

## **Meeting of the Council – 13<sup>th</sup> October, 2014**

### **Report of the Cabinet**

#### **Tenant Involvement Arrangements**

##### **Purpose of Report**

1. To formally end the existing arrangements as structured through the Area Housing Panels.
2. To advise the Council of the changed involvement arrangements.
3. To approve the changed arrangements for expenditure of the Community and Environmental budget.

##### **Background**

4. Under the Localism Act 2011 responsibility for regulation of social housing passed to the Homes and Communities Agency and a new regulatory framework was introduced. All registered providers are required to meet the relevant standards.
5. A key aspect of the regulation is the tenant involvement and empowerment standard (in place from 1 April 2012) which states that: registered providers shall ensure that tenants are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in:-
  - (a) The formulation of their landlord's housing related policies and strategic priorities;
  - (b) The making of decisions about how housing related services are delivered, including the setting of service standards;
  - (c) The scrutiny of their landlord's performance and the making of recommendations to their landlord about how performance might be improved.

In Dudley we have established the Take Control project to work in partnership with tenants and residents to take empowerment to a new level. The aim is to ensure that services are accountable and contestable by tenants and residents in the Borough in order to achieve excellence in our housing services.

6. This work enhances the quality and scope of community engagement and involvement in the Borough and marks progress in our commitment to work in close partnership with tenants and residents.

7. A Tenant's Conference was held on 22nd September 2012 which was attended by over 80 people (both tenants and Elected Members). Tenants recognised the progress made through the Area Housing Panels along with the need to move even further on their journey to secure greater influence over the service they receive. The Dudley Federation of Tenants and Residents Association (DFTRA) involved as many tenants' representatives as possible to develop a new structure and approach which will include a Board and range of challenge groups.
8. The four priorities as identified by tenants and residents are:
  - Greater opportunity to influence decisions
  - The ability to scrutinise housing services
  - Have more involvement opportunities
  - To improve communication
9. Proposals for a new Tenants Board were put forward in January 2014 and appointments to the interim Board were made in June/July 2014. Membership includes tenants, residents, leaseholders with advisory support from the Cabinet Member and Shadow Cabinet Member for Housing and Community Safety and the Assistant Director of Housing Management. A comprehensive training programme has been devised and delivered alongside an ongoing development programme.
10. Copies of the Tenant structure and Road Map, which plots progress to date, have been placed in the Members Room and are complementary to this report.

### **Area Housing Panels**

11. The establishment of five Area Housing Panels with both Member and Tenant representation was approved by the Council's Executive on 6th June 2002 forming part of a report entitled 'Developing Dudley's Council Housing Service'.
12. The Area Housing Panels were established in the light of best practice from preparatory work for stock transfer around the devolution of control to service users.
13. Area Housing Panels have been successful in that they forged a partnership between Members and tenants to pro-actively monitor performance and influence change in service development.
14. The role of the Area Housing Panels was intended to be largely consultative with the intention over time of introducing a decision-making framework. The Area Housing Panels made recommendations in regard to expenditure of the community safety and environmental budget.
15. The intention is that the Area Panels will cease once the Tenants Board is in place and responsibilities transferred.

## **Finance**

16. The operating costs will be met from existing budgets within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).
17. Following recommendations by the Tenant's Board, approval of the Community Safety and Environment budget will be obtained in accordance with Council processes.

## **Law**

18. Social housing tenants have the right to hold their landlord to account through the tenant scrutiny arrangements introduced in the Localism Act 2011.
19. By virtue of section 21 of the Housing Act 1985 the general management, regulation and control of its stock is vested in the Council.
20. Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 enables the Council to do anything which is calculated to facilitate or is conducive or incidental to the discharge of its functions.

## **Equality Impact**

21. The new arrangement will have a clear regard to our duties under the Equalities Act 2010 and an initial assessment has been completed. A full assessment will be completed during the period of the interim board arrangements and impacts monitored throughout implementation.

## **Recommendation**

22. The Council is recommended:-

- To approve the disestablishment of the Area Housing Panels.
- To offer support to tenants in the development of a structure that will assist them in achieving their priorities as listed in paragraph 8 of this report.
- To approve a transfer of responsibility from the Area Housing Panels to the Tenants Board to make recommendation(s) relating to expenditure of the Community Safety and Environment budget.
- That the Constitution and Terms of Reference of the Tenants Board, as set out in the Appendix, be approved.



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**Leader of the Council**