

## Housing Sub Committee

**Monday, 20 March 2023**

Present: Councillor A Newman (Chair)  
Councillors John Hunter, M Thirlaway, J Walker,  
E Parker-Leonard, M Fox, R O'Keefe and L Bones

Apologies: Councillors G Madden and O Scargill

### **HO25/23 Appointment of Substitute Members**

Pursuant to the Council's Constitution the following substitute was reported:

Councillor L Bones for Councillor O Scargill

### **HO26/23 Declarations of Interest**

Councillor M Thirlaway declared a non-registerable interest in Item 5 Social Housing White Paper and Item 6 Draft Housing Services Rent Policy as his father works for North Tyneside Council.

Councillor E Parker-Leonard declared a registerable personal interest in Item 5 Social Housing White Paper and Item 6 Draft Housing Services Rent Policy as her wife works for Shelter.

### **HO27/23 Minutes**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2023 be agreed as a correct record.

### **HO28/23 Social Housing White Paper**

The sub-committee received a presentation which provided an update on the work of the Authority to meet the requirements of *The Charter for Social Housing*

*Residents: Social Housing White Paper.*

Members were reminded that the themes of the White Paper were:

- Safe in your home
- Know how your landlord is performing
- Have your complaint dealt with promptly and fairly
- Treated with respect
- Have your voice heard by your landlord
- Have a good quality home and neighbourhood
- Supported to take first step to ownership

A gap analysis of the proposals against current practices had been completed. Work undertaken to ensure future compliance included the fitting of smoke and CO2 alarms; transparent billing; DAHA accreditation and refreshed tenant engagement.

In relation to the CO2 detector programme, it was highlighted that, to date, 81.49% of properties had been fitted with detectors. It was expected that 100% compliance would be achieved by June 2023.

A suite of new tenant satisfaction measures would be live from April 2023. The Council had gone out to tender for the delivery of a survey to get feedback on the satisfaction measures. There was a requirement to submit the survey result to Government by 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024. The Government will publish all social housing satisfaction surveys, which would enable benchmarking against other providers.

The sub-committee was informed that the white paper gave the social housing regulator more powers to inspect, meaning that there was an increased likelihood of external inspection. It was anticipated that there would be more consultations in the coming months in relation to decent homes standards, consumer standards and audit requirements.

In addition to undertaking the tenant satisfaction measure survey, work would be ongoing to launch and promote a revised Engagement Strategy; provide relevant training to staff to ensure compliance with all aspects of the White Paper; and develop a draft Lettings Policy for consultation.

The sub-committee highlighted the need for engagement and the data gathered through the tenant satisfaction survey to be representative. Officers advised that there was guidance available to achieve a representative tenant profile as part of the engagement process.

Members also discussed the cultural changes in housing services that were required through the White Paper and how this would be effectively rolled out. It was noted that the White Paper required certain levels of training for housing officers and that training would be focused on creating the right culture for tenants. Training would also be reactive to current issues and targeted in the correct way.

It was **agreed** to note the presentation and progress made to date in responding to the requirements of the *The Charter for Social Housing Residents: Social Housing White Paper*.

### **HO29/23      Draft Housing Services Rent Policy**

The sub-committee received the draft Rent Policy which set out the overall approach to rent setting and income management, helping to maximise income and sustain tenancies. The sub-committee was invited to comment on the draft Rent Policy.

Members were informed that the Authority is responsible for calculating rents applicable to every Council home, using a formula based on the value of the home, average income for the area and Government guidelines. The higher the value of the property the higher the rent calculated, however, to protect tenants from large increases the Government caps the amount by which rent can increase in any one year.

Effective income management means the Council can deliver a good housing service, develop and maintain homes and help sustain viable tenancy arrangements by ensuring tenants receive appropriate support and advice to enable them to deal with their finances.

The housing rent policy covered income collection, rent charges, leasehold service charges, garage charges, accessible service and universal credit and

housing benefit.

The current housing rent policy was updated in 2011. The policy had been reviewed by officers and brought up-to-date in line with legislation and current processes and procedures. As part of the review a wide range of staff and tenants had been consulted.

It was noted that there were many processes and procedures that accompanied the rent policy but that each case was looked at based on individual circumstances and support tailored to the needs of the individual. Pre-tenancy checks to establish affordability are undertaken with tenants, along with reviews to assess any changes in circumstances. It was explained that evictions were used as a very last resort and in exceptional circumstances. It took many years and a lot of work to evict a tenant on the basis of rent arrears.

The sub-committee discussed the options for people to pay rent. It was noted that there are limited options for paying via cash but that tenants had the option to pay on a weekly basis and the dates on which rent is paid are flexible.

Members asked what the current rent collection rate was in relation to Council properties. Officers advised that this was at 98.6%.

It was **agreed** to note the contents of the report.