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Scrutiny Team Report

Review of End of tenancy

Management Response

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Date:

1 Introduction:

This is the ninth Scrutiny team review and is focused on how we bring tenancies to an end; in particular, those tenancies where a customer has either passed away or is unable to bring it to an end themselves.

This review covers a range of aspects including our written correspondence with customers, the keyfax scripting used by customer support, the content of leaflets, and training for staff.

2 Management response:

The subject matter of this scrutiny review cuts across the work of the neighbourhoods, lettings, and income and money advice teams. Teams within the housing directorate enjoy working with the Scrutiny team and always welcome the opportunity for customer-led service improvement. Colleagues that met with members of the Scrutiny team found the interviews pertinent and welcome the focus on what can be a very challenging part of a tenancy's 'life'.

Both the income & lettings manager and the neighbourhood services manager met with the scrutiny team; this was to provide an overview of the circumstances where tenancies need to come to an end outside of the regular 'customer-giving-notice' scenario. A brief

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explanation of the current provision was given, as well as general outline of the legal framework which this has to be done in.

3 Findings and recommendations:

The findings of the group are very customer focused and the recommendations are welcomed.

The recommendations made cut across several teams. Some of the recommendations are being delivered by projects running across the organisation or pieces of standalone improvement work.

4 Conclusion:

This has been a very timely review of the end of tenancy for the housing directorate. There is an on-going dialogue between teams around this subject; particularly the need to balance a customer-focused approach with the needs of the business.

This tension is clear in the scrutiny team's report: it is the area that requires the upmost sensitivity and professionalism, whilst being the time when void loss and rent debt are a higher risk than usual.

The leadership team would like to thank the scrutiny team for their work and the neighbourhood services manager will ensure that they are updated on the progress of the action plan.

5 Recommendations:

	Recommendation	Management response
1	<p>The Scrutiny Team received copies of existing and proposed letters to customers and recognises and approves of the changes. However, all departments need to use the same End of Tenancy/Notice to Quit letters.</p> <p>We recommend the changes to the existing letters are implemented.</p>	<p>Expected completion date: end of Q1 19/20</p> <p>Coordinator: Marc Robins NSM</p> <p>Response: The letters that are used need reviewing, and we have welcomed the input of the scrutiny team. At present the letters try and balance sensitivity with the provision of unambiguous tenancy advice. These letters can occasionally generate further</p>

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		<p>correspondence where the clarity of the message has been diluted by the attempt to empathise.</p> <p>These letters will be reviewed by the neighbourhood team by end June 2019, and colleagues from Income, Lettings and Customer support will be invited to contribute.</p>
2	<p>Scripts used by Customer Services team to be updated in a similar fashion to the proposed letters. See Appendix 6 and 7</p>	<p>ECD: end of Q1 19/20</p> <p>Coordinator: Marc Robins NSM; Customer support scripter</p> <p>MR: As part of the review of our letters being carried out in quarter one, we will ensure that the script writer in the Customer support team is included and the customer / report's call mapped and accurately conveyed in scripting. Learning taken from bereavement training (see recommendation 6) will be incorporated into the scripting.</p>
3	<p>An overhaul of the relevant leaflets to match the information on the website with updated costs.</p> <p>Consideration could be given to users being unfamiliar with Selwood ie Next of Kin/Executor</p>	<p>ECD: end of Q1 19/20</p> <p>Coordinator:</p> <p>MR: There has been a shift away from providing a lot of information in a leaflet format, as it can date very quickly. There is a dedicated page on our website that provides information on ending a tenancy and ending a</p>

