

Committee: Housing Management and Almshouses Sub Committee	Date: 22/07/2019
Subject: Tenancy Visits Project Final Report	Public
Report of: Director of Community & Children's Services	For Information
Report author: Dean Robinson, Tenancy Visits Project Manager	

Summary

This report informs Members of the outcome of the Tenancy Visits Project. The aims of the project were to:

- improve the quality of data held on the City's housing management information system, which is used to plan and deliver services
- improve future communication and engagement with residents by updating electronic contact details and preferred methods of communication,
- help ensure proper and efficient use of housing assets by identifying instances of:
 - tenancy fraud,
 - misuse,
 - disrepair, and
 - unauthorised alteration of properties

The project also aimed to look at the under-utilisation (including illegal sub-letting, non-occupation, under-occupation) of properties.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report

Main Report

Introduction

1. It was decided by the Departmental Leadership Team to implement a comprehensive one-off tenancy visits project to improve baseline data across all the 1,934 City of London Corporation (COL) tenanted properties within a six-month timeframe. The programme was to provide essential service and other

information to all households and identify new ways to enable all data to be refreshed in the future.

2. In addition to the key objectives mentioned above in the Introduction, the project also set out to improve resident safety and comfort by providing advice or referral to other agencies on:
 - home and fire safety
 - repairs and maintenance
 - domestic energy advice
 - housing benefits
 - issues such as hoarding safeguarding
3. The development of the project was scheduled for two months and involved the following:
 - Recruiting and training the project manager and the tenancy visiting officers;
 - developing the tools and documents required to carry out the project;
 - designing and delivering a two-week training programme to cover all aspects of the project;
 - designing the delivery schedule for the tenancy visits programme for all properties;
4. A meeting was held with Camden Council to learn more about how they used a Key Amnesty campaign and a specially designated fraud team to conduct the visits and interviews. This meeting helped inform the approach the City of London would take for the project.

Privacy Impact Assessment

5. When setting up the project, a Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA) was carried out, as the project involved the collection of personal data and special category data. The form helped to identify potential areas of risk with regards to access and storage of the data collected. Steps were taken to ensure data was only available by the Project Manager, IT and Fraud. Checks were made to ensure data was not held on devices once a survey had been submitted.

Ensuring GDPR compliance

6. As Data Protection legislation in the UK changed with the introduction of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in May 2018, we had to ensure that our surveying tool, Survey Monkey, was compliant with the new regulations. A privacy notice was compiled to inform respondents of where the data was stored and for what purposes. Active consent was sought for gathering their data.

Compiling the Survey

7. To carry out the surveys with the tenants, the Survey Monkey surveying tool was installed on iPads for the visiting officers to use in tenants' homes. The survey was tailored to meet the requirements of the visiting programme and was designed to be carried out in two parts – tenancy household information and Property & Fire Safety checks.
8. Tenancy Household survey information included:
 - Proof of Identity, photo and address proof were photographed onto the survey;
 - National Insurance number;
 - Contact details – telephone numbers, email address;
 - Preferred contact details;
 - Next of Kin contact information;
 - Sexual orientation;
 - Gender identity;
 - Relationship status;
 - Preferred language;
 - Employment status;
 - Nationality;
 - Ethnic group;
 - Religious belief;
 - Disability;
 - Details of Other people living at the address;
 - Household evacuation plan;
9. Property & Fire Safety checks included:
 - Number and exact size of bedrooms;
 - Observations of any mould/condensation/leaks/infestations/disrepair;
 - Observations of unauthorised alterations;
 - Observations of disabled adaptations;
 - Observations of potential electrical fire hazards;
 - Observations of combustible materials near or over fuse boxes, meters or gas cooker;
 - Working smoke alarms on all floors of the property;
 - Working carbon monoxide detectors in rooms with fuel burning devices;
 - Observations of any health and safety issues inside the property;
 - Observations of any health and safety issues to the tenant or general public;
 - Observations of a breach of tenancy;
 - Any questions or concerns raised by the tenant;
10. The questions included in the survey were chosen to enable the Corporation to ensure properties were being properly occupied and maintained in accordance with tenancy conditions. They also helped us to get to know our tenants and their specific needs better. The survey and visits also helped

uncover tenancy fraud, update household information where circumstances have changed and identify additional or changed needs within households.

Survey trials

11. Before the official start of the project, the Project Manager carried out trial interviews with a selection of tenants to ensure the survey was appropriate and the questions were correct. The relevance and level of sensitive questions were also examined in the trials. Any changes and adjustments required were recorded and modified by the Project Manager and the Information and Systems Manager.

Training

12. A two-week training programme was put in place for the visiting officers and Estate Officer using the resources and knowledge of both the Corporation's internal departments and external agencies. The training programme ran from 24 July 2018 – 3 August 2018 and incorporated the following subjects:

- Fraud awareness;
- GDPR compliance;
- Equalities;
- Customer focus;
- Smoke alarms;
- Fire safety;
- Welfare Benefits;
- Housing Needs;
- Lone Working;
- Orchard & Survey Monkey IT systems;
- Safeguarding;
- Hoarding;
- Anti-terror & Human Trafficking (provided by the City of London Police);

13. Some of the training courses were completed online using the City Learning system. The surveys were conducted using iPads and the officers were also provided with iPhones, Laptop tablets and Sky Guard personal safety devices.

