

**TENANTS PANEL  
23 FEBRUARY 2016  
COUNCIL CHAMBER, WEELEY**

**Attended by:** John Read (Chair), John Johnson, Ron Weyda, Brenda Bragg, Dorothy Clark, Carol McDougall, Dennis Smith, Catherine Conway, Linda Bradnum, Angie Payne, Sid Payne, Judy Heath, Tony Scannell, Patrick Gafney, Barbara Campbell, Muna Smith and Michael Wyatt.

Also in attendance: Emma Norton (TDC), David Black (TDC), Damian Williams (TDC), John Cholmondeley (TDC) and Matthew Wicks (TDC).

**1. Welcome and introductions**

John Read welcomed everyone and thanked Panel members and the TDC representatives for attending the meeting.

**2. Apologies for absence**

Emma Norton advised that apologies for absence had been received from Iris Peacock, Hazel Harris, Teresa Retter, Gill Williams, Graham Brand, Paul Brown, Pauline Kent, Christian James and Roy Payne.

Emma Norton also advised that Delia Aldis had resigned from the Panel.

**3. Minutes of meeting held on 22 December 2015**

The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record

**4. Housing Investment Programme 2016/17**

Damian Williams presented to the Panel the draft Housing Investment Programme for 2016/17 that is proposed to be recommended to the Portfolio Holder and advised that there had been a slight reduction in the overall budget. The Panel were also advised that performance management measures have been put in place to ensure that schemes are progressed in a timely manner.

In response to a query from Ron Weyda, Damian Williams advised that there wasn't a programme to remove and replace any lead from Council properties but that any cases of theft are dealt with as required and the lead is replaced with an alternative material.

In response to a query from John Read, Damian Williams advised that the item to complete two new dwellings for letting referred to the construction of two replacement properties in Bradfield. David Black also advised that there were plans to redevelop a former garage site in Harwich.

Members of the Panel noted the contents of Damian Williams' report and agreed that the proposed budget allocation and outline programme are put forward for consideration by the Portfolio Holder.

## **5. Housing Anti Social Behaviour Strategy**

David Black, Housing Manager, outlined the content of the proposed Housing Anti Social Behaviour Strategy Delivery Plan for the period 2016 to 2021.

Following a discussion of some of the key and new actions included in this action plan, it was agreed that this would be put forward for consideration by the Housing Portfolio Holder and Michael Wyatt commended the team on the production of this document.

In response to a query from Ron Weyda, David Black stated that he did not believe there to be a legal definition of hoarding in this context but advised that each case is dealt with on its individual merits in consultation with other relevant agencies, such as the Fire Service.

David Black also confirmed the extent of anti social behaviour complaint received by the team to date this year.

## **6. Rents**

John Cholmondeley, Revenues and Recovery Manager, advised that for 2016/17 rents for general needs housing would be reduced by 1% but that there was an exemption introduced for sheltered housing accommodation meaning that the rent for these properties would be increasing by CPI +1%. This exemption is applicable for 2016/17 only.

John Cholmondeley advised that the 1% reduction in rent levels would be applicable for the next four years and then it is anticipated that rent levels will revert to an annual increase of CPI +1%. The difference over a four year period is estimated to be IRO £1.1 million.

However, John Cholmondeley also advised that, where a property had not reached the defined level under the previous rent restructuring regime, a formula rent can be applied for any new tenants. This means that the rent for these properties can be increased to the formula rent at the start of the new tenancy.

John Cholmondeley also advised the Panel of the current level of rent arrears, which stand at £176,000 against a target of £183,000 and stated that there had been a limited impact, to date, in connection with the transfer to universal credit.

In response to a query from Carol McDougall, John Cholmondeley advised that, under universal credit, housing benefit is normally paid to the tenants but there are some circumstances where direct payment to the landlord can be requested.

In response to a query from Angie Payne, John Cholmondeley outlined the arrears recovery procedure and the timescale for a straightforward case leading to possession.

## **7. Tenancy Fraud Initiative**

David Black explained the tenancy fraud initiative and key amnesty that is taking place in March 2016 and circulated examples of the leaflet that will be sent to all tenants with their rent level notification for 2016/17.

In response to a query from Barbara Campbell, David Black advised that tenancy fraud was not thought to be a significant problem in the district but that the results of this initiative, which will be fed back at a later date, would either confirm or deny this.

#### **8. Feedback from themed sub groups and Arch Tenants Group**

Ron Weyda gave feedback on the planned maintenance and improvements liaison meeting held on 3 February 2016 and advised that the programme is progressing well and outlined some key works being carried out.

Dennis Smith provided feedback on the first meeting he had attended as a member of the Association of Retained Council Housing (ARCH) Tenants Group. Anyone wishing to receive a copy of the reports produced to contact Emma Norton.

#### **9. Any further business**

In response to a query from Barbara Campbell, David Black confirmed that responsibility for highways is with Essex County Council and that any issues can be reported via their website or by phone (0345 603 7631).

No further issues were raised.

Next meeting of the Tenants Panel to be held on Tuesday 26 April 2016 in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Weeley commencing at 2pm.