

Report to: Cabinet Meeting: 23 July 2024  
 Portfolio Holder: Councillor Lee Brazier, Portfolio Holder - Housing  
 Director Lead: Suzanne Shead, Director Housing, Health and Wellbeing  
 Lead Officer: Julie Davidson, Business Manager, Housing Services ext. 5542.

Report Summary	
<b>Type of report</b>	Open report Non-key decision Update
<b>Report Title</b>	“Getting to Know You Visits” Programme Update
<b>Purpose of Report</b>	To update on the progress and outcomes from the first two years of the GTKY visit programme.
<b>Recommendations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To note the progress and outcomes of the GTKY visit programme to December 2023.</li> <li>• To note the sharing of the report with the Tenant Engagement Board.</li> <li>• To support the ongoing programme of GTKY visits with a further update in April 2025 or when all tenants have been visited.</li> </ul>
<b>Alternative Options Considered</b>	None, getting to know you visits are an important good practice housing management activity to help us understand who is behind the front door of our homes, support tenants to sustain their tenancies and identify where there are additional needs
<b>Reason for Recommendation</b>	<p>To report the positive impacts of the GTKY programme as they align to the following Community Plan objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve health and wellbeing.</li> <li>• Increase the supply, choice and standard of housing.</li> <li>• Reduce crime and anti-social behaviour.</li> <li>• Celebrate and invigorate community spirit, prod of place and a sense of belonging.</li> <li>• To be a top performing, modern and accessible council.</li> </ul>

## 1.0 Background

- 1.1 The implementation of a rolling programme of “Getting to Know You Visits” commenced in October 2021 following Government guidance from the Social Housing Charter (now enshrined in the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 placing the focus on landlords to ensure the safety of tenants and to promote their right to recourse should we fail to keep them safe or listen to their views.
- 1.2 There is now also a greater focus placed on landlords ‘knowing their tenants’ by the Regulator for Social Housing through the recently updated Regulatory Standards and knowing who is behind the front door and to understand how our homes are working for them. It is also one of the ways the Council combats tenancy fraud.
- 1.3 These feature in the Transparency, Influence and Accountability and Tenancy Consumer standards:

The standards state that providers must:

- Understand the diverse needs of tenants, including those arising from protected characteristics, language barriers, and additional support needs.
  - Provide a home that meets the government’s Decent Homes standard.
  - Support tenants to maintain their tenancy.
  - Develop and deliver services that seek to address under-occupation and overcrowding in their homes. These services should be focused on the needs of tenants.
  - Take action to prevent and tackle tenancy fraud.
- 1.4 The GTKY programme provides a perfect platform to engage positively with our tenants, and their households, building on the making every contact count ethos and moving away from only contacting tenants when things are going wrong, or they are in crisis.
  - 1.5 The GTKY programme aims to visit all 5383 tenants on a planned basis with a pre-prepared questionnaire that covers a range of subjects and discussion points as listed below:
    - Proactive, planned engagement with our tenants that lets them know their views are important to us and their satisfaction with us as their landlord is our priority.
    - Ensure the accommodation is suitable for the household e.g., if there was an emergency, that safe evacuation can happen.
    - Maintain sustainable tenancies and proactive tenancy management.
    - Identify any support needs within the household.
    - Update the tenants preferred communication and consultation method.
    - Check that the property is being maintained in accordance with the Tenancy Agreement.
    - Identify potential Tenancy Fraud – subletting or unauthorised occupation through checking occupant details.
    - Checking for any outstanding repairs and that the property is safe and secure.
    - Understand the levels of occupation within the household.
    - Provide the opportunity to improve tenant profile information to support better tailoring of services.
  - 1.6 Within our Housing with Care facilities at Gladstone House, Vale View, Armstrong Gardens and The Broadleaves tenants receive regular visits and support alongside an annual reviews so are excluded from this programme.

