

21 September 2021		ITEM: 9
Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Property Audits (aka Tenancy Audits)		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: N/A	
Report of: Peter Doherty - Strategic Lead – Housing Operations		
Accountable Assistant Director: Ewelina Sorbjan – Assistant Director of Housing		
Accountable Director: Ian Wake – Corporate Director, Adults, Housing and Health		
This report is public		

Executive Summary

This report is being presented to the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee to explain the purpose of the tenancy audit programme, provide an update on the positive action that has taken place with the programme over the past two years, and to highlight how the programme has been adapted to integrate Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans. This document provides an overview of the progress made and the plans to further develop this proactive engagement with our residents.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1. The Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee are invited to comment on the Council’s approach to property audits carried out by the Tenancy Management Team within general needs housing.**

2. Introduction and background

- 2.1. Tenancy audits were introduced some years ago to focus on combatting tenancy fraud and illegal subletting. When the programme was started, the focus was very much on enforcement and the gathering of information for the Fraud Team. However, over the last two years the audits have taken on a more tenant supportive focus.

The programme has always had a property inspection focus.

A tenancy audit involves a home visit by a Tenancy Management Officer (TMO) to check that a tenant’s household records are up to date on our system. The officer will also check the condition of the property for example, for damp and mould and provide the tenant(s) the opportunity to discuss any

issues about their home, tenancy or neighbourhood, during what is a relaxed and friendly face to face visit.

The Tenancy Management Team aims to audit around 33%, approximately 2,700, of our properties each year, so residents can expect to have a tenancy audit approximately every three years. However, where circumstances change and there is a need, one may be carried out inside this time frame.

- 2.2. During the pandemic, the welfare of our vulnerable residents was a high priority for us. The team assisted Adult Social Care in contacting vulnerable residents, checking on their health and well-being and working with various partners to ensure appropriate support was provided in a timely and effective way.
- 2.3. The Tenancy Management Team was also keen to continue contacting residents who were due a tenancy audit. Although the face to face visits could not take place during the lockdown, contact was made via telephone to check the well-being of our residents who we had not had contact with for some time.
- 2.4. The scope of the audits has been further extended over the past three months to include Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEP) in high-rise residential buildings – a recommendation originating from the Grenfell Inquiry.
- 2.5. The Tenancy Management Team is now contacting tenants living on the first floor and above in both our 15 high and 662 low rise blocks to discuss fire safety with them and to develop a PEEP for tenants and household members who are unable to self-evacuate in the event of a fire. This is a high priority for the team in ensuring resident safety and providing up to date fire safety information.

3. Progress made

- 3.1. Welfare calls to support vulnerable tenants during Covid.

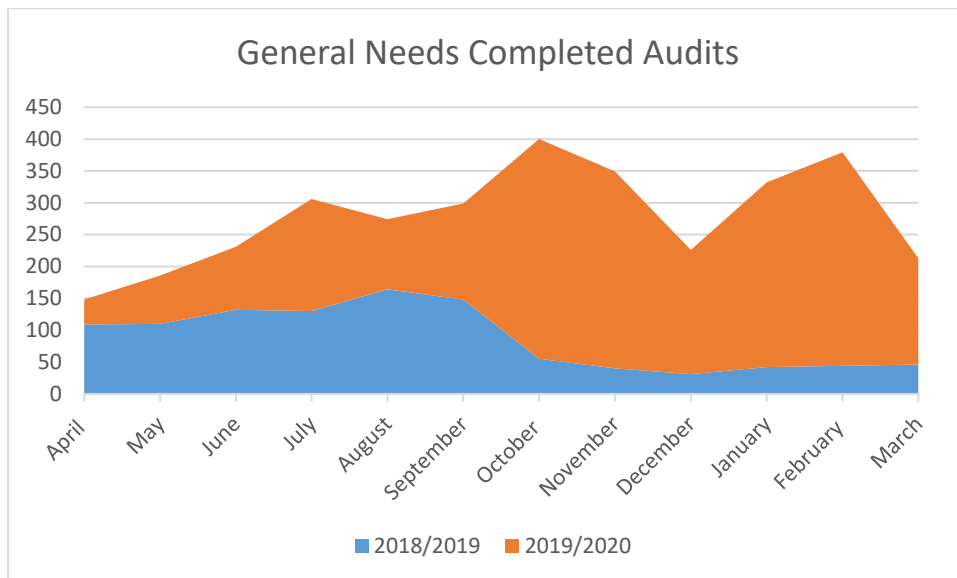
When we entered lockdown we had 2,113 vulnerable tenants recorded on our housing management system. At the time, we felt it important to contact this cohort first to check they were safe and that they were receiving appropriate levels of support. With the help of the Rents and Welfare and Neighbourhood and Resident Engagement Teams all 2,113 tenants were contacted.

This exercise has significantly improved the relationship we have with our vulnerable residents which is something the Tenancy Management Team had planned to concentrate on during the year. The welfare calls made a big difference to vulnerable residents living in our general needs properties and our staff received many compliments from those they contacted. This work filtered into the borough-wide work which was headed by the Adult Social Care team aimed at maintaining contact with the most vulnerable residents in the borough.

