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Cabinet Housing Panel
19 February 2025

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

* Reporting to Cabinet

Minutes of a meeting of the WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL CABINET HOUSING PANEL held on Wednesday 19 February 2025 at 7.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, The Campus, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6AE.

PRESENT: Councillors M.Hobbs (Chair)
T.Rowse (Vice-Chairman)

M.Birleson, J.Cragg, R.Trigg, J.Weston, J.Otumunye,
A.Nix, P.Zukowskyj and T.Skottowe

ALSO Councillor G Moore, Executive Member for Housing
PRESENT: Anthony Goodwin, Tenants' Panel Chair

OFFICIALS J White, Assistant Director (Homes and Neighbourhood)
PRESENT: R.Misir, Senior Democratic Services Officer
S.McDaid, Executive Director (Resident Services and Climate Change)
R.Baker, Executive Director (Finance & Transformation)
S.Kiff, Income and Home Ownership Manager

68. APOLOGIES & SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor S Khan, for whom Councillor T Skottowe attended as a substitute, and from Councillors L Chesterman and R Lass. An apology for absence was also received from Ardita McHugh, Tenants' Panel representative.

69. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2024 were approved as a correct record.

70. NOTIFICATION OF URGENT BUSINESS TO BE CONSIDERED UNDER ITEM 13

There were no items of urgent business.

71. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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Councillor Zukowskyj declared a non-pecuniary interest by virtue of being a Member of Hertfordshire County Council. Councillor Nix declared that she is a Council tenant.

72. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME AND PETITIONS

There were no public questions or petitions.

73. QUARTER 3 2024/25 PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Executive Director (Resident Services and Climate Change) introduced the report and took the meeting through a presentation which is attached to these minutes.

Members made the following points:

- A member noted the number of repairs that were not completed as a result of no access. Officers said a task and finish group had looked at the customer journey and Morgan Sindall would be asked to increase text messages reminding residents of appointments to see if that made a difference; various suggestions would be presented to the Tenants' Panel next month. When there is no access, tenants are written to with their duties and responsibilities set out. Additional text messages will remind them the appointment can be rescheduled and if they are not present at a scheduled appointment a card is left inviting them to make contact to rearrange. A 'getting to know you' survey will take place next financial year to ensure tenants' email and phone numbers are up to date.
- A member asked about the improvement plan. Officers said this is in place with Morgan Sindall: voids have remained on it and a target for major repairs has been added. Future reports will highlight which elements are part of the improvement plan so members can monitor where improvements are being made (**action: Assistant Director, Homes and Neighbourhood**). The Council's expectation is that improvements will need to be sustained and so items will remain on the plan until there have been improvements over three consecutive months.
- In relation to overall satisfaction with the repairs service, a member asked how many homes the survey had been sent to and what work was taking place to increase the response rate and ensure the survey was more accessible to non-responsive tenants. Officers undertook to provide the figures (**action: Assistant Director, Homes and Neighbourhood**) and noted it was unusual for this to be below target; there had been a larger sample size this time which explained the dip.
- With planned works, officers advised the number of survey questions had been reduced and incentives offered but this had not led to increased responses. Contractors were also carrying out a survey which the Council has asked to see.
- A member asked about housing complaints. Officers explained there are two stages to the corporate complaints process and if a resident remains dissatisfied they can approach the Ombudsman. There had been no

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Ombudsman determinations this quarter; future meetings would be informed of any determinations and this is also reported to Cabinet.

- A member expressed concern about the efficiency of the repairs service. Officers acknowledged this was a challenging area for all social housing providers and there was more work to do. Some of the Key Performance Areas (KPIs) were monitored via an improvement plan, including voids and some repair response times; there had been an increase in customer satisfaction in these areas in the last quarter (see later report on Tenant Satisfaction Measures). Staff were discussing the customer journey with the Residents' Panel which was key in unpicking how the repairs service could be improved.
- A member noted it had taken more than six months to turn around some voids and asked how this was being addressed. Officers advised there had been more void properties recently than usual which had affected turnaround times. Legacy voids had been unoccupied for an extended period due to a range of factors including the need for major structural works (some of which needed design work by architects) which lengthened the time the homes remained void; they wanted works to be done more quickly and noted that longer-term voids skewed the voids figure as a whole. Morgan Sindall had experienced some supply issues and had brought in additional subcontractors to progress voids work but some of those did not have a direct labour force which had had a knock-on effect. Major voids needing replacement bathrooms and/or kitchens, electrical wiring replaced etc would normally take place as part of a planned programme - the contractor is proposing to take this approach and has said this will mean they can work on more voids and will provide a plan for this which the Council will monitor. However officers were mindful of the need to have a Plan B in place. The member was concerned about the issue with the contractor and subcontractors. Officers responded that timescales were determined as voids came in and the improvement plan was a result of timescales not being met. The plan had seemed realistic (as the contractor had said they had an additional supply chain in place) but had not been met and officers reiterated the need not to be fully reliant on this approach and have an alternative. The contract contains liquidated damages and the Council was collating data on that.
- A member noted 17 properties had not been inspected due to no access and asked whether the gas could be turned off there for safety reasons. Officers said they needed to go down the legal route to gain access which could be delayed as a result of the court process which was why it was important to expedite contact with the tenant.
- The Tenants' Panel Chair advised that panel representatives were attending some strategic meetings looking at the improvement plan and some of their proposals had been accepted, for example, text messages now state which services will be addressed during an appointment. The Tenants' Panel was concerned about the voids situation and intended to do some work to support tenants in understanding what they were required to do when releasing their homes.

