

ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE ON 22 February 2022

REPORT

SUBJECT: Housing Fraud Update Report

REPORT AUTHOR: Johanne Batty, Neighbourhood Services Manager

DATE: January 2022

EXTN: 37221

AREA: Residential Services

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

At the Audit and Governance Committee meeting on 29 July 2021 the Committee requested that an update report be provided to the Committee on Housing Fraud.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Audit and Governance Committee are asked to note the content of this report.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 At the last Audit and Governance meeting members asked for an update on Tenancy fraud to be brought to this meeting.
- 1.2 This post was vacant during 2020 when the Officer changed roles within the Council.
- 1.4 The new Fraud Investigator officer has been in post since 1 June 2021.

2. Fraud Investigation activity 1 June 2021 - 31 December 2021

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Number of referrals received | 78 |
| Properties successfully obtained back | 1 |
| Sole to joint applications refused | 1 |
| Mutual Exchanged applications refused | 2 |
| Tenancy succession applications declined | 3 |
| Number of cases referred for legal action (awaiting Court date) | 1 |
| Financial saving to the Council (including £2324 Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit reclaimed) (7 x £42k + £2324) | £296,324* |

*Tenancy Fraud Forum have published figures that estimate the average cost of each detected tenancy fraud to the national purse is £42k.

3. JOINT WORKING

3.1 The Fraud Officer has developed close joint working with banks and building societies to obtain information under the PoSHFA legislation, NAFN (National Anti-Fraud Network), West Sussex County Council and Local Authorities and is an active member of The Tenancy Fraud Forum and the Sussex Fraud Officers Group.

4. RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT

4.1 To assist in raising the profile of Tenancy Fraud and the Councils commitment to investigating it a two-page article detailing what constitute tenancy fraud, how to report it together with case studies was published in Residential Services Resident Newsletter in December 2021. By educating residents about the impact of tenancy fraud and publicising successful outcomes we hope to encourage more reporting.

5. FUTURE SERVICE DEVELOPMENT

5.1 We continue to focus on proactive work to detect tenancy fraud and developing a programme of communication both internally and externally to support the role of the fraud officer.

2. PROPOSAL(S):

2.1 Members are asked to note the content of this report.

3. OPTIONS:

3.1 This report is information only.

4. CONSULTATION:

| | YES | NO |
|---|-----|-----------|
| Relevant Town/Parish Council | | ✓ |
| Relevant District Ward Councillors | | ✓ |
| Other groups/persons (please specify) Members of the Housing and Customer Services Working Group | | ✓ |
| 5. ARE THERE ANY IMPLICATIONS IN RELATION TO THE FOLLOWING COUNCIL POLICIES: (Explain in more detail at 6 below) | | NO |
| Financial | | ✓ |
| Legal | | ✓ |
| Human Rights/Equality Impact Assessment | | ✓ |

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| Community Safety including Section 17 of Crime & Disorder Act | | ✓ |
| Sustainability | | ✓ |
| Asset Management/Property/Land | | ✓ |
| Technology | | ✓ |
| Other (please explain) | | |

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|--|
| 6. IMPLICATIONS: N/A |
| 7. REASON FOR THE DECISION: N/A |
| 8. BACKGROUND PAPERS: <u>Audit & Governance Committee Meeting Minutes - 29 July 2021</u> |