

## **TENANT PARTICIPATION REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT GROUP**

Notes of a meeting of the Tenant Participation Review and Development Group of the Bolsover District Council held in the Committee Room 1, The Arc, Clowne on Monday, 25<sup>th</sup> March 2024 at 10:00 hours.

### **PRESENT:-**

Members:-

Councillor Sandra Peake in the Chair

Councillors Janet Tait, Ashley Taylor and Jane Yates.

Officers:- Victoria Dawson (Assistant Director of Housing Management and Enforcement); Jo Wilson (Housing Strategy and Development Officer); Cathy Ford (Tenant Participation and Liaison Officer); and Jackie Martin (Principal Admin Officer).

Dragonfly Development Ltd.:- Andy Clarke (Head of Property (Repairs and Maintenance)).

Tenant Representatives: Mr. S. Bramley, Ms. A. Sharpe, Mrs. J. Payne, Mrs. H. Fretwell and Mrs. K. Blair.

### **1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absences were received on behalf of Councillor Rita Turner, Deborah Whallett (Housing Services Manager), Katie Walters (Head of Property Services), Mrs. D. Potts and Mrs. C. Morley.

### **2 NOTES OF A MEETING HELD ON 2<sup>ND</sup> NOVEMBER 2023**

Note No. 9 – Joint Complaint Handling Code for the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and the Housing Ombudsman – the Housing Strategy and Development Officer reported that the new Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy was being presented today at Customer Service Scrutiny Committee. Moving forward, a report would be produced on a quarterly basis for this meeting with the housing specific data and everyone was asked to consider the type of information they would like included in that report. It was intended to present Tenant related complaints/contact and compliance with customer standards at future meetings. The Housing Strategy and Development Officer would circulate a copy of the report being considered that morning and outlined the details. The Housing Strategy and Development Officer clarified that the report would only include the number and timescales in dealing with compliments, comments and complaints that had been submitted through the corporate reporting channels. The Assistant Director Housing Management and Enforcement said we could include a narrative if required and the aim was to identify hotspots/trends that the Group could consider.

**AGREED** that the notes of a meeting of the Tenant Participation and Development Group held on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2023 be approved as a true and accurate record.

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### 3

### TENANT SATISFACTION MEASURES

The Assistant Director Housing Management and Enforcement stated the Council had carried out all planned invitations to complete the survey for 2023/24. In total 577 responses had been received, which reflected a 23.9% return rate (the original aim was for 30% at the end of the process). The final deadline for responses was 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024. The guidance was clear that based on the Council's stock size only 536 responses needed to be secured. The data received showed a positive response. Responses were being analysed to establish how many had been returned from the different property types so the data could be representative. All free text had been picked up and all Tenants contacted. The Housing Strategy and Development Officer had agreed to send the Head of Property (Repairs and Maintenance) the free text data from the latest survey responses, in relation to repairs.

Councillor Yates asked how the survey results compared with the last survey. The Assistant Director of Housing Management and Enforcement explained that the Star Survey had been carried out several years ago but asked different questions; only some questions were similar, but these could be compared and reported to in the next meeting. Councillor Yates asked if there were any set targets. The Housing Strategy and Development Officer stated this could be looked at in the future. Currently the Housing Stock Management Group monitored a set of targets on performance. Councillor Taylor queried why the Bolsover data was low. The Assistant Director of Housing Management and Enforcement stated this could be because of the Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) in the area in 2023 and hopefully this could change with the next round of surveys.

The Housing Strategy and Development Officer circulated a further report at the meeting which gave details of stock profile, and the response rate so far which showed a higher return from those in older persons housing. The Council was now targeting general needs with follow up emails to boost the response from this housing type.

The surveys were to be carried out each year and would help the Council to identify areas to work on, as well as benchmarking against the sector average. This information would be reported to the Group and the Challenge and Change Group. Data collection methods would also be investigated to identify what worked best.

The Assistant Director of Housing Management and Enforcement stated the final survey results would be published on the portal as well as the Council's website by 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

A discussion was held about how to engage Tenants, i.e., outside normal working hours and different meeting places; this would be considered further at Agenda Item No. 9.