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		<p>tenancy following bereavement.</p> <p>As part of the review of the covering letters and scripting, we will carry out an appraisal of the information on the website.</p>
4	<p>Reference Appendix 5 of the Termination of Tenancy procedure. Where a letter is sent to a tenant who has gone into residential accommodation, the letter should add that a copy has also been sent to their relative or representative if/where appropriate</p>	<p>ECD: end of Q1 19/20</p> <p>Coordinator: Marc Robins NSM</p> <p>MR: This letter will be checked and the recommendation incorporated as part of the letter review planned for the end of Q1. See recommendations 1 and 2.</p>
5	<p>Termination of Tenancy form to be available from Reception or by post.</p>	<p>MR: termination forms are available from reception and the customer support team. This was checked by the neighbourhoods services manager on 17 August 2018.</p>
6	<p>Bereavement counselling training for younger staff members</p>	<p>ECD: 31 July 2018</p> <p>Coordinator: Learning & development; Senior neighbourhood manager</p> <p>MR: Bereavement training had been identified as a need for colleagues in customer-facing teams. This was completed for Neighbourhoods, lettings and customer support on 31 July 2018. The training was delivered by Cruse bereavement care.</p>

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7	Revisit staff passing information through QL as a matter of protocol and for consistency	<p>ECD: end of Q1 19/20</p> <p>Coordinator: Lou Grant (Debt recovery manager), Scripters Customer support</p> <p>DB: Agreed, it is a sensitive and upsetting time. It is important that we purvey the correct information to the NOK and/or executor and that their contact details are updated into QL to ensure the correct correspondence goes to the right person. Scripting will help with this.</p>
8	<p>http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/registrations-register-a-death will guide the user to the Tell Us Once service and could be added to the website and leaflets. One other association contacted in benchmarking, uses this facility to access notifications of deaths.</p>	<p>ECD: end of Q1 19/20</p> <p>Coordinator:</p> <p>MR: As set out in recommendation 3, our leaflets can date quickly, and because of the numbers that they are produced in, can be wasteful.</p> <p>It is acknowledged that we can make better use of sign-posting to other services to help families at this time. As part of the review of the letters, scripting and website, we will make sure that the sign-posting identified in this recommendation is used.</p>
9	Facebook – Suggest a named contact if people prefer to communicate away from the open posting.	<p>MR: given the sensitivities and the need to convey unambiguous information around the tenancy agreement, we would prefer that an open forum like Facebook is not used.</p>

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		<p>Instead customers will be sign-posted to our website, where there will be adequate and up to date information on bringing a tenancy to an end.</p>
10	<p>Suggest two to three weeks between letters regarding Debt Recovery is too long – this could in some cases be shortened in an effort to reduce losses.</p>	<p>ECD: end of Q1 19/20</p> <p>Coordinator: Darren Bird, Income & lettings manager</p> <p>MR: At the point debt recovery letters are sent, the tenancy has ended and will not be incurring any further charges. This point is valid when ending the tenancy, we will ensure that regular weekly reviews of the tenancy are undertaken by neighbourhood services to ensure the correct notice is received by the NOK or executor. At times, due to non-engagement this is not possible, Notice to quits are to be served by the organisation in such instances to prevent the debt increasing.</p>
11	<p>Include a process where mobility aid is checked in a property and an onus placed on the provider to remove it.</p>	<p>When we come across any items we call Medequip, and arrange for them to collect. They can be slow. We work with families and will not allow this wait to take them beyond the tenancy end date. We provide a key safe code is provided so Medequip can enter the</p>

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		<p>property and remove the items.</p> <p>These working practices are already in place.</p>
12	<p>Improve the website and move the ending a tenancy page which currently sits under find a home.</p> <p>In addition consider re-wording this section as it comes across as cold, some people using this part of the site will have been bereaved.</p>	<p>ECD: end of Q1 19/20</p> <p>Coordinator: <i>Grace Hoskins, digital and social marketing executive</i></p> <p>We could move the page to tenants' services and the "your documents" sub-menu and include other links throughout the website sub-headed "useful links". We are looking to improve the search bar with developers currently.</p> <p>The communications team would be happy to work the scrutiny team to re-word the contents.</p>