Managing the project

14. Tenants were first notified about the project in the Spring 2018 newsletters, which were hand-delivered to every address. We created several other publications and personalised them for each estate including posters and leaflets that were placed in estate notice boards or hand posted through tenant's letterboxes (Appendices 1 and 2).
15. The visits commenced on 6 August 2018 at Isleden House sheltered scheme. This was agreed so that the estate staff could assist the visiting officers and use their knowledge and experience to ensure the visiting officers were supported. Vulnerable tenants were visited with a visiting officer and the

scheme manager. The local estate officers also attended interviews and carried out surveys.

16. The order the estates were visited was:

- i. Isleden House – both sheltered and general needs
- ii. Windsor House
- iii. City of London Almshouses
- iv. Harman Close - sheltered scheme
- v. York Way Estate
- vi. Holloway Estate
- vii. Dron House
- viii. Middlesex Street Estate
- ix. Horace Jones House
- x. Southwark Estate
- xi. William Blake Estate
- xii. Sydenham Hill Estate
- xiii. Avondale Estate
- xiv. Golden Lane Estate - tenanted properties/trial leasehold survey

17. The Project Manager organised and scheduled the daily visits and appointments and recorded the outcome of visits made. Each tenant was visited at least three times.

18. If the tenant was not home for the first visit, a calling card was posted requesting contact within two days to make an appointment for an interview with the visiting officers (Appendix 3).

19. If the tenant did not respond, a second visit was carried out and if the tenant was not at home, a letter was posted with more details of the project and what was required. The letter gave the tenant seven days to contact the visiting team to arrange a visit.

20. If after seven days there was still no contact, a third visit was made to the tenant with a formal addressed and sealed letter advising them to contact the visiting team or formal action may follow. Tenants who did not comply with the visits were referred to the Fraud team and Estate Managers. An outline of the above process can be found in Appendix 4.

21. Each visit was logged and the outcome recorded to ensure that the appointments, visits and re-visits were carried out in line with the timeframe given in the letters. Managing the visits in this way meant each estate could be monitored and completed before moving on and ensured visiting officers were proceeding at the correct pace.

Housing Management Issues

22. Identifying possible hoarding was part of the visiting officers' training and they were provided with the "Clutter Image Rating" sheet. This sheet gives a 1-9 rating of clutter in a room.
23. Before visiting the estates, local Estate Officers compiled lists of vulnerable tenants, tenants who should not be visited alone and tenants who may be hoarders (and the level of hoarding). New cases discovered by the visiting officers were referred to the local estate offices.
24. The visiting team worked closely with the City of London Fraud team. Any suspicions of fraud identified during interviews were referred to the Fraud team and the local estate office. Part of the survey involved requesting every tenant provide two forms of proof of identity, one photo ID and something that shows the address. Whatever proof of identity shown was scanned onto the Survey Monkey survey.
25. There were over 100 tenants referred to the Fraud team for not responding to the visits. Working closely with the Fraud team, the visiting officers discovered a fraudulent tenant who lived abroad. The tenant decided to relinquish possession of the property rather than go through the formal process of being interviewed. This property has now been handed back to the Corporation and has been re-let to a new tenant.

Fire Safety

26. Tenants were very keen to have the Fire Safety checks carried out and were grateful to have the advice and signposting for further information. They were also handed a flyer with domestic fire safety advice, links to consumer advice on faulty appliances (including product recall information) and information on the City's Fires Safety Protocol.
27. Where officers had concerns about potential fire hazards in the homes they were visiting, they were able to alert Estate Managers for further investigations to be undertaken.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

28. The tenancy visit programme was a key objective in the Housing & Neighbourhoods division business plan and contributed to the delivery of Strategic Priority 4 - Supporting homes and communities: Developing strong neighbourhoods and ensuring people have a decent place to live.

Conclusion

29. The visits project was very successful and exceeded the projected target of 95% of tenants completing the survey by 0.4%. During the project there were

challenges with the survey and how the team delivered and recorded the results, however these were successfully resolved.

30. The Tenancy Visits project has also provided the Corporation with a better understanding of its tenant profile (Appendix 5).

31. Future tenancy visits can now be carried out using the technology used on the project and adapted for any future changes that may happen as a result of the project. The information the project gathered may also have a long-term effect for the supply of housing and help sustain tenancies. The internal links developed with the fraud, housing needs, and estate teams may improve the services provided to tenants as well.

32. The project has met the original aims and targets set:

- to improve and update the quality of tenancy and personal data on the Orchard housing management information system;
- To improve communication and engagement with residents by updating electronic contact details and preferred methods of communication; and
- To help ensure proper and efficient use of housing assets by identifying instances of tenancy fraud, misuse, disrepair or unauthorised alteration of properties

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Project publicity posters
- Appendix 2 – Project publicity leaflets
- Appendix 3 – Calling cards
- Appendix 4 – Visits flowchart
- Appendix 5 – Key Statistics

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