

## HRA Budget Report

1	<p><b>Name of the ‘policy’ and briefly describe the activity being considered including aims and expected outcomes. This will help to determine how relevant the ‘policy’ is to equality.</b></p>	<p><b>HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET 2018/19</b>  <b>The Impact of Decreasing Dwelling Rents for the Council’s Housing Stock.</b></p> <p>Doncaster Council is landlord to 20,471 properties of which 20,209 are socially rented and 262 are leasehold. The Housing Management responsibility for the stock has been delegated to St Leger Homes of Doncaster (SLHD) under a management agreement. On 8 July 2015 the Government held a summer budget and announced in that budget that all social housing rents would reduce by 1% a year for the next four years from 2016/17 to 2019/20. This announcement is being forced upon local authorities through the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016. For 2018/19 the rent reduction will be 1.0% for all tenants meaning that the average rent will be £69.83 per week.</p> <p>This due regard statement seeks to identify those groups noted in the protected characteristics (section 3) that may be affected positively or negatively by the reducing of rents and sets out the measures to mitigate the impact on those groups. The rent decrease of 1.0% will be applied to all properties irrespective of the tenant.</p>
2	<p><b>Service area responsible for completing this statement.</b></p>	<p><b>St Leger Homes of Doncaster.</b></p>
3	<p><b>Summary of the information considered across the protected groups.</b></p> <p><b>Service users/residents</b></p> <p><b>Doncaster Workforce</b></p>	<p><b>Age</b>  The rent decrease of 1.0% will apply to all properties, regardless of the resident’s age. However, other specific welfare reform measures may have an impact as a result of the age of the tenant , these are as follows;</p> <p><b>Social Sector Size Criteria (bedroom tax);</b> Introduced 1 April 2013, this welfare reform only applies to working age households and currently affects 2,699 tenants claiming HB and 87 tenants who are claiming Universal Credit. 2,151 tenants have to make up a 14% shortfall for their rent and 548 have a shortfall of 25% to make up. The average age of tenants affected by under occupation charge is 46. We are not aware of the number of</p>

households who under occupy but do not claim housing benefit. Bedroom tax still applies to tenants that claim Universal Credit however we are unable to obtain accurate information as to how many are affected so the figures quoted above do not provide the full picture of the impact.

**Benefits Cap:** A Cap on the total amount of benefits a household can receive was introduced in July 2013, which affected 20 DMBC tenants. A further, lower cap was fully implemented on 9<sup>th</sup> January 2017 (£20k for families and £13,400 for single claimants). The lower cap currently affects 110 families in Council accommodation, although previous data would indicate that this is likely to change as cases are reassessed. For DMBC tenants, the reduced cap will largely apply to single parent households with 4 or more children or couples with 3 or more children.

**No automatic entitlement to Housing costs for 18-21 year olds:** This policy removes the automatic entitlement to help with housing costs for anyone in this age group who makes a claim for Universal Credit (UC), only applies in UC Full Service areas and it has applied in Doncaster since October 2017. We are not aware of any tenants in this age group who are currently affected by this change, but this is likely to become problematic for our younger tenants as more UC Full Service claims are made.

**Full Service roll out of Universal Credit from October 2017**

Universal Credit '*Full Service*' was implemented in Doncaster on 11 October 2017 and replaced the Universal Credit *Live Service* which had been operational since September 2015. From this point all new claims from working age tenants for any of the 6 former benefits (Job Seeker's Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance, Income Support, Child Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit and Housing Benefit) will automatically go onto Universal Credit and these former benefits will be closed to new claims. Based on new claims to UC made since 11 October 2017 where the rent costs has been verified by St Leger Homes, we are anticipating over 2,100 tenants will move onto UC in 2018/19. It is however, worth noting that claimants with 3 or more children are not currently eligible to claim Universal Credit. From January 2019, the policy will change and these families will

also be required to claim Universal Credit which is likely to increase the projected numbers of claimants moving to UC.

As at January 2018, there are approximately 38% pension age tenants and 62% working age. 5,207 (25.9%) pension age tenants and 6,796 (33.7%) working age tenants are in receipt of Housing Benefit or the Housing Element of Universal Credit. Currently there are 755 (3.8%) tenants claiming Universal Credit, all of which are working age.

#### Disability

Out of the main tenants on our Universal Housing system, 6,858 have identified as disabled – which equates to 34.19%. This compares to a national figure of 8.3% across the whole population in England (2011 Census data). It is not anticipated that the decrease in rents will adversely affect individuals based on their disability. The Housing Revenue Account also has a specific budget of £1.7m for adaptations to the homes of disabled residents.

