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**REPORT TO: COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE ON 27 AUGUST 2019**

**SUBJECT: SERVICE IMPROVEMENT**

**BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR (ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT,  
PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE)**

**1. REASON FOR REPORT**

- 1.1 This report presents the Communities Committee with details of a service improvement proposal relating to management of the condition of the Council's housing stock.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section III (G) (3) of the Council's Scheme of Administration relating to the management and maintenance of the Council's Housing Stock.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

**2.1 It is recommended that the Communities Committee:**

- i) notes the issues of poor property condition of some council tenancies;**
- ii) agrees that officers investigate the addition of a new Housing Inspector post to the staffing structure; and**
- iii) agrees that a further report will be presented to this Committee in October 2019 setting out the full scope of any new job description and associated costs.**

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 On 12 February 2015, The Moray Council, at a special meeting, approved the Housing Revenue Budget for 2015/16 (Paragraph 6 of the minute refers). A number of service developments were included within the budget to help the Service respond to changes arising from welfare reform, improving neighbour disputes/anti-social behaviour performance and void management performance.

- 3.2 The service's developments were progressed as part of a Change Management Plan which was implemented later in the year. One of the changes introduced by the plan was that the role of the Area Housing Officers became less generic, more specialised with a focus on providing "person centred services", supporting tenants to pay their rent and addressing risks to rental income arising from the roll-out of Universal Credit. The responsibility for dealing with neighbour disputes/anti-social behaviour and some void management practices were removed from the Area Housing Officer's job description.
- 3.3 The Capital Programmes Team took on all of the main "property" elements of housing management. The Housing Projects Officers became responsible for all property maintenance issues including the delivery of the housing investment programmes, property inspections, permissions, organising repairs, tenant recharges and preventing transfers in circumstances where the condition of a tenant's home had deteriorated due to wilful neglect or from deliberate damage.
- 3.4 Despite the changes implemented in 2015, the Service is continuing to encounter a number of council properties that are being kept in poor condition. The Council's tradesmen regularly encounter poor housing conditions when carrying out repairs or managing void properties following tenancy termination. Poor property conditions are also being brought to our attention through the Multi-Agency Community Safety Hub by partner agencies (e.g. Police Scotland, Scottish Fire & Rescue, Social Work Teams etc.) following visits to our tenants. Hoarding is a further issue that is becoming more prevalent.
- 3.5 The Average void recharge for 2018/19 was £3,668 which is a £736 increase on the 2017/18 average recharge of £2,932. This is around £1,500 higher than the 2016/17 average of £2,208. Whilst these increases are not solely attributable to poor property condition, it is a significant driver of recharge levels. The average days to complete void properties also increased from 34.8 days in 2017/18 to 47.51 days in 2018/19. This increase is partly related to more work being required during the void period to bring properties up to the lettable standard.

#### **4. PROPOSED SERVICE IMPROVEMENT**

- 4.1 Due to pressures in other areas of their workload, it has become evident that the Area Housing and Capital Programmes Teams do not have the capacity to support tenants who are not keeping their homes in the condition required by their tenancy agreement. Senior housing managers are of the view that an additional Housing Inspector staff resource could fill a service gap by actively managing the condition of these properties and that this resource could deliver significant benefits through reduced repairs costs and improved property condition. It could also lead to fewer complaints from tenants about the condition of neighbouring properties.
- 4.2 The new Housing Inspector post would intervene early where house conditions arise, work proactively with the tenant to put in place an improvement plan of action and monitor the outcome of the plan in effecting

the required improvements. This will include arranging for repairs to be carried out and, where appropriate, recharging tenants for the cost of repairs in line with Council policy.

- 4.3 The post holder would liaise with colleagues in other services e.g. Social Work Teams, Scottish Fire and Rescue and the Council's Housing Support Team as a preventative measure also.
- 4.4 The post holder would bring other services on board, e.g. mental health services, addiction services to help improve tenant's wellbeing, which in turn leads to sustainability of tenancies.
- 4.5 Subject to the agreement of this Committee, it is proposed that officers investigate the option of establishing an additional Housing Inspector staff resource within the Area Housing Team. Details of the proposed Housing Inspector post, including the job description, and the budgetary implications will be presented to this Committee for consideration at the October 2019 meeting.

## **5. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS**

### **(a) Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))**

Improving the condition of the housing stock and the management of tenancies are key priorities of the Local Housing Strategy. This will enable the Council to manage assets more effectively to provide the best outcomes for tenants and other customers. It also promotes safer communities and adults living healthier, sustainable independent lives safeguarded from harm while meeting the key objectives of the Corporate Plan and the Housing and Property Service Plan.

### **(b) Policy and Legal**

There are no policy or legal implications arising from this report.

### **(c) Financial implications**

The financial implications of adding a Housing Inspector post to the staffing structure will be presented to this Committee for consideration on October 2019.

### **(d) Risk Implications**

This Housing Inspector will help mitigate risks to the Council arising from poor property condition. The post will provide tenants with the support they require and/or need to keep their homes in good condition and this will help reduce repair costs to the Council.

### **(e) Staffing Implications**

There are no staffing implications arising from this report.

### **(f) Property**

There are no property implications arising from this report.

**(g) Equalities/Socio Economic Impact**

There are no Equalities implications arising from this report.

**(h) Consultations**

Consultation on this report has taken place with the Acting Head of Housing and Property, Housing Needs Manager, Building Services Manager, Acting Housing Strategy and Development Manager, Deborah O'Shea (Principal Accountant), and Caroline Howie (Committee Services Officer) and any comments received have been incorporated into the report.

**6. CONCLUSION**

**6.1 This report provides the Committee with details of a proposed service improvement in relation to the addition a new Housing Inspector post to address issues of poor property condition in some tenancies.**

Author of Report: David Munro, Housing Services Manager  
Background Papers: With author  
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