



Tenancy Support (Housing Services)

Housing Scrutiny Commission: 9 January 2024

Assistant Mayor for Housing: Cllr Cutkelvin

Lead director: Chris Burgin, Director of Housing

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1. Summary – Purpose of report

This report details the support offered and provided by Leicester City Council housing services to its tenants, to help sustain and maintain their tenancies. Support is provided by Homeless Services to applicants prior to a tenancy being offered. Tenancy management offers support, signposting and makes referrals for tenants once they are living in their tenancy. The STAR service provides support to our very vulnerable and complex needs tenants and the Income Management Team support tenants to pay their rent and maximise their income.

2. Background

- 2.1 Leicester City Council manages approximately 19,000 council tenancies. One of our key responsibilities as a social landlord is to support tenants and prevent homelessness, this is set out in the Tenancy Standard which is regulated by central government. The Housing Ombudsman and now the Housing Regulator have legal powers to ensure we provide good customer service and support to our tenants.
- 2.2 Increasingly we are re-housing people with additional support needs, who need help setting up a new home and accessing services to cope with living independently. This may be because it is their first tenancy, or that they have health needs, including poor mental health and/or substance use issues. Many people do not have support from family or friends and are isolated.
- 2.3 Social Housing is prioritised and allocated to applicants in the greatest housing need. There are now more vulnerable people being rehoused from challenging backgrounds than ever. The profile of tenants has changed with people often having multiple support needs and chaotic lifestyles. The cost-of-living crisis has had an additional substantial impact on this group of tenants.
- 2.4 Not everyone with complex needs requires support, some tenants cope well independently or have family and friends to assist. We target support to those tenants that really need our help and that is why we carry out checks, assessments and have an eligibility criteria for the STAR service.

3. Detailed Report – Support Provided

3.1 Support provided by Homeless Services prior to tenancy.

Support provided by Homelessness Services prior to a tenancy.

- 3.1.2 A range of support, advice and help is provided to individuals and families who are threatened with homelessness and individuals and families who are already homeless.
- 3.1.3 Most individuals will have a Homeless Persons Application which entitles them to advice and assistance to help them to avoid homelessness or recover from homelessness. This is done via a personalised housing plan that contains actions for the authority, and actions for the applicant.
- 3.1.4 Applicants who enter temporary accommodation will usually hold a much higher than average level of vulnerability. These applicants are allocated a support worker after initial assessment when entering temporary accommodation. Dependent upon the assessment this can be a Temporary Accommodation Officer, or a Transitions Worker, who picks up the most complex and difficult to engage service users.
- 3.1.5 Support is provided to coach and navigate through the process of stabilisation and progression at the right time into independent or semi-independent accommodation, dependent upon the applicant's need.
- 3.1.6 Service users are encouraged and supported to register with GP (Inclusion Health Care) and other services relevant to their individual circumstances. This can include, Adult Social Care, Street Lifestyles, Criminal Justice, Homeless Mental Health services, Probation, Turning Point, Department for Works and Pensions, St Mungo's, other Voluntary and Community Sector organisations.
- 3.1.7 Other support offered:
- Support to create Housing Online account
 - Maximisation of income.
 - Liaison/support with relevant agencies involved
 - Next steps and options for re-housing with Applicant
 - Discuss what steps for the service user to move out of homelessness and sustain independent living.
 - Enhanced Letting scheme available to those homeless applicants with the need for more practical support to move on.

3.1.8 Support is dependent on applicants' individual requirements and pertinent to their specific needs. This can include, income maximisation, establishment of immigration status, enhanced engagement with services and improving interactions with agencies. A holistic approach is taken to give the greatest opportunity of success in ending an individual's homelessness.

3.2 Support provided by Tenancy Management

3.2.1 We have a sensitive let process for those applicants with additional support needs coming from the single homeless pathway, a direct let is completed along with a STAR risk assessment. Careful consideration is given to match to an appropriate property, considering area preferences and areas that applicants may not be able to live in because of potential restrictions. For tenants with additional support needs already identified prior to their tenancy commencing, referrals to appropriate support services are made to assist them to set up their home and settle into a tenancy.

3.2.2 Housing Officers will carry out a first visit on all new tenants usually within the first 6 weeks. At these visits, checks are carried out and if support needs are identified our welfare and tenancy support procedures are instigated. This means a welfare support plan will be developed for the tenant and referrals made to appropriate support services.

3.2.3 The creation of the central Housing ASB team has enabled Housing Officers to focus on ensuring tenants are supported.

