Item No. 5	Classification: Open	Date: 4 March 2016	Meeting Name: Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Report title:		**Report on processes to support older and more vulnerable tenants living on their own.**	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		Borough-wide	
From:		Director of Resident Services	

RECOMMENDATION(S)

1.   Members note the report

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1.   Following the recent death of two council tenants living alone, the Leader of the Council asked Chief Officers to:

    a.   Review the current policies, procedures and practices
    b.   To consider whether any more proactive steps could be taken to identify trigger points of concerns.
    c.   To review the response to such triggers.
    d.   To consider the findings of the 2009 'Lambert' report

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Case 1, Mr I

2.   Mr. I (aged 74) was a council tenant in Camberwell SE5 from September 1977. In line with the council's programme of periodic tenancy visits Mr I was last visited on 5 July 2015. Mr I was in receipt of full Housing Benefit with payments of arrears being deducted by the DWP and paid directly to the Council. The last payment to his account was on 12 February 2016.

3.   On 2 December 2015 the council was first alerted by a neighbour that Mr. I had not been seen or heard from since 28 November 2015. The neighbour also alleged there was a strange smell in the shared corridor coming from his property.

4.   Consequently on 2 December officers took the following action:

    • called the tenant on his mobile (no response).
    • called the local Police team and left a voice message.
    • emailed the local Police team to request a welfare check.

5.   On 3 December the Resident Services Manager (RSM) and Resident Services Officer (RSO) visited the address. No strange smell was detected as reported. The neighbour who initially raised their concerns was present during this visit.

6.   The same neighbour also advised officers that the tenant's car was missing

which was usually parked in front of the property. Officers concluded that the tenant may have travelled and therefore a decision was made not to undertake a forced entry on that occasion. The decision was based on the fact there was no smell and the tenant's car was not present.

7.   A letter was left at the property requesting the tenant to contact the office on their return.

8.   On 4 December 2015 a repeat visit was conducted by the RSO. Again no smell was noted but the letter remained in its original position. The neighbour was again present during this visit was advised that checks would continue. Officers continued to leave messages for the tenant and kept the neighbour updated. The tenancy file was checked and no next of kin details were found.

9.   On 7 January 2016 officers were contacted by a friend of the tenant who raised concerns as they had not spoken to the tenant since the end of November 2015. This information was discussed with the Police and it was agreed to undertake a forced entry.

10. On 7 January officers met the Police on site and a forced entry was carried out. The tenant was found dead in the bath with the tap still running.

11. Contact with the tenant over the previous 12 months was also reviewed as follows:

   • 23 April 2015 – Telephone conversation with Mr I regarding pest issues in his home.
   • 14 May 2015 – Office meeting with Mr I with SASBU present.
   • 5 July 2015 – Tenancy visit conducted at the property.
   • 10 July 2015 – Pest control team confirmed a home treatment visit.
   • 27 October 2015 – Office meeting with RSM and RSO.
   • 17 November 2015 - Telephone call from Mr I to discuss the mediation service.

Case 2 Ms G

12. Ms. G, aged 72, became a council tenant in Camberwell SE5 in April 1994, following succession of the tenancy from her mother. She had lived at the property since 1973. The last tenancy check was carried out on 22 September 2014. Ms G was in receipt of full HB.

13. The RSO was first alerted via email on 6 January 2016 by the Income Officer to advise that the tenant's rent account had gone into arrears and there was a missed appointment. The RSO was on leave at the time. (Recommendation in para 44).

14. On 21 January 2016 the RSO tried contacting the next of kin and a voicemail message was left. Adult Social Care was also contacted who confirmed the tenant was not known to them.

15.   On 22 January 2016 the RSO visited the property and left a calling card. No sign of any cause for concern was found.

