

POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 3RD MARCH 2009

SUBJECT: DOOR TO DOOR RENT COLLECTION

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF THE ENVIRONEMENT

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide information requested by Councillor Etheridge: this includes a review of the proposals and criteria where collectors call, the costs the Council have saved and whether the service could be extended.

2. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 2.1 As an essential element of a high quality housing service, which includes support to vulnerable and disadvantaged tenants, the provision of the council's doorstep rent collection service links to the following strategies:
 - The Meeting the Housing Requirements of Disadvantaged People theme of the National Housing Strategy - Better Homes for People in Wales;
 - Living Environment Objective 1 and Health, Social Care &Well Being Objective 27 of the Community Strategy;
 - · CCBC Improvement Plan 2005/08; and
 - The People theme of People, Property, and Places: A Local Housing Strategy for Caerphilly County Borough 2008-2013.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Welsh Assembly Government requires Council Housing stock to meet a range of quality standards. From the limited resources available Councils need to consider ways in boosting their investment in maintenance.
- 3.2 Separately but equally important is the Welsh Assembly Governments efficiency agenda and the need for Councils to achieve significant savings/improve performance.
- 3.3 The Living Environment Scrutiny Committee considered a report on the door-to-door rent collection service in January 2006 see appendix 1. The views of the Committee were sought at the time in order to inform the Cabinet prior to a decision being taken on the reduction of the door-to-door rent collection service.
- 3.4 After consideration of the report in January 2006, the Scrutiny Committee endorsed the recommendations within the report that the door step rent collection service be offered only to tenants in sheltered housing complexes and tenants in non sheltered housing who are in receipt of DLA care/mobility or attendance allowance. Cabinet considered the report in March

2006, the recommendations were agreed and implemented in September 2006.

4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 The qualifying criteria decided in 2006 was that the service would only be offered to tenants in sheltered complexes and tenants in non sheltered housing who are in receipt of DLA care/mobility or attendance allowance. This enabled the service to be focused upon tenants with a particular need i.e. those in supported housing or with mobility problems.
- 4.2 The Authority has received few complaints since the reduction of this service. To help resolve these complaints rent staff worked in partnership with Age Concern and the DWP to assist tenants who were currently not in receipt of the qualifying benefits. In many cases tenants were successful in claiming these benefit and not only qualified for the door to door collection service but their income also substantially increased.
- 4.3 The Authority currently has 1095 let units of sheltered accommodation of these 374 pay their rent to the rent collector, in comparison with 539 in 2006.
- 4.4 Outside of sheltered accommodation 1088 tenants pay their rent to the rent collector, in comparison with 910 in receipt of DLA and on the rent round in 2006
- 4.5 The number of tenants choosing to pay by direct debit has also increased since the reduction of the doorstep collection service. In 2006 a total of 1700 tenants paid by direct debit and this has now increased to 2600. Appendix 2 "rents general information leaflet" shows the various payment methods offered to tenants.
- 4.6 The rent arrears have not increased since the reduction of the service and the rent arrears as a percentage of the annual rent debit for the past 3 years are as follows:

March 2006 1.91% March 2007 1.79% March 2008 1.74%

4.7 The annual savings achieved from the reduction of the service (based on 2007/8 figures) were £127,161. These savings were made in the Housing Revenue Account.

Salaries £106,661

Doorstep collection machines £ 15,375

Mobiles £ 1,025

Software licence fee £ 4,100

Total Saving £127,161

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There would be increased budget requirements if the doorstep collection service were offered to more tenants, additional rent collection staff; IT hardware and software provision would be needed. Any change in service delivery would need to be fully costed and evaluated.

6. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The personnel implications were fully covered in the original report. There are no further personnel implications that have arisen since the service has been reduced.

7. CONSULTATIONS

7.1 No formal consultation was required.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 The report to be noted.

9. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 This report has been prepared for information purposes only.

10. STATUTORY POWER

10.1 Housing Act 1985.

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Consultees: Anthony O'Sullivan – Director of the Environment

Cllr Lyn Ackerman - Cabinet Member Environment & Housing Services

Cllr Colin Mann - Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member For Finance, Resources

and Sustainability

Cllr John Taylor - Chairman of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee Cllr Margaret Sargent - Vice Chairman of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny

Committee

Cllr Malcolm Parker - Chairman of the Living Environment Scrutiny Committee Cllr Keith Lloyd - Vice Chairman of the Living Environment Scrutiny Committee

Nicole Scammel - Head of Corporate Finance Nigel Barnett - Director of Corporate Services Graham North - Public Sector Housing Manager Lesley Allen - Principal Accountant (Housing) Mark Jennings - Housing Strategy Officer

Appendices:

Appendix 1 Report to the Living Environment Scrutiny Committee – 17th January 2006

Appendix 2 Rents General Information Leaflet