

ACTION PLAN

To address recommendations from the Tenant Led Inspection into the City of Edinburgh Council's Approach to Rent Collection

Recommendations	Comment	Lead Officer	Action	Target date	Review date
(1) Face to face communication between the Housing Officer and the tenant should be encouraged where appropriate.	We agree and this is one of the key principles of patch working.	JC	Ongoing face to face communication is being encouraged. Individual housing officer contact details are now included on relevant letters.	Ongoing	Ongoing
(2) Ongoing training for the Housing Officer role is required (i.e. people skills, communication skills and all aspects of Housing Officers' roles).	All staff have received generic patch working training. We recognise the need for ongoing training.	JC	Specific training is being developed on contact skills and managing difficult conversations to support the ongoing development of communication skills in a wide range of scenarios.	31 March 2018	30 Sept. 2018
(3) Rent Statements could be simplified so that tenants can understand them better.	We agree and this is an ongoing piece of work, which we would welcome tenant input on.	JC/SP	We will continue work to simplify rent statements to ensure tenants can better understand them. We will ensure tenant input in to approach. We will work with you to set up a focus group and send an invitation for interested parties in next rent statement end April/May 2018.	31 Dec. 2018	1 June 2019
(4) More specific training could be given to Housing Officers to help them to better communicate with tenants with mental ill health about their rent.	As per recommendation (2). All staff have received generic patch working training. We recognise the need for ongoing training.	JC	This will be included in development of new sessions as per action (2). Specific training is being developed on contact skills and managing difficult conversations to support the ongoing development of communication skills in a wide range of scenarios.	31 March 2018	30 Sept. 2018

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(5) At the first point of communication, offer the tenant their preferred method of communication. Where the tenant's first language is not English, offer interpretation and translation services.	Housing officers always seek to provide access to information through tenants' preferred communication method via the Interpreting and Translation Service.	Ongoing	It is standard practice for all housing staff to gather and record preferred communication and contact methods – includes email, telephone and translation needs.	Ongoing	Ongoing
(6) More specific training could be given to Housing Team Leaders to help them to better communicate with tenants with mental ill health about their rent.	As per recommendation (2). All staff have received generic patch working training. Recognise the need for ongoing training.	JC	As per action (2). Specific training is being developed on contact skills and managing difficult conversations to support the ongoing development of communication skills in a wide range of scenarios.	31 March 2018	30 Sept. 2018
(7) The communication between the Council and tenants needs to be flexible to take tenants' own personal circumstances and preferred communication methods into account.	We agree and as per recommendation (5). Information is gathered and recorded on an ongoing basis during tenant contacts.	JC	It is standard practice for all housing staff to gather and record preferred communication and contact methods – includes email, telephone and translation needs.	Ongoing	Ongoing
(8) The Council should publicise more effectively that help is available to tenants who experience rent difficulties.	This information is provided via a range of sources at different points of contact with the tenant.	JC/SP	A review of a range of communications to tenants is underway. We would welcome tenant input, including exploring an information postcard on accessing rent advice, rent payment methods, and revising the content of our letters. We can include these in the focus groups.	30 June 2018	30 Sept. 2018

Recommendations	Comment	Lead Officer	Action	Target date	Review date
(9) The Council need to take into account that some tenants don't have any access to a computer or knowledge of the internet.	Our approach is to use a range of methods. The UK Government will require tenants in Edinburgh to make any claims for assistance with rent online (November 2018).	JC/SP	As part of Universal Credit and wider Council digital roll out plans, we will continue to keep inspectors informed. Also raise awareness of online application process and where tenants can access support. For your information, the most recent tenants' survey found that 60% of tenants can now access the internet from various devices.	Ongoing	N/A
(10) The Housing Operations Manager should monitor and regularly review rent communication training for all housing staff.	Agree. Housing Operation Managers have an overview of all staff training in the localities.	JH	Monthly Housing managers meetings take place and training development needs are discussed.	Ongoing	N/A
(11) The Council should make it clearer to tenants that information/letters are available in Braille or another language.	As per recommendation (5), we already do this at sign up and when tenants notify us of a change in their circumstances during their tenancy.	Ongoing	Standard practice for all housing staff to gather and record preferred communication and contact methods – includes email, telephone and translation needs.	Ongoing	N/A
(12) The Council should use more social media methods including Facebook and Twitter to communicate with tenants on all aspects of rent collection communication.	We use social media to promote awareness of services where relevant. Social media cannot be used for individual contact due to the confidential nature of personal finance.	JH	We will look at our approach to social media as part of a wider consideration of all communications provided to tenants to raise awareness of services available to them. This will include publicising our new direct debit system due to go live early 2018.	31 March 2018	30 Sept. 2018

