

## **Income Focus Group Meeting Minutes**

**Date:** Friday, 14th February 2025

**Time:** 10:30 AM – 12:30 PM

**Location:** Civic Centre, Committee Room 5

**Chair:** Daniel Lyons (Director of Finance and Corporate Services)

### **Attendees:**

- Daniel Lyons (Director of Finance and Corporate Services)
- Nicola Powell (Tenancy and Support Services Manager)
- Keith Ducker
- Carol Campbell
- Sean Peters
- Tony Hopkin
- Mr Ali
- Jane Stokes
- Angela Burrows

### **Agenda:**

1. Welcome and Apologies
2. Minutes from the last meeting
3. Performance Update
4. Guest – Nicola Powell, Tenancy and Support Services Manager
5. Review - Income Recovery Strategy
6. Discussion: UC migration for ESA claimants
7. Key outcomes
8. Any Other Business (AOB)
9. Next Meeting Proposal: Friday, 25th April 2025, 10:30 AM – 12:30 PM

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### **1. Welcome and Apologies**

- Daniel Lyons welcomed attendees and noted apologies from Lauren Anderson, who was unable to attend due to illness.

### **2. Minutes from the Last Meeting**

- The minutes from the previous meeting were reviewed. Actions from the last meeting were discussed, including:

- **Action:** Lauren Anderson to review and discuss income recovery strategies. – On Agenda
- **Action:** Articles for the next issue of Insight magazine. – Some information handed out and to be included in future insights magazines
- **Action:** Adding a hold message to the Hunt group line. - Completed
- **Action:** Promoting the Income Focus Group on notice boards. - Completed

### 3. Performance Update

- Daniel Lyons provided a performance update, highlighting:
  - Rent collection rate for January was 99.94%.
  - Current rent arrears stand at 2.83%.
  - An increase in evictions due to rent arrears, with 20 evictions so far this year.
  - Challenges with Universal Credit rollout contributing to higher arrears.
- **Discussion Points:**
  - Concerns were raised about the impact of Universal Credit on rent arrears.
  - Attendees discussed the importance of early intervention and support to prevent arrears from escalating.
  - The need for clear communication with tenants about their rent obligations and available support services was emphasized.

### 4. Guest Presentation – Nicola Powell

- Nicola Powell discussed the work of the Tenancy and Support Services team, focusing on:
  - Early intervention for rent arrears.
  - Support services available to tenants, including food vouchers, counselling referrals, and budgeting support.
  - The importance of communication and engagement with tenants to prevent arrears from escalating.
- **Discussion Points:**
  - Attendees shared personal experiences and challenges with rent arrears and the support they received.
  - The need for better visibility and accessibility of support services was highlighted.
  - Suggestions were made to improve communication methods, such as including support service information in the Insight magazine and on notice boards.
  - **Action:** Review and improve communication methods to ensure tenants are aware of available support services.

## 5. Review - Income Recovery Strategy

- The review of the Income Recovery Strategy was deferred to the next meeting due to Lauren Anderson's absence.
  - **Action:** Review Income Recovery Strategy at the next meeting.

## 6. Discussion: UC Migration for ESA Claimants

- The group discussed the impact of Universal Credit (UC) migration for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claimants.
  - Concerns were raised about the transition from housing benefit to UC, which is paid in arrears and directly to tenants.
  - The need for support and communication to help tenants manage this transition was emphasized.
- **Discussion Points:**
  - Attendees shared concerns about the financial impact of UC migration on tenants, particularly those who are vulnerable or have difficulty managing their finances.
  - The importance of providing clear information and support to tenants during the transition was highlighted.
  - Suggestions were made to work closely with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to ensure tenants receive the necessary support.
  - **Action:** Develop and implement a communication plan to support tenants transitioning to UC.
  - **Action:** Provide additional support and resources to tenants affected by UC migration.

## 7. Key Outcomes

- The group identified the need for better communication and support for tenants transitioning to UC.
- The importance of early intervention and engagement to prevent rent arrears was highlighted.

## 8. Any Other Business (AOB)

- Daniel Lyons introduced a new software, Voice Scope, which will help manage rent arrears more efficiently by automating some processes and allowing officers to focus on tenant engagement.
  - **Discussion Points:**
    - The software will reduce the administrative burden on officers, allowing them to spend more time engaging with tenants.
    - It will help identify tenants who need support earlier, improving the effectiveness of interventions.

- Attendees expressed interest in how the software will be implemented and monitored.
- **Action:** Implement and monitor the effectiveness of the Voice Scope software.

#### **9. Next Meeting**

- The next meeting is proposed for Friday, 25th April 2025, from 10:30 AM to 12:30 PM.