

## 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 2021/22</b>  <b>The Impact of Increasing Dwelling Rents for the Council’s Housing Stock.</b></p> <p>Doncaster Council is landlord to 20,365 properties of which 20,089 are socially rented and 276 are leasehold. The Housing Management responsibility for the stock has been delegated to St Leger Homes of Doncaster (SLHD) under a management agreement. In February, 2019 the Government published “Policy Statement on Rents for Social Housing” which regulates rent increases from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 for the next five years. For 2021/22 the rent increase will be 1.5% for all tenants meaning that the average rent will be £72.89 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 increasing of rents and sets out the measures to mitigate the impact on those groups. The rent increase of 1.5% will be applied to all tenancies 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 increase of 1.5% will apply to all tenancies, 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<sup>st</sup> April, 2013, this welfare reform only applies to working age households and currently affects 1,463 tenants who are claiming Housing Benefit*. 1,143 tenants have to make up a 14% shortfall for their rent and 320 have a shortfall of 25% to make up. We are not aware of the number of households who under occupy but do not claim housing benefit.</p> <p>*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</p>

not provide the full picture of the impact and also explains why the number of HB claimants affected by bedroom tax is reducing as people move on to UC.

**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 current benefit cap affects 74 families in Council accommodation. 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.

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

Universal Credit '*Full Service*' was implemented in Doncaster on 11<sup>th</sup> 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. In January 2019 the total number of cases claiming UC was 2,826. By January 2020 the number of tenants claiming UC now stands at 6,300 cases, an increase of 3,474.

As at January 2021, there are approximately 34% pension age tenants and 66% working age

**Disability**

Out of the main tenants on our housing management system, 6,617 have identified as disabled – which equates to 33%.

It is not anticipated that the increase in rents will adversely affect individuals based on their disability. The Housing Revenue Account also has a specific budget of £2.2m for adaptations to the homes of tenants that need adaptations.

	<p><b>Ethnicity</b> 16,105 of our tenants identify as White British – which equates to 80%. 1,343 (7%) identify as belonging to black, Asian or minority ethnic groups. Information is not currently available for the remaining tenants. Translation services are offered where requested and every effort is made to ensure that tenants understand their tenancy agreements and any other legal documents. Sign-posting to support services and assistance in obtaining help is also available.</p> <p><b>Gender</b> It is not anticipated that the increase in rents or under occupation charge will adversely affect individuals based on their gender. Male and Female residents will be equally affected. 12,667 of our tenants have identified as Female (64%) and 7,191 (36%) as Male.</p> <p><b>Sexual Orientation</b> It is not anticipated that the increase in rents will adversely affect individuals based on their sexual orientation.</p> <p><b>Religion and Belief</b> It is not anticipated that the increase 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 increase as a result of their pregnancy or maternity leave.</p> <p><b>Gender Reassignment</b> It is not anticipated that the increase in rents will adversely affect individuals who have undergone gender reassignment.</p>
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4	<p><b>Summary of the consultation/engagement activities</b></p>	<p>Directors, Cabinet and Members have been consulted at meetings between October 2020 and February 2021; this included Labour Group, Overview &amp; Scrutiny Management Committee (OSMC) 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), SLHD Tenant Board Members and representatives from Tenants and Residents Associations (TARAs) on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2021. Views were also sought from a further 93 tenants via a survey.</p> <p>Tenants think that Council rents in Doncaster are excellent value for money (and this is reflected in Tenant surveys 94.2% are satisfied that their rent provides value for money). They thought that the increase in rent was reasonable although these are tough times financially.</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 are keen to be involved in further consultation about the standard of homes going forward.</p> <p>Tenants were pleased to hear that the Council is investing significantly in additional Council houses as they know that there are many people that would benefit from homes of an excellent standard with good services.</p> <p>SLHD consult with their staff and unions on the proposals within the HRA budget that directly affect them.</p> <p>Once a decision has been made by Council on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2021, a letter will be sent to all Council tenants, which will give details of the rent change with effect from 5<sup>th</sup> April 2021.</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 be impacted from the rent increase. However, 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. The changes to welfare reform currently only affect 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 24 staff members during 2019/20 (and has remained the same since then) 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.</p> <p>The rent increase is the same percentage increase for all tenancies, the rent is calculated based on the characteristics of the property and not with regard to the tenant.</p>
6	<p><b>Decision Making</b></p>	<p>This due regard statement has been made available to Members in advance of making any decisions on rent increases. The HRA Budget 2021/22 report to Council on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2021 asks the Council to agree the rent increase for the 2021/22 financial year with effect from 5<sup>th</sup> April 2021.</p>
7	<p><b>Monitoring and Review</b></p>	<p>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.</p>
8	<p><b>Sign off and approval for publication</b></p>	<p>Julie Crook, Director of Corporate Services, St Leger Homes of Doncaster.</p>