



Private Sector Housing Management and Enforcement

Report: 1st January to 31st March 2022

Area: Barnsley - North East Area
Wards: Cudworth Ward, Monk Bretton Wards, North East Wards and Royston Ward
Service: Safer Neighbourhood Services
Base: Cudworth Police Station, Manor Rd, Cudworth, Barnsley. S72 8DG
Housing and Enforcement Officer (HEO): Chris Platts

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Chris Platts

About Me:

“Prior to this role, I worked as a Community Safety Officer within the Safer Neighbourhood Service for 3 years and prior to that, I was an Environment Officer in BMBC’s Environmental Regulatory Unit for the previous 7 years.

I came from a Life Assurance background having spent 15 years working for Scottish Widows and Aviva in new business processing centres dealing with new applications initially before moving onto complaints handling for insurance broker networks and also call centre work (including Team Leader).



I realised I wanted to change career and wanted to give something back, so started studying for an OU qualification to enable me to get into environment related work and then went to the University of Sheffield to gain a BSc in more environmentally related subjects”.

About my Housing Enforcement Officer Role (HEO):

“My role involves proactively looking for private rented housing disrepair issues, environmental matters within the curtilage of a premises for example build-up of waste etc and also identifying vulnerable people within those properties. I also deal with fly tipping if it takes place within the curtilage of a private rented property.

Since Covid began however, my role has been more of a reactive one and other issues have come to me such as low level anti-social behaviour, the odd neighbour dispute and some pollution jobs too. Most Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) jobs are dealt with by Case Management Officers within the Safer Neighbourhood Service though.

Initially, I try to work informally with tenants and landlords to reach the desired outcome, but occasionally I have to serve legal Notice to resolve matters. The number of proactive disrepair jobs have dropped off since Covid came but will pick up as we approach relative normality.

In the case of vulnerable people, it can take a time to identify their needs, especially at the moment with fewer visits due to Covid. People don't always want to 'open up' over the phone and it can take weeks to make that breakthrough.

Sometimes it can be fairly straight-forward and is a case of signposting or getting somebody who can help further to contact the tenants. Other times it can obviously be more complex, and I am still working with a couple of tenants from three years ago to help them with various matters.

I've filled out countless application forms for people who can't read or write very well, switched energy contracts for them because they weren't confident enough, changed lightbulbs for people, made cups of tea, visited food banks for them, you name it!

It's very rewarding at times but it can also be quite an emotional experience, particularly when tenants are in a bad way for whatever reason".

Referral to Housing & Environment Officer Process

What's the need?



Housing Disrepair



Housing Environment (EG: Waste)



Vulnerable people

Who gets in touch?

Individuals

- Tenants
- Neighbours

Partners

- Berneslai Homes
- Fire Service
- Housing Associations
- South Yorkshire Housing
- Elected Members
- South Yorkshire Police
- Parish Councillors
- Other partners

How they get in touch



BMC Website via Requestry online form



Phone



Email

Central Team will...

- Add to Case Management System
- Triage
- Risk Assess
- Assign to Housing and Environment Officer

Housing Enforcement Officer will...

- Pick up New Case (OR via HEO visits in the locality identifies unreported cases)
- Work with tenants, landlords and partner agencies to resolve issues
- Complete visits or digital calls to all involved
- Provide support and advice
- Signpost to other agencies
- Send warning letters, formal CPN, issue FPN
- Monitor outcomes
- Report to Central Team

North East Area:

Cases/Interventions:

The HEO has contacted at least another **61 properties** by way of door knocking when working in a particular area.

