

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

Nottingham Voice



FOR CIRCULATION TO VOICE READERS WITH EDITION 58 ON 12th FEBRUARY 1977

FOR CIRCULATION TO MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL HOUSING COMMITTEE
ON 10th FEBRUARY 1977

HOUSING COMMITTEE MEETING 10th FEBRUARY 1977

"B" ITEM No 54: POSSESSION ORDERS FOR RENT ARREARS

THE HOUSING COMMITTEE IS BEING ASKED to authorise enforcement of a total of 51 Possession Orders. These orders (authority from the courts to evict tenants) involve a total of 26 families with children.

Families with children, if evicted, would become the responsibility of the City Council - homeless families are the responsibility of the City's Homeless Families Unit.

Voice reporters have been unable to visit all of the families threatened with eviction (we only received the list on the 9th February). But we note that a high proportion (9 out of 26) were in the West Area of the County Council Social Services Department. These 9 addresses were visited.

Our visits show:

1. In no case has the tenant been informed that their case was to come before the Housing Committee.
2. Some of the information contained in the report is incorrect.
3. Some of the families are in arrears primarily because they have not been able to take advantage of various welfare benefits available to them - for example rent/rate rebates.
4. Social Services are totally unable to cope with requests for information from the Housing Department. In 21 out of the 26 families they have only been able to say "no comment" and in the other 5 cases they "do not wish to become involved".

INDIVIDUAL CASES

It is to be noted that none of the tenants interviewed wished for any publicity.

CASE 1 (Lenton Ward)

THE TENANTS CLAIM that payment was made into the County Court to clear the arrears to January 17th. A further payment of £18.70 was made for rent to January 31st. The tenant now claims that no rent is due until February 14th.

The tenant is self-employed but was unable to work from November 1976 to January 1977. No benefits were claimed in this period. A claim for rent/rate rebate alone would have brought in £80. The last time a rebate was received was over a year ago.

They have been told that they would be evicted on February 2nd, but after explaining to the City Treasury that they had paid all the arrears they were told that the eviction wouldn't be pursued.

They received a letter from Social Services on this matter on February 10th.

CASE 2 (Lenton Ward)

THIS CASE INVOLVES a widow and six children - not a man and a wife and six children as stated in the Housing Committee report.

The woman claims that there have been repeated problems concerning "arrears" since a rebate had been paid. She claims that she has been paying the full rent since April 1976.

She has spent periods in hospital in June and October 1976. During these periods she received Sickness Benefit but did not claim rent/rate rebates. Shortly after leaving hospital she received notice of the Court case showing £165 arrears and she took this to the City Treasury. An official explained that it was "nothing much" to bother about.

She has received no communication from the Social Services Department.

CASE 3 (Radford Ward)

THIS CASE NOW ONLY CONCERNS a mother and child, the father having left about four weeks ago.

She is receiving £22.13 Supplementary Benefit out of which she has to pay £14.29 per week in rent (including £2 per week off the rent arrears). In the last four weeks she has paid £14.29, £14.29, £14.29, and £14.00.

A social worker visited in October 1976 and asked the Department of Health and Social Security (David Lane Office) to pay rent direct to the Council. They refused to begin with. Then they made deductions of about £12 per week for three weeks in October. They then stopped these deductions and then, after repeated requests, made deductions of about £14 per week for two weeks in December. It adds up to £64. This sum is now probably held by David Lane DHSS (since they only pay rent direct three monthly in arrears to the City Council).

When the couple moved into the flat about a year ago they received help with household items from the DHSS. The items supplied proved to be unuseable and they bought replacements. Hire purchase is still owing on the replacement cooker. No allowance was made for baby things when a baby arrived. Money was spent which should have gone on rent.

Since the husband left the mother has made rent payments regularly.

CASE 4 (Radford Ward)

THE COUPLE WERE LIVING on Supplementary Benefit until September 1976 when the mother obtained work. Deductions were made for over a year prior to this time by David Lane DHSS. It is not known whether David Lane owes any more. The rent book has not been returned and the couple eventually obtained a replacement in November.

When the mother started work she was earning £32 per week out of which £10 was stopped as she was on the emergency income tax code. It was not possible to pay any rent at this time.

No application was made for Family Income Supplement or rent/rate rebates.

If an application had been made the family would have received about £3.50 FIS, £4 rent rebate and £2 rate rebate - a total of nearly £200 in unclaimed benefits since September 1976.

Social Services wrote about two weeks ago and the man visited the Social Services Office. He was told that if he kept to the agreement of paying the rent plus £1 they would probably not be evicted. The social worker failed to mention Family Income Supplement or rent/rate rebates.

CASE 5 (Park Ward)

THE TENANT CLAIMS that he paid £180 this week off the arrears because he had just been paid off from his previous employment. He now owes about £40. He claimed that his total pay was £44 though in some weeks it was less and in some weeks more. He did not apply for a rent/rate rebate because it was too much trouble. The difficulty was his fluctuating wages. Assuming that his average wage was £44 per week he would be entitled to about £4 per week in rebates.

He has received no communication from Social Services.

CASE 6 (Bilborough Ward)

THE NEXT DOOR NEIGHBOUR claims that the tenant moved before Christmas and that workmen had been in since.

CASE 7 (Bilborough Ward)

THE TENANTS were out. A lodger confirmed that there were rent arrears but knew no details.

CASE 8 (Robin Hood Ward)

THE LADY'S HUSBAND left in September 1975 but returned for a brief period in July 1976. He has been violent towards her - the latest incident was last Friday, 4th February. On Tuesday 8th February while she was at work he got into the house and stabbed one of the children. He is now detained in police custody.

Because of her husband she is keen to pay off the arrears because she wants to move and Council policy does not allow this while there are arrears. There is a history of arrears which goes back to the time her husband was living with her.

She went to Court last summer and agreed to pay £5 per week which included payment towards the arrears. She has been receiving Family Income Supplement and rebates.

Late last year she was off work for seven weeks and was receiving only £26 a week for herself and six children. She did not claim Supplementary Benefit because it would have meant losing her rebates and having to reclaim it when she restarted work. She would have lost up to £100 by not claiming Supplementary Benefit for this period.

She has now offered to pay at least £10 per week. Social Services wrote to her two weeks ago concerning the possibility of eviction but she did not see any point in visiting them because she had come to the arrangement with the Treasury.

CASE 9 (Robin Hood Ward)

THE TENANTS were not at home but their son said they had recently come to an arrangement over the arrears.

NOTTINGHAM VOICE RECOMMENDS:

1. No action be approved by the Committee on the list before it - instead we suggest that Officers be asked to provide adequate information on individual circumstances.
2. No Possession Orders should be sought where it is possible to obtain an agreement from the Department of Health and Social Security to pay rent direct or an order from the County Court for an attachment of earnings.
3. It should be easier for tenants to transfer to cheaper accommodation where they are having difficulty in meeting high rents.
4. County Court proceedings should not be taken until it is established that the families concerned are receiving all the benefits which are due to them - particularly Family Income Supplement and rent/rate rebates.
5. The procedure for claiming rent rebates should be simplified.
6. That contentious issues which seriously affect people's lives should not in future be treated as "B" items (items which are dealt with "on the nod") and should not be placed 54th on the agenda ("A" item 9, for example, being a request for Committee approval to vary a contract price by 1/3 - a matter which can only be described as routine).