

EXTRACT of MINUTES of a meeting of the POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Coalville on WEDNESDAY, 8 MARCH 2017

Present: Councillor M Specht (Chairman)

Councillors N Clarke, J Cotterill, T Eynon, J Geary, D Harrison, G Hault, V Richichi, A C Saffell and N Smith

In Attendance: Councillors R Johnson and J Legrys

Portfolio Holders: Councillors R D Bayliss and T J Pendleton

Officers: Mr C Brown, Mr P Collett, Mr A Hunkin, Mr G Jones, Mr J Richardson and Mrs R Wallace

31. REVIEW OF HOUSING POLICIES

The Head of Housing presented the report to Members, explaining that policies were periodically reviewed and updated to provide officers with a framework for delegated decision making when delivering services. He then went through each of the four policies in turn.

Anti-Social Behaviour Policy

Councillor J Geary referred to the management of complaints at section five of the policy and suggested that the timeframe specified should be '3 working days' rather than 'earliest possible time' as he believed it was too loose. It would also then be aligned with other timeframes specified within the policy. The Head of Housing was happy to put the change to Cabinet when the policy was considered.

Councillor N Smith asked what the process would be if a tenant was dissatisfied with the response from an officer and how it would be resolved. The Head of Housing stated that differences were often irreconcilable regarding the outcome but officers do all that they could. If a tenant was dissatisfied with how an issue had been handled then the corporate complaint process could be followed. He confirmed that the aim of the policy was to make it clear what could and could not be done.

In response to a question from Councillor D Harrison, the Head of Housing explained that as part of the sign up process, all new tenants were informed of their rights and responsibilities which included anti-social behaviour. He also added that all new tenants had an introductory tenancy for the first twelve months which made it easier for the authority to evict them from the property if there were any significant problems.

Councillor N Clarke asked if concentrating resources on the more high profile cases, better results were expected and if so how the resolutions of the cases would be monitored. The Head of Housing commented that it was always challenging to monitor the outcomes of anti-social behaviour cases as people could sometimes be left unsatisfied due to not receiving their desired outcome, which was often unrealistic, despite the officers doing all that they could legally do. The proposed policy meant that officers could be more specific about what could or could not be done and to listen to what people wanted to achieve, before offering realistic advice. He added that tenant satisfaction surveys would gauge how satisfied residents were with the anti-social behaviour service, plus other tenant feedback would be monitored in order to learn and improve.

Tenancy Policy

In response to a question from Councillor J Geary, the Head of Housing advised that the appropriate support agencies referred to in section 3.5 of the report in relation to vulnerable tenants were a Nottingham Community HA Support Service as well as housing officers. There was also specialist support available from other agencies.

Councillor N Clarke referred to the major change coming to tenants regarding the introduction of fixed term tenancies, which would mean the loss of secure tenancies for a high number of people within his constituency. He asked if a report could be brought back to the committee once the government's guidance had been released in the autumn. The Director of Housing was happy to bring a further report on the subject to committee and commented that it would be interesting to see how much discretion the authority would have on the issue.

Compensation Policy

Councillor T Eynon found the language used confusing and it was not clear until later in the document that there was a standard set of payments applied to some issues. The Head of Housing agreed to look into the language used to ensure clarity.

Homeless Duty

Councillor J Geary suggested that the fourth paragraph under the background section of the policy relating to former arrangements under which private rented properties could be turned down in order to wait for a council property be re-written as it was very unclear.

Councillor N Clarke asked why the decent home standard was not referred to in the suitability of accommodation section of the policy. The Head of Housing explained that there was a lot more to the decent home standard than was needed for this policy but it had not yet been thought necessary to roll it out nationally to the private sectors. Therefore the policy mirrored the decent home standard to a certain extent without actually making reference to it. Councillor N Clarke stated that he just wanted reassurances that people would be given a decent standard of home. The Head of Housing assured Members that officers do all they can to ensure a decent standard of home and there were checks in place. He also reminded Members that tenants would not be paying the local authority rent in these cases, it would be paid to the private landlord, as the authority was just discharging its homelessness duty.

In response to a question from Councillor M Specht, the Head of Housing explained that tenants who were entitled to benefits in these instances would apply in the usual way and once housing benefit was received the rent would need to be passed on to the landlord themselves. These changes in who the benefit was paid to were a result of the soon to be introduced universal credit.

In response to a question from Councillor N Smith, the Head of Housing explained that the rent was set by the landlord and as there was a limit on the amount of housing benefit that could be claimed, the tenant would have to make up the difference if the rent was above the benefit received.

It was moved by Councillor J Geary, seconded by Councillor D Harrison and

RESOLVED THAT:

Comments provided by the Committee be considered by Cabinet when discussing the report at its meeting on 25 April 2017.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 7.40 pm

Chairman's initials