3.2.4 The housing officer will provide low level advice and assistance and make referrals and signpost as appropriate. Referrals for support are often made to:

- Income Management Team
- Domestic abuse support services
- STAR
- STAR - Drug and Alcohol Use Team
- Changing Futures
- Children's Services
- Adult Social Care
- GP or Community Mental Health Team
- Fire Service/Police
- Community Safety/ Housing Anti-Social Behaviour Team

3.2.5 Housing Officers will provide initial support, but their main role is to oversee the case and ensure that the right specialist support services are working with the tenant. This can prove challenging as many tenants may not be ready to engage with services and the capacity of services to take on cases maybe limited due to reduced funding and resources.

3.2.6 To be proactive, the service also carries out a welfare data trawl and interrogates information available on tenants, to identify which tenants may require a welfare visit. Other services can also refer cases for a welfare check or visit, referrals are made by the Repairs Service, the Police and others as they come across tenants who they think may require additional support. Housing Officers may themselves identify the need for a welfare check when dealing with other issues for a tenant. The need for a welfare visit can happen at any point during a tenancy. From **April 2022 to April 2023, 1515**, welfare visits were carried out by Housing Officers.

3.3 Support provided by STAR

3.3.1 Cases referred to STAR need to meet the criteria attached at Appendix 1; this was introduced in April 2021. STAR provide a floating support service to vulnerable council tenants, with very complex needs, some cases are intensive drug and alcohol users, with poor mental health, suicidal, chaotic and/or ex street homeless.

3.3.2 The service is accessed through referrals from a range of services, over the last year 15% of referrals were from homeless services and 20% from housing officers. Tenants can also make a self-referral, details on how to make a referral can be found on the LCC website. [Tenant support - STAR \(leicester.gov.uk\)](https://www.leicester.gov.uk/tenant-support-star/) . STAR can help with a wide range of issues which may contribute to people becoming homeless and losing their council tenancy:

3.3.3 The **STAR service** provides wrap around support; the service is committed to stabilising the tenancy to prevent homelessness by developing a personalised support plan with tenants. The service has 5 community teams supporting Leicester City Council tenants and has developed the service around trauma informed practice. This is a strength-based approach, which values the capacity, skills, knowledge, connections and potential in individuals and communities. The aim is to understand and respond to the impact of trauma on people's lives. It emphasises physical, psychological, and emotional safety for everyone, aiming to empower individuals to re-establish control of their lives. The service understands the importance of building trust with individuals, who have experienced trauma-so they feel safe enough to build effective relationships and move forward with their recovery. The STAR service understands that before we can support people to affect change in their behaviour, the basic needs of a home, food, warmth, income, security must be met.

3.3.4 The STAR service reflects the diverse communities of Leicester and people speak a range of community languages:



3.3.5 From **April – 2022 to April 2023**

- **1027** referrals have been received from a range of agencies.
- **987** cases were supported during this period representing a **20%** increase in cases being supported from the previous year.
- **43** cases currently presenting with suicide or self-harm.
- **51** hoarding cases
- **260** households have been homeless within 2 years.
- **199** cases receiving mental health support.
- **198** vulnerable adults at risk of self-neglect
- **337** households require help with furniture and household items.
- **£250,000** income maximised on average per quarter. This is captured as a snapshot.

3.3.6 **The STAR AMAL team** was set up in 2015 to resettle Syrian refugees through the government foreign aid funded Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. STAR AMAL has had specialist training, knowledge and specific experience of working with newly arrived refugees and has extensive experience of the practicalities of managing refugee families fleeing conflict and persecution. The team now provides support to Locally Employed Staff (LES) who had been supporting the collation forces in Afghanistan. The STAR AMAL team is currently working with 12 Afghan families who were in the Leicester bridging hotel, who they have supported into settled accommodation in the city, including some council tenancies. The council is also purchasing properties as part of a central government initiative and the team will be supporting an approximate additional 8 households who will move into these properties.

3.3.7 **The Homes for Ukraine Team** sits under the STAR umbrella and provides resettlement support to people fleeing the war from Ukraine who have come to Leicester. This is part of the nationally funded Homes for Ukraine project. Currently the team supports 59 households in the city some in their own accommodation, but mostly people living with sponsors in the city.

3.3.8 Through a successful funding application from the Department of Health a specialist **STAR Drug and Alcohol Use** team has been set up in July 2023. The team have started working with some of most complex needs tenants who have a combination of drug, alcohol and mental health issues. Often coming from a background of entrenched rough sleeping, who are not coping in tenancies. The team is providing intensive long term floating support to assist people back into recovery in partnership with Health and Drug and Alcohol Services in the city. The team are current working with 25 cases.

3.3.9 We have purchased the Zip building which contains cluster flats, and the Drug and Alcohol Team will also be facilitating these units as **Trainer Accommodation**. This will be for people who have little experience of living independently or have had previous tenancy breakdowns. It will be for people with low level to medium needs and the team will provide support and training to upskill people to be able to live independently before they are allocated a tenancy.