**AGREED** that: (1) the responses are noted and Tenants provide feedback on the approach taken for 2023-24;

(2) Officers complete a review of the methodology used in 2023-24 and evaluate the response rate and quality of the data; and,

(3) Officers submit the final results to the Regulator of Social Housing by deadline of 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

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### 4 REGULATOR OF SOCIAL HOUSING CONSUMER STANDARDS

As previously reported to the Group in November 2023, the Regulator of Social Housing published a consultation on a revised set of consumer standards on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2023. The consultation ran for twelve weeks and closed on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2023. The Group reviewed the Council's response to the consultation as part of the November 2023 report, which had received Tenant input prior to submission.

The revised consumer standards would come into effect 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024.

The Regulator received 1,125 responses to the consultation on the consumer standards. Overall, these represented a positive response. A significant majority of respondents agreed that each of the proposed consumer standards set the right expectations of landlords, with the proportion agreeing ranging from 85% to 89% across the four standards. 86% of respondents agreed that the Code of Practice met its aim. In response to the consultation feedback, the Regulator had made several minor changes to the consumer standards to improve their clarity and consistency. They have also amended the Code of Practice to help amplify the outcomes they expected landlords to deliver.

Annex 3 set out the final suite of consumer standards, and Annex 4 the final Code of Practice that would apply to all registered providers and come into effect 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024.

Mrs. Payne referred to the Rent Statement letters recently sent out to all Tenants and expressed her concerns about how it was worded. The Assistant Director of Housing Management and Enforcement explained that it is a legal notice but took on board Mrs. Payne's comment. A short discussion took place on the difficulties of getting the right balance for all.

**AGREED** that: (1) Members note the final Consumer Standards and Code of Practice that the Council must operate under from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024;

(2) Members ensure they are familiar with the approach to inspections attached at appendix 3;

3) Members work in conjunction with Officers to review the Council's current delivery against the expected standards and co-develop an action plan for required improvement actions where gaps in delivery are identified.

### 5 CHALLENGE AND CHANGE - VERBAL UPDATE

The Tenant Participation and Liaison Officer stated the Scrutiny Panel consisted of six Tenants that had met and had chosen The Voids Process; this work was almost complete. With part of this work, site visits had been carried out. Mr. Bramley explained the Tenants had looked at how the office worked as well as on site visits to consider all stages, including the financial aspects. Some void properties were more challenging than others and the whole process had provided an insight into what happened through the void process. The Tenant Participation and Liaison Officer stated the outcome of this review would be for the Tenants to make recommendations to the Council. The Housing Strategy and Development Officer also explained that it will link back to Council and the Customer Services Scrutiny meeting so all Members were aware. The Housing Strategy

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and Development Officer would help the Tenants structure the report and how to present the information. The Head of Property Services (Repairs and Maintenance) stated it was good that the lettable standards had been brought up to date and made fit for purpose; it can be a technical document – this work would ensure a Tenant friendly document was produced. Mrs. Blair asked what the process would be if a Tenant died but had no living relatives. The Assistant Director of Housing Management and Enforcement advised Mrs. Blair that advice could be sought from the Law Centre or Citizens Advice regarding 'executor of will'.

**AGREED** that Mr. Bramley attend the Housing Stock Management Group meeting to be held on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2024 to present the final report.

### 6 MONITORING OF TENANT ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY ACTION PLAN

The Tenant Participation and Liaison Officer went through the key elements of the Action Plan; overall everything was on target.

Opinions were asked for regarding Ref. No. 4.1; the objective was to publish and promote a Tenant's newsletter and encourage Tenants to become actively involved in its production. A Tenant editorial team needed to be established to invite the Council's Communications Team to participate. The Assistant Director of Housing Management and Enforcement explained that there would be two newsletters produced per year; it was hoped to get this circulated to Members later in 2024.

The Head of Property (Repairs and Maintenance) referred to Ref. No. 4.3 and explained the Group needed to agree a report template and raw data would be presented to the next meeting to agree.

**AGREED** that progress against the action plan is noted and further action in relation to Ref. Nos. 4.1 and 4.3 be progressed.

### 7 STOCK CONDITION SURVEY - VERBAL UPDATE

The Assistant Director Housing Management and Enforcement reported that to meet the expectations of the Consumer Standards Code of Practice Safety and Quality Standard, the Council needed to undertake a Stock Condition Survey. The Council's last survey had been undertaken 10 years ago; unfortunately, new housing management systems had affected the data and so the Council had to have an element of concern. Also, new legislation was a result of Awaab's Law, which provided the Council with specific timeframes to handle hazards in the home.

