

**TENANTS PANEL  
19 DECEMBER 2019  
WIX VILLAGE HALL**

**Attended by:** Mike Wyatt (Chair), Linda Bradnum, Sid Payne, Angie Payne, Roy Payne, Judy Heath, Carol McDougall, Ron Weyda, Jon Langfield, Muna Smith.

Also in attendance: Emma Norton (TDC), Matthew Wicks (TDC), Jane Dunne (TDC), Steve Pearce (TDC), Damian Williams (TDC), Ian Taylor (TDC), Nick Lowery (Think Business Support) and Terri Tyce (Think Business Support).

**1. Welcome and introductions**

Mike Wyatt welcomed everyone and thanked Panel members, TDC representatives and other guests for attending the meeting.

**2. Minutes silence in memory of John Johnson**

A minutes silence was held in memory of John Johnson, Vice Chair of the Tenants Panel.

**3. Apologies for absence**

Emma Norton advised that apologies for absence had been received from Hazel Harris, Iris Peacock, Teresa Retter, Dennis Smith and Patrick Gafney.

**4. Minutes of meeting held on 25 June 2019 and any matter arising**

The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record.

Michael Wyatt advised that the matters arising from this meeting would be addressed during item 9 on the agenda.

**5. Communal Cleaning Contract**

Nick Lowery advised members of the Panel that Think Business Support have recently been awarded a new three year contract, with the option of a one year extension, for the cleaning of communal areas in certain blocks of flats across the district. Nick Lowery outlined the standard of service being provided and confirmed that representatives from Think Business Support would attend a future meeting of the Panel to discuss the progress of the contract.

In response to queries from Roy Payne, Nick Lowery confirmed that the specification for the contract includes the cleaning of bannisters and that the position regarding the removal of items in the communal areas in order to clean around them is agreed with individual clients.

Matthew Wicks confirmed that the Council's policy was that communal areas should be kept clear of items and that Tenancy Management Officers are frequently taking enforcement action in connection with this. In response to a query from Ron Weyda, Matthew Wicks advised that the council's policy would be presented to a future meeting of the Tenancy Management Sub Group for review.

Matthew Wicks also advised that there is an alert procedure in place for the contractor to notify the Council of any issues of concern for follow up action to be taken.

Jon Langfield enquired whether there was any difference in the standards expected from Council tenants and leaseholders with regards to items in communal areas. Matthew Wicks advised that leaseholders are expected to comply with the terms of their lease agreement which imposes similar conditions to the Council's tenancy agreement. Jon Langfield was asked to email Matthew Wicks with details of the specific incident being referred to.

In response to a query from Muna Smith, Matthew Wicks confirmed the extent of the service being provided and outlined the consultation that was carried regarding the proposed extension of the contract to other blocks of flats with communal areas in the district. This consultation only demonstrated a demand for the service to be provided in an additional four blocks to the ones included in the previous contract. Jon Langfield enquired whether there was any option for additional blocks to be included in the future and Matthew Wicks confirmed that there might be the opportunity of a further review towards the end of the current contract if there is sufficient demand or need.

## **6. Open Spaces**

Ian Taylor, Head of Public Realm, outlined the remit of his department and the grounds maintenance service provided across the district. Ian Taylor also outlined his aspirations for the improvement of items within Public Realm's responsibility and explained how members of the Tenants Panel could have an involvement in this.

Michael Wyatt confirmed that the Panel would be keen to participate in developing the approach towards areas of housing land and advised that some of the main issues previously raised related to the spraying of weeds and the frequency of grass cutting.

Nick Lowery also discussed how the standards of grounds maintenance impact on the communal cleaning service and gave the example of the cut and leave regime for grass cutting which can then cause a build up of grass in shared areas.

In response to a query from Linda Bradnum, Ian Taylor advised that there would be a significant cost impact if the grass was collected across the district. Sid Payne also stated that there was a need to ensure that staff are provided with sufficient time to carry out the grass cutting to a reasonable standard.

In response to a query from Michael Wyatt, Ian Taylor advised that the weedkiller used attacks the infrastructure of weeds and is not harmful to wildlife once it is dry. It is also not considered to be any risk to human health.

Michael Wyatt agreed that TDC staff and Panel representatives would work together to identify a priority list of areas and to agree how to target these. Damian Williams suggested that a task and finish group be set up to work on this project.