16. On 25 January 2016, the following action was taken by the RSO:

- The tenant's rent account was reviewed, the last payment was made in March 2015. (Recommendations in paras 41 and 42).
- Telephone call to next of kin. No response was received.
- Telephone calls to several hospitals to check recent admittance. None were recorded.
- Neighbours were called but no responses were received.
- The Police were contacted and a decision made for a welfare check and entry was forced at 3pm when the deceased tenant was found

17. The RSO made follow-up enquiries with other services to confirm if tenant was known:

- 26 January 2016 – Enquiries made to the Sustain team, who confirmed the tenant was not known to their service.
- 26 January 2016 - Enquiries made to the mental health team, who confirmed tenant was not known to their service or receiving support from any of the support services.
- 26 January 2016 – Enquiries to the older persons mental health team who confirmed that the tenant was previously known to their service but the case was closed on 22 October 2014. The tenant had been under the care of the psychologist team for cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) but with no allocated CPN or caseworker.

18. The information about the tenant's mental health was not disclosed by the tenant to the RSO during a tenancy visit on 22 September 2014. (Recommendations 40 44)

Policy implications

19. The Director of Resident Services has reviewed the existing processes and practice in respect of both cases and the existing processes in place to support older and more vulnerable adults living alone in council housing; as well as wider practice across the Resident Services Division and the Council as a whole focusing on adherence to procedures, joint working and continuous improvement.

20. The future vision for the service is to adopt a more collaborative cross-Council approach with agencies, working closer together to protect and support more vulnerable households. There are already a number of existing processes in place to safeguard adults in our properties including:

- Improved joint working with internal and external departments on matters of adult safeguarding.

- Having a clear adult safeguarding lead in each Division responsible for improved relationships and joined up working with other services.

- A new multi-agency team who work to prevent individuals ending up in high need social care. This includes individuals who have a range of complex needs including antisocial behaviour, mental health, substance misuse, disrepair, hoarding, and high rent arrears. The team aims to deliver early intervention and a coordinated partnership response.

- A significant programme of periodic tenancy visits by Resident Services.

- When a new tenant signs up for a tenancy lettings staff record details of support agencies (social workers, probation officers, reablement and resettlement case officers etc) working with any vulnerable tenant.

- A monthly hoarding panel is held with key partners present. The panel reviews cases of neglect and safeguarding concerns some of which were picked up during tenancy checks or by operatives. The panel agrees action plans to safeguard those concerned.

- There is a programme of child and adult safeguarding training available through My Learning Source aimed at all Council staff. This training is mandatory for RSOs to ensure they have a better understanding of triggers and behavioural changes and the need to act quickly on any concerns.

- All opportunities are used to gather intelligence on safeguarding matters including established processes for front-line operatives to report any concerns they may have witnessed. Front-line staff (for example building operatives/estate cleaning staff) have a process for reporting safeguarding issues they have identified and this information is shared regularly with resident services staff.

21. A Steering Group has been established involving Mental Health Services, Adult Social Care and Resident Services, focused on delivering more effective joined-up working across the Council and partner agencies, utilising shared management information and systems at the point of service delivery.

22. There is an existing process in place for area housing management staff to initiate when a concern or alert is raised regarding a tenant not seen and not answering their door, or telephone calls. This includes welfare checks and where necessary forced entry in partnership with the Police. This is the process that was followed in both cases in question.

Periodic Tenancy Visits

23. During 2013/14 Resident Services Staff completed visits to 31,968 households, (93.1%), as part of a programme aimed at visiting every Council tenant under direct management. This included a verification check of the tenancy; the collection of demographic information; a compliance check and an assessment of any support needs for vulnerable households.

24. The tenancy check process includes an initial assessment of vulnerability and support needs which will trigger further activity under the cause for concern (C4C) process (below). The C4C process is also triggered from referrals from Council staff or other agencies.

25. Where visits were not successful during 2013-14 these were targeted for attention in the 2014-15 programme to ensure that all tenants are visited.

26. 2014/15 - This programme was designed to reinforce the work completed the previous year and 18,340 visits were completed.

27. 2015/16 - The current year is the second year of the programme and a further

11,402 visits have been completed to date (end Jan 2016).