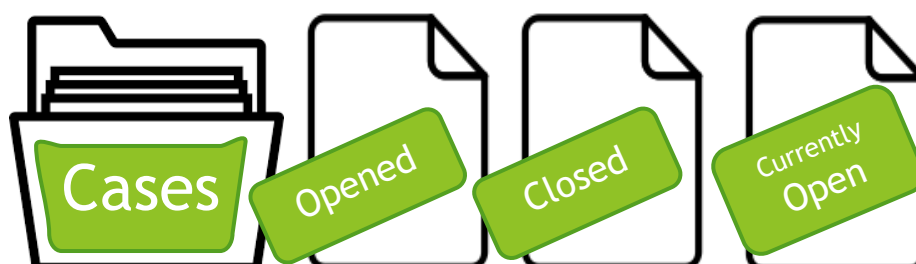
“For the majority of the last three quarters, I have been responding to reactive service requests within the team but have now returned to proactive work full time”.

Cudworth	51
Monk Bretton	15
North East Ward	22
Royston	17

Cases in the North East Area between
1st January 2022 and 31st March 2022:
By Wards

Cases in the North East Area between 1st January 2022 and 31st March 2022: Total

NB: Cases ‘Closed’ can be from previous quarters



A Very Busy Quarter:

“This quarter has been my busiest ever period with the NEAC with over 100 new cases taken on. The first couple of weeks in a new year tend to be busier anyway as people struggle to get rid of excess waste from the Christmas period or decide that the time has now come for them to get in touch with the council regarding whatever it is they put on hold for the holidays. As is always the case in this period, complaints are received regarding damp and mould in properties or excess cold.

I am now working predominantly proactively and have been able to prevent a lot of situations deteriorating to the point where formal enforcement action would be required, by way of doorstep chats and/or informal letters to residents. I have also hand-delivered warning letters to several streets in the North East with a colleague, warning of the penalties faced for waste on premises, fly-tipping and giving waste to unlicensed removal companies. I picked up 9 property inspections this quarter and in some cases, the improvement works have been carried out, whereas in others it is either ongoing or the landlord has yet to start work. These cases are being followed closely and may progress to formal enforcement action if the landlords do not comply”.



Waste on Premises

"I have dealt with over 10 issues regarding waste on premises and the vast majority of these cases were discovered proactively across the area. Some cases have been resolved by informal doorstep chats or telephone calls, whereas others have progressed to informal letters and/or formal Community Protection Notice written warnings and full Notices on the tenant and/or landlord.



Disrepair - Heating and Condensation

Many people I have visited have again had condensation issues caused by a lack of ventilation, or due to not heating their homes appropriately. Fear of the rise in energy costs seems to be causing people to be reluctant to heat their home adequately although hopefully warmer temperatures are coming which will help the situation. Boiler re-pressurisation issues are still commonplace as well as the need for radiators to be bled regularly. Again, I have been able to resolve some of these issues over the telephone. I have carried out eight property inspections and dealt with other disrepair complaints by telephone and email".

- 9 General Disrepair
- 4 Defective Heating/Hot Water
- 4 Damp & Mould
- 3 Excess cold
- 3 Structural collapse
- 3 Position and operability of amenities

I continue to provide a lot of advice to tenants about ways to combat condensation.

