

Meeting:	Overview and Scrutiny	Date:	10th November 2014
Subject:	Annual Review of the Evictions Appeal Panel		
Report of	Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Leisure		
Wards Affected:	All		
Key Decision:	No	Budget/Policy Framework:	No
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Appendices:	None		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide an annual update in respect to the outcomes from the delegation of duties of the Gloucester City Council Eviction Appeal Panel to Gloucester City Homes.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 That Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the information contained in the report.

3.0 Background and Key Issues

- 3.1 Eviction Appeal Panel (EAP) was first established in the 1980s when there were fewer ways of assisting or supporting tenants who were facing a possible eviction and tenants would go to their local Councillor for help. The EAP was set up to provide tenants with a body of appeal when facing eviction proceedings.
- 3.2 The EAP has been run and managed by GCC since that date and provided a group of Councillors to consider the 'reasonableness' of the actions of officers. The Panel provides a final landlord appeal for those GCC tenants facing eviction. The Panel provides them with the last opportunity to sustain their tenancy and avoid an application being made to the Court for an eviction warrant. An eviction warrant will usually result in them losing their home, subject to any appeal they make to the Court.
- 3.3 A change to the management of the Eviction Appeal Panel was considered at Council and approval was given for a delegation of duties to Gloucester City Homes in July 2010. The matter was investigated and considered after a report and recommendation of The EAP Task and Finish Group. The decision was passed with a recommendation that Gloucester City Homes report back to Scrutiny and Overview Committee consider the impact of the change and on an annual basis thereafter.

- 3.4 The Gloucester City Homes (GCH) managed Eviction Appeal Panel consists of one elected member and two independent managers from GCH supported, when possible, by a representative from an independent advice agency and a representative from Gloucester City Homes' Income Team. The Panel can make a variety of recommendations to assist the tenant in retaining their tenancy with the aim of ensuring that eviction remains a sanction of last resort.
- 3.5 GCH continues to ensure that all tenants who are potentially threatened with the loss their homes, are all offered an opportunity to have their case considered by the Eviction Appeal Panel. As an integral part of this process they are advised to seek independent advice to support them and assist with their financial situation. The Panel can often review cases at multiple meetings and where the case merits repeated support or scrutiny.
- 3.6 The Panel has met four times since the last report to Overview and Scrutiny in November 2013. The format of the Panel has remained the same and cases have been considered within the same guidelines as previously. For each Panel Meeting an elected member representative has been sought with only Gloucester City Homes' Board members and others with a conflict of interest excluded.
- 3.7 There have been 18 new cases considered by the Panel this year and 6 cases reviewed.
- 3.8 The outcomes from those cases considered by the EAP:
- The debt since the hearings has reduced from £27,622.15 to £18,901.54 across all the cases considered by the Eviction Appeals Panel this year.
 - Of the 18 new cases that were considered, 2 cases have cleared the debt entirely through a Debt Relief Order.
- 3.9 There have been eight evictions since the last report. Five of those were due to abandonment of the property with the resulting accrual of arrears; no appeals were received. Of the remaining three evictions solely due to rent arrears, two were considered by the Evictions Appeal Panel and given the opportunity to remain in their homes.

4.0 Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 No alternative options have been considered for the purpose of this report.

5.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 5.1 This is the final annual report to Council before the transfer of the housing stock to Gloucester City Homes.

6.0 Future Work and Conclusions

- 6.1 The EAP has demonstrated over the years its value as a means of sustaining tenancies and promoting financial responsibility. It has provided assurance to Gloucester City Council that evictions remain the course of action of last resort. The EAP has ensured that tenants realise the importance of paying their rent.

- 6.2 Gloucester City Homes as the new landlord will continue the commitment to ensuring that evictions are only undertaken when all alternative courses of action have been fully explored. Gloucester City Homes will continue to review all evictions to ensure that reasonableness has been applied and tenants have been given the opportunity to seek assistance and sustain their tenancies.

7.0 Financial Implications

- 7.1 None

8.0 Legal Implications

- 8.1 None

9.0 Risk & Opportunity Management Implications

- 9.1 None

10.0 People Impact Assessment (PIA):

- 10.1 The PIA Screening Stage was completed and did not identify any potential or actual negative impact, therefore a full PIA was not required.