28. During the course of a tenancy visit an RSO has to complete a paper questionnaire collecting information on a wide range of matters. On their return to the office this information then needs to be transferred onto different management systems and actions arising from the visit, undertaken. This builds in delays in updating systems and increases the risk of inaccurate or incomplete transfer of data from the paper questionnaire. This process is, therefore, the subject of phase 1 of the Council's mobile working project designed at ensuring a more robust, automated system of recording the outcome of these visits, including recording concerns and updating systems in real time as they are identified, giving us greater assurance that the C4C process is being triggered. Phase 1 is scheduled for implementation during April 2016.

29. As can be seen from the two case reviews, tenancy visits took place in compliance with this regime.

Cause for Concern

30. There are 4 main criteria in the process for identifying a 'cause for concern':

- contact from the public or a partner agency identifying concerns;
- staff highlighting concerns;
- incidents highlighting concerns;
- an online trigger report – this identifies all those tenants over the age of 65 where there has been no repairs raised in the previous 3 months and no rent paid over the same period.

31. Once a cause for concern is triggered a programme is agreed between the Resident Services Officer (RSO) and the Resident Services Manager for more frequent visits. This also triggers routine checks across the Council to ensure a multi-agency approach to addressing identified support needs. The RSO currently manages each case using manual systems.

32. Management oversight of compliance is delivered through Resident Services' performance reporting regime.

Forced Entry – Tenant Not Seen Recently Procedure

33. There is an existing process available online for Resident Services staff designed to ensure the well-being of vulnerable residents, ensure prompt and effective action when their well-being is in doubt; and ensure that forcing entry is a controlled and managed process.

34. The existing process is subject to a review which is expected to be completed by the end March 2016. The current process includes guidelines for staff for how reports of concern are to be recorded, reporting requirements to Adult Social Care, and on when and how to escalate matters.

35. Included are two process maps, one setting out the process between receiving the notification of a concern up to the decision to force entry if required; the second sets out the process once the decision to force entry has been made. There is also a checklist to guide staff through the process.

Case Summaries

36. Full reports have been completed detailing the circumstances surrounding the two cases.

37. In the case of Mr I the right steps were taken to locate him as soon as possible and prompt action was taken in respect of initial contact from concerned parties. Council Officers investigated the concern raised by the neighbour, visited Mr I's home on a number of occasions and saw no signs of an emergency before contacting the Police to carry out a welfare check.

38. The actions taken by officers in the case of the death of Mr I from the moment the concern was first raised by his neighbour was in line with standard practice.

39. The actions taken by officers in the case of Ms G from the moment the concern was first raised by the income officer was in line with standard practice.

40. In both cases neither resident was currently known to Adult Social Care.

Lambert Report

41. The Director of Resident Services also reviewed the Lambert report of 2009 which concerned the death of Ms Engelina Lambert. The circumstances surrounding Ms Lambert's death and that of the two cases under review are different. The report was a follow up to the concerns from the Coroner into how Mrs Lambert's case was handled by Adult Social Care following concerns raised by the Ambulance Service. No such concerns have been raised in the two recent cases under review. Once common theme, however, is the critical need to ensure that information is shared across agencies working with vulnerable households.

Findings

42. The vision of greater collaborative working and wider information sharing within the Council and with its partner agencies needs to be embedded into all working practices. This will include a note on 'The Source' reminding all staff of their responsibility to report issues of concern; included in the standard Southwark induction checklist, raised at team meetings and by letter to contractors and other partner agencies.

43. Cross Council working to better support vulnerable residents, especially those living alone, can be improved by better sharing of information between those responsible for assisting and supporting people through the use of a single database, or shared system to flag cases of concern. For example, work is underway with Adult Social Care on sharing information to ensure that the directorates of the Council dealing with vulnerable households have a shared view of vulnerable residents. In addition the scope for this work extending into SLAM/NHS will be explored.

44. The 'forced entry' procedure, 'tenant not seen' procedure used by Resident Services is being reviewed, particularly with reference to how information of concern is communicated and to what timescales.