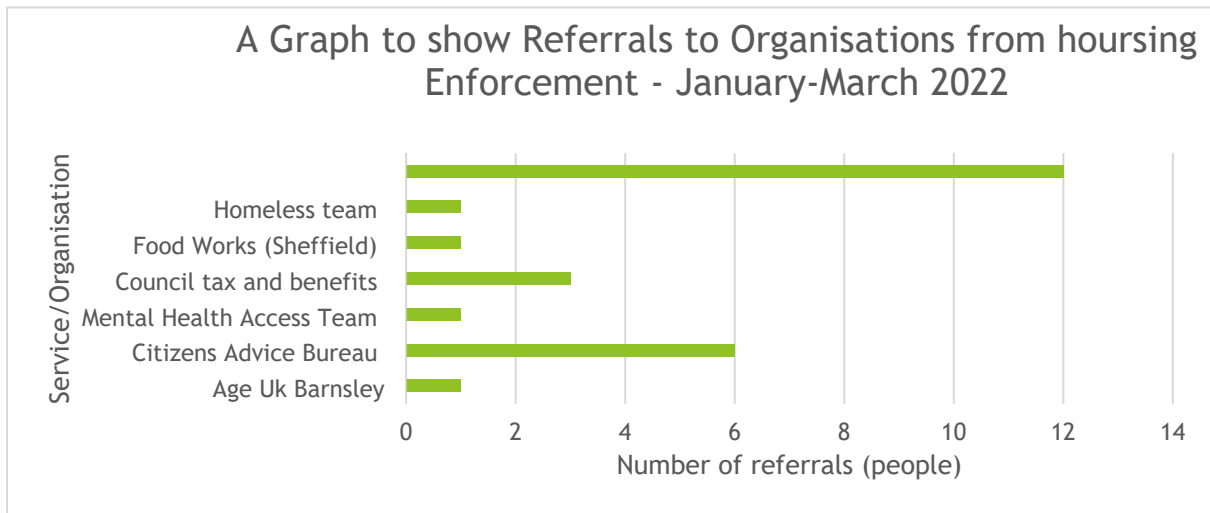


Supporting and identifying Vulnerable tenants

- 6 households identified

Agencies and Services referred to: 12 people

A Graph to show Referrals to Organisations from housing Enforcement - January-March 2022



NB: Uswitch - The HEO recommended that people review their energy tariffs yearly as and when required.

Food Works (Sheffield) - 1 family was informed about Food Works, which offers surplus food parcels from major supermarkets for a minimum £1 donation

The Outcomes, Impacts and Results January-March 2022

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Worked with x12 households to directly support with waste disposal and recycling leading to more waste recycling and less waste on the premises
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Written x7 CPN warnings
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Issued x2 CPN
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Improvements in 45 properties took place following service intervention, 18 of these showing improvements after the first HEO visit
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	x0 Anti-Social Behaviour written warnings were sent
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	X8 fly-tipping cases
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Community events including organised street and green area litter picks are planned for 2022.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	x6 Vulnerable people have been given early help by not only the HEO but also from other relevant services. This has helped them decrease bills especially in these times of austerity, reduce worry, secure safer and healthier accommodation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	HEO continued to work flexibly with the community - email and phone as well as face-to-face visits

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Number of informal requests for action to private landlords
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Identified x4 individuals to have support needs
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Signposted x12 individuals to other services and agencies

Case Study 1

Following a call received from an elected member, I visited a gentleman in his 70s.

I called to see him, and he allowed me into his house to have a chat with him. It was immediately obvious however that he needed some help, as there was litter all over the floor in every room that I could see, as well as on the kitchen side and on the tables and chairs in his living room, including empty cigarette packets, used tablet packets, junk mail, paper, boxes, bags and clothes amongst a lot of other things. The gentleman had a big pile of coins on his coffee table and dozens of full cigarette packets on one of his armchairs. He said he had all his dustbins although how much they get used was not clear. There was a huge pile of cigarette ends outside his back door. He did not appear to be hoarding but was clearly having difficulty keeping his home clean and tidy.

This gentleman has lived alone since 1982 and has no friends or relatives nearby or even neighbours that can help him unfortunately. He has a sister in Wales who he rarely sees but speaks to on the telephone quite often. He still manages to get out and about in his car to church and to Co-op to do his shopping around 3 times a week and said he had food and drink in the house and didn't need any help with that. He has a bank account and is receiving benefits. The gentleman said his health was not an issue, with his one problem controlled by medication. He had electricity, hot water and gas central heating working and there were no disrepair issues, damp or mould that I could see - or that he complained about.

The gentleman seemed to be managing satisfactorily for the most part, although I didn't pry too much as he did look a little overwhelmed with my being there and I didn't want to make it worse for him. I asked him outright if he felt he needed some help and he admitted that he did even though he'd never asked for help before. I asked him if it was ok for me to pass his telephone number on so we could get somebody else out to see him and he was fine with that. He understood what was happening but when Age UK followed up my visit, he did not want to speak to them.

