

**TENANTS PANEL
29 AUGUST 2017
COUNCIL CHAMBER, WEELEY**

Attended by: Dennis Smith (Chair), John Johnson (Vice Chair), Carole Vann, Brenda Bragg, Ron Weyda, Judy Heath, Iris Peacock, Linda Bradnum, Sid Payne, Angie Payne, Roy Payne, Patrick Gafney, Barbara Campbell, Carol McDougall, Michael Wyatt and Jackie Garner.

Also in attendance: Emma Norton (TDC), David Black (TDC), Tim Clarke (TDC), Jane Dunne (TDC) and Jamie Fenton (TDC).

1. Welcome and introductions

Dennis Smith welcomed everyone and thanked Panel members and TDC representatives for attending the meeting.

2. Apologies for absence

Emma Norton advised that apologies for absence had been received from Hazel Harris, Christian James, Teresa Retter, Garry Champion and Ashley Purvis.

3. Minutes of meeting held on 20 June 2017 and any matters arising

The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record.

4. Home Start Colchester

This item was deferred as representative from Home Start Colchester did not attend.

5. Sheltered housing review update

David Black gave a brief update on the current position in relation to the review of sheltered housing.

6. Rent collection and arrears

Tim Clarke, Jane Dunne and Jamie Fenton gave a presentation regarding rent collection outlining available payment methods, arrears recovery procedure and the current level of arrears.

In response to a query from Iris Peacock, Jane Dunne confirmed that arrears cases will be held in Chelmsford from the start of 2018 and advised that over £10,000 of the arrears outstanding is subject to court action and waiting judgements, with £3,000 attributable to cases waiting for eviction dates. However, Jane Dunne confirmed that eviction is viewed as a last resort and that the aim of the team is to sustain tenancies, wherever possible.

In response to a query from Jackie Garner, Tim Clarke advised that, if a tenant is evicted for rent arrears, the Council has a legal duty to provide advice and assistance but this would not normally include any duty to rehouse as the former tenant would be classed as intentionally homeless.

In response to comments from Linda Bradnum, Michael Wyatt and Dennis Smith regarding the impact of Universal Credit, Tim Clarke advised that this is having a

significant impact nationally with local authorities losing £6.7 million in rent arrears due to Universal Credit. In Tendring, rent arrears of £10,900 can be attributed to 31 Universal Credit cases.

Dennis Smith advised that TDC is a member of ARCH who are collating and providing feedback on the national experience of Universal Credit to Government and its agencies.

Tim Clarke also outlined the close working arrangement that rent arrears staff have with Council Tax staff at the Council and explained the difference between the two types of debt.

Angie Payne enquired about the impact of bankruptcy on rent arrears. Jane Dunne explained that, if there are rent arrears but no legal action has been taken in connection with these, then the arrears will be written off. However, if there is a possession order, then the arrears would be classed as a secure debt and would be subject to repayment.

In response to a query from Carol McDougall, Tim Clarke confirmed that Universal Credit will replace Housing Benefit and that a managed application can be made, where payment continues to be paid direct to the landlord, if it can be demonstrated that the claimant is vulnerable. At the current time, there are no plans to include pensioners in the roll out of universal credit.

In response to a comment from Michael Wyatt, David Black confirmed that recovering the maximum amount of rent payable will be the most important issue in the future as this impacts on the services provided by the Council as a landlord.

7. Feedback from themed sub groups

Emma Norton provided feedback from the meeting of the Tenants Performance and Scrutiny Group meeting held on 4 July 2017.

Iris Peacock provided feedback from the Planned Maintenance and Improvement Programme meeting held on 1 August 2017.

David Black provided feedback from the Communal Cleaning Review meeting held on 15 August 2017.

8. Any other business

Angie Payne referred to the response given regarding items left in a communal hallway in Ardleigh which were noted during a recent estate inspection. David Black to discuss with Tenancy Management Officer for this area.

Michael Wyatt referred to the Community Fun Day held in August in Grange Road, Dovercourt and asked for thanks to be passed on to all involved in both the organisation of the event and the day itself.

9. Date and time of next meeting

Next scheduled meeting of the Tenants Panel is to be held on Tuesday 31 October 2017 commencing at 2pm in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Weeley