

HOUSING MANAGEMENT ADVISORY BOARD – 9th SEPTEMBER 2020

Report of the Head of Landlord Services

SERVICE STATUS UPDATE

1. Purpose of Report

The Board considered a report on the 29th July 2020 which set out the Landlord Services response to the Covid-19 Pandemic. This report provides an update on the current position.

2. Recommendation

The Board is asked to note the update.

3. Current Service Status

Services are now largely restored. A letter was sent to all tenants in late July 2020 to provide an update. The letter text can be found at Appendix 1.

New non-urgent repairs are being completed. External planned maintenance works have re-commenced, with internal works expected to commence in September 2019. The kitchen and bathroom replacement programmes are scheduled to start in quarter 4 (after Christmas) however we are in discussions with our capital contractor with a view to bringing internal work programmes forward where possible.

The level of face to face contact with tenants has been reduced, and new ways of working have been implemented. Some notable adjustments are as follows:

- Support plans and weekly welfare calls with elderly vulnerable customers are being completed over the phone rather than in person. Communal lounges and kitchens at sheltered accommodation remain closed, however a risk assessment is being undertaken at each location to see whether and how they can be opened safely.
- Non-urgent office interviews are not currently taking place. Generally, interactions are taking place by email or phone where possible.
- Lifeline demonstrations in vulnerable customers' homes are not currently being delivered (these would usually take an hour with the potential user in close proximity). A self-installation pack has been introduced and used successfully - allowing customers to set up their own lifeline where they are able, without our officer being present.
- A remote diagnostics tool has been introduced for our repairs team. Tenants are now able to use the video camera on their mobile phone to show us repair issues in real-time. This will support faster diagnosis of repair issues, increase

first time fixe rates, reduce car mileage, and the potential for transmission of Covid-19.

- Tenant meetings and estate walkabouts are not taking place. We are exploring options around the provision of electronic tablets or equivalent to support customer engagement.
- Victory in Europe Day 75 took place whilst coronavirus restrictions were in place. To mark the event, some plaques have been produced and benches will be installed at sheltered accommodation. The Mayor has recently met with residents and has presented the plaques. An article will appear in the next issue of the tenant magazine Your Homes Matter.

4. Performance

Rent Arrears

Rent arrears have increased by £138,591 since the end of July 2019. Former tenant arrears have reduced by £15,193 over the same period.

A three month freeze on possession claims was introduced by the government in March 2020 in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. In line with government guidance the Council did not serve any notices of seeking possession over this period. As expected, and in line with the experience of other landlords rent arrears have increased.

On the 21st August 2020 government issued a press release, the headlines of which are as follows:

- Ban on evictions continues for 4 weeks taking the total ban to 6 months
- New 6 month notice periods to be in place until at least 31 March 2021
- Once eviction hearings restart, the judiciary will carefully prioritise the most serious cases including those involving anti-social behaviour and domestic abuse

Whilst we are awaiting clarity on the mechanics of this, it is likely that rent collection will be negatively affected.

The numbers of tenants receiving universal credit (UC) continues to rise. At the end of July 2020 1,224 tenants were receiving universal credit compared to 752 at the end of the same period in 2019.

Anti-Social Behaviour

In line with a national increase in reported ASB, the Landlord Services ASB Team has seen an increase in caseload. June 2020 accounted for most of this increase, with a 68% increase in ASB reporting (an extra 51 cases) received that month. In total we received 452 reports over the period April to July. Cases have been prioritised on a risk basis, and where we have not been able to meet target response times on cases assessed as low risk holding letters have been sent.

Repairs

In June work started on the backlog of non-urgent repairs put on hold in March. Therefore, the volume of repairs has increased, and there was a small reduction in performance on target repair times. This is shown in the below table.

	May	Jun	Jul
Monthly performance	98.11%	98.46%	93.82%
YTD	97.57%	97.90%	96.64%
Repairs in timescale	312	768	638
Number of responsive repairs	318	780	680

Table 1. % Responsive repairs completed within timescales (24 hr, 5 day and 28 day work orders).

Gas Safety Checks

The position continues to improve with around 30 checks behind schedule, largely due to the courts not hearing applications for warrants of entry and Covid-19 related access issues.

