

Tenants' and Leaseholders' Forum Action and Decision Log

2nd June 2020 – Telephone Conference

1) Welcome and apologies

Forum members present: Wendy Biddles, Gwen Clifford, May Jones, Peter Hookway, Phillip Allen

Apologies: Jean Williams, Joe Carroll. Ann Green

Leicester City Council Officers: Chris Burgin (Director of Housing), Helen McGarry (Programme Manager), Shain Mohammed (Business Change Manager)

2) Introduction

Chris Burgin introduced the meeting stating he would like the work of the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Forum to re-start again, following a break due to Covid19. Discussions took place with members as to how this could happen, when it was likely face to face meetings would not be feasible for the foreseeable future.

Decision: Meetings would continue via telephone conference calls and this is to be reviewed at the end of each future meeting. This is to be a standard agenda item at each meeting.

Action: Shain Mohammed to call each member and explain how to mute and unmute phones during telephone conference calls.

3) Tackling the challenges of Covid19

Chris Burgin provided an overview of the Housing Divisions response to Covid19.

Key points:

- The critical services in Housing that have continued to operate have been:
 - Responding to gas emergencies – We have been receiving approximately 30 calls a day in relation to this. The Gas Regulator has stated gas safety checks must also continue during this period and timescales for these have not been extended, so annual gas safety checks are still taking place.

- Emergency repairs – It has been our priority to ensure tenants and staff are safe and therefore only essential repair work has been carried out. Demand for emergency repairs has been relatively low, with the completion of approximately 100 jobs per day.
- Homelessness support – Homelessness services have been working hard to get homeless people off the streets and into a safe environment. To do this we have increased our supply of temporary accommodation by 216 units. The Outreach Team has continued to go out to identify rough sleepers who require temporary accommodation. About 15 of these people have refused the support we have offered. Additional services have been put in place, particularly related to health and drug / alcohol support. Also, people placed in B + B are being provided with food parcels. We have temporarily closed the day centre at the Dawn Centre to protect residents who are living there and to reduce the spread of Covid19 to people who may have used the day centre.
- Tenancy Management – the focus of these services has been to ensure our tenants are safe with work ongoing with Fire Safety Checks. Approximately 6,000 telephone calls have been made to vulnerable tenants to offer support. This is on top of the calls that have been made corporately to potentially vulnerable people living in the city. STAR have also been supporting 600 of our most vulnerable tenants. The Income Management Team have been providing support to tenants, particularly in relation to claiming benefits, where their financial situation has changed as a result of Covid19

Challenges:

- Rent arrears have increased by approximately £78,000 per week and total arrears are up to £2.1 million. Courts are currently closed resulting in us being unable to take action against tenants who are not paying their rent and who are refusing to engage with our services.
- 5,000 non-priority repairs have been logged – This will result in a backlog of repairs and will be a challenge to catch up as we develop our recovery plans.
- Gas servicing – A number of tenants haven't wanted us to go into their homes due to Covid19 safety concerns, so non completion of servicing is increasing.
- We have over 200 people in temporary accommodation, that we will need to find homes for.
- Building companies that undertook our capital work have been closed. This has impacted on the installation of kitchens, bathrooms and development of new homes.
- Some services have not been operating at full speed, for example the Voids Team. Previously a team of operatives would undertake work in an empty property, but due to social distancing requirements, only one operative at a time can be in the property, which is slowing down the completion of work prior to re-letting. However, we have been prioritising repairs to void properties for those experiencing homelessness, domestic violence and harassment.

4) Plans for recovery]

Chris Burgin explained the plans for the recovery of Housing Services:

Key Points:

- Some services are currently operating, however, at a reduced level.
- Recovery plans are currently being developed with Heads of Service.
- The full recovery of services is not expected to be achieved overnight and will be phased over a number of weeks and months. This is dependent on the Covid19 situation and whether we experience a second spike in the number of cases.
- Risk Assessments are being undertaken for all the work that is carried out and any risks are to be mitigated. This includes the identification of personal protective equipment that our staff will need.
- Buildings are to be prepared for staff / customers to use and access safely, this is likely to be at a reduced level to ensure safety.
- There are a number of staff that are currently shielding. We must ensure these people are kept safe. As a result of this some people are unable to carry out their normal roles, which may impact on the delivery of services.
- The Housing Register and Choice Based Lettings will continue to be closed for a few weeks, so we can prioritise the re-housing of those people currently experiencing homelessness, domestic violence and harassment.
- Communication of services opening will be published on the Council's website.

5) Any other business

The Tenants Forum members asks for their thanks to be passed on to the frontline staff who have continued to deliver services during the Covid19 situation.

ACTIONS:

- Gwen Clifford to be contacted outside of the meeting to discuss a situation with a tenants' gas fire.
- May Jones to be contacted outside of the meeting to discuss an issue of anti-social behaviour.
- Wendy Biddles to be contacted outside of the meeting to discuss a situation with mould.
- Key performance indicators for Housing to be an agenda item at the next meeting
- Shain Mohammed to explore if it is feasible to hold future Forum meetings via Microsoft Teams

7) Date of next meeting

Wednesday 22nd July 2020 – 2.00 pm – 3.30 pm, via telephone conference call