

Report of Director of Environment and Housing

Report to Scrutiny Board (Housing and Regeneration)

Date: 25th March 2014

Subject: Update report on schemes providing kitchen appliances to tenants

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| Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s): | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| Is the decision eligible for Call-In? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number: | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |

Summary of main issues

1. At the Scrutiny Board meeting on 7 January 2014, the Board requested a further report outlining opportunities to develop links with re-use organisations within the city who currently provide kitchen appliances including cookers and fridges to tenants in need.
2. There are schemes operating in Leeds to enable vulnerable and low income households to access basic household goods and appliances. In April 2013, the Council launched a Local Welfare Support Scheme to provide support for families and vulnerable people faced with unforeseen difficulties and emergency situations. This includes the provision of kitchen appliances where the applicant fulfils the eligibility criteria.
3. The Council has existing relationships with furniture re-use organisations and supports the growth of furniture re-use schemes in Leeds to ensure opportunities to re-use furniture and household goods are maximised.

Recommendations

4. Scrutiny Board is requested to:
 - note the content of this report;
 - acknowledge the procedures in place to identify and refer tenants in need through the appropriate pathways; and
 - recognise the potential to maximise re-use opportunities through council house voids.

1 Purpose of this report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to:

- Provide Scrutiny Board with background information on the range of furniture re-use organisations in Leeds;
- Outline how tenants in need are identified and signposted; and
- Identify potential to further develop links with re-use organisations in order to maximise re-use opportunities through council house voids.

1.2 The report also identifies some opportunities to provide additional support or added value to furniture re-use organisations.

2 Background information

2.1 At the September Scrutiny Board meeting, the Board felt that provision of fridges and cookers would have a direct and positive impact on the health and wellbeing of the household.

2.2 The Council is keen to tackle poverty and deprivation in the city and develop new solutions and integrated approaches in order to mitigate the challenges of deprivation and poverty.

3 Main issues

3.1 Background information on furniture re-use organisations

3.2 There are currently seven furniture re-use organisations that form the membership of the Leeds Furniture Re-use Group, who work closely with Waste Management Services in Leeds. These are:

- St Judes Furniture Store
- Leeds and Moortown Furniture Store
- Emmaus Leeds
- SLATE
- Sydney Bridge
- Safe Haven
- Revive Leeds

3.3 These organisations operate slightly differently. All of them accept donations of furniture and some also take electrical items including white goods, clothing, bedding and bric-a-brac. For the organisations that accept electrical goods, Leeds City Council obtained funding to train their operatives in portable appliance testing (PAT) so all electrical equipment can be tested before being distributed. In addition to this, with the exception of Revive Leeds, the Council also pays these organisations re-cycling credits at £77.80 per tonne for furniture items re-used within the Leeds district. The recycling credit paid is equivalent to the avoided cost (landfill tax and the gate fee £/tonne) of disposing of the waste to landfill. In 2012-

13, £43,300 of recycling credits was paid to the re-use groups for the re-use of 600 tonnes of furniture.

- 3.4 Leeds City Council has a longstanding relationship with St Judes Furniture Store (a project of the St Vincent de Paul charity) and Leeds and Moortown Furniture Store. Both of these charities receive annual grant funding from the Council of £72K as well as provision of two vehicles each for the collection, transportation and delivery of furniture items to households in need referred to them by staff in housing, adult social care and children's services, and a wide range of social agencies.
- 3.5 Leeds and Moortown Furniture Store accepts household furniture as well as bedding, crockery and pans but not electrical items. They accept referrals from approved agencies including council staff and re-donate all their furniture items to socially and economically disadvantaged people at no cost to the recipient other than a £10 delivery charge. From April-December in 2013-14, they have provided 3646 items to 652 referrals, with an average of six items per referral, with an estimated value of £215 for a single person, or £345 for a couple/family. They have experienced a 23% increase in the number of referral requests in 2013-14. Leeds and Moortown also has a trading arm which operates as a social enterprise providing the whole range of new household goods including kitchen appliances at competitive prices. They are a supplier under the Local Welfare Support Scheme. The Council has also funded furniture packs from the trading arm of Leeds and Moortown Furniture Store from the Homeless Prevention Fund to help households setting up a new home. For 2011-12 and 2012-13, this amounted to roughly £30K per annum.
- 3.6 In addition to donations of furniture, St Judes Furniture Store also accepts the full range of electrical items. As part of the funding agreement with the Council, they provide the equivalent of £500 worth of re-use electrical items each month to council tenants through supported referrals from staff within housing, adult social care and children's services. These items are provided free of charge and £500 equates to between six and nine electrical items; mainly fridges or fridge freezers but also cookers and washing machines. Between April and December 2013, St Judes provided 64 electrical items in this way; 39 fridges or fridge freezers, 4 electric cookers and 21 washing machines or tumble dryers. St Judes also provides furniture packs (beds, table and chairs, sofa, wardrobe, drawers) free of charge by way of referrals from partner agencies. So far this financial year, St Judes have accepted 816 referrals from council staff resulting in 5,158 items of furniture being delivered; an average of six items and a financial equivalent of at least £330 per referral. St Judes also operates a network of 9 charity shops across Leeds that raise funds for the work of the St Vincent de Paul charity.
- 3.7 Based on statistics, St Judes received a total of 803 referrals in 2012 from April to December. For the same period in 2013, 1191 referrals were made, representing an increase of over 48%. This illustrates a significant increase in need across the city throughout this financial year.
- 3.8 St Judes is currently the only furniture re-use organisation in Leeds that has a workshop and the expertise to repair equipment to maximise re-use potential. In light of this, Leeds City Council's Waste Electrical Appliances Contractor,

Weelink, has recently sub-contracted St Judes to collect large domestic appliances (cookers, fridges, freezers, washing machines, tumble dryers, hoovers and microwaves) from the Council's eight waste recycling sites across the city to repair if necessary and re-use within the Leeds area. In December 2013, St Judes collected 394 electrical items from the recycling sites and re-used 173 items, which equates to a 43% re-use rate. Of the 173 re-used items, the vast majority were televisions and monitors (122 which equates to 70%); only 9 fridge and fridge freezers out of 23 collected were able to be re-used and the one cooker received was not re-usable.

