
Meeting: Social Care, Health and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 17 November 2014

Subject: Tenant's Scrutiny Panel

Report of: Cllr Mrs Carole Hegley, Executive Member for Social Care Health and Housing

Summary: The report updates the progress of the action plan produced as a result of the Tenant's Scrutiny Panel investigation on improving the way Anti Social Behaviour is dealt with for the Council's Landlord Service as identified through their role in co regulation.

Advising Officer: Julie Ogley, Director of Social Care, Health and Housing

Contact Officer: Carol Rooker, Head of Housing Management

Public/Exempt: Public

Wards Affected: South of Central Bedfordshire

Function of: Council

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

1. As a landlord, the Council is responsible for providing good quality homes and services to the Council's tenants. Many of these tenants are vulnerable. Tenant scrutiny provides a means of ensuring that the Council has sound financial and service management and this will contribute to the Council providing value for money, and enabling the Council to successfully deliver its priorities.

Financial:

2. The costs involved in developing and supporting the Tenant's Scrutiny Panel can be covered within the existing Landlord Service Business Plan.

Legal:

3. On the 01.04.2012, the Localism Act 2011 changed parts of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 and established standards that social housing providers are expected to achieve.

As part of this revised regulatory framework for social housing providers standards under the 2011 and 2008 Acts in particular require registered providers to comply with specified rules about methods of enabling tenants to influence or control the management of their accommodation and environment.

The Council, as part of the new revised regulatory framework for social housing providers, is expected to give tenants a wide range of opportunities to influence, and be involved, in the following areas:

- Formulating their landlord's housing related policies and priorities;
- Making decisions about how housing related services are delivered, including setting service standards;
- Scrutinising their landlord's performance and recommending how performance might be improved

Whilst there is no prescriptive solution as to what methods are used to achieve this, a Tenant's Scrutiny Panel provides a good local mechanism and the formal scrutiny role for tenants, who will, if necessary, hold the Council to account for any concerns they have with the services that they receive. Panels are also mentioned in consultation documents published just prior to the changes being implemented by the 2011 Act.

Risk Management:

4. There is a reputational risk to the Council if there are inadequate arrangements in place to ensure that tenants are supported in being able to hold the Council as their landlord to account.

There is also a risk of intervention by the Homes and Communities Agency (Regulation Committee) if they consider that the Council is not complying with the regulatory arrangements, in terms of co-regulation.

There is a governance risk of the Panel failing to act in the best interests of the tenants and community. The above risks have been mitigated by the introduction of clear terms of reference and a robust Code of Conduct for the Tenants Scrutiny Panel and this mechanism for the Panel to communicate with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

5. Since the Panel's report investigating the way Anti Social Behaviour is dealt with for the Council's Landlord Service, Housing has undergone a staff restructure. This has seen the introduction of a part time Tenant Involvement Officer to support the Tenant's Scrutiny Panel.

Equalities/Human Rights:

6. The Council, as a public body, must act to eliminate unlawful discrimination, victimization and harassment against people on the grounds of race, religion or belief, age, sex, pregnancy and maternity, gender reassignment, sexual orientation and disability. Further, the duty requires the Council to advance equality of opportunity between different groups, and foster good relationships between different groups.

The National Standard for Housing Providers on Tenant Involvement and Empowerment – requires that the Council understands and responds to the diverse needs of tenants. The new Tenants Scrutiny Panel recruits from across our tenant base and has added a new member in August who has increased the diversity of the group.

Public Health

7. Good quality housing and services have a positive impact on public health and well being.

Community Safety:

8. Not Applicable.

Sustainability:

9. Not Applicable.

Procurement:

10. Not applicable.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

The Committee is asked to:-

1. **Review the progress on the anti-social behaviour project recommendations and to comment on the proposals for the Tenant's Scrutiny Panel's new project.**

Background

1. Members will recall that as part of the Government's revised regulatory framework for social housing, that housing providers are expected to support tenants in enabling them to monitor and shape the housing services that are provided, and to hold their landlords to account.
2. As part of this requirement for co-regulation, the Council's tenants, following consultation, agreed to set up a formal Tenant's Scrutiny Panel. Formed in 2013 it completed its first enquiry into the way that the Landlord Service deals and responds to complaints about anti social behaviour. This was presented to the Overview & Scrutiny committee in April 2014.
3. The Tenant's Scrutiny Panel were asked to monitor the implementation of the action plan and report back to the committee in 6 months on their experience. See Appendix A – The Tenant's Scrutiny Panel action plan on anti-social behaviour.

Presentation

1. At the last presentation the Tenant's Scrutiny Panel were invited to monitor the implementation of the recommendations and report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in the future.

2. The Tenant's Scrutiny Panel has prepared a presentation to showcase the successful implementation of the action plan and the positive working relationship with the housing management team. The panel has found the regular monthly monitoring meetings and frank discussions with officers over the past few months to be a beneficial and learning experience.
3. The presentation will also include details of the second enquiry that they have commenced into the complaints process.

Conclusion

1. A lot of good work has gone into the adoption of the Tenant's Scrutiny Panel's recommendations with many of the actions implemented and signed off which is reflected in the improvements in the anti-social behaviour service and feedback from those whose cases have been closed.

Appendices:

Appendix A – The Tenant's Scrutiny Panel Action Plan on Anti Social Behaviour

Appendix B – The Tenant's Scrutiny Panel Presentation on the Action Plan implementation

Background papers and their location: (open to public inspection)

Tenant's Scrutiny Panel and Designated Persons and Tenant's Complaints Panel from Social Care, Health and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee 21 January 2013.

Tenant's Scrutiny Panel report, action plan and presentation from Social Care, Health and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee 7 April 2014.