

## **East Area Panel: 4<sup>th</sup> September 2017**

### **Briefing Paper: Tenancy Fraud Amnesty - Outcome**

#### **Purpose**

This paper outlines the outcome of the Tenancy Fraud Amnesty that the council ran from 1<sup>st</sup> December 2016 to 31<sup>st</sup> January 2017. The amnesty was put in place to encourage people to return their tenancies to the council if they were illegally sub-letting their council or temporary accommodation home, or where the authorised tenant has moved out and was not using it as their main home.

National figures suggest that tenancy fraud costs the public purse £18,000 a year for each property.

#### **Why was there a need for an amnesty?**

The council has approximately 11,500 properties and 1600 long term temporary accommodation units.

The housing, legal and corporate fraud teams work together to identify and pursue cases of fraud and in recent years have had some notable successes.

Anecdotal evidence and national data suggested that the problem was likely to be much more widespread as it is predicted that the level of tenancy fraud outside of London is 2-3%. In response, some authorities had conducted amnesties which had been successful in returning large numbers of council dwellings to the council stock thus enabling the Local Authority to provide a home to those with genuine need.

#### **How the amnesty worked?**

The housing and corporate fraud team worked closely with the communications team to publicise the amnesty.

The amnesty ran from 1<sup>st</sup> December 2016 to 31<sup>st</sup> January 2017 and was timed to end when we received the results of a national data matching exercise.

The key features of the amnesty were as follows:

- Tenants were able to hand back properties without fear of prosecution.
- The council's Housing Customer Services Team was able to offer advice to anyone who was affected.
- To take advantage of the amnesty the property had to be empty of people and furniture before the keys were returned.

- The amnesty gave an additional opportunity to get the message out there that tenancy fraud is wrong.
- There was a data matching exercise underway which was likely to show the council some properties that may be being sublet. This exercise was publicised as part of the campaign. We made it clear that Tenancy Fraud identified after 31<sup>st</sup> January 2017 may result in prosecution.

### **Communications**

We developed a communications plan which involved the following:

- Informing ward councillors and Tenant Reps – posters were provided, where requested tenant association members informed.
- Posters were put up in council blocks, housing offices and libraries
- An article was placed in the winter edition of Homing In
- The council's Social Media channels were used
- Ensuring all staff were aware of the amnesty.
- Community and Voluntary Sector Partners were briefed

### **Outcome of Tenancy Amnesty**

Six families were rehomed thanks to the tenancy fraud amnesty for council housing and temporary accommodation in the city.

The six homes returned through the amnesty were two three-bedroom, two two-bedroom and two one-bedroom properties. .

A data-matching exercise is now being carried out to identify further illegal subletting and tenants not using their council property as their main home. Legal action will be considered against anyone found to be committing housing fraud.

Tenancy fraud deprives residents in housing need at a huge cost to the city and the council's Corporate Fraud Team will continue to do all they can to tackle it.

If you suspect someone isn't living in their council house or is subletting it, you can report it in confidence by calling the council on 01273 291847 or emailing [anti-fraud@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:anti-fraud@brighton-hove.gov.uk).

**Contact:** Rachel Chasseaud, Head of Tenancy Services  
Email: [rachel.chasseaud@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:rachel.chasseaud@brighton-hove.gov.uk)  
Tony Barnard, Corporate Fraud Manager  
Email: [tony.barnard@brighton-hove.gcsx.gov.uk](mailto:tony.barnard@brighton-hove.gcsx.gov.uk)