Michael Wyatt reminded Panel members that a form had been provided for them to monitor ground maintenance standards and that this information could then be collated and discussed with Open Spaces.

Carol McDougall reminded Panel members of individual tenant's responsibilities in connection with the maintenance of their own gardens and Ron Weyda enquired whether there would be any issues with volunteers carrying out work on communal land. Ian Taylor said that he would welcome community involvement and also greater personal responsibility to prevent issues such as dog fouling and littering becoming a problem in the first instance.

## **7. Housing Investment Programme**

Steve Pearce informed members of the Panel of the outturn of the Housing Investment Programme for 2018/19 and confirmed that 95% expenditure had been achieved.

Members of the Panel accepted the report and its recommendations and gave their thanks to their planned maintenance and improvement representatives.

Damian Williams also outlined the minor restructure that was being implemented in Building Services to reflect Barry Eldridge's retirement. This will provide for one new trainee position and a part time post inspector role for capital works. The management of the Building Surveyors will also formally transfer to Steve Pearce.

## **8. Rental income**

Jane Dunne advised that from April 2020, there will be a national increase in council house rent levels of CPI plus 1%, which equates to an increase of 2.7%. This comes after the implementation of the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 which required registered providers to reduce social housing rents by 1% for a four year period although this did not apply to service charges. The planned increase will result in additional income of £350k taking into account potential Right to Buy sales and the properties due to be gifted to the Council. The average increase for tenants will be £2.50 per week.

Jane Dunne advised that there are concerns around affordability due to the fact that rents have been at a relatively flat rate for so long and also as to the impact of future rises in CPI.

Jane Dunne also advised that, where tenants are in receipt of Universal Credit, it will be their responsibility to notify the DWP that their rent has increased so that the housing element of their benefit can be increased. If this is not done, it will be up to the claimant to pay the increase in rent.

Jane Dunne / Matthew Wicks to obtain a breakdown of the service covered by the grounds maintenance charge.

In response to a query from Angie Payne, Jane Dunne advised that the CPI plus 1% formula for rents will be applicable for a five year period, subject to any future amendments.

## **9. Update from Chair**

Michael Wyatt outlined the discussions that had taken place during the meetings held with Emma Norton and John Johnson on 26 July and 11 October 2019 regarding the operation of the Panel.

In connection with this:

It was agreed that the election of the Chair and Vice Chair would now take place at the next meeting of the Panel.

Meetings will be held quarterly in March, June, September and December at Wix Village Hall.

Feedback regarding the ARCH Conference has yet to be provided and Michael Wyatt will contact Dennis Smith regarding this and to confirm whether he intends to continue on the ARCH Tenants Group.

It was agreed that that, following a review of expenses, the existing arrangements for payment of a flat rate fee for those not having transport arranged for them would continue.

It was agreed that a trial scheme would be implemented to involve tenants in recruitment but that any training would be arranged after April once the election of the Chair and Vice Chair had taken place.

The draft Recharge Policy would be presented to a future meeting of the Tenancy Management Sub Group and the draft Tenant Alteration Policy to the planned maintenance and improvement representatives.

Michael Wyatt reminded Panel members of the changes that had been agreed to the Tenants Panel Constitution and Code of Conduct and asked members to familiarise themselves with these revised documents in connection with future meetings.

#### **10. Feedback from themed sub groups**

Michael Wyatt provided feedback on the meeting of the Tenancy Management Sub Group held on 19 November 2019.

Ron Weyda provided feedback on the meeting held on 12 November 2019 to monitor the planned maintenance and improvement programme.

#### **11 Any other business**

Michael Wyatt asked members of the Panel to encourage other council tenants to get involved in the housing services they receive and to consider joining the Tenants Panel.

Michael Wyatt also thanked Panel members for their involvement and contribution throughout the year and Angie Payne thanked Michael Wyatt on behalf of the Panel for his work as Chair.

#### **12. Date of next meeting**

The next meetings of the Panel will be held on:

- Tuesday 24 March 2020 commencing at 2pm
- Tuesday 23 June 2020 commencing at 2pm
- Tuesday 22 September 2020 commencing at 2pm
- Tuesday 15 December 2020 – time to be confirmed.