

## **Better together - tips for managing the impact of welfare reform**

### **By Jackie Westwood, Derby Homes**

Derby Homes established a Welfare Reform Project Board with representatives from Housing Options, Income Management teams and colleagues from Derby City Council and local housing providers. The Board developed strategies to prepare for and manage the changes. The top three tips we can share are:

#### **1. Know your tenants**

Knowing your tenants is essential: identify what data is available and where there are gaps. Once data on tenants and stock is gathered, it is important to analyse and model the impacts on income collection and other areas of the organisation. The data will need to be reviewed regularly.

Derby Homes were able to deliver a targeted and prioritised approach to supporting tenants affected by the benefit changes by having the right data available.

#### **2. Communicating the changes to tenants**

Communicating the changes to tenants is essential, it is important to do this in a positive way as the changes can be unsettling for some individuals.

Derby Homes delivered a campaign to raise awareness of the changes and to advise tenants of their options. A wide range of communication methods was used including:

- Articles in tenants newsletter
- Social media updates
- Website with links though to DWP, credit Union and Money Advice services
- Targeted mailings, telephone contact, texts and home visits
- Posters and leaflets
- A series of adverts on local radio and adverts of buses

#### **3. Working with others**

The scale and nature of welfare reform means that no one organisation will be able to manage the impact alone.

Derby Homes worked in partnership with 8 other social landlords in Derby to identify potential matches to tackle under occupancy and overcrowding issues and arrears associated with under occupation charge. The Derby Mutual exchange Project (DMEX) allows each provider to make best use of their housing stock and ultimately makes it easier for tenants to swop their homes.

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