

TESS – Tenants Extra Support Scheme

TESS began its days in 1998 as a pilot scheme covering North Huyton and Stockbridge Village.

The project was a response to research carried out in the area which had identified people who were vulnerable in the community and trying to cope without appropriate support and a lack of understanding how to access support.

This was having a massive impact on their ability to live independently or to manage their tenancies.

The original aims of TESS were

- To prevent tenancy breakdown by providing and procuring support to people currently living within the Stockbridge and Huyton locality
- To provide assistance in supporting vulnerable people managing new tenancies
- To enable tenants to access relevant support services

As a result of the success of TESS and an awareness of the need for the service throughout Knowsley, TESS approached Supporting People to expand the scheme to cover all of Knowsley.

In 2002 TESS employed 4 new staff and grew to the scheme we have now covering all of Knowsley.

In line with SP we are now offering the service to all RSLs in Knowsley.

Tenants are referred because they are struggling to manage in their tenancies and seem to be vulnerable.

This could be due to mental health problems, suffering alcohol/drug related issues, physical or learning disabilities or vulnerable due to age etc.

However we do not provide Support to clients who are already receiving full support from other agencies

They also have to be tenants of social landlords in Knowsley

We also need them to agree to support

Often rent arrears is the trigger for problems in the tenancy and although arrears reduction is not our primary aim, the result of TESS support can impact on this quite dramatically. In the 3 years TESS has been up and running in its present form, we have reduced rent arrears for both KHT and Villages by £81,437.

In addition of the 600 + plus clients we have assisted they have averaged an increase in income through benefits of £59.

How the scheme works

The scheme works via a referral system and referrals come primarily through Housing staff. (referral form included)

Once received I assess the referral and prioritise it based on urgency and also carry out a risk assessment

The case is then allocated to a Project Officer

The project officer meets the tenant and carries out an assessment of their needs

Appropriate support is then arranged for the tenant and they will be referred on to services they need

TESS will then monitor the case to make sure all support is successful before closing

TESS works very closely with both statutory and voluntary groups such as benefits, social services and alcohol services.

Most Housing staff use rent arrears as a trigger for support or on sign up when a tenant is deemed as vulnerable. TESS work better if we can prevent problems from spiralling out of control and therefore encourage housing to try and refer a case before it reaches eviction point, however we will look at all cases where support is needed .