45. The online trigger report for the C4C process, (para 30 above), has been

reviewed to ensure that a concern is triggered, either when no repair has been raised, or no rent paid for all those over the age of 65 and all those flagged as 'vulnerable', given age is only one factor, in the shared system. The 'rent paid' trigger is being reduced to 6 weeks and income staff are being briefed to ensure they highlight to the RSO, (copied to the RSM and Area Manager), any significant change in payment patterns for more vulnerable households. This will be added to the Rent Income and Arrears Procedure.

46. The process where main contractors inform Resident Services of vulnerable households or subletting concerns has been reviewed and will include sub-contractors as far as possible. This review also ensures that concerns are communicated between operative and RSO more quickly and that contractors are fully compliant with these processes. This process will also feed into the proposal for shared information across the Council.

47. Existing information held by colleagues in the Occupational Therapy Service, the Housing Adaptations Team and SMART will be shared and cross-referenced in a managed way initially, by sharing existing client lists, followed up with a new process. SMART have agreed to share their list by 4/3/16.

48. The Concierge service improvement plan will include additional support for vulnerable residents, based on assessed support needs for those blocks under their management.

49. Resident Services and Communities Division's will work to ensure TRA members and the wider community are aware of routes to report any cause for concern they may have regarding residents in their neighbourhood. This will be done through a programme of attendance at routine TRA meetings and using the Council's website. This will include advice on what to be aware of and potential triggers.

50. The Leader of the Council noted the report and supported the actions outlined.

51. The Director of Resident Services will review the outlined action plan periodically during 2016/2017 to ensure actions are carried out and completed.

52. Action Plan:

Ref	Recommendation	By whom and by when
Para 42	Include a note on The Source reminding all staff of their responsibility to report issues of concern and all managers to raise at team meetings.	Area Manager/ Communications by end March 2016
Para 42	All managers to ensure that all staff are briefed on their responsibilities in safeguarding, triggers to look out for and reporting routes as part of the standard Southwark Induction checklist.	Human Resources by end March 2016
Para 42	All repairs contractors to be reminded by letter of the need to report all safeguarding concerns through the standard reporting regime and ensure that this is cascaded to all sub-contractors (para 25).	R&M Manager/Head of Engineering by end of March 2016
Para 43	Put in place information sharing protocol with Adult Social Care.	Robertson Egueye by end April 2016

Para 43	Information sharing protocol with Health Services.	Robertson Egueye by end June 2016
Para 44	Review of forced entry procedure – tenant not seen' procedure.	Andrew Rogers by end March 2016
Para 45	Change parameters of trigger report as set out in para 24.	David Eatwell/Paul Montigue by end March 2016
Para 45	Amend Rent Income & Arrears Procedure to re-inforce requirement for Income Officers to report concerns to RSOs (copied to RSM/Area Manager). Instruction to staff to report concerns to RSOs (copied to RSM/Area Manager).	Martin Hilder by end July 2016 Martin Hilder by 4/3/16
Para 47	Shared data with OTs, Housing Adaptations and SMART service and protocol to ensure regular cross-reference against 'vulnerable' list.	Robertson Egueye by end April 2016
Para 48	Concierge staff to receive access to 'vulnerable list' and new instruction to door-knock in the event of service outage/incident.	Hazel Flores, Andrew Rogers, Abi Oguntokun by end March 2016
Para 49	Briefing note for RSOs for TRA meetings and completion of attendance at all associations to raise awareness.	David Eatwell by end September 2016
Para 49	Poster for TRA halls and publish Website content for TRA's.	David Eatwell/Comms by end March 2016

APPENDICES

No.	Title
	none

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Gerri Scott, Strategic Director of Housing and Modernisation
Report Author	Paul Langford, Director of Resident Services
Version	
Dated	21 March 2016
Key Decision?	No
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER			

Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments Included
Director of Law and Democracy	Yes/No	Yes/No
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	Yes/No	Yes/No
List other officers here		
Cabinet Member	Yes/No	Yes/No
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team / Community Council / Scrutiny Team		