3.2. Tenancy Audit project

During the past year, from March 2020, and whilst undertaking the welfare calls, the tenancy audits continued albeit by telephone, due to face to face visits being suspended, with officers concentrating on contacting residents they had not been in contact with over the previous three years.

The following graph shows the progress in the number of tenancy audits completed in the two years prior to the Covid Pandemic:



During 2020 – 2021, in addition to the welfare calls we made to vulnerable residents, partial audits were also completed for tenants. These audits were completed over the telephone, the plan was for the audits to be completed once the property visits resumed. At the beginning of the reporting year 2020 – 2021 3,846 tenants had not had an audit within the previous three years. During the year 3,106 partial audits were completed or 81% of those outstanding at the beginning of the year. The remaining 19% have subsequently been followed up to further reduce these outstanding numbers.

Now that the restrictions have been lifted we have resumed face to face visits from July 2021 to ensure that the property inspection is completed.

4. Tenancy audit outcomes

4.1. Tenancy matters

The property visits are particularly important because they have enabled us to identify issues such as safeguarding, hoarding, abuse, cuckooing, changing support requirements and the suitability of accommodation. Each TMO has a target of completing 20 audits a month, or 4,320 each year over the 18 officers, subject to a full complement of staff. Officers have been reminded

that any visit or contact with a resident can be an opportunity to complete a tenancy audit.

Appendix 1 shares some good news stories following audit procedure.

4.2. Property matters

During the property audit visits, the Tenancy Management Officer looks around the property to check that the property is being utilised appropriately and is in a general good state of repair. Where there are concerns regarding the property condition, referrals to the relevant property services are made to ensure there is follow up to these matters. A number of cases have been highlighted where unauthorised alterations have been made, in some instances they have compromised the safety of the property. Each of these cases have been followed up appropriately to ensure the property is restored to a safe standard.

Other examples of referrals would be damp and mould concerns, poor state of repair and fire safety concerns including hoarding and overuse of plug sockets within the property. The team work with a variety of partners including our contractors and property surveyors to resolve property concerns collaboratively and link in with various support services to ensure residents are supported in the best way, for example mental health services and the Local Area Co-ordinators.

- 4.3. There is still much work to do in this area, however this is an excellent start and in time will improve the landlord/ tenant relationship. A number of hoarding cases, unauthorised property alterations and incorrect resident details have been uncovered through audits and such issues will reduce over time as we start to visit properties more regularly and provide a more proactive service.

5. **Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans**

- 5.1. A PEEP is a plan for a person who may need assistance for instance, a person with impaired mobility, to evacuate a building or reach a place of safety in the event of an emergency.
- 5.2. The visits to discuss Fire Safety within the high rise blocks are taking place in a phased approach. The team started by contacting those classed as vulnerable. This work has almost concluded and contact is now being made with the remaining residents within the high rise blocks.
- 5.3. Once households in the 15 high rise blocks have been contacted, the service will then move onto the low rise blocks within the borough.

6. **Stock condition surveys – interrelationships with tenancy audits**

- 6.1. Whilst tenancy audits do look at the general condition of the home, they are primarily focussed on people living in the property and their immediate surroundings.
- 6.2. In addition to tenancy audits, full stock condition surveys are undertaken of 30% of the housing stock every three to four years. These are managed by the Housing Asset Management Team. The properties surveyed as part of these programmes are a representative sample ensuring a balanced mix of the asset types, including flats, houses and maisonettes taking into account the standardised construction of many building types. These are technical surveys which look at the condition of the buildings, both internal and external elements and communal areas. They also provide an overall energy assessment of the properties.
- 6.3. In 2017/18, a total of 3,223 stock condition surveys were undertaken. The next round of stock conditions surveys is currently being procured and will be undertaken in the period January to March 2022 again ensuring a balanced mix of asset types.

7. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 7.1. The impact related to the property audits and Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans is positive and provides proactive support to the residents living in council owned social housing.

8. Implications

8.1. Financial

Implications verified by: **Mike Jones**
**Strategic Lead - Corporate Finance –
Resources and Place Delivery**

There are no direct financial implications flowing from the report and any costs associated with the works will be contained within the existing budget.

8.2. Legal

Implications verified by: **Tim Hallam**
**Deputy Head of Legal and Deputy Monitoring
Officer**

Given the nature of this report there are no legal implications directly arising from it.

8.3. Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Becky Lee**
Team Manager - Community Development and Equalities

Through the course of the pandemic, the tenancy audit programme was extended to incorporate welfare calls to 2,113 vulnerable residents to ensure that appropriate levels of support were provided. Information on the impact this had on the wellbeing of residents was reported to the service at the time and since with case studies shared. To ensure that recommendations from the Grenfell Inquiry are met, the tenancy audit programme has extended in recent years to incorporate Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans ensuring that, in an emergency, residents are safeguarded if they require assistance to evacuate a building or reach a place of safety. Tenancy audits enable the Housing Service to continuously update knowledge about the diverse needs of our residents and tailor services accordingly.

8.4. Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

Not applicable

9. Appendices to the report

- Appendix 1 – case studies

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Housing