I revisited the gentleman a week or so later but he was out, although I was able to see through his door and window that he had cleaned and tidied the house and that the situation appeared to have improved dramatically. His wheelie bins were clearly being used and there was no litter on the floor, no piles of cigarette boxes etc where anywhere to be seen.

I called again a couple of weeks later with a new mobile phone provided by Age UK and set it up for the gentleman so he would be able to use it, as it had been reported that his old phone was not working properly. At the time of my revisit, the house was still in a clean and tidy condition, I was told by the resident that he had done it all himself without the need for external help, which was great to hear. We had a chat and it seemed that all was now well. He felt better for the house being in a good condition, he was going out a little more often and he was going to go straight out and put more credit on his mobile phone once I had left.

I then revisited with a colleague from social services and again found the house and its occupier to be in good condition. He was happy for social services to close their file and was just on his way out to church as we visited. The gentleman agreed for me to revisit again sometime to see how he is doing and I will keep in touch with him for a while. He also has my telephone number and I told him he can use it if he needs help or signposting for anything. I feel that now he has had that little nudge in the right direction, he is back to his old self and my support will not be needed.

Case Study 2

A call was received from a concerned resident in Grimethorpe, following fires that were being started in the garden of a nearby property. The tenant of the property has been known to burn rubbish before rather than disposing of it the correct way and the complainant reported that several fires had been started over the weekend due to the amount of waste the tenant had to get rid of.

I initially sent an informal warning letter to the tenant and contacted the landlord who agreed to speak to her, but unfortunately it did not result in any improvement with a fire being started the same night. The landlord did not seem to know what to do next and was quite laid back in his attitude towards the problem.

Because of this, I felt it necessary to serve a Community Protection Notice written warning on both the tenant and the landlord. The tenant was ordered not to accumulate further waste, not to burn any waste and to have the garden cleared legally and responsibly. The landlord was ordered to ensure that his tenant had no further fires, accumulated no more waste and in the event that his tenant did not clear the garden of waste, he had it cleared as ultimately, he was responsible as the landowner.

The fires stopped immediately and the landlord ordered a skip to have the waste removed inside of the time permitted by the notice. Unfortunately, not all the waste was removed, and the case has since progressed to a full Community Protection Notice ordering the remaining rubbish to be removed.

The tenant then started fires in a neighbouring friend's back garden, as the notice only applied to her own house. A new written warning was served on her ordering her not to burn waste anywhere in the village whether on private land or council land. She has since stopped burning waste. There was a large amount of waste in the neighbouring property as a result and following intervention and the threat of legal action against the owner, the waste was removed by skip within 24 hours.



Case Study 3

A complaint was received about some high and overgrown conifers in a garden that were blocking light from a neighbouring property. Following a visit to the property where the trees are and a lack of communication from the occupier, I wrote to the household requesting that the conifer be cut back and maintained to a point where they could not be seen to be a problem to neighbouring houses. Unfortunately, no response has been received and the complainant has been informed that no offence is being committed, although BMBC will look at the case and consider taking it further, subject to the fee for doing so under a High Hedges dispute.

Case Study 4

A property in Cudworth was occupied by a tenant who was allegedly building up waste in the rear garden, although allegations were also made that people were fly tipping over the wall and onto the premises.

A Community Protection Notice written warning was served on the tenant to clear the garden of waste within 14 days but when I revisited, only a small amount of waste had gone. Despite repeated visits to the property to speak to the tenants about the matter before progressing the case further, I was unable to catch them at home. I contacted the landlord about the matter to be informed that the tenants had left the property and that he would deal with the waste in the garden shortly. Unfortunately, the landlord did not keep his word and as well as the garden remaining full of household and industrial rubbish, it was attracting further waste. A Community Protection Notice written warning was served on the landlord giving him 7 days to clear the garden of all waste and he complied. Warning letters have been sent to neighbouring properties regarding fly tipping following the allegations made and the landlord of this particular property is installing CCTV as a deterrent.

