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May 11 2006

Rent arrears down in Coventry

Debt amongst Whitefriars Housing Group tenants is at a record low thanks to new rent specialist teams and customer focused procedures.

The not-for-profit housing group, which has some 17,000 homes across Coventry, has slashed the amount of rent arrears in the city by £234,000 since last year. This puts them among the top performing housing associations and councils in the country.

However, Whitefriars is still urging tenants to ensure their rent is paid on time to help reduce debts even further.

The drop follows the introduction of four teams dedicated to helping tenants pay their rent on time. New prevention initiatives, backed by a strong enforcement policy have also helped claw back rent owed.

To reduce rent arrears and help tenants facing debt Whitefriars has teamed up with Coventry Law Centre and the local Citizen's Advice Bureau. A recent pilot with the law centre has tested how early intervention can avoid court cases and eviction.

The law centre also offers legal representation to Whitefriars customers facing court action due to non-payment of rent.

The number of evictions carried out by Whitefriars has decreased from 220 two years ago to 130 this year.

Richard Monk, managing director of housing operations at Whitefriars, said: “I am delighted that we have reduced rent arrears this year. Our teams have worked hard and our customers will benefit as this means more money can be spent on improving our neighbourhoods.

“As a not-for-profit organisation rent is our main source of income so without it we cannot improve homes or communities. Rent paid is directly ploughed back into Coventry, not into the pockets of shareholders, so tenants who don’t pay are effectively being subsidised by those who do.”

New procedures have also been introduced to speed up recovery action, contact customers quickly if they fall into arrears and try to resolve rent arrears without court action.

In addition, on May 8, Whitefriars and Coventry City Council, launched an initiative which sees housing benefit officers work in Whitefriars offices processing tenants’ claims. This scheme helps speed up claims payments and will help further reduce arrears and improve customer care.

Joan Allen, Whitefriars’ tenant board member and Willenhall resident, said: “I am really pleased that our new procedures are getting results through early contact with tenants. Such a big improvement is great news and reassuring for tenants and for everyone in Coventry.

“It is also important for us that the fall in debt owed is coupled with a decrease in the number of evictions. This proves that preventative action is working and that the right help is on hand for residents that need it. I urge any tenant who is experiencing difficulties to contact their local housing office promptly. Ignoring the problem will not make it go away.”

Sue Bent, director of Coventry Law Centre, said: “Prevention of evictions is one of the main goals of the housing team at Coventry Law Centre and, traditionally, we have represented housing association tenants in court to try to achieve this goal.

“We are very pleased to be able to work together with Whitefriars Housing Group to offer independent advice to their tenants at a much earlier stage in the arrears recovery process. Our experience is that assistance at an earlier stage is more likely to offer solutions that are sustainable, and involvement with tenants before their case reaches court is a much less traumatic process for them.

“The reduction in evictions by Whitefriars is an excellent result for all involved.”

Any tenants having difficulty in paying their rent are urged to contact their local housing office.

Ends

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