

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:	Executive Response – May 2015:	Update May 2017
<p>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.</p> <p>Action: Matt Partridge and Strategic</p>	<p>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</p>	<p>In March of this year Resident chairs’ group had been set up which meets on a monthly basis to discuss how they can work together and share their experiences on different projects they are working on.</p> <p>This has also meant that a more consistent Terms of Reference has been finalised for the different resident groups that we are supporting. The main emphasis has been on clearly stating the</p>

<p>Housing Officers</p>	<p>resident meetings to tenants in a more direct way – as well as to overhaul the purpose/function of the resident meetings.”</p> <p>Tenant in this context would be council tenants and not tenants that 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>purpose of the various groups so that any new members (both tenants and residents) are clear on what the group is trying to achieve.</p> <p>The Housing specific groups continue to work in their particular areas to improve the housing services.</p> <p>HMB 's comments on 3 policies/ procedures were taken to the Council's Executive, where the documents were discussed further and agreed.</p> <p>The Customer Scrutiny Panel have carried out reviews of the following services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Former Tenants Arrears • Customer Service Centre <p>As well as the above reviews the CSP also reviewed the outcomes of previous reviews and have recently started the Gas contract review.</p> <p>The Resident inspectors have been busy with carrying our flat block inspections and assisting with repairs surveys.</p> <p>The Disability Advisory panel has had successful outcome with respect to providing better access for wheel chair users at the Christmas light switch on event.</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>The structure of the Resident Involvement is being reviewed and a report to Executive is due in November 2017. This year we will also develop the Resident Involvement Strategy for 2018/21.</p> <p>The training is currently under review for the coming year.</p> <p>In addition to the current website, the various groups together with the Resident Involvement team will be promoting their particular groups at Stevenage Day.</p> <p>No further update.</p>
--	---	--

<p>2. That SBC endorse the work of National Landlords' Association and consider the possibility of promoting and hosting training 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.</p> <p>Action: Matt Partridge and Strategic Housing Officers</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> <p>The DWP have also expressed an interest in attending any events.</p> <p>A summary of the work the NLA do (taken from their website) is as follows:</p> <p>There are now over 50 Acts of Parliament and more than 70 sets of regulations governing the private-rented sector.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>The network of regional representatives and branches provide an important link with local authorities and our members.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>SBC has hosted two NLA led landlord forums in Daneshill House. Last month SBC attended the NLA Landlord Forum hosted by North Herts, which wasn't well attended, prompting officers to question the benefits of working with North Herts moving forward. The partnership has been set up with NLA and the landlords who have attended the forums do seem to enjoy them.</p> <p>The Housing Solution Manager believes that the forums need to take a new format as the current NLA led forums do not seem to be increasing the number of landlord and properties we are getting. The same landlords seem to have been attending and where there have been new landlords they haven't signed up to our Next Step Lets Scheme.</p> <p>The Housing Solution Manager proposes that SBC still works in partnership with NLA but we have more input into the agenda of forums and we push through items which will increase our access to private sector accommodation.</p> <p>The new financial year has presented us with the opportunity to try out new things and quantify the impact. Remodelling our</p>
--	---	--

	<p>Full Membership benefits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 <p>To encourage Landlords to take advantage of the services provided, we want to include this as part of our revised incentive package.</p>	<p>package/offer to landlords is something will help increase provision. Officers wish to use the next Forum to push through SBC's agenda to landlords to achieve the overall objective of getting twenty new private sector properties per quarter.</p>
<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>Action: Matt Partridge and Strategic Housing Officers</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</p>	<p>Officers ceased any consideration to accreditation of landlords. NLA members are highly likely to be NLA accredited. Therefore providing our own accreditation scheme would be duplicating what the NLA are delivering.</p>

	scrutiny.	
<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>Action: Matt Partridge and Strategic Housing Officers</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>Tenant training is to be introduced for all tenants who are referred to the private sector team by Housing Advice Officers when they are threatened with homelessness or client in emergency accommodation who have been identified as suitable for the scheme.</p> <p>The tenant training for clients in emergency accommodation is to be delivered in the form of E-learning. Tenancy Support Officers support clients to ensure that this is done.</p> <p>For household referred to the Next Step Lets Team the tenancy training will be delivered by the Tenancy Sustainment Officer. We hope to have a full time Tenancy Sustainment Officer in place in the coming months who will provide tenancy training on a twice monthly basis, preferably in a location away from Daneshill House. This has proved to be successfully implemented in Luton and something SBC want to introduce Stevenage.</p>
<p>5. That Officers consider undertaking an awareness</p>	<p>After seeking clarification on this (as officers were concerned that positive publicity around</p>	<p>The Housing Solution Manager has met and</p>

<p>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>Action: Matt Partridge and Strategic Housing Officers</p>	<p>the work the homelessness and housing advice team provide would increase the workload to an unmanageable level) the officers were advised “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”</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).</p> <p>Recent television exposure has highlighted the work the officers do across a range of services, and feedback has been really positive. Recent contact from 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>established a good working relationship with the Communication Team. Since the relationship has been established, Officers have used twitter to broadcast and share information such as accessing cold weather provision and published a myth busting article in December 2016 to try and manage customer expectation in relationship to social housing.</p> <p>As this platform has been establish Officers will continue to liaise with the Communications Team to share valuable information via twitter/facebook and other platforms. Officers hope that when a new SBC website is set up it will allow the Housing and Homelessness Team to update content so that there is a lot of information to allow client to self-help. There is a valid concern that promoting the Housing Advice Service so publicly would lead to more calls and presentations to the Customer Service Centre so it is important to ensure that messages and information being shared with customers are informative and empower customer to make the right decisions with their housing.</p>
<p>6. That Members support the introduction of a Landlord Forum for Stevenage as detailed by the Strategic Housing Solutions</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>Members have offered their support to the Landlord Forum and this is now up and running.</p>

<p>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>Action: Matt Partridge and Strategic Housing Officers</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>Action: Matt Partridge and Strategic Housing Officers</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>	<p>An Interim Housing Solution Manager has been appointed in August 2016 and has discussed the possibility of setting up a Social Letting Agency with the AD for Housing and Investment.</p> <p>Both parties believe that there is scope in the next financial year for a Social Lettings Agency to be created, but do not believe that there is the right structure in place now to ensure the success of such an agency.</p> <p>AD Housing Investment has requested that the Housing Solution Manager provide a cost benefit analysis to highlight the benefits of setting up a Social Letting Agency. With the Housing Transformation in progress this will be a good opportunity to shape the service to meet the demands of our customers which include private landlords.</p>

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