues or support needs identified per property visited. At most, there have been six actions identified in one property visited.

65 households have been supported with better stock management, either upsizing, downsizing, or moving into more suitable accommodation for their needs. In 75% of the referrals made to Children's Social Care, overcrowding has been identified as an issue.

In 98 properties, repairs have been identified and reported by the Housing Officers. Warning letters have been issued in these cases to remind tenants of their obligations to report repairs within the conditions of their tenancy agreement. There are also significant numbers of unauthorised alterations, with alterations such as garden decking or partition walls identified. In cases of poor property condition, issues such as poor decorative standard, overgrown gardens and the presence of pests have been identified.

As a direct result of the Tenancy Audit visits, we have identified seven domestic abuse cases and the appropriate support has been offered to the victim. Three of the identified cases have met the threshold for a formal referral to be made for Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) support.

18 Safeguarding referrals have been made in total and in 89% of those cases, issues with the property condition have been identified, predominantly poor property conditions and hoarding.

The Business Case for Tenancy Audits

- 3.10 In addition to the value to the Council and tenants from the outputs detailed above and in Appendix B, Tenancy Audit visits should save the Council a considerable amount of money by working proactively to prevent issues escalating. For instance, by identifying and addressing property condition issues and unauthorised alterations following the Tenancy Audit, the Council should see a reduction in

void repair and time costs, as well as a reduction in the loss of rental income.

- 3.11 Housing Officers are able to identify tenancy or estate issues early, so that they are resolved before escalating into a bigger issue that will take more time and resource to resolve. The Council should in turn see a reduction in the number of complaints received. For example, during a Tenancy Audit, we identified that a tenant who had failed to engage with the Council's contractor has several disabilities that were not known to the Council. One of these is that they are not able to open and respond to letters or telephone calls, so special measures have now been put in place to communicate solely by email with this tenant, which will prevent any future missed appointments, saving the Council time and money.
- 3.12 The Tenancy Audit visits are allowing those experiencing Domestic Abuse the opportunity to seek help. Aside from the positive impact for the well-being of the individual(s) concerned, this also saves the Council time and money. The Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) has found that residents living with Domestic Abuse are four times more likely to have anti-social behaviour complaints made against them. They are also four times more likely to have a Notice of Seeking Possession served against them and more likely to be in rent arrears of more than £1,000. Void properties are six times more expensive to prepare to re-let.

4. Implications

a) Financial Implications

Page: 5

If approved, a bid will be made within the 2023/2024 budget setting process to fund the additional permanent 1 FTE Housing Officer. The cost for this post is £47,450.

b) Staffing Implications

If the permanent 1 FTE Housing Officer is not approved, the patches would need to revert to four, meaning an increase of properties to each of the remaining 4 FTE Housing Officers. An additional implication would be that we would no longer be able to carry out Tenancy Audit visits. The

post holder of the current fixed-term Housing Officer post would return to their substantive post.

c) Equality and Poverty Implications

An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and is attached as **Appendix A**.

d) Net Zero Carbon, Climate Change and Environmental Implications

The climate change tool has been completed and has concluded that this project will have a low negative rating and therefore a low impact overall. This is because there will be a slight increase in vehicle usage, but this will be mitigated by incorporating Tenancy Audits with visits already booked in and where visits are to be conducted outside of these, these will be carried out by visiting one street at a time so the Housing Officer can walk from property to property. In addition, there will be an increase in the use of paper, but this will be recycled via the confidential waste once the information has been uploaded to the system. The Council are considering mobile working IT solution options so that this process can be made paper free. There are no other impacts that have been identified from completing the tool.

e) Procurement Implications

None.

f) Community Safety Implications

The Tenancy Audit visits have already had a positive impact on community safety as they have helped to identify concerns that are now being addressed. It is anticipated that we will continue to identify issues that would not otherwise have been reported to the Council and we will also work towards prevention of such issues.

5. Consultation and communication considerations

An article was written in the Summer addition of Open Door explaining the purpose of Tenancy Audit visits. Documents have been shared with other relevant departments within the Council.

6. Background papers

The budget for the pilot was agreed at the January 2020 Housing Scrutiny Committee Meeting as part of the annual budget setting process. Item 20/9/HSC contains this report [Agenda for Housing Scrutiny Committee on Wednesday, 15th January, 2020, 5.30 pm - Cambridge Council](#)

7. Appendices

Appendix A – Equalities Impact Assessment

Appendix B – Summary of Outputs

8. Inspection of papers

If you have a query on the report please contact Anna Hill, Housing Services Manager (City Homes), tel: 01223 458312, email: anna.hill@cambridge.gov.uk .