

## **Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel**

**Date of meeting: 19<sup>th</sup> March 2013**

**Portfolio: Housing – Cllr David Stallan**

**Subject: Progress Report on the Tenant Scrutiny Panel**

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**Committee Secretary: Mark Jenkins (01992 564607)**



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### **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

That the Housing Scrutiny Panel notes the progress that has been made in setting up a Tenant Scrutiny Panel.

### **Report:**

1. As a front line service of the Council, the provision of a high quality housing service to our customers that meets their needs, properly informs them of the service being received and provides them with sufficient information to make appropriate choices is essential. The Housing Directorate's "customers" are predominantly (but not exclusively) tenants, leaseholders, housing applicants and landlords. To ensure that the service meets the standards expected by customers, it is important that they play a key role in scrutinizing the Council's performance and are involved in setting targets for further improvement
2. Tenant scrutiny aims to give tenants more power in holding their landlords to account for their decisions, performance and conduct. Changes to regulation in England from April 2012 required landlords to be more proactive in self-regulation and in involving tenants in the scrutiny process. In addition, the localism agenda envisages a greater role for service users at a local level to influence and scrutinise service delivery.
3. Under the theme of 'Community Engagement' one of the Council's Key Objectives is to 'engage with communities to put them at the centre of the Council's policy development and service design'. At its meeting on March 11<sup>th</sup> 2013, the Cabinet will be considering a report which recommends that one of the 'key deliverables' under the Council's medium-term aim to be an 'innovative and transparent council' will be 'the facilitation of a new Tenant Scrutiny Panel, to enable tenant representatives to undertake detailed service reviews and monitor the performance of housing services'.
4. At its meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2010, the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation agreed, in principle, to the setting up of a Tenant Scrutiny Panel to undertake the majority of the scrutiny and monitoring functions currently carried out by the Federation.
5. Following a recruitment process, interested tenants attended an information evening on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2012 which was also attended by Assistant Director of Housing (Private Sector &

Resources), Principal Housing Officer (Information and Strategy), Tenant Participation Officer and Chairman of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation.

6. Terms of Reference were drawn up for the Scrutiny Panel (Appendix 1) and these were agreed by the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation at its meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2012. The Federation also agreed a model for the way in which the Panel would interact with the Council. The Tenant Scrutiny Panel 'Model' is attached at Appendix 2.
7. Tenants who had attended the information evening on 4<sup>th</sup> July were formally invited to join the Tenant Scrutiny Panel on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2012 and the new Panel members attended a training day on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2013. The training was provided by an external trainer with practical experience of helping set up and working with scrutiny panels in other areas. The trainer will also provide support to the Panel during its first year of operation.
8. The Tenant Scrutiny Panel has eight members. They met formally for the first time on 21<sup>st</sup> February 2013 to elect a Chair, Vice-chair and Secretary and to agree the first subject that they would look at. Under its Terms of Reference the Panel's Chair is entitled to attend the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation and attended her first Federation meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> February 2013.
9. The Panel will meet again on 19<sup>th</sup> March to start work. The first subject they will address will be how the Housing Directorate deals with complaints. Members of the Panel will look in depth at the way complaints are processed, monitored and analysed. Part of this work is likely to involve discussions with the Council's Complaints Officer and with Housing Officers but will not include consideration of the specific details of individual cases.
10. In addition to scrutinising specific subjects, the Panel will review the quarterly performance figures produced by the Housing Directorate.

**Reason for decision:**

To ensure that the service meets the standards expected by customers, it is important that they play a key role in scrutinizing the Council's performance and are involved in setting targets for further improvement. The Council believes that tenant scrutiny gives tenants more power in holding their landlords to account for their decisions, performance and conduct. Changes to regulation in England from April 2012 required landlords to be more proactive in self-regulation and in involving tenants in the scrutiny process. In addition, the localism agenda envisages a greater role for service users at a local level to influence and scrutinise service delivery.

**Options considered and rejected:**

Not to have a Tenant Scrutiny Panel.

**Consultation undertaken:**

The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation were initially consulted on the proposal to set up a Tenant Scrutiny Panel in September 2010 and have been kept apprised of progress during the intervening period.

**Resource implications:**

Budget provision: Funding from resources available for tenant participation within the Housing Revenue Account

Personnel: Support of the Tenant Participation Officer

Land: N/A

Community Plan/BVPP reference: N/A

Relevant statutory powers: Localism Act 2012

Background papers: N/A

Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications: N/A

Key Decision reference: (if required) N/A None

## Appendix