

Report to: Housing Review Board



Date of Meeting 15th June 2023

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

Tenant Scrutiny Panel - Review of the Mobile Support Officers; Lines of Communication and Boundaries

Report summary:

This report sets out the findings and recommendations made by the Tenant Scrutiny Panel following their investigations into the roles of Mobile Support Officers. The report makes recommendations aimed at clarifying the boundaries of the responsibilities of Mobile Support Officers.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes ☒ No ☐

Policy Framework Yes ☒ No ☐

Recommendation:

- A) That the HRB note and approve the report
- B) To approve the recommendations highlighted within the report

Reason for recommendation:

This report seeks to find ways to address the differing expectations of the services provided by Mobile Support Officers amongst Sheltered Housing Tenants, the Mobile Support Officers themselves, and the wider housing service.

Officer: Yusef Masih – Interim Housing Services Manager

Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- ☐ Climate Action and Emergency Response
- ☐ Coast, Country and Environment
- ☐ Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- ☐ Democracy, Transparency and Communications
- ☐ Economy and Assets
- ☐ Finance
- ☐ Strategic Planning
- ☒ Sustainable Homes and Communities
- ☐ Tourism, Sports, Leisure and Culture

Equalities impact Low Impact

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Risk; Low Risk

Links to background information

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- ☒ Better homes and communities for all
- ☐ A greener East Devon
- ☐ A resilient economy

1 Background

- 1.1 The Tenant Scrutiny Panel was made up of 4 tenants. The aim of the Panel is to give the members the formal opportunity to take part in strategic performance monitoring and service reviews.
- 1.2 The Panel also demonstrates East Devon District Council's commitment to tenant involvement, scrutiny and listening to the tenant voice.
- 1.3 The panel's role is to investigate selected topics and report recommendations and findings to the Housing Review Board.
- 1.4 This report was produced in September 2019 (APPENDIX 1). Unfortunately the Covid 19 pandemic caused a long delay in bringing this report before the Housing Review Board. The report sought to clarify the role of Mobile Support Officers. Changes have been made to the structure of the Mobile Support (MSO) team since this report was completed, with many of the recommendations having already been implemented. However it is important that we acknowledge the work of the Scrutiny Panel and ensure the learning is fully implemented
- 1.5 The tenant scrutiny panel conducted interviews with MSOs, their line manager, the Support Services Manager (Home Safeguard), and the Landlord Services Manager. They also spoke to members of the Housing Allocations Team, and a number of sheltered housing tenants.
- 1.6 As a result of their findings, the Scrutiny Panel drew out 8 recommendations for improvements to the service and a further two recommendations have been identified.

2. Recommendations

Recommendation 1 (2019): The MSO job description needs to be more specific leaving less open to interpretation.

Evidence (2019): The MSOs have commented on the variable efficiencies of their colleagues because of the different interpretations of the job description

Update (2023): The Job Description and the MSO handbook are currently under review, with a target date for completion of Dec 2023.

ACTION: The reviewed Job Description and Handbook should be shared and discussed with all MSOs so they all have the same understanding of the extent of their

responsibilities. It is the ideal opportunity to ensure all MSOs are offering the same agreed levels of service to their tenants.

Recommendation 2 (2019): MSOs should be better informed of changes which affect their role

Evidence (2019): Complaints from MSOs that constant changes led to confusion especially when dealing with professional bodies

Update (2023): Direct communication between managers and MSOs has greatly improved as a result of the interim management structure now in place (since July 2022). This challenge has therefore been addressed.

ACTION: This issue has now been resolved

Recommendation 3 (2019): A mechanism needs to be devised where MSOs can talk directly to their line manager at times of urgency or emergency

Evidence (2019) MSOs were frustrated with their line management as they found it was difficult to make contact and get support and advice. The Senior Mobile Support Officer felt the area of responsibility was too wide to be able to cover effectively. There was little time to make meaningful personal contact with the MSOs

Update (2023): With the interim management structure in place, there are no longer the same difficulties in getting support at times of urgency or emergency. This challenge has therefore been addressed.

ACTION: This issue has now been resolved

Recommendation 4 (2019): A representative MSO should be invited to attend any Housing meeting where decisions are made which directly affect supported tenants

Evidence (2019) MSOs were frustrated that processes and procedures were being changed and they were not being kept informed.

Update (2023): Members of the interim management team attend Housing Department meetings. They act as the two way communication stream for the MSO team. This has addressed the concerns raised. They also hold team meetings with all MSOs, and individual One to ones with all their team members on a regular basis, which ensures that everyone is kept up to date and informed.

ACTION: This issue has now been resolved

Recommendation 5: The system whereby MSOs are advised if their tenants are taken into hospital needs to be reviewed.