#### Ethnicity

16,771 of our tenants identify as White British – which equates to 83.62%. 1,285 (6.41%) identify as belonging to black, Asian or minority ethnic groups. A report by Department for Work and Pensions in June 2012 also tells us that working age adults living in households headed by someone from an ethnic minority were more likely to live in low-income households. This was particularly the case for households headed by someone of Pakistani or Bangladeshi ethnic origin. Translation services are offered in exceptional cases, but every effort is made to ensure that tenants understand their tenancy agreements and any other legal documents.

#### Gender

It is not anticipated that the decrease in rents or under occupation charge will adversely affect individuals based on their gender. Male and Female residents will be equally affected. 12,683 of our tenants have identified as Female (63.23%) and 7,327 (36.53%) as Male. 28 tenants have identified as transgender.

		<p><b>Sexual Orientation</b> It is not anticipated that the decrease in rents will adversely affect individuals based on their sexual orientation.</p> <p><b>Religion and Belief</b> It is not anticipated that the decrease in rents will adversely affect individuals as a result of any specific religion or belief they may have.</p> <p><b>Maternity and Pregnancy</b> It is not envisaged that those residents who happen to be pregnant or on maternity leave will be adversely affected by the rent decrease as a result of their pregnancy or maternity leave.</p> <p><b>Gender Reassignment</b> It is not anticipated that the decrease in rents will adversely affect individuals who have undergone gender reassignment.</p> <p><b>Marriage and Civil Partnership</b> It is not anticipated that the decrease in rents will adversely affect individuals if they are married or in civil partnerships, more so than non-married residents or those not in civil partnerships.</p>
4	<b>Summary of the consultation/engagement activities</b>	<p>Directors and Cabinet have considered these matters at several meetings between December 2017 and February 2018.</p> <p>Members have been consulted at meetings between November 2017 and February 2018; this included Labour Group and representatives from other parties.</p> <p>The proposed HRA budget and changes to rent and service charges have been the subject of formal consultation with members of the Tenants and Residents Involvement Panel (TRIP) and representatives from Tenants and Residents Associations (TARAs) on 18 January 2018.</p> <p>Tenants think that Council rents in Doncaster are excellent value for money (this is reflected in Tenant surveys, 93.6% are satisfied that their rent provides value for money).</p>

		<p>They thought that the increases in fees and charges were reasonable and that the increases were very small weekly changes. They also responded to say that many tenants were seeing decreases in their fuel bills following investment in energy efficiency improvements.</p> <p>Tenants are happy with the condition of their homes and the services that they receive, they could not identify any service improvements or investment needs which were not being met by the proposed budgets. They were particularly pleased to see the resources to be invested in fire safety work and felt that the Council had acted quickly to address fire safety issues.</p> <p>SLHD consult with their staff and unions on the proposals within the HRA budget which directly affect them.</p> <p>Once a decision has been made by Council on 5 March, a letter will be sent to all Council tenants which will give details of the rent change with effect from 2 April 2018.</p>
5	<p><b>Real Consideration:</b></p> <p><b>Summary of what the evidence shows and how has it been used</b></p>	<p>All Council tenants will benefit from the rent reduction. But some tenants will continue to be impacted by the under occupation charge and/or benefit cap, however it is likely that some groups will be affected to a greater extent because of their lower income.</p> <p>The changes to welfare reform currently only impact on tenants that are deemed to be of “working age”.</p> <p>SLHD have a tenancy sustainment team to help assist tenants in financial difficulties and to help to sustain tenancies. This team was reconfigured and significantly strengthened to 17 staff members during 2017/18 to help the increasing numbers of tenants in rent arrears as a result of welfare reform changes. SLHD staff and staff from the Council’s benefit team work together with tenants to assist them to claim discretionary housing benefit (DHP) where this is appropriate. The Council has identified a budget of up to £0.561m to assist tenants impacted by welfare reform, a revised policy was approved which detailed how this money could be spent in August 2017, as further welfare benefit reform changes are made this policy may need to be updated again.</p> <p>The rent reduction is the same percentage reduction for all properties, the rent is calculated based on the characteristics of the property and not with regard to the tenant.</p>

6	<b>Decision Making</b>	This due regard statement has been made available to Members in advance of making any decisions on rent decreases. The HRA Budget 2018/19 report to Council on 5 March asks the Council to agree the rent reduction for the 2018/19 financial year with effect from 2 April 2018.
7	<b>Monitoring and Review</b>	The HRA budget is monitored on a quarterly basis by Cabinet, performance information for SLHD is monitored every 3 months by Cabinet and includes information on rent arrears. SLHD management team and Board monitor performance on a regular basis and there is a focus on rent arrears as a result of the recent welfare reform changes. Financial assistance is offered to all tenants who are in rent arrears, the number of evictions due to rent arrears is also monitored in detail to identify if any trends are emerging. Payments made from the welfare benefit reform fund are monitored and these details include the protected characteristics of the tenants.
8	<b>Sign off and approval for publication</b>	Julie Crook, Director of Corporate Services, St Leger Homes of Doncaster.