3.3.10 We are also using the funding to develop **Supported Housing** in the city and are currently recruiting a Supported Housing Manager. The aim will be to develop supported housing units for our very complex tenants who are struggling and not coping in general needs housing. Intensive support will be attached to the accommodation as we have cases where people are not sustaining independent living and therefore at constant risk of becoming homeless or making others homeless. This also results in constant churn on our estates and an increased turnover of properties.

3.3.11 Compliment for one of the Housing Related Support Workers:

I haven't had a worker in my life that has given so much caring and empathy in a professional role. Its one thing for the Home office to say you can stay but another to say you have someone to walk with you and help you to find a life. You have held my hand and you may not know it but you have been my back bone , strength and courage. You helped with things when I felt low and unable to deal with them myself. It is hard to trust people but you have listened and helped get my doctor to listen regarding my mental health, also the job centre. You helped me get in touch with the Great project, and they have helped me to get skills and confidence. I hope to find work despite my health- I was looking at jobs in finance but you have inspired me to look at social care because I know what a difference it makes to peoples lives. Thank you so much.

3.4 Support provided by Income Management Team

- 3.4.1 Within the Income Management Team there is a specialist group of **8 Rent Management Advisors (RMA)** responsible for supporting our most vulnerable tenants, or those with complex needs with claiming and maintaining Universal Credit claims. They have been helping tenants set up e-mail accounts, supporting people to make and manage their UC claims, supporting tenants with backdated payments and reconsideration of welfare benefits and encouraging people to consider digital learning courses. Additionally, they are regularly conducting research and sharing information within the team so we can respond to tenants needs and provide the most appropriate advice.
- 3.4.2 The RMAs received a total of **938 referrals** which is **55% higher** than at the same point in the previous year and **65%** from the total number of referrals had an identified vulnerability disclosed by the tenant.
- 3.4.3 The cases are separated into two types of support 'Short-Term' usually up to two months and 'Long-Term' up to six months. From the 672 cases that have been closed so far, a total of **73%** of the tenants required **short-term support** in making benefit claims or basic budgeting advice and the remaining **27%** required **longer-term support** to help manage their claims and also, to apply for any additional elements within their claim for example, Limited Capability for Work Related Activity. This is worth an extra **£390.06 per month** to tenants, however it can take several months for this to be awarded as tenant would usually be required to complete a Work Capability Assessment (WCA) to qualify for this payment.
- 3.4.4 The referrals were marked within a priority banding high, medium, and low. **High** defines tenants at immediate risk of homelessness i.e., pending evictions which amounted to **23%** from the **879 referrals received**. **Medium** priority referrals where tenants who were at risk of court possession proceedings equated to **59%**

of the referrals. **Low** priority referrals where tenants had low level arrears with no legal action being considered were **18%**.

- 3.4.5 The team pursue legal action only as a last resort when all opportunities to sustain tenancies have been exhausted. From the 672 closed cases, **10%** of cases were pursued with **legal actions** due to non-engagement or persistent non-payment despite RMA intervention. This demonstrates that **90%** of households were supported with **tenancy sustainment** and any threat of possession proceeding as removed. On current and active cases, it demonstrates there is further scope to provide tenancy sustainment and support. For ongoing eviction cases RMAs provide frequent support and maintain efforts to engage with tenants until such time the eviction is cancelled or goes ahead.
- 3.4.6 RMA's supported tenants to claim welfare benefits, discretionary housing payments (DHP), backdated payments, reconsiderations, and underpayments. In the last 12 months a total value of **£182,609k** was achieved by supporting **672 households**. This amount includes any potential entitlements for the next 12 months for disability related benefits which are awarded for a minimum of 12 months before reviewed.
- 3.4.7 Due to RMA involvement and contributions in rent arrears cases the total value of **reduction in rent arrears** through RMA intervention equated to **£206,712k**. This figure has been drawn out by taking the value of rent arrears at case opening stage and subtracting this from the value at the time of closing the case, resulting in the difference RMA intervention made to the rent arrears.
- 3.4.8 RMAs measured "Soft Outcomes" to help identify tenants confidence levels *after* their support had ended. It also helped to determine if the tenant felt empowered to be able to manage their claims for benefits without support in the future. An initial assessment gives scores between 1 and 5 based on tenant confidence. When the case is closed the assessment is then carried out again and re-scored to establish any improvement. If the score is higher than when the support initially started, it demonstrates an improvement in tenants confidence. Based on the 672 closed cases, **67%** of tenants confirmed they had a **marked improvement** in their level of confidence. The remaining **33%** were tenants who felt their confidence levels **did not improve** or did not engage with the service.

4. Implications

4.1 Legal Implications

This report, being prepared for the purposes of informing the Commission of the vision and priorities of the service, does not give rise to any specific legal implications.

