

Appendix Two – Impact of Pilot on Service Areas

Private Sector Team

1. The housing coach who co-ordinates the Rent Guarantee scheme is based in Home Choice, and so this team has been at the forefront of changes in the way of working.
2. The team have enjoyed a good level of corporate support and have been adopting a coaching role for tenants and landlords, which is a change from their traditional support model, and more akin to the holistic, customer focussed offer of the welfare reform team.
3. The housing coach currently splits his time 40% on procuring properties and dealing with landlords, 35% on administrative tasks and 25% on tenant support. The balance of workload is still weighted unfavourably towards manual administration work rather than coaching for the customers which is a barrier to achieving greater outcomes in the pilot.
4. Moving existing Home Choice tenants into the pilot has been straightforward. However identifying new cases from people accessing Housing Options has been more challenging. Regular communication between the Housing Coach and Options team is supporting Options staff to identify appropriate cases. Changes to be made from April 2018, as a result of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 will also facilitate this. It brings a focus on early prevention and requires customers to follow a housing plan.
5. No tenants are in the eviction process yet, so the pilot has not tested whether the scheme is compatible with making intentionally homeless decisions. The team have had over eighteen enquiries from other local authorities and national publicity on the scheme which has been highlighted for good practice.

Incomes

6. A part time incomes officer funded by the pilot, leads on the collection of rent. They work closely with the housing coach and Benefits team, ensuring that the direct debits for rent coincide with Housing Benefit payments and conditional top ups. Rent collection is a critical success factor in a guarantee scheme and other Councils have met significant challenges in this area. Having a dedicated officer familiar with the scheme, who can develop a relationship with tenants struggling to pay their rent ensures prompt action is taken when arrears are accrued. However staff vacancies this year have meant that the team have found it challenging to provide resilience in the absence of the assigned officer.

Welfare Reform Team

7. The welfare reform team dedicated significant time to providing training for the housing coach. This included the coaching aspect of advising, signposting and monitoring conditionality plans to support the progress of the tenant. The team continue to provide support to the housing coach who is included in meetings to review casework from both teams. The majority of the tenant plans have run smoothly and those tenants who were reluctant to engage and undertake steps to improve their situation have with determination been won over.

Benefits

8. The team already had a dedicated officer to administer the benefit claims of Home Choice clients and this has carried over into the Home Choice pilot. Dedicated benefits staff have worked closely with colleagues in the pilot to ensure that changes or delays to benefit payments, do not result in the rent Direct Debit bouncing.

Procurement & Payments

9. Payments of monthly top-ups to tenants, and quarterly payments of rent to landlords have to be made manually as there is no facility to set up regular payments. As the number of tenants in the plot has increased, so have the number of manual payments. This increases the work for both the housing coach and colleagues in the Procurement & Payments team. The second year of the pilot will see explore options for automating this process.

ICT

10. ICT have provided support in developing new functionality for collecting rent owed in the pilot. They have an ongoing role in setting up new properties in the Northgate housing system, so the housing coach can create the necessary rent account. This has been dependent on one member of staff which has resulted in delays when they are absent. Proposals to train additional staff in this process have not yet been carried out.
11. Housing is currently using an old version of Northgate which is planned to be replaced in 2019 with new software. This software has been commissioned with the rent guarantee scheme in mind to enable better interfacing between processing teams