

To: Housing Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee)
Date: 3 October 2019
Report of: Head of Housing Services
 Head of Law and Governance
Title of Report: Co-option of tenants as non-voting members

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	For the Housing Panel to appoint a tenant co-optee and consider its arrangements for co-option and the involvement of contributors.
Key decision:	No
Lead Member:	Councillor Nadine Bely-Summers, Chair of Housing Panel
Corporate Priority:	Meeting Housing Needs
Policy Framework:	Tenancy Strategy and Tenancy Policy 2018-23
Recommendation(s): That the Panel resolves to:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Thank Geno Humphrey for serving as the Housing Panel's tenant co-optee since 2015; 2. Appoint Tony Buchanan as a non-voting co-opted member of the Housing Panel for the remainder of the 2019-20 Council year; 3. Agree to seek contributions from other tenants, including housing association tenants and private rented sector tenants, at specific meetings where relevant matters will be considered. 	

Appendices
None

Introduction and background

1. When the Housing Panel was originally established by the Council's Communities and Partnership Scrutiny Committee in 2011 the Panel was asked to appoint an Oxford City Council tenant to sit as a non-voting co-opted member of the Panel.
2. Tenant involvement in scrutiny of housing services is recognised as being good practice by the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS). A CfPS guidance paper from September 2018 entitled "Taking on the housing challenge, a scrutiny councillor's guide" states that:

“Co-option allows for resident views to be expressed first hand, for better deliberation and access to networks and wider contacts. Having residents directly involved will also strengthen the legitimacy of scrutiny work”.

3. While an individual tenant cannot be expected to provide a “representative view” they can provide the Panel with the reaction and insights of an individual tenant to the matters before the Panel.
4. The Panel is asked to thank the outgoing tenant co-optee Geno Humphry who has served in this capacity for four years and has decided to stand down.
5. The Panel is recommended to appoint Tony Buchanan as tenant co-optee for the remainder of the current Council year.
6. The Panel has on occasion invited additional Council tenants to contribute to specific agenda items at meetings, for example on the subjects of fire safety in tower blocks in July 2017 and tenant involvement in April 2016. The Panel may wish to do so again in future where it is considered that the views of multiple Oxford City Council tenants would be beneficial to the Panel.
7. As the Panel’s remit extends beyond the Council’s responsibilities as a social landlord to include consideration of wider housing issues that affect the city and its people, the Panel is asked to agree to seek contributions from other tenants, including housing association tenants and private rented sector tenants, at future meetings where the subject matter dictates.

Process for identifying a new tenant co-optee

8. There is no established formal process for identifying a tenant representative. Prior to the appointment of Geno Humphrey in 2015 an advertisement was placed in the Tenants in Touch newsletter and the Tenant Involvement Team encouraged tenants to put themselves forward for this role. Informal interviews were then held involving a cross-party panel of members.
9. The Tenant Involvement Manager, whose team is responsible for working to empower tenants and leaseholders to develop, monitor and scrutinise the Council’s landlord related services, has been asked to identify a tenant. Following a process of identifying prospective tenants with the skills, experience and willingness to become a co-optee to the Panel, the Tenant Involvement Manager has proposed Tony Buchanan on the basis that Tony has a lot to offer in this role and is enthused by the opportunity. Tony lives in the city centre and volunteers for both Restore and Oxford Recovery College. His volunteering includes the recruitment and interviewing of new staff, acting as a tutor and training service users.
10. Having held preliminary discussions, the Tenant Involvement Manager organised a meeting between Tony Buchanan, Geno Humphrey (the current tenant co-optee), the Head of Housing Services, the Tenant Involvement Manager, the Committee and Member Services Manager and the new Scrutiny Officer to discuss the role. Following this meeting, Tony Buchanan confirmed his eagerness to become involved. The Scrutiny Officer will seek to undertake an on-boarding process should the appointment proceed.

Involvement of non-Oxford City Council tenants

11. The Panel has expressed a wish to co-opt tenants from other sectors, specifically housing association and the private rented sector tenants, to complement its consideration of wider housing related issues.
12. The status of the tenant co-optee position reflects the Council's special responsibilities as a social landlord. The formal co-option of additional panel members would increase the membership of the Panel which has already been set for the 2019/20 year. A panel of seven members (six councillors plus one tenant co-optee) is considered to be large for a sub-committee and an even larger group would be more difficult to support and accommodate.
13. It is recommended that the Panel seeks to involve non-Council tenants for specific items that are relevant to those sectors. For example, a view from one or more housing association tenants would be sought for the discussion on tenancy management standards to which representatives of housing associations will be invited. These tenants could contribute as invited guests or alternatively as non-voting co-opted members for a single item or, depending on the agenda, a whole meeting. The Scrutiny Officer, in discussion with the Chair, would determine when to extend invites to non-Council representatives.
14. The Oxford Influencer's Group has approached the Panel about one of their members contributing as a housing association tenant. Similarly, the Panel may wish to engage with the Oxford Tenants Union to seek tenant representation from the private rented sector where there are items of interest to that sector e.g. the Council's next Private Sector Housing Policy.

Financial implications

15. There are no cost implications arising from the recommendations in this report. Co-opted members of committees and sub-committees are not paid allowances and any other associated costs can be met from existing budgets.

Legal issues

16. The Local Government Act 2000 (section 9FA(4)) provides for scrutiny committees and sub-committees to appoint persons who are not members of the authority as non-voting co-opted members.

Level of risk

17. There is a risk that if the Panel decided not to appoint a Council tenant as a co-opted member, this would send the wrong message to tenants and could serve to undermine the Council's tenant involvement activities.

Equalities impact

18. This report does not have any impacts on equalities that would require an equalities impact assessment.

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