Jeremy Rainbow – Principal Lawyer (Litigation) - x371435

4.2 Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.
Stuart McAvoy – Head of Finance

4.3 Climate Change Implications

Housing-related energy consumption is responsible for 33% of carbon emissions in Leicester. Following the council's climate emergency declaration and ambition to achieve net zero carbon emissions addressing these emissions is key, particularly within the council's own housing stock, where it has the greatest level of influence and responsibility.

The council's management of its housing should include identifying opportunities to reducing emissions from properties, such as increased insulation, use of low energy lighting and appliances, the installation of low carbon heating and renewable systems and provision of home energy advice for tenants. These measures could also improve housing conditions and reduce energy bills for tenants. Various schemes have been and continue to be delivered within the council's housing service to deliver such improvements to various properties.

Aidan Davis, Sustainability Officer, Ext 37 2284

4.4 Equality Implications

Under the Equality Act 2010, public authorities have a Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which means that, in carrying out their functions, they have a statutory duty to pay due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't.

Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

The report details the support offered and provided by Leicester City Council housing services to its tenants, to help sustain and maintain their tenancies. Tenants will be from across a range of protected characteristics and equality considerations need to be taken into account as part of the ongoing work. The services help people with a wide range of issues which may contribute to people becoming homeless or losing their council tenancy. Having an accessible service that provides advice, support and guidance to vulnerable tenants either when moving into a new home or if difficulties arise when living there should lead to positive impacts. Quality of housing can have a huge impact on wellbeing. Inadequate housing increases the risk of severe ill health and disability; it can also lead to poor mental health, lower educational attainment, unemployment and poverty.

Equalities Officer, Surinder Singh, Ext 37 4148

Appendix 1

STAR eligibility assessment for Council & HomeCome tenants

(Critical) C over 100 points

(High) H under 100 points

Have to meet one criteria from each section to meet the threshold for support

Housing Need
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. People moving from temporary accommodation and eviction cases2. People who have been identified and referred to STAR in last 2 years.3. Tenants at risk of losing their tenancy4. Hoarding (refer to clutter rating level 6 and above in Hoarding Procedure)
Vulnerability Identified
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. History of homelessness within 2 years2. Essential furniture/household items required3. Vulnerable adult at risk: self-neglect and/or risk of abuse and harm (including modern slavery)4. Substance Use5. Severe physical health problems: including restricted mobility/terminal illness6. High level mental health needs: diagnosed/receiving support from special mental health services (e.g. has a CPN, psychiatrist, outpatient from mental health unit)7. Learning difficulties8. Cognitive impairment (brain injury)9. Sensory disability10. Domestic abuse in last 2 years11. Care leavers (25 or under)12. Child Protection13. Person from abroad with benefit issues14. Loan shark15. Gambling16. Ex Armed Forces
Functional ability-Evidence required
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Self-neglect2. Significant problems with finances or budgeting3. Chaotic lifestyle4. Language or literacy difficulties
Support networks
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Lives alone2. No Social care involvement

3. No or inadequate/ineffective support network

VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT

History of homelessness within 2 years	20	
Essential furniture required	20	
Vulnerable at risk-self neglect and/or risk of abuse and harm (Modern Slavery)	20	
Physical or Restricted Mobility/Terminal Illness	20	
High level mental health -diagnosis/under specialist Mental Health Service	20	
Learning Difficulties	20	
Cognitive impairment – brain injury	20	
Sensory Disability	20	
Domestic Abuse in last 2 years	20	
Care Leavers (25 or under)	20	
Child Protection	20	
Person from abroad with benefit issues	20	
Loan Shark	20	
Gambling	20	
Ex Armed Forces	20	
High Risk Service User – MAPPA/MARAC/MOSOVO	15	
Suicide/Self Harm	15	
Introductory Tenancy	15	
Nil Income	15	
Benefit Cap	15	
Issues with supply of utilities	15	
Rent Arrears	10	
Universal Credit Issues managing claim	10	
Housing Benefit Problems/Housing Element	10	
Benefit Problems/ Sanctions	10	
High Level Priority Debts totalling 5K or subject to enforcement	10	
Non-Dependant Charge	10	
Under Occupying/Bedroom Tax	10	
Substance Use	10	
Ex-offender – subject to licence/probation	10	
Digitally Excluded	10	
Age: 16 to 25 or 55 Plus	10	
Mental Health – GP managed	5	
Physical Health – GP managed	5	
ASB/Harassment	5	
Child Behavioural Issues	5	
Children under 18 in household/Pregnant	5	
Other household members disability	5	
Carer for resident vulnerable adult	5	
Poor Literacy	5	
Language	5	
No Bank Account	5	
Name	Date	Total