- 3.9 In addition to the above, St Judes also provide low cost re-used kitchen appliances to referred households. On average a cooker or fridge freezer would be sold for £65 if a household is referred through one of the partner agencies.
- 3.10 Identifying tenants in need
- 3.11 As part of the council tenancy allocations and sign-up procedure, prospective council tenants are asked about access to furnishings, including white goods. Where a need is established they are signposted to re-use organisations or the Local Welfare Support Scheme as appropriate. This is currently managed slightly differently across the city, and as part of the re-design of housing services, officers in Housing Leeds are working to standardise the approach to make sure all need is identified during the offer and sign up process and a consistent referral procedure is applied citywide.
- 3.12 In relation to existing council tenants, Housing Leeds has already made amendments to the annual Tenancy Verification visit form. A question has been added on Health and Wellbeing in order to establish if a tenant has cooking facilities. Referrals to re-use organisations or the Local Welfare Support Scheme will be made where need is identified.
- 3.13 Through the Local Welfare Support Scheme, the Council seeks to assist vulnerable people to meet their immediate short term needs or where they require assistance to maintain their independence within the community. The scheme focuses on providing goods instead of cash and eligible recipients will have some of their basic household items met at no cost. Up to the end of January, 1069 cookers, 24 microwaves and 888 fridges have been provided under this scheme. This indicates that there is clear need across the city for household goods and in particular kitchen appliances.
- 3.14 Maximising re-use potential through council house voids
- 3.15 Through its repairs and maintenance contractors, Environment and Housing is keen to ensure that opportunities to re-use furniture and electrical appliances left in a vacated council properties are identified and maximised.
- 3.16 Some research was carried out in 2012 which shows there is definitely potential to further develop links with furniture re-use organisation through our contractors to maximise opportunities to re-use items left in council void properties.

- 3.17 A survey of 58 properties going through the void process in early 2012 suggested that 50% have items left in them by the outgoing tenant. This led to further research by housing officers and, between April and June 2012, the contents of 438 void properties were recorded. This showed that 1001 items with potential for re-use had been left behind by the former tenant. Of these items 113 were white goods – cookers, fridge freezers and washing machines. In a typical year in the region of 4600 Council properties become vacant and therefore as many as 1200 white goods could be being left behind by outgoing tenants.
- 3.18 Through this research, 20 gas cookers were left in void properties. Currently none of the seven furniture re-use organisations accept gas appliances as they do not have the skills to test and install them. Officers in Housing Leeds and Waste Management Services are currently working in collaboration with the existing repairs and maintenance contractors and furniture re-use organisations to increase re-use opportunities in relation to void properties.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

- 4.1.1 The initial Local Welfare Support Scheme was developed in consultation with frontline services and advice agencies and has been revised in response to feedback from service users and elected members. The proposed scheme for 2014/15 is substantially unchanged from the 2013/14 scheme and no further consultations required.
- 4.1.2 New and existing tenants in need will be signposted to appropriate schemes through the tenancy sign-up procedures and annual tenancy visits.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 4.2.1 An equality impact assessment is not relevant at this stage as the report is primarily an information report.
- 4.2.2 Existing schemes focus on people in need irrespective of ethnicity, religion, sexuality, gender or disability.

4.3 Council policies and City Priorities

- 4.3.1 The report deals with the issues of tackling debt, poverty and deprivation in the city which are key priorities for the City and contributes to a number of the city priorities and the identified poverty-related actions – i.e. the Sustainable Economy and Culture Plan, the Health and Well Being Plan and the Children and Young People Plan (through the Child Poverty Strategy).
- 4.3.2 The Local Welfare Support Scheme and furniture re-use organisations contribute to the Council's City Priorities, particularly the anti-poverty agenda. They offer an alternative to high interest providers and help to tackle high cost lending, child poverty and debt.
- 4.3.3 Furniture re-use organisations also contribute to the best council priorities by increasing recycling and reducing landfill tax costs.

4.4 Resources and value for money

4.4.1 There are no identified resource implications associated with the issues under consideration.

4.4.2 Maximising re-use opportunities will reduce landfill tax costs.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

4.5.1 This report does not contain any exempt or confidential information.

4.1.1 This report is not eligible for call in.

4.6 Risk Management

4.6.1 There are no identified risks associated with the issues under consideration.

5 Conclusions

5.1 Through the Local Welfare Support Scheme and furniture re-use organisations vulnerable and low income households are supported to access basic household goods and appliances at little or no cost to the recipient. These schemes enable tenants to avoid the risk of debt by providing an alternative to the high interest high street providers.

5.2 There is clear evidence of need based on the research outlined in this report as well as statistics provided by the furniture re-use organisations on the number of referrals they receive each year.

5.3 Through collaborative working with existing repairs and maintenance contractors and furniture re-use organisations, officers in Housing Leeds and Waste Management Services are committed to maximising re-use opportunities in relation to void properties.

6 Recommendations

6.1 Scrutiny Board is requested to:

- note the content of this report;
- acknowledge the procedures in place to identify and refer tenants in need through the appropriate pathways; and
- recognise the potential to maximise re-use opportunities through council house voids.

7 Background documents¹

7.1 None

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.