The Head of Property (Repairs and Maintenance) stated the report would be detailed and provide a strategic map of where the Council needed to target repairs. The report would also provide a full list of vulnerable Tenants and those living with them.

The Assistant Director of Housing Management and Enforcement explained there were two options to undertake in the survey; (1) external provider; (2) in house. An explanation of the pros and cons of both was given, but whichever route was chosen, the cost would be in the region of £800,000 and a report would need to be submitted to Council in May

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2024 to seek approval. The Council were using a framework and had gotten x3 indicative costs. It was confirmed that the Government would not be providing any funding either budget or grants to support this work. In the long term it was intended to have this work undertaken in-house.

Councillor Peake referred to the new Housing Allocation Policy and the downsizing options; any Tenant wishing to proceed would be offered support. The Head of Property (Repairs and Maintenance) referred to a Tenant who had moved out of their property to downsize, adding this example could be used in the next newsletter.

The Group supported the proposals.

### **8 DANGEROUS DOGS - VERBAL UPDATE**

The Assistant Director of Housing Management and Enforcement stated an XL American Bully Ban update had been included with the rent letters and asked for further ideas for wider circulation. It was suggested that an article in the next Newsletter could include contact details to report any issues. Mrs. Payne and Mr. Bramley stated they had not received the update with their letters. The Assistant Director of Housing Management and Enforcement stated she would make enquiries on why they had not received the update and would send another copy to them directly.

With regard to current arrangements, the Council was currently developing a flag for the Council's Housing System, which would alert staff of dogs in properties. The Council would also have an Employee Protection Register, which recorded all incidents/threatening behaviours, and this was shared with all staff. All staff were aware they should report any incidents. Details of pet ownership in tenancy agreements was discussed and permissions required.

### **9 INCREASING TENANT ENGAGEMENT - GROUP DISCUSSION**

The Tenant Participation and Liaison Officer gave a brief outline of Tenant involvement over the last twenty years. More recently it had become clear that the Council needed to look at best practice; what worked or did not work and the need to be flexible. Other organisations did a lot of community involvement and reference was made to the Bolsover Youth Council and whether that could be used as a pilot. Another option on how to engage was to arrange x4 workshops in each contact centre area. It was intended to have service specific groups and arrange mystery shopping with neighbouring authorities. Digital Engagement options could be explored using Zoom/Teams, with consideration in out of hours meetings.

The Housing Strategy and Development Officer referred to the report circulated setting out the Tenant Engagement and Governance Structure and explained the different parts of decision making and how they interacted and were linked.

The Tenant Participation and Liaison Officer stated she had attended a recent TPAS (Tenant Engagement Experts) event on Youth Engagement, which had been really useful.

The Council were running a joint Tenants Conference on the 15<sup>th</sup> May 2024 alongside

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Rykneld Housing (North-East Derbyshire housing) and Chesterfield Borough Council; 30 places would be available for Bolsover Tenants and officers. It was an opportunity for Tenants to network with Tenants from other housing providers, speak to local agencies and influence future service delivery.

### 10 ALLOCATION POLICY - UPDATE AND LAUNCH

The Assistant Director Housing Management and Enforcement stated it was a statutory requirement under the Housing Act 1996 for Local Authorities to have an Allocation Policy in place which outlined how social housing located within their authority would be allocated.

The Council had approximately 380 properties becoming available each financial year to meet the housing needs of applicants. However, the Council had approximately 2,500 people on the housing register seeking Council housing.

Demand for social housing continued to rise, and it was important that the housing Allocation Policy provided a genuine route to access housing for households in need. The criteria to determine access to the housing register and priority banding were important. The policy had been reviewed in the context of local housing need. The changes proposed could mean that some households which did not have a housing need were no longer eligible to access social housing via the Bolsover District Council's Housing Register.

An 8-week period of consultation (13<sup>th</sup> November 2023 – 7<sup>th</sup> January 2024) had taken place resulting in 74 responses, of which 50% were applicants already on this list, 15% were existing Tenants and 19% were local residents. The full breakdown of responses was attached to the report. The vast majority of proposed changes were well received by the Group. There were only 2 which received less than 50% support:

- Amending the eligibility for permanent employment from 12 hours for more than 12 months to 16 hours for 6 months, and it take more than 90 mins on public transport to travel to employment – 41% agreed, 25% disagreed, 29% did not agree nor disagree and 6% were unsure.

