

Council urges tenants to take action on rent arrears



RENT ISSUES – DON'T BURY YOUR HEAD IN THE SAND

Council tenants in Edinburgh falling behind with their rent were today urged not to bury their heads in the sand and ignore the consequences of not paying their rent.

Rent arrears for Council housing in Edinburgh have historically been low compared to other local authorities but the number of tenants getting into difficulties with their rent has been on the increase over the last 12 months. While there are a range of services in place to help tenants get back on track there are concerns that many tenants are failing to respond to offers of help and assistance when they get into arrears.

Help and advice is available from Council housing staff, who can help tenants to draw up payment plans for to repay the rent due, apply for Housing Benefit and future housing options if tenants are looking to move home. There is also an income maximisation service that helps ensure that tenants are getting all the financial help available to them and they can also be referred on to other specialist advice agencies to deal with wider debt or support issues.

Over the next few weeks radio adverts and posters urging tenants not to ignore rent arrears problems will be aimed at those in arrears.

Councillor Cammy Day, Housing Convener, said: "We want to support tenants so that they can stay in their homes and

understand that some households may face difficulties from time to time. But it's important that tenants don't bury their heads in the sand and ignore the help and support available to them and ultimately risk losing their home as a result.

"We have a responsibility to ensure people pay their rent but also get the help they need. Tenants are facing increased financial pressure as a result of benefit reforms, sanctions and suspensions. Household energy bills are placing further pressure on tenants. Increasing rent arrears means less investment in making homes more energy efficient and cheaper to heat."

Warriston tenant Lynn Derighetti, who has received advice from the Council about rent issues, was very impressed with the service. She said: "I haven't been keeping in great health and had to stop work, and had to apply for housing benefit. The north office were so helpful and took time out to go through application forms for discretionary payments, and getting the money back has helped a lot, as it eased some of the pressure.

"I would encourage anyone who is worried about rent payments to contact their local office, as they have helped me so much. I get the same person every time I phone. The first thing that you do is panic, and if it hadn't have been for the contact I've had, I would have worried myself sick. The staff are there to help you sort things out and to advise you."

Betty Stevenson, Convener of the Edinburgh Tenant's Federation, added: "Edinburgh Tenants Federation welcomes the opportunity to be part of the Council's Rent Communication Strategy launch. It's very important that tenants get in touch with the Council if they are experiencing any problems with rent arrears."

Contact rentfirst@edinburgh.gov.uk or 0800 028 2786 for advice.