

Enterprise and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee

December 11th, 2014

Briefing Note – Support for Vulnerable Tenants

1.0 Background information

1.1 The purpose of the report to Cabinet on January 13th 2015 is to review the current arrangements in place to support vulnerable tenants and to update Members on the new support in place or in progress to manage the emerging issues.

2.0 Existing Support

2.1 **In-house Tenancy Support Service** – the Council currently has 3 fte Tenancy Support Workers, 2 permanent and one on a 2 year temporary contract due to expire in April 2015. Each of the three have a massive caseload, over 35 each, which is way over the optimum size.

2.1.1 It was always envisaged, and indeed initially the TSW's were to provide low level general tenancy support, referring the cases requiring specialist support, for example substance misuse and mental health issues, to the specialist support providers.

2.1.2 However, this is no longer the case due to the number of cases requiring support, and the lack of other provision. and TSW's are finding themselves dealing with the specialist, resource intensive cases themselves and the Estate and Neighbourhood Officers are becoming more involved in the low level support cases.

2.1.3 We are currently reviewing our requirements in terms of current caseloads, service demands and emerging issues as part of a fundamental review of the Neighbourhoods Team, in order to establish where our resources should now best be deployed.

2.2 **Specialist Support Providers** – there are currently a number of specialist support providers funded by Derbyshire County Council providing support services to specific groups, for example, young

people, offenders and substance misusers, learning disabilities, mental health etc..

2.2.1 These services will either disappear or reduce dramatically as part of the DCC budget cuts.

3.0 Emerging Issues

3.1 **Tenancy breakdown** - It is clear that there is a higher incidence of tenancies breaking down amongst young people than in any other group, and therefore a review of the housing waiting list, allocations, tenancy breakdown, terminations and affordability has been carried out.

3.1.1 Meetings have been held with other interested and appropriate agencies, chaired by the Executive Member for Housing regarding the issues that had been raised.

3.1.2 Specific concerns regarding affordability and the ability of young people to sustain a tenancy were discussed. All partner agencies agreed that we should not be allocating tenancies to people who had little chance of sustaining a tenancy and that we needed to look at other options.

3.1.3 There was, however, an understanding that the homelessness safety net would ensure that vulnerable young people were still accommodated and that they would need support to sustain a tenancy.

3.2 **Young people and welfare reform** - Changes introduced as a result of welfare reform could all lead to increased financial pressure and stress on family relationships and include, changes to the shared room rate, non-dependant deductions to Housing Benefit and changes to the sanctions regime – data produced by the DWP show that 46% of JSA sanctions imposed since October 2012 were on claimants aged 18-24.

3.2.1 Further planned reforms such as the introduction of Universal Credit will place increasing pressures on young people who lack financial budgeting skills. It has now been confirmed that Universal Credit will roll-out in Chesterfield from February 2015.

3.3 Reduction in supported accommodation and tenancy support as a result of DCC cuts -the reduction in supported accommodation available to young people and other vulnerable households as a result of the cuts by Derbyshire County Council will increase the number of people applying to the Council for accommodation.

3.3.1 Derby City Council reported a 458% increase in single homelessness as a result of their supported housing services being decommissioned in March 2013.

3.3.2 Many young and vulnerable people need accommodation with support and tenancy training before they are ready to live independently successfully.

4.0 Research

4.1 The key findings of our research is:

- There are 336 young, single people aged under 25 registered on the Council waiting list
- In 2012, 162 tenancies were allocated to single, under 25's; only 72 of those tenancies became secure (44%), that is 56% failed
- In 2013, 270 tenancies were allocated to single under 25's
- On several of our estates, turnover of 1 bed flats is over 30% per year. The average across all areas in 2013/14 was 18.5% (with almost all estates being over 10% which is seen as being unacceptable)
- Young people on JSA simply do not have enough money to live independently
- Increasing numbers of young people are terminating their tenancies, often returning to live with parents because they cannot afford to live in them; the majority have accrued debts which they must repay

4.2 The problems we are identifying are fairly unique to Chesterfield because of our stock profile and the availability of single person accommodation. Many authorities, whilst allowing young people to apply for housing, will not in reality offer them accommodation, due to the lack of supply.

5.0 National research

5.1 In January 2014, Homeless Link published the report, Young and Homeless 2013. The report, whilst focussing on homelessness, captures many of the issues that also face young people who may not be without somewhere to live but who may be threatened with homelessness due to problems with parents, overcrowding or lack of income. The key findings of the report are:

- That the main cause of homelessness amongst under 25's is that parents are no longer willing to house them,
- Over half of those in need of accommodation are not in employment, education or training,
- Local authorities and homelessness agencies are reporting that young people's needs are increasingly complex,
- A range of welfare reforms are having a negative impact on young people, for example, the shared room rate limiting access to private rented accommodation as well as benefit sanctions.

5.2 Preventing young people becoming homeless or threatened with homelessness is key, and the report highlights that there is an increasing recognition that young people who are supported to remain with their immediate family or other family members, have better outcomes than those young people who leave home or become homeless.

5.3 Agencies working with young people have stated that young people may not understand the realities when they come to leave home and have unrealistic expectations of what independent living entails.

5.4 Homeless Link's survey of Needs and Provision 2013 found that over 50% of young people who were homeless were not in education or training and lacked independent living skills. Almost 30% had an offending history and substance misuse problems and 20% had mental health problems.

5.5 For many young people a tenancy is not necessarily the solution. For many young people they need the opportunity to prepare for a tenancy, develop life skills and get into education, training or employment.

5.6 Helping young people to return or remain at home, provided that it is safe to do so, is often the best option for some young people.

6.0 Recommendations from the National Youth Reference Group regarding housing for young people

6.1 The recommendations from the National Youth Reference Group are -

- That homelessness prevention work is carried out in schools
- That families are made aware of housing issues facing young people
- more access to mediation services
- more information regarding housing options for younger people
- more options for work and training
- support services which are less generic and more specialist to meet the needs of young people
- more move on and emergency accommodation available
- young people in employment should be prioritised for move-on accommodation
- current investment in services to support young people are protected
- any further welfare reforms should not cause additional hardship for young people, for example, the proposal to withdraw housing benefit and JSA for under 25's
- continue to prioritise partnerships between housing and children's services

7.0 Proposals for CBC

7.1 **Communication and Information** - we are aware that we need to get the message across to young people and their parents of what the realities and responsibilities of holding a tenancy really mean, and as a result have introduced the following:

- A tenancy training scheme for under 25's delivered by SYHA (piloting at present)
- Producing literature for schools and running a housing education project (SYHA to pilot)
- Producing literature for parents re the difficulties of their children sustaining a tenancy on benefits/low income
- Considering a mediation service to encourage parents to keep their children at home

7.2 **Supported Accommodation** - where young people have tenancies we are exploring the following:

- Developing a 'supported' housing project in partnership with Action Housing to incorporate tenancy training and signposting to other agencies for support. This will provide 13 units initially with the potential to expand the scheme to a total of 30 units or more as demand dictates.
- Looking at the feasibility of a furnished accommodation scheme

7.3 **Specialist advice and support** – we are exploring all opportunities to access funding in order to enhance current service provision, for example:

- Bidding for additional funding in partnership with NEDDC and Bolsover DC to provide specialist housing advice for young people in receipt of benefits (working in partnership with the Ambition project funded by Sheffield City Region)