

# Taunton Deane Borough Council

## Tenant Services Management Board 21<sup>st</sup> May 2013

### Information Report – Welfare Reform Project Officer Activities

#### Report of the Housing Manager Lettings – Paul Hadley and Welfare Reform Project Officer Michaela Mullen

(This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Jean Adkins)

#### 1.0 Executive Summary

This report provides members of the Tenant Services Management Board (TSMB) with details of work currently being undertaken by the Welfare Reform Project Officer (WRPO).

The report will outline what progress Housing Services has made in responding to the implications of the Welfare Reform changes.

#### 2.0 Background

The Welfare Reform Act 2012 came into force on the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013 bringing changes to the welfare benefit system that will have an impact on our tenants who are of working age and claim Benefits. In response to the implementation of the Welfare Reform Act, a Project Officer was appointed in December 2012. The officer is responsible for providing support and assistance to our tenants who are affected by the changes.

The 4 main changes are:

- Under occupation (bedroom tax);
- Benefits cap;
- Non dependant deductions; and
- Universal credits.

#### 3.0 Welfare Reform Project Officer Objectives

Following the development of the Welfare Reform Strategy and Action Plan (a copy is available on request) a number of objectives were given to the WRPO:

The objectives are:

- Improve the information that we hold about our tenants to enable us to provide them with appropriate advice and support;
- Ensure tenants are claiming all benefits they are entitled to;
- Improve money management skills;
- Help tenants resolve any debt problems they may have;

- Enhance tenant access to bank accounts which allow payment of bills by direct debit;
- Help improve tenant access to low cost credit and opportunities for saving;
- Enhance tenant access to the internet;
- Help in achieving affordable warmth for tenants;
- Assist tenants in moving to more affordable accommodation which better meets their household needs; and
- Invest in community development to improve opportunities for employment and skills for tenants.

#### **4.0 Results achieved to date**

- Articles published in both Tenants' Talk and Deane Housing News. Additional information/ articles will be included in future editions of these newsletters
- All affected tenants received correspondence from Housing Services in relation to the benefit changes
- The Tenants' Forum held an Open Day event in Taunton for all affected tenants
- 380 visits completed with affected tenants
- 152 of the affected tenants have stated they intend to remain in their current home and will ensure they pay their weekly rent
- 112 tenants were not at home for visit, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit required
- 61 tenants wish to downsize to a smaller property
- 15 tenants have completed moves to a smaller property
- 26 affected tenants are in receipt of Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP)

#### **5.0 Recommendation**

It is recommended the Tenant Services Management Board note this information report.

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