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An update for all residents in Charnwood Borough Council accommodation

We hope that you and any family you may have stayed safe over this period. We are writing to provide an update on our services, the steps the Council is taking to keep tenants and their families safe, and the support that is available.

Repairs and Maintenance

Over the last few months, in line with government guidance, we have prioritised our repairs service, only carrying out those repairs which are most urgent. We are currently working on the backlog of repairs that were put on hold just before the national lockdown.

From Tuesday August 4 2020 we will be able to log new non-urgent repairs. Going forward, it will take us longer than normal to complete repairs. We may also have longer call waiting times at our contact centre, so if you wish to log a repair, and you are able to, I would strongly encourage you to do so online at the following webpage:

www.charnwood.gov.uk/repairs

Alternatively, you can contact us on 01509 634 666. If you have a housing repair or gas emergency outside council opening hours (Monday to Thursday 8.30am to 5.00 pm and Friday 8.30am to 4.30pm) please call 0333 200 8811.

Operatives entering your home will attempt to notify you in advance of arrival, maintain a safe distance and follow hygiene procedures, and may ask you, where possible, to move into a different room from where the works are taking place.

No visits will be undertaken to any household that is self-isolating due to confirmed or suspected coronavirus, and / or where the government has advised someone in the household shield (note that from 1st August 2020 it is expected the government will pause shielding), unless it is to remedy a direct risk to the safety of the household.

Gas safety checks

Every year, people die and are seriously injured by poorly maintained gas appliances. We will make every effort to abide by our statutory safety obligation to undertake an annual gas safety check in your home. For more information about your gas safety check, please contact our contractor Sure Group on 0800 840 8021 or 01509 634 666.

Paying Your Rent

We understand this is a difficult time for many of our residents. If you are having difficulty paying your rent, I strongly encourage you to get in touch with your housing income officer. Help and advice about paying your rent and about benefits is available from our housing income and tenancy support teams by phoning 01509 634666. We would urge you to continue to pay your rent as a priority and keep to any agreement you have to clear any arrears.

If you pay your rent using a rent payment card at some outlets and you are finding these are closed, there are other and easier ways to pay your rent:

- by direct debit: through Allpay you can decide which day of the week you want to pay your rent and the frequency - weekly, fortnightly, four-weekly or monthly;
- by phoning 01509 634666 and making a debit card payment over the phone with a contact centre adviser;

- if you have your payment reference, by going on the council's website you can make a payment online
- by setting up a standing order with your bank. Ring the income team on 01509 634666 for details

Planned Maintenance

We are in discussions with our contractors around how works including new kitchens, and bathrooms can be undertaken safely. If you are due to have these works undertaken, we will contact you with an update over the coming months.

Warden and Tenancy Services

We are now able to deliver most of our warden and tenancy services. Whilst we can visit you at home if necessary, where reasonable and practicable to do so, we will aim to communicate by phone, letter, online, or by email, avoiding face-to-face contact where possible.

Helping the vulnerable and the community at large

The Council, working with John Storer Charnwood, has launched Charnwood Community Action - a campaign to help support, advise, guide and co-ordinate groups and people who are volunteering to help others in the borough. As part of the campaign, the Council is keen to support the community during this difficult time and has pledged £100,000 to help with any needs identified as part of this co-ordinated approach.

More information can be found at www.charnwood.gov.uk/cca.

More Help and Information about Coronavirus

We have created a webpage that contains all the latest updates on coronavirus, including changes to services, cancellations of events, and more. You can find it at www.charnwood.gov.uk/coronavirus.

Please find below several useful weblinks in relation to the coronavirus pandemic, including government and NHS advice:

- NHS advice for everyone www.nhs.uk/coronavirus
- NHS 111 coronavirus service: 111.nhs.uk/covid-19
- Coronavirus outbreak FAQs: what you can and can't do: www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do
- Getting a Coronavirus test: www.nhs.uk/ask-for-a-coronavirus-test
- Getting financial help and staying safe at work: www.gov.uk/coronavirus/worker-support
- Advice for people travelling abroad: www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-advice-novel-coronavirus

We strongly encourage you to continue to follow the government's advice; and thank you in advance for your patience as we increase service delivery, whilst balancing the need to keep our staff and tenants safe.