

## 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 2016/17</b>  <b>The Impact of Decreasing Dwelling Rents for the Council's Housing Stock.</b></p> <p>Doncaster Council is landlord to 20,705 properties of which 20,452 are socially rented and 253 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 enforced upon local authorities through the welfare reform and work bill 2015-16, it is assumed that the Bill will receive royal assent before april 2016. The proposals within this report follow the principles outlined in the Bill and the recommendation is that rents reduce by 1.0% with effect from 4 April 2016. For 2016/17 the rent reduction will be 1.0% for all tenants meaning that the average rent will be £70.57 per week.</p> <p>In the current financial climate it is important that measures are implemented to minimise and mitigate the financial hardship that tenants will face in paying their rent, along with other welfare reform changes. For example, the under occupation charge/bedroom tax was introduced with effect from 1 April 2013 and a benefits cap was introduced in July 2013. 3,137 tenants are affected by the under occupation charge and a small number of tenants (20) are affected by the benefits cap.</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.</p> <p>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>St Leger Homes of Doncaster.</p>
3	<p><b>Summary of the information considered across the protected groups.</b></p>	<p>Age  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</p>

<p><b>Service users/residents</b></p> <p><b>Doncaster Workforce</b></p>	<p>age of the tenant , these are as follows;</p> <p><b>Under Occupation Charge</b> This welfare reform only applies to working age households. 3,137 tenants, 15.6%, are affected by the under occupation charge. The average age of tenants affected by under occupation charge is 44. We are not aware of the number of households who under occupy but do not claim housing benefit.</p> <p><b>Benefit Cap</b> In January 2016 there were 20 households where the benefit cap was being applied. The average age of tenants affected by the benefit cap at this date is 36 in single parents households and 38 in couple households.</p> <p>The benefit cap will be reduced during 2016/17 from £26k to £20k. It will affect working age tenants but as yet we don't know who will be affected as each case is assessed individually by DWP. The reduced cap will only apply to single parent household with 4 or more children or couples with 3 or more children who are not exempt. As at January 2016, there are 20,123 active tenancies of which approximately 38% are pension age tenants and 62% are working age. 5,800 (28.8%) pension age tenants and 7,400 (36.8%) working age tenants are in receipt of Housing Benefit or the Housing Element of Universal Credit.</p> <p><b>Disability</b> There are 8,585 (36.55%) known disabled residents within the Council's housing stock, of which 20.45% are registered with a physical disability. This compares to a national figure of 8.3% across the whole population in England<sup>1</sup>. 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 £1.8m for adaptations to the homes of disabled residents.</p>
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<sup>1</sup> Office of National Statistics 2011

	<p><b>Race</b> The SLHD resident data shows that 86.8% of our tenants are white British and 3.2% of tenants are from black, Asian or minority ethnic groups with a further 10.0% unknown. A report by Department for Work and Pensions in June 2012<sup>2</sup> 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.</p> <p><b>Gender</b> 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. The split of tenants is 61% female and 39% male.</p> <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 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>
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<sup>2</sup> Department for Work and Pensions: *Households Below Average Income – An analysis of the income distribution 1994/95 – 2010/11 June 2012 (United Kingdom)*

		<p>Marriage and Civil Partnership</p> <p>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	<p><b>Summary of the consultation/engagement activities</b></p>	<p>Directors and Cabinet have considered these matters at several meetings between September 2015 and February 2016.</p> <p>Members have been consulted through various meetings and with the Leaders of the other parties. Meetings have taken place since December 2015 and will continue until February 2016.</p> <p>Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee have been consulted on the Mayor's budget proposals at meetings held between November 2015 and February 2016. The following meetings took place:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. OSMC Informal Budget Meetings – 9th December, 2015 and 27th January, 2016;</li> <li>b. Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on the 11th February, 2016, formally considered the budget proposals. The Chair will provide a detailed written response for the Mayor and will provide a verbal response at the Council meeting.</li> </ol> <p>The proposed HRA budget and changes to rent and service charges have been the subject of formal consultation with representatives of the Doncaster Federation of Tenants' and Residents Association (TARA), members of the Tenants and Residents Involvement Panel (TRIP) and representatives from TARA groups on 28 January 2016. In summary the tenants were pleased with the reduction in rents and the freeze in the majority of other charges. They understand the rationale for the increases in the heating charges on Balby Bridge estate. They think that additional Government funding should be provided to fund new Council House building. They are confident that St Leger Homes and DMBC will manage the reduced resources within the HRA.</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 1 March, a letter will be sent to all Council tenants which will give details of the rent change with effect from 4 April 2016. Tenants will be given 28 days notice for the decrease in rents.</p>
<b>5</b>	<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. SLHD have a financial inclusion team to help assist tenants in financial difficulties and this team was strengthened to 5.5 staff members during 2014/15 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 £0.6m to assist tenants impacted by welfare reform, a policy was approved which detailed how this money could be spent in May 2014, as further welfare benefit reform changes are made this policy may need to be updated. 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>
<b>6</b>	<b>Decision Making</b>	<p>This due regard statement has been made available to Members in advance of making any decisions on rent decreases. The HRA Budget 2016/17 report to Council on 1 March asks the Council to agree the rent reduction for the 2016/17 financial year with effect from 4 April 2016.</p>
<b>7</b>	<b>Monitoring and Review</b>	<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 monthly 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</p>

		made from the welfare benefit reform fund are monitored and these details include the protected characteristics of the tenants.
<b>8</b>	<b>Sign off and approval for publication</b>	Julie Crook, Director of Corporate Services, St Leger Homes of Doncaster.