The Council only had 7 applicants who were eligible for this reason out of 1469 active and 1066 suspended applicants – this represented a very small percentage of applicants which would be affected.

- Removing key worker status – 44% agreed, 18% disagreed, 28% neither agreed nor disagreed and 11% were unsure. The Council was satisfied that by removing this eligibility criteria no significant amount of the applicant population would be adversely impacted.

The Council only had 2 current applicants who had key worker status of the 1469 active and 1066 suspended; this was such a small percentage of applicants affected the Council did not consider this proposed change needed removing.

As mentioned earlier, a number of free text comments had been worked through and external advice has been sought which referred to Transgender individuals.

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A decision would be made to adopt the Allocation Policy as per the consultation draft and this would take effect 29<sup>th</sup> April 2024. This would allow a period of downtime to ensure every application was reviewed and was re-banded in light of the new policy; there would be no properties advertised on the Council's website during that period and local Members were aware of this. Independent Living Scheme/emergency lets for homeless cases would continue.

**AGREED** that the revised Allocation Policy and consultation responses be noted.

### **11 HOUSING STRATEGY 2021-2024 - VERBAL UPDATE**

The Housing Strategy and Development Officer stated work was ongoing for the new Housing Strategy. An Annual Monitoring update would be submitted to the Scrutiny Committee April 2024.

The Housing Strategy and Development Officer explained there were 25 objectives in total and 19 had been completed; 6 were still ongoing and would be carried forward to the next Strategy.

This work had been reported to Member Scrutiny on an annual basis, but officers would be looking to include some summary information out to Tenants and residents as a progress report. Tenants would also be consulted later in 2024 on the proposals for the new Housing Strategy 2024-2029.

The Housing Strategy and Development Officer stated service provision to care leavers had been addressed in the old and new Allocation Policy, alongside the Council signing up to the Derbyshire-wide Care Leavers Officer and all Armed Forces personnel that contacted the Council were added to a database to ensure they remained informed about local service provision and support events.

Mr. Bramley referred to Derbyshire County Council's withdrawal of their careline service which had now been handed over to Medequip. There had been no consultation, and this had caused undue upset and concerns. The Assistant Director Housing Management and Enforcement explained that the Council's Independent Living and Careline Manager had contacted the vast majority of the County's clients and they had agreed to stay with the Council; a meeting was being held later in the week where concerns would be raised. Mr. Bramley stated he would also be expressing his concerns at the Place Alliance meeting tomorrow also.

**AGREED** that a copy of the Housing Strategy 2021-2024 be circulated with the minutes.

### **12 TENANT CONFERENCE MAY 2024 - VERBAL UPDATE**

The Tenant Participation and Liaison Officer stated she had been involved in a joint project with Chesterfield Borough Council and Rykneld Homes to arrange an event taking place 15<sup>th</sup> May 2024 (11:00 – 15:00 hours) at Chesterfield Football Stadium; X100 delegates capacity with 30 places for the District. There were keynote speakers from TPAS, a number of workshops would include mystery shopping, and there would be discussions around barriers to engagement. There would be an interactive quiz; "Who Wants to be a Millionaire" on housing related issues in teams. Transport and lunch would

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be provided. A flyer was due to go out shortly.

### **13 FEEDBACK FROM TPAS ENGAGING COMMUNITIES CONFERENCE - 13TH MARCH 2024 - VERBAL UPDATE**

The Housing Strategy and Development Officer stated that the Council had signed up to TPAS (Tenant Engagement Experts) and advised the Group they could link into sessions, including training. The Housing Strategy and Development Officer and a Tenancy Management Officer had attended an Engaging Communities event earlier this month, with representatives from the Regulator of Social Housing, Housing Ombudsman and Chartered Institute of Housing would also be attending. If anyone would like to get more involved, they would need to contact the Tenant Participation and Liaison Officer and Housing Strategy and Development Officer.

### **14 DATE OF NEXT MEETING - TO BE DETERMINED**

A brief discussion was held on suitable times/day. The date of the next meeting was agreed and the Housing Strategy and Development Officer/Principal Admin Officer would consider further dates avoiding Monday, clashes with other Council meetings and in line with quarterly reporting dates. 10:30 hours was the agreed start time.

**AGREED** that: (1) the date of the next meeting is Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> July 2024 at 10:30 hours, Committee Room No. 1, The Arc, Clowne; and,

(2) further dates will be confirmed with a start time of 10:30 hours.

The meeting concluded.