

Council rent arrears at all time low

The amount of rent arrears owed by council tenants in Edinburgh is at a record low for the seventh successive year.

Despite the recession and financial difficulties everyone faces the total debt owed by tenants in arrears at the end of March 2011 was down to £1.2 million from a high of £3m in 2003/04.

The number of tenants being evicted from their homes because of rent arrears is also at a record low. New figures released by the City of Edinburgh Council show that only 112 people were forced to leave their homes in 2010/11 due to rent arrears. The fall in evictions has been put down to the Council's rent strategy and the quality of the customer service provided to tenants. This ensures that people who get into difficulties with paying their rent get advice and help as early as possible.

Staff in neighbourhood teams offer expert advice so tenants get back into the habit of paying their rent, improve their incomes and help them with ways of reducing other debts.

Another factor in the positive results achieved is the joint partnership working with other organisations to keep cases out of court.

The Edinburgh Housing Advice Partnership (EHAP) and Cyrenians Homelessness Prevention Service have joined forces to provide a stronger focus on early intervention to help tenants who are struggling with rent payments.

All this combined has led to the reduction in evictions and also a fall in court actions:

A 36% reduction in evictions (112 compared to 175 for the previous year)

An 11% reduction in legal notices being issued (848 compared to 945 for the previous year)

A 22% reduction in cases lodged at court (584 compared to 745 for the previous year)

A 30% reduction in decrees granted (346 compared to 492 for the previous year)

Councillor Paul Edie, Housing Leader for Edinburgh, said: "It is very encouraging that the amount of rent arrears owed by Council tenants has fallen again for the seventh year running. This is despite the financial pressures everyone is facing as a result of the recession.

"The number of tenants being evicted has also fallen for yet another year and demonstrates that our policy of getting people to pay their rent while seeking effective alternatives to eviction is working. The cost of not paying rent is homelessness and we need to make sure hard-pressed tenants have the help they need when they get into financial difficulties. Our success in collecting rent helps pay for the services that all tenants in Edinburgh need and expect."