1.7 The programme was prioritised using a risk-based approach:

No repairs reported in previous 2 years.	No recorded Council visits or contact in previous 2 years.
Rent account in arrears.	Officers' local knowledge
Reports of subletting or abandonment	

1.8 The initial programme was established in October 2021 and scheduled over a two- year period to December 2023 with the ambitious aim to visit every general needs household during this time. To achieve this over a two-year period the target visits per officer per year was 224. This report presents progress to date, an analysis of the impact of visits and the outcomes.

1.9 Between October 2021 and December 2023 several other targeted priorities fell to the tenancy and estates team which delayed progress including:

- July 2022 onwards – Supporting the compliance team to gain access for gas and/or electrical services to ensure regulatory compliance.
- August 2022 - The requirement to install CO monitors in all properties in a time limited period to ensure regulatory compliance.
- October 2023 – Responding to the impact of floods and the subsequent support for tenants who needed to move out for repairs.

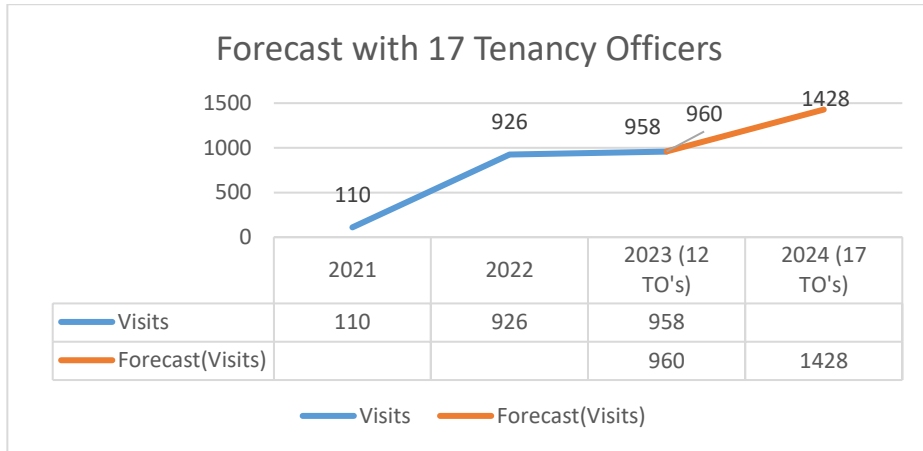
1.10 As the programme progressed officers found a significant amount of support needs and signposting requirements which increased workloads and slowed progress against the programme. This was acknowledged at Cabinet in September 2023 when a request for additional resources was approved allowing for the recruitment of five officers. This recruitment has been completed and officers in post completed by March 2024.

## 2.0 Progress

2.1 The Council have 17 tenancy officers with a target of visiting seven households per month. Based on this level of resource, this delivers 119 overall per month this will average at 1428 per year giving a cycle of three and a half years to complete first visits.

