

Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel

Date of meeting: 23 April 2014

Portfolio: Housing – Cllr David Stallan

Subject: Tenant Scrutiny Panel Report on Complaints Handling in the Housing Service

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Committee Secretary: Mark Jenkins (01992 56 4607)



Recommendations:

That the Housing Scrutiny Panel notes the contents of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel's Report on Complaints Handling attached at the Appendix.

Report:

1. As a front line service of the Council, the provision of a high quality housing service to 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. To ensure that the service meets the standards expected by customers, it is important that they play a key role in scrutinising 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. Social housing providers are now required to be proactive in self-regulation and to involve 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. In order to meet these requirements the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation ("the Federation") decided to set up a Tenant Scrutiny Panel (TSP) in February 2013 to take an independent view of the Housing Service's performance and to undertake scrutiny activities on the Federation's behalf. It was planned that, in addition to carrying out in-depth reviews of the Service's performance, it would also carry out a detailed assessment of one housing service each year, making any recommendations for further improvements.
4. The TSP agreed that the first subject that they would address would be the way complaints are processed, monitored and analysed. In order to do this the TSP:
 - Reviewed information and data about compliments and complaints by the Council's Housing Service in the previous year (although this did not extend to considering the specific details of individual cases);
 - Compared the Council's complaints processes with that of other local authorities;
 - Interviewed members of staff, including the Corporate Complaints Officer; and

- Reviewed the good practice of other housing providers and the private sector.

Throughout this process the TSP received support from the Tenant Participation Officer and an independent consultant who had also given the group its initial training.

5. The TSP completed its research and produced its draft report, which was endorsed by the Federation at its meeting on 25 February 2014. It includes 14 separate recommendations which appear on Pages 6 and 7 of the Report attached at the Appendix.
6. The Federation was informed that, partly in response to the TSP's findings, a new post of Customer Relationship Officer would be established in the new Communities Directorate, of which the Housing Service forms a significant part. The purpose of this role will be to investigate complaints about the service provided in a comprehensive, consistent manner and, as a result, provide a customer-orientated response in accordance with the TSP's recommendations.