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Promoting Positive Behaviours in Social Housing

This is a summary of a research project undertaken by the University in collaboration with a social housing provider in 2013/14. The project aims were to undertake a pilot study to support the development of a more effective and efficient model for delivering social housing services. The model was specifically in relation to accommodating a more streamlined approach to management practices based on a strategy of positive reinforcement of good tenant behaviour. This was in the context of a strategy to reduce or eradicate cases of Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) amongst the Association's tenants and allow staff time to be devoted to other work areas. The development of the new model was based upon the vision of the housing provider that introducing rewards and incentives to tenants would promote a culture of positive tenant behaviours.

The study employed a mixed methods approach involving predominantly the facilitation of focus group interviews with staff and service users, a visual audit of the estate and a daily monitoring exercise of staff and officer time expended on estate and tenancy matters. A review of the literature on the social housing sector revealed a lack of data in the field of predictive modelling but confirmed that housing associations had developed a variety of systems of incentives and rewards to encourage tenants to conduct their tenancies in a responsible manner. Despite the range of reward schemes in operation in the social housing sector the literature review revealed no clear conclusions of the benefits to the sector or of the benefits to the tenants of introducing an incentive scheme to reward good behaviour.

Focus group interviews with staff revealed a mixed response to the development of a predictive model on tenant behaviour and to the introduction of a range of incentives to support rewarding 'good tenants'. Concerns around the development of a system of incentives to reward good behaviour were also expressed by the service users through the focus group interviews held on the estate.

The data collected via the daily logging of staff time revealed that no staff time was spent on cases of Anti Social Behaviour. However, staff time was spent disproportionately in respect of vacated tenancies that may be the site of or somehow connected to ASB. A disproportionate amount of staff time was recorded in addressing the functional aspects relating to inspections, repairs and the reallocation of the tenancy. The daily monitoring activity schedule revealed that the most common form of contact with by the tenant was by phone at 39% with only 15% of officer time spent on the estate in face to face contact with the tenants.

The conclusions suggest that despite the limitations of the case study research project there was insufficient evidence at this stage to support the development of a predictive model to determine tenant behaviour in the social housing sector. Furthermore the benefits involved in introducing incentives and rewards to promote positive behaviour in tenants was not apparent from the literature review, nor was this overwhelmingly accepted by staff at the Association or indeed the service users interviewed in focus groups.

The Association has acknowledged the conclusions of the research and adjusted their strategic position as a result of the findings. The research team involved in the project were Dr Rachel Armitage and Leanne Monchuk of Human Health Sciences and Gillian Bishop, Dr Katie Dhingra and Professor Stephen Swailes of The Business School. The full report is confidential but enquiries and requests for further information should be directed to Gillian Bishop on g.bishop@hud.ac.uk