Evidence (2019) MSOs expressed disappointment/concern .When one of their tenants was inexplicably not at home. They felt helpless.

Update (2023): When hospital stays are planned most sheltered tenants will advise either Home Safeguard or their MSO beforehand. Sometimes hospital stays are unexpected, and if family do

not advise us, or there are no family members to keep us updated it can be difficult to find out where a tenant has been hospitalised. When it is known that a tenant has been taken into hospital, there is a robust system in place whereby Home Safeguard do keep MSOs updated.

ACTION: This issue has now been resolved

Recommendation 6: Sheltered tenants should be made more aware of the responsibilities of MSOs. This could be included in the tenant handbook and perhaps reiterated in the magazine.

Evidence (2019) MSOs felt their job description was unclear and open to misinterpretation. This lead to differences in performance between MSOs and in expectations from tenants.

Update (2023) The MSO Handbook and Job Description are currently under review with a completion target date of Dec2023.

ACTION: Once handbook and job description have been updated, the tenant handbook for sheltered tenants should also be updated to reflect changes and to give clarity to the extent of a MSOs responsibilities, it should be made clear where they start and where they end. This information also needs to be clarified to existing sheltered tenants

Recommendation 7 (2019) Because MSOs rotate every 3 months there should be a record of visits and matters of importance kept in the tenants home to ensure a smooth and trouble free take over.

Evidence (2019) The feedback taken from the interviews with the Mobile Support Officers (MSOs) was that there were mixed feelings on the application of a 3 monthly rotation pattern. It was felt that a detailed handover was required every 3 months, which takes a lot of time, and a lot of information needs sharing and passing on. This was not always happening

Update (2023) At the end of a 3 month rotation the cluster team meet up and spend several hours updating each other. All MSOs are also able to view all the notes made previously by other MSOs about any tenant. Any issues with sharing information within clusters are dealt with through individual performance management meetings (Called 1-2-1s) which are held regularly between individual MSOs and their Senior MSO. This also forms part of the training schedule for new staff too.

ACTION: This issue has now been resolved

Recommendation 8 (2019) That shadowing opportunities are provided. Senior and line managers shadow operational staff and vice versa

Evidence (2019) The Senior MSO met with her team in person only once a month, which the panel felt was insufficient for her to be able to act in a supervisory role, or to evaluate the performance of each MSO.

Update (2023) Senior Mobile Support officers now in place under the interim management structure, frequently work shadow their MSOs and go with them on occasions where joint visits are necessary. MSOs are encouraged to work shadow other departments through their regular 1-2-1s.

ACTION: This issue has now been resolved

Recommendation 9: That MSOs should have access to greater support and training when having to deal with tenants with complex mental health issues

Evidence (2019) MSOs felt pressurised to deal with situations and people with which they lacked training. The prime example of this being tenants who presented with complex mental health needs

Update (2023) A Mental Health Officer has been employed, who works with a case load of individual tenants who have mental health needs. However her workload is at full capacity, and there are still many challenging tenants the MSOs have to manage with limited support. The help such tenants should be getting from the Mental Health Services is often inadequate

ACTION: That MSOs need greater access to support and training to assist in dealing with mental health issues amongst tenants.

Recommendation 10: Greater consideration needs to be given to whether it is appropriate to expect a MSO to be able to manage tenants with complex mental health, and the impact on a community, before such an allocation is made.

Evidence (2019) MSOs expressed the view that Allocations worked in isolation and not with the MSOs. This problem manifested itself when MSOs had to deal with issues caused by tenants being placed in inappropriate communities and accommodation. The panel appreciated the difficulties facing the allocations team with the lack of available housing, but did feel that the knowledge MSOs had of particular communities should be taken into account when placing new tenants into them

Update (2023) The MSO role is one of signposting, so whilst the perception of MSO's is that they manage tenants with mental health issues, they do not directly manage such tenants, but do have regular contact with them.

Mental health services and other professionals are responsible for those with serious mental health problems, albeit, this may be inadequate.

There has been an increase in tenants experiencing mental health illnesses of various degrees since 2019. This is also reflected in the wider community.

The introduction of the Mental Health Officer in 2022 has mitigated some cases but it is not the entire answer.

There is now a better mechanism in place with regards to allocations. The new management structure means that a manager is now able to challenge allocations which the MSO teams believe to be inappropriate. These cases are now taken to a panel to be discussed. This has resulted in a more open working relationship between MSOs and the Allocations Team.

ACTION: That the limits of the responsibilities of MSOs are made clear through the new MSO handbook which is due for completion in Dec 2023. This, along with a recognition of the inability of Community Mental Health Teams to provide sufficient support to many individuals, needs to be an important consideration within the allocation process.

Financial implications:

There are no financial implications.

Legal implications:

There are no legal implications on which to comment.