Recommendations	Comment	Lead Officer	Action	Target date	Review date
(13) The Council should reword rent collection communication letters so they are less intimidating to tenants.	We will consider the content of rent collection letters on an ongoing basis to ensure that clear and correct information is provided. We would welcome tenant input in to this work. Patch officers also contribute to these discussions.	JC/SP	We would be keen to clarify an approach to involving tenants in discussion with the Tenant Led Inspectors. As per (3) – include in focus group items	31Dec2018	1June2019
(14) The Council should simplify the process when sending letters to Council tenants regarding rent collection communication.	We will consider processes around rent collection communication letters on an ongoing basis and we would welcome tenant input in to this work. We are legally obliged to send some letters to tenants in certain formats.	JC/SP	As per (3) – include in focus group items	31 Dec 2018	1June 2019
(15) All Housing Officers need to work with other agencies including the NHS and SW to identify any problems relating to rent collection communication, where the tenant grants permission for this to happen.	Noted. Arrangements are in place to liaise with relevant agencies, as required, on a tenant's behalf, when we have the tenant's permission to do so. It is a legal requirement to ensure that tenants have had access to independent advice before any court action is taken.	JC/SP	We will continue to keep inspectors up to date with new ways we work with Advice agencies and other external partners to support tenants.	Ongoing	Ongoing

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(16) The Council should improve the signposting options to other agencies which are available to all tenants (i.e. the Advice Partnership) in terms of supporting tenants in rent collection communication.	Our existing arrears letters signpost tenants to independent advice agencies. We agree and as per recommendation (3).	JC/SP	As per (3) – include in focus group items	31 Dec 2018	1 June 2019
(17) Change the term ‘rent arrears’ to ‘rent debt’.	We welcome this recommendation and will take this work forward as per recommendations 8 and 13.	JH/JC	We have made these changes to our year end rent letters and also agreed to include (3) in focus group items	31 Dec 2018	1 June 2019
(18) Each of the letters should include up to date contact details of the tenant’s Housing Officer.	This has already been implemented where practicable and most letters now include the name of the housing officer. Legal letters have to remain with Senior managers details.	JH/JC	Contact list of localities sent.	Ongoing	N/A
(19) Each of the letters should be in plain English with no jargon and personalised.	We agree with this recommendation and will take forward as per recommendation 18 above.	JC	As per (3) – include in focus group items	31 Dec 2018	1 June 2019
(20) The letters should be updated as a result of the move to the four localities.	Our systems have been updated to take account of these changes and this is complete.	JC	Send inspectors samples	31/3/18	N/A

Recommendations	Comment	Lead Officer	Action	Target date	Review date
(21) Each of the letters should state more clearly that it is the tenants' responsibility to arrange to pay rent for their own home.	We agree with this recommendation and will take forward as per recommendations 8, 13 and 19.	JC	As per (3) – include in focus group items	31 Dec 2018	1 June 2019
(22) The Inspectors would like to meet with Council staff to discuss the rent collection communication letters in more detail.	Agree and to cover recommendations 8, 13 and 19.	MH/SP/ JC	Date of meeting to be arranged for focus group.	31 Dec 2018	1 June 2019
(23) The City of Edinburgh Council rent collection communications should take into account tenants with literacy difficulties, where English is not their first language and mental ill health.	We agree and this is an ongoing piece of work, which we would welcome tenant input on	N/A	As per (3) – include in focus group items	31 Dec 2018	1 June 2019

Lead officers		
JH	Jennifer Hunter (Tenant & Resident Services Manager)	(0131) 529 7532
JC	Joy Campbell (Senior Housing Development Officer)	(0131) 529 7063
SP	Sherina Peek (Housing Development Officer)	(0131) 529 7172

Acronyms	
NHS	National Health Service
SW	Social Work
RTO	Registered Tenant Organisation