

## **Minutes of a meeting of the Housing and Homelessness Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee) on Monday 24 April 2023**



### **Committee members present:**

Councillor Diggins

Councillor Rawle

Councillor Sandelson

### **Officers present for all or part of the meeting:**

Richard Doney, Scrutiny Officer

Nerys Parry, Head of Housing

Amie Rickatson, Strategy & Service Development Manager

Bill Graves, Landlord Services Manager

Alice Courtney, Committee and Member Services Manager (Interim Acting)

### **Also present:**

Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing, Cabinet Member for Housing

### **Apologies:**

Councillor(s) Dunne, Fouweather, Nala-Hartley and Mr Church sent apologies.

## **1. Apologies**

In the absence of the Chair, the Panel resolved to elect one of its members to chair the meeting. The Panel elected Cllr Diggins.

## **2. Declarations of interest**

None were made.

## **3. Chair's announcements**

None were made.

## **4. Notes of previous meeting**

The notes of the previous meeting were approved without amendment.

## **5. Work Plan**

The Panel approved the work plan as it stood, noting the Landlord Services Manager's advice that it was anticipated that a report on the STAR survey, relating to tenant satisfaction, would be received at the June meeting too.

The Panel requested that the advice of the Cabinet Member for Housing and of the Executive Director (Communities and People) in identifying what the strategic priorities were envisaged to be in the next municipal year be sought offline and requested the Scrutiny Officer to bring a list for discussion and approval by the Panel to its meeting on 15 June 2023.

## 6. Tenancy Agreement

Cllr Smith introduced the report on the new Tenancy Agreement and explained that, although the decision to implement the agreement had been delegated to officers, she had been engaged in its development and had been keen that it was presented to the Panel in the interests of transparency and accountability. Cllr Smith explained that she had raised questions regarding gardens and sheltered housing and that, as a result, these had been clarified.

The Head of Housing invited the Landlord Services Manager to provide an overview of the report. The Landlord Services Manager explained that the tenancy agreement had last been revised in 2014. The Council had intended to revise the agreement beginning in 2019 but the COVID pandemic had necessarily led to reprioritisation

The Landlord Services Manager explained that the statutory consultation process was followed and that there had been a small number of responses. A number of legislative changes and requirements had come into force since 2014 and these had been incorporated.

In response to questions, the Panel established that:

- One of the conditions for dogs being permitted was that they were cared for and that included being walked regularly. The Council did not have resources to monitor the treatment of all pets but relied on reports. There was an animal warden to whom reports could be made. If the Council was satisfied that pets were being maltreated, it would be open to the Council to seek to remove the pet.
- Whilst there had only been 31 responses to the consultation on the tenancy agreement, there had been approximately 1000 responses to the tenant satisfaction survey and the transformation programme would lead to ongoing conversations with huge numbers of tenants as individuals. The Council was not surprised that there had been a low number of respondents given previous response rates when earlier tenancy agreements had been consulted upon.
- One particularly important reason for restrictions on pets in tower blocks related to health and safety, insofar as they can cause significant challenges during evacuations in the event of a fire. The example of an unauthorised first floor aquarium which caused significant weight load concerns was also provided to the Panel.
- Permission to park a caravan or motorised boat next to a property was not given because of the fire risk.
- The reason mobility scooters were not permitted to be stored inside, other than in a store specified for that purpose, was also because they represented a severe fire risk. The Council had provided tenants with fireproof scooter stores with electricity to charge the scooters and this had been publicised in *Tenants in*

*Touch* previously. Such stores required the provision of electricity to them and were recorded on the Council’s asset register. The need for such provision was generally noticed during inspections.

- Annual tests of carbon monoxide levels were now required.
- Assurances were given that the requirement to be responsible “for the good behaviour of my family, friends and visitors in my home, on the estate and local areas” was not over-reach and ensured, amongst other things, that the Council could protect tenants from ‘cuckooing.’ It also ensured that the Council could take measures, such as applying for community protection order notices and public place protection orders. Applying for possession orders was always the very last step and something the Council sought to avoid but such clauses did enable the Council to take enforcement action. The Panel was also assured that the inclusion of policies relating to friends and family had been included in tenancy agreements for at least three decades and probably much longer.
- It was good practice to consider whether tenancy agreements needed revision every five years. However, the Panel was reminded that legal decisions and Central Government policy changes could impact and require changes earlier than that.

The Panel was grateful to officers for preparing and presenting the report. The Panel considered the report and made one recommendation to Cabinet:

*Recommendation 1: That the Council considers every three years if it would be appropriate to revise the tenancy agreement.*

## **7. Dates of next meetings**

The Panel noted the dates scheduled for the next municipal year.

**The meeting started at 6.05 pm and ended at 7.00 pm**

**Chair .....**

**Date: Thursday 15 June 2023**

*When decisions take effect:*

*Cabinet: after the call-in and review period has expired*

*Planning Committees: after the call-in and review period has expired and the formal decision notice is issued*

*All other committees: immediately.*

*Details are in the Council’s Constitution.*

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