

Appendix 2

Recommendation	Action	Update
<p>5 – Downsizing Support</p> <p>Completed</p>	<p><i>The Strategic Director for Regeneration and Environment is requested to discuss with the Registered Providers whether a more joined-up approach could be employed regarding the marketing and promotion of downsizing services which are already available to tenants.</i></p>	<p>The Council is working alongside Registered Providers (RPs) regarding the range of options and advice available to assist tenants affected by the under-occupation charge, of which downsizing is one of a number of solutions that could be available. Other solutions include income maximisation and budget management. All RPs are promoting and targeting affected tenants with a range of marketing and promotional materials such as emails, letters and newsletters.</p> <p>Discussions with RPs on a downsizing scheme have not proved popular and therefore downsizing services have not been promoted because the traditional downsizing schemes offer financial incentives to move. This is not the case for Welfare Reform and issues are more related to smaller accommodation being available.</p> <p>Emphasis has changed and agreement reached to offer support and advice via a dedicated welfare reform officer who commenced in post on 1st April 2014. The post holder has been working alongside RPs to further assist residents to understand and explore the full range of options available to help them, such as mutual exchange (further detail in point 5). The post holder has also been working on identifying solutions and implementing interventions to address a mismatch in supply and demand for some property types as a result of the Welfare Reforms e.g. low demand for 2 bed flats and over demand for 1 bed properties. A range of interventions have been identified and implemented including new advertising methods for some low demand properties,</p>

		<p>increasing the number of applications for rehousing from employed households who can potentially afford to under-occupy accommodation, giving preference to employed applicants for a small number of properties where suitable applicants are unlikely via standard advertising criteria, relaxing bedroom need stipulations for households not affected by Welfare Reforms thereby increasing demand, and housing options for these households and potentially increasing supply and lowering demand for 1 bedroom accommodation. .</p>
<p>6 – Promotion of Mutual Exchange</p> <p>Completed</p>	<p><i>The Strategic Director for Regeneration and Environment is requested to consider ways in which mutual exchanges in the social housing sector could be encouraged. This will include use of the Property Pool Plus.</i></p>	<p>A Mutual Exchange facility is available within the PPP Scheme to existing partner Registered Provider tenants. However, until recently this aspect of the scheme has been undersubscribed, with interest and emphasis being focussed on the Choice Based Lettings aspect of the service. The Welfare Reform Officer has been working to promote the Mutual Exchange facility amongst Registered Provider Landlords and their tenants. This work has involved raising awareness, and providing staff training within Registered Provider organisations, together with promotion to tenants by way of a series of Mutual Exchange Information and awareness events which have been held in various community venues. This work has proved successful in that the number of Mutual Exchange applications has increased from 15 when the Welfare Reform Officer post was introduced in April 2014 to almost 300 currently, meaning that there is now a substantial pool of potential exchanges. The Welfare Reform Officer plans to further build on this success by analysing applications and identifying potential exchanges with a view to encouraging applicants to further explore the</p>

		potential to exchange
<p>8 – Training Programme for private landlords regarding benefit reforms</p> <p>Completed</p>	<p><i>The Strategic Director for Regeneration and Environment is supported in undertaking a training programme for private landlords to explain the changes and how prospective tenants will be affected. The holding of seminars regarding Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and regulations regarding shared accommodation is also supported.</i></p>	<p>Various training sessions and seminars for landlords and letting agents have been regularly carried out by the Council and in partnership with the Residential Landlord Association since the implementation of the Housing Act 2004, the introduction of the new HMO definitions and the introduction of the mandatory HMO licence requirements to ensure that landlords are aware of their legal responsibilities.</p> <p>At Wirral’s Private Landlord Forums, regular agenda items and presentations are given on welfare reform and benefit changes. If presentations are not given, Housing Benefit staff have a stall and area available to provide information and advice. The last Housing Benefit presentation update provided more than 70 landlords and agents and addressed Welfare Reform, including changes to Housing and Council Tax Benefit, in addition to how the Universal Credit could affect landlord attendees. The Housing Benefit Team will continue to play a role in future Private Landlord Forums going forward to keep landlords up to date with welfare benefit changes.</p> <p>Information and advice to landlords is regularly given and also examples and options on how landlords can help in responding to welfare reform changes whilst still letting their properties.</p> <p>Advice and assistance continues to be given to landlords and those intending to introduce new HMOs to ensure relevant standards are met. Training is ongoing as required by new landlords.</p>
<p>9 - Monitoring of Houses in Multiple Occupation</p>	<p><i>The Strategic Director for Regeneration and Environment should establish how the Council can better monitor illegal Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in</i></p>	<p>Processes are now in place to identify new HMOs and Officers are officially consulted via the planning process, in addition to existing routes via the fire</p>

<p>(HMOs)</p> <p>Completed</p>	<p><i>order to ensure that enforcement action is taken.</i></p>	<p>service and Housing Benefits.</p> <p>In 2014/15, 370 HMOs were inspected, 57 Category 1 hazards were removed and 12 new HMOs were licensed.</p>
<p>15 – The allocation of armed forces veterans on Property Pool Plus</p> <p>Completed</p>	<p><i>Armed forces veterans, by nature of their duty to the country, should be allocated as Band B on the housing waiting list system.</i></p>	<p>A revised version of the Property Pool Plus Policy was introduced in January 2015. The revisions include additional provision for Armed Forces Personnel leaving the forces, by way of increasing the time period for which they can be awarded a Band B priority, to 12 months from the date of leaving the Forces.</p> <p>The revised Policy also allows for the enhancement of the award date by 3 months for Armed Forces Personnel who are eligible for Band A Urgent priority for re-housing.</p>
<p>16 – Partnership working and self-repair projects</p> <p>Completed</p>	<p><i>The Council should act as a community leader to encourage the transfer of hard to let or empty properties to temporary supported housing providers or community organisations. Opportunities to support this should be explored through revenue finance/services from the Supporting People Programme or other relevant revenue funding streams. This support would help provide on-going housing management services so that vulnerable people could maintain tenancies. Consideration should also be given to creative ideas such as self repair projects.</i></p>	<p>Although the Council continues to act as a community leader and to encourage new and varied ways of working with community organisations, there have been no new self-repair projects in Wirral due to a reduction in funding opportunities. The Council continues to explore any opportunities to work with partners to assist vulnerable people to maintain tenancies.</p>
<p>18 – Credit Unions in Schools</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p><i>The Strategic Director for Families and Wellbeing is requested to hold discussions with Wirral Credit Union regarding the possibility of Credit Unions being established in schools in</i></p>	<p>On 16th June 2015 Wirral's child and family poverty group received a presentation from Julia Webster, Church Credit Champions Coordinator which included an example of a pilot scheme in Sefton that is running</p>

	<p><i>order to promote education regarding financial management and budgeting.</i></p>	<p>'money in schools'. Rebecca Mellor to liaise with Leasowe and Woodchurch Hubs, via the steering groups, regarding opportunity to develop and pilot school credit unions. The Hubs steering groups include the local primary schools and are chaired by Holy Spirit Primary and Woodchurch Primary Headteachers.</p>
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