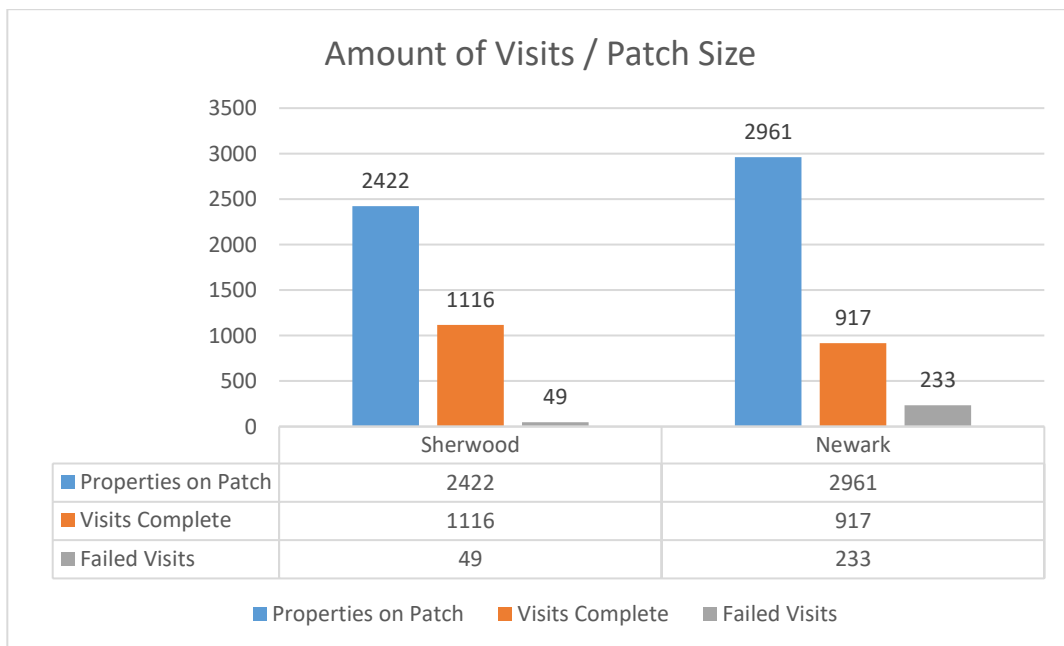


2.2 With the additional officers in post from April 2024, more GTKY visits will be completed to reduce the timeframe for the completion of a GTKY visit to all tenants.



2.3 As it is difficult to estimate the exact timescales for the completion of all first visits, a further update will be presented in March 2025 or upon completion of all visits, whichever comes sooner.

2.4 Analysis of the programme shows that all tenancy officers have experienced challenges in achieving their respective GTKY targets. The table below demonstrates this, and includes the numbers of failed visits:



2.7 The disparity between the Newark and the Sherwood data cannot be explained - greater levels of access are enjoyed by the officers working in Sherwood along with lower failed visits.

District	Property Numbers	Visits Complete	%
Newark	2961	917	31%
Sherwood	2422	1116	46%

### 3.0 Data Collation and Monitoring Process

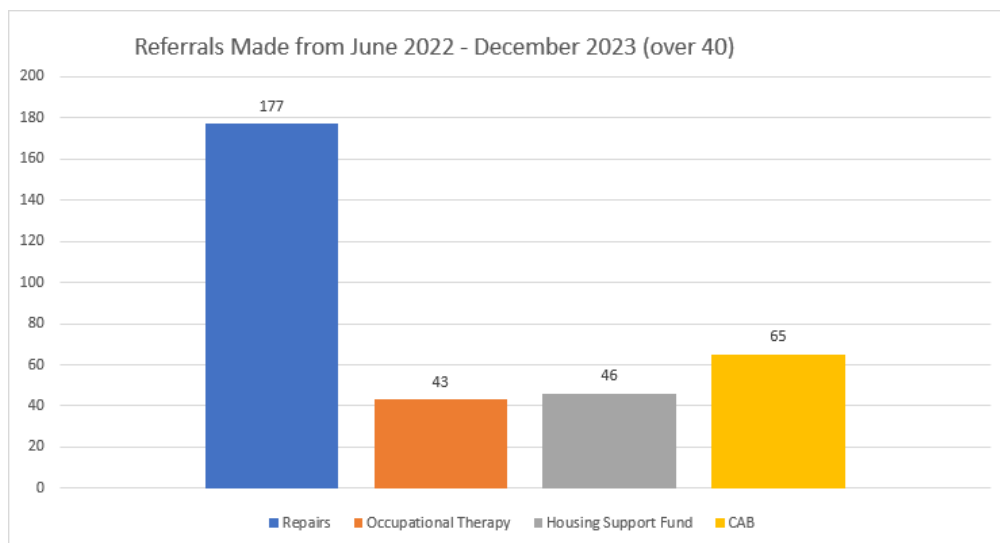
- 3.1 The data collation and monitoring process for the Getting to Know You visits has evolved since the programme commenced in October 2021 from a paper form to a Microsoft form on the officers' mobile phone. The data is downloaded weekly into a master spreadsheet which details addresses that have been visited, those outstanding, and the target date for the next visit (this is set up to automatically generate the next GTKY visit date. An individual log of the answered questions is also downloaded and sent to the tenancy officer, so they have a record of any changes in circumstances, referrals to make, and issues raised.
- 3.2 This programme will be built into the new Housing Management System, improving the process further by automatic data transfer, referral triggers being system generated and date of next visit added to the officer's workflow making the process more efficient.

