

Executive Member Response to the Scrutiny Review into Conditions in the Private Rented Sector

**Date Recommendations agreed by Scrutiny Select Committee:**

Community Select Committee, Monday 2 March 2015 (circulated 11 March 2015)

**Date responses should be made by:**

Executive responses should be received by 6 May 2015

**Recommendations:**

1. That Resident Involvement Groups undertake a fresh awareness campaign, promoting a generic logo and recognisable branding for the groups as well as promoting its purpose amongst local residents (of any tenure), this could be via a news article in the Chronicle, the Council's Residents magazine.

**Action: Matt Partridge and Strategic Housing Officers**

**Executive Response:**

Clarification after the meeting was requested and the following response was provided.

“that residents be made aware of them (resident involvement Groups) and to have an agenda that would be relevant for them. The meetings should be open to all resident as opposed to tenants. When I was observing a housing officer she asked tenants if they attended them...a ...tenant response about resident groups was that they did not know what they were and why they might go to them.. Therefore the recommendation is to link existing resident meetings to tenants in a more direct way – as well as to overhaul the purpose/function of the resident meetings.”

Tenant in this context would be council tenants and not tenants that

	<p>we have placed in the private rented sector.</p> <p>Housing specific groups such as the Housing Management Board, the Housing Forum, the Customer Scrutiny Panel, and the customer pool exist to enable customers of SBC social housing to meet others in the area, to improve services and discuss local issues. This also includes the leasehold forum and the supported housing forum.</p> <p>The resident involvement strategy has recently been published and work is starting on the “tenants leading change” agenda which seeks to look at other ways that tenants can be involved. Once an approach is agreed this will be published in the Chronicle.</p> <p>The Resident Involvement Team provide training opportunities for SBC tenants and have established the programme for 2015/16. If there is insufficient take up from interested tenants, those who the homeless team have placed in the private rented sector will be given the opportunity to attend.</p> <p>Resident Groups are advertised on the website for the following areas:  Bedwell, Hertford Road and Bragbury End, Pin Green, St Nicholas and Martins wood, Roebuck and Marymead. These groups are facilitated by the housing resident involvement team.</p> <p>No further work has been undertaken at present around branding as this is subject to the tenants leading change agenda outcomes.</p>
<p>2. That SBC endorse the work of National Landlords’ Association and consider the possibility of promoting and hosting training</p>	<p>Initial meetings have taken place with the NLA about our intention to host two events in partnership with the NLA and North Herts District Council. Dates are still to be confirmed.</p>

sessions to encourage local landlords who are not associates to take up the advice and best practices regarding relationships with tenants, with the caveat that officers provide some more background information to Members on the NLA before embarking on any formal promotion or training with that group.

**Action: Matt Partridge and Strategic Housing Officers**

The DWP have also expressed an interest in attending any events.

A summary of the work the NLA do (taken from their website) is as follows:

**There are now over 50 Acts of Parliament and more than 70 sets of regulations governing the private-rented sector.**

This increasingly heavy regulatory burden means it is more important than ever that landlords understand the legal and regulatory environment in which they manage their lettings.

The NLA seeks a fair legal and regulatory environment for landlord and tenant, and actively lobby the government at all levels on behalf of their members. They also help ensure that members are aware of their statutory rights and responsibilities.

They support over 55,000 Members and Associates, ranging from full-time landlords with large property portfolios to those with houses-of-multiple-occupancy or with single bedroom flats.

The network of regional representatives and branches provide an important link with local authorities and our members.

**Membership of the National Landlords Association offers access to a wide range of products and services with discounts and privileges that are exclusive to NLA members.**

**Full Membership benefits:**

- Know your rights and responsibilities
- Meet fellow landlords
- Gain a competitive edge
- Benefit from a wide range of services
- Enjoy substantial savings
- Help us strengthen our voice

To encourage Landlords to take advantage of the services provided, we want to include this as part of our revised incentive package.

<p>3. That subject to the delivery of some satisfactory training sessions with the National Landlords' Association that officers investigate the possibility of a local Accreditation Scheme and report back to Members on the feasibility of this proposal at a future meeting of the Community Select Committee in 2015.</p> <p><b>Action: Matt Partridge and Strategic Housing Officers</b></p>	<p>The outcome of this is subject to Members agreeing that we should promote the NLA, and the success of the two events referred to above.</p> <p>An accreditation duplicates the work that the NLA do. If the NLA is the preferred model, then we would not seek to set up a local accreditation scheme. It should be noted that full accreditation can be achieved through the NLA.</p> <p>Setting a scheme up would require a budget which if members wish to pursue we can include in this years' Priority Based Budgeting work which would be subject to LSPG scrutiny.</p>
<p>4. That Housing Officers consider providing some awareness training to tenants on their expectations when renting a property, to educate them and avoid possible pitfalls.</p> <p><b>Action: Matt Partridge and Strategic Housing Officers</b></p>	<p>The Private Sector Co-ordinator already establishes key tenant responsibilities such as liability to pay rent, council tax and other utilities, responsibility to the landlord in reporting repairs in a timely manner.</p> <p>This service is due to expand from September, with an additional (part time) post to market our revised private sector incentive scheme to encourage new private landlords to work with us. As part of this we will review the website content and ensure that appropriate literature is available on both tenant and landlord responsibilities.</p>
<p>5. That Officers consider undertaking an awareness campaign regarding the extensive advice that SBC Housing Officers are able to provide to Stevenage residents for both private and social rented sector irrespective of the residents tenure.</p> <p><b>Action: Matt Partridge and Strategic Housing Officers</b></p>	<p>After seeking clarification on this (as officers were concerned that positive publicity around the work the homelessness and housing advice team provide would increase the workload to an unmanageable level) the officers were advised</p> <p><i>"a couple of case studies in the Chronicle would demonstrate how Tenants are supported. If the case studies were chosen intelligently then it would go some way to demonstrate the positives of Stevenage Housing"</i></p> <p>This work for tenants is carried out by the tenancy management and tenancy support functions within housing management (HRA rather than GF activity). Recent television exposure has highlighted the work the officers do across a range of services, and feedback has been really positive. Recent contact from</p>

	<p>the TV producers has confirmed that SBC would like to be considered for series 3 of Housing Enforcers. Officers have also been advised that Series 1 and 2 will be repeated at prime time on BBC1 – dates yet to be confirmed.</p>
<p>6. That Members support the introduction of a Landlord Forum for Stevenage as detailed by the Strategic Housing Solutions Manager and would like to receive an update on the progress of this initiative at a future meeting of the Community Select Committee in 2015.</p> <p><b>Action: Matt Partridge and Strategic Housing Officers</b></p>	<p>This is subject to the NLA work and could be duplication. Once a decision is made on the NLA officers can investigate whether this is viable.</p>
<p>7. That the Committee welcome the Strategic Housing Solutions Manager offer of a feasibility study being undertaken into the local suitability of a social lettings agency and await with interest its findings, which Members would like reported to a future meeting of the Community Select Committee in 2015.</p> <p><b>Action: Matt Partridge and Strategic Housing Officers</b></p>	<p>The Strategic Housing Solutions Manager left the organisation in January. The post has yet to be recruited to.</p> <p>The HRA Business plan refers to improving the offer for Leaseholders. This piece of work is proposed to be delayed until 2016/17 (subject to agreement of the HRA business plan refresh at Exec in October 2015). The feasibility of a social Lettings agency will be incorporated in this piece of work.</p>

A copy of these recommendations have been sent to the named officers for a response on behalf of the Executive.