

# GLOUCESTER CITY HOMES

## PROPERTIES

**4,500**



## ARREARS REDUCTION

**21.3%**



(2.43% IN 18/19 TO 1.91% IN 19/20)

## COVID ARREARS RED'N

**£66,000**



(MAR 2020 - SEPT 2020)

Gloucester City Homes (GCH), a housing association with around 4,500 properties, is situated in and around Gloucester with their housing stock located between the Cotswolds and the River Severn.

GCH originally invested in **RentSense** in 2019 as they were concerned their Housing Management System (HMS) was not presenting an accurate arrears caseload for the income team.

"Staff were having to go through rafts of reports to try and identify their cases and we were also concerned that the HMS was missing cases," explains Becky Hayward, Income Collection and Tenancy Sustainment Manager at Gloucester City Homes.

GCH wanted to invest in **RentSense** to ensure a clean and accurate caseload for officers so they were able to focus on their specific arrears' caseload.

"We wanted **RentSense** to provide a more efficient way of managing our arrears caseloads and ensure we were looking at the right cases." Highlights Becky.

With any system change it is important that the people who will use the new software solution embrace the new way of working.

"Staff love It (**RentSense**). They just wanted an accurate caseload so they could be more efficient and essentially get on with their work without having to find the right cases." Enthuses Becky.

With the enthusiasm from the team **RentSense** had an immediate impact at GCH helping them reduce their arrears, and as Becky explains the benefits of the system have helped them be more proactive.





“At the beginning of the week the team know their workload for the week, so they then begin planning their diaries. They also now complete their workload, which before was unheard of. This enables them to do preventative work. So, they look at and work on accounts at risk of falling into arrears, or those that may transfer from Housing Benefit to Universal Credit. This has really helped the organisation and you can see the improvement in performance. Arrears were 2.43% in March 2019, then at the end of March 2020 arrears had fallen to 1.91%.” Comments Becky.

Not only is the arrears reduction substantial, it equates to 21.3%, but the organisation's target for year end in March 2020 was 2.99%, so the income team have outperformed their target by over 1 percentage point.

## COPING WITH COVID

Like all social landlords the Covid pandemic has impacted GCH and how they serve their customers, with restrictions on visiting. But for GCH their immediate priority was the safety and well-being of their customers.

“We stopped all enforcement at lockdown. We wanted to speak to every customer to understand what they needed and what they wanted, and what we could do to help with their situation.”

In income all the standard letters and escalation stopped, no letter ones or twos and so forth have been sent. All communication has been personalised and addressed the individual situation.

“The personal approach has been critical,” comments Becky. “Our customers have responded really well. Whereas before they might have avoided us or their situation. Many have spoken with us.”

“And for the harder to reach tenants we have taken different approaches. We have kept trying even when there was no response and by being reasonable and clearly demonstrating we want to help they have engaged with us.”

The response from customers too has been really positive with customers commenting about their caring approach.

Again, throughout lockdown **RentSense** has directed the officers to the tenants in most need of support and helped them manage their Universal Credit cases effectively.

“**RentSense makes it easy to monitor UC cases and prompts actions at the right times,**” comments Becky.

So, what has been the impact of this approach coupled with **RentSense** throughout lockdown?

“We have reduced arrears by £66,000 since lockdown. Every month arrears have fallen, except for September where they increased by £145. Abandoning all processes and talking and listening to the right tenants at the right time has enabled this.” Comments Becky.

**RentSense** has helped Becky manage the team through lockdown as well, as she explains.

“As **RentSense** is web-based it made the switch to home working really easy for the team. The dashboard also makes it really easy to monitor the team's performance. The workload is transparent as well, so we can ensure we put the right resource into the right places.” Comments Becky.

When asked if GCH would recommend **RentSense** to other social landlords Becky is unequivocal in the response.

“Yes, I would recommend **RentSense**. It focuses attention to the right cases. And it is so flexible you can tailor it to your needs. You can change the priorities so you can switch your focus if you need to, whether that's UC cases, lower levels of debt, Direct Debits and so on. It ensures the officers are working on the right cases in the right order.”