### 4.0 Visit Outcomes

- 4.1 Data collected from June 2022 (previous data not collated in detail) and December 2023 shows 529 referrals were made, with the highest number being for repairs – both new and follow-up. This word cloud shows the nature of the information collected.



- 4.2 The graph below details circumstances where over 40 referrals were made.



- 4.3 As the graph at 4.2 indicates 53% of all 40+ referrals have been to Asset Management and Responsive Repairs; further assessment will be done to understand if these are unreported repairs or chases/follow ups indicating the current processes could be improved or whether there was an opportunity when prompted by the officer, to report a repair.
- 4.4 The second highest referral category is to Citizens Advice which demonstrates tenants are willing to engage with services to support with money advice and/or debt management. The Housing Support Fund referrals indicate officers are supporting tenants to access the grant in times of crisis and food poverty.
- 4.5 Referrals through to Nottinghamshire County Council Occupational Therapy Team supports tenants to either live independently for longer with adaptations or provide information on unmet housing need to consider matching to an already adapted properties as they become available.
- 4.6 This report details the proactive work carried out by the tenancy and estate team and the importance of engaging with tenants in a positive way. To put the work into context and to demonstrate the difference these visits can make a few case studies are included below.
- 4.7 *"GTKY was completed and highlighted the tenant was living alone in a general needs 3-bedroom house with a large garden, tenant wanted to downsize to a more suitable property. Tenant wasn't managing with the size of the property. However due to finances being very tight, tenant couldn't afford the move. Decorating and garden work was preventing the tenant from passing the transfer inspection. Tenant was eligible for the Home Release Incentive Scheme; we successfully moved the tenant to a more suitable property and released a 3-bedroom house. Tenant managing well in their new property and is very happy".*
- 4.8 *"Mrs D became an involved tenant, following a GTKY visit at her property. She was a little bit reluctant at first to get involved but now she loves it".*
- 4.9 *"During a GTKY visit I identified an older tenant who needed support as the property was a first floor flat and they were stuck in the flat struggling to get up the stairs. This highlighted they needed help with a move and after a few months I supported them with a move to a 2-bedroom bungalow - their health has improved drastically meaning they was able to attend their son's wedding last year. They did not believe they would be well enough to make it".*
- 4.10 *"I attended a property for an untidy garden and completed a GTKY visit when I was there. It was highlighted there were support needs not being met and both Mr X and his wife were struggling. His wife is disabled and had no form of care support meaning this fell onto Mr X to care for his wife even though he had disabilities of his own. Following a number of referrals, he now has full care support for his wife, and he has made massive progress in his home and garden and is now starting to take pride in his property".*
- 4.11 *"During a GTKY visit, a tenant disclosed concerns about a neighbouring flat not being lived in and when investigated, the cultivation of 33 cannabis plants was discovered. Action is ongoing".*

## **5.0 Equalities Impact**

Undertaking these visits helps officers to identify household vulnerabilities and where there are additional needs within a household, help us to provide a fair and equitable service to all tenants and their families.

## **6.0 Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications arising from this report as the visits are undertaken as part of the tenancy officer role.

## **7.0 Future Reporting**

7.1 The next report will be provided to the Portfolio Holder for Housing in April 2025 or when all visits are completed.

## **Background Papers and Published Documents**

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.