The Panel noted the report.

74. HOUSING COMPLIANCE UPDATE

The Assistant Director (Homes and Neighbourhoods) introduced the report. 100% compliance had been achieved in asbestos, fire, water and electrical communal areas. Domestic electricity testing was 98.45% compliant (no access to 150 properties) and domestic gas testing was 99.8% compliant (no access to 15 properties); officers were pursuing a legal route in addressing this.

The Tenants' Panel Chair wondered if the Council was perhaps being overly cautious in respect of fire doors as there had been conflicting advice from the Council and the fire service. Officers were aware of this and advised they employed an expert whose advice they needed to accept; they were proposing to get the experts together to agree an approach.

The Panel noted the report.

75. PROPOSED REVISED TENANCY AGREEMENT

The Executive Director (Resident Services and Climate Change) introduced the report and took the meeting through a presentation which is attached to these minutes.

Members raised the following points:

- A member asked how many instances there had been this year when residents were charged for having their garden maintained and how much income had been raised as a result. Officers said notice could be served if tenants were not maintaining their garden and they could seek recovery of the costs although they would take into account any vulnerabilities of the tenant before doing so. It would be difficult to ascertain how often this happened and what the charges were but incidents like this were rare. The member felt it would be helpful to have income data on this as it was a regular complaint from constituents.
- A member asked how garden maintenance was monitored. Officers said neighbourhood officers carried out inspections and tenancy audits on a rolling programme which would identify such issues which were also identified by neighbour and/or councillor complaints, and then took appropriate action.
- A member asked whether general tenants could be offered the opportunity to pay for garden maintenance (the garden assistance service offered support to residents who needed it). Officers said they were exploring a paid-for service with the contractor.
- A member noted that a consultation had been carried out with 8,800 tenanted properties on the proposed revised tenancy agreement and asked about the remaining homes. Officers advised that the figure for tenanted properties fluctuated, some properties were used as non-secure

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properties for temporary accommodation, and the agreement did not apply to leaseholders. The consultation was also only in relation to secure tenancies.

- The Tenants' Panel Chair reflected that when consultations were sent out it would be helpful to give a longer response time. Officers said lessons had been learned and in future texts as well as letters would be sent, meaning residents could be immediately directed to the website and more time allowed for post.
- The Tenants' Panel Chair felt it would be useful for the Council to consider its own grounds maintenance. Officers responded that grounds maintenance had been considered by a recent task and finish group.

RESOLVED

The Panel:

- a) Noted the content of the report; and
- b) Recommended the revised tenancy agreement for approval by Cabinet.

76. TENANT SATISFACTION MEASURES SURVEY 2023/24 ACTION PLAN - UPDATE

The Executive Director (Resident Services and Climate Change) introduced the report and took the meeting through a presentation which is attached to these minutes.

The Panel noted the report.

77. RENT ARREARS POLICY - COUNCIL TENANTS

The Income and Home Ownership Manager introduced the report which recommended approval of the rent arrears policy set out in Appendix 1 of the report following a review.

RESOLVED

(Unanimous)

The Panel recommended the changes to the rent arrears policy as set out in Appendix A of the report be approved by Executive Member Decision.

78. FORMER TENANTS ARREARS POLICY

The Income and Home Ownership Manager introduced the report which recommended approval and adoption of the Former Tenant Arrears Policy set out in Appendix A of the report.

RESOLVED

(Unanimous)

The Panel recommended the changes to the Former Tenant Arrears Policy as set out in Appendix A of the report be approved by Executive Member Decision.

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Meeting ended at 8.45 pm



Q3 2024/25 Performance and Complaints

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Q3 performance- KPIs out of target (RED):

- BPI 37 – Normal voids relet times
 - 185.22 days (target 18 days) – 24 voids
 - Legacy (older) voids impacting the figures
 - Working on the end to end process
- BP 88 – Major voids relet times
 - 185.92 days (target 35 days)
 - Legacy (older) voids impacting the figures
 - Major works required eg structural
 - Working on the end to end process to make it smoother and more efficient



Q3 performance- KPIs out of target (RED):

- BPI 133 Disrepair cases per 1,000 properties
 - currently 113 cases so above target
 - Going through the legal process
- BPI 129 Satisfaction with planned works
 - Decreased satisfaction from Q2, but low level of surveys



Q3 performance- KPIs slightly out of target (AMBER):

- **BPI 33 Overall satisfaction with repairs service**
- This has decreased slightly below target in Q3 (83.56% against 85% target) and is being monitored

BPI 130 Percentage of emergency repairs completed in time

- 98.77% against a target of 99%
- 32 of the 2232 emergency repairs were not completed on time

BPI 151 Percentage of non emergency repairs completed in time

- 81.30% against a target of 95%
- 313 of the 4173 non-emergency repairs were not completed on time
- This is an improvement on Q1 and Q2



Q3 performance- KPIs slightly out of target (AMBER):

- **BPI 131 percentage of repair appointments kept**
- At 93.88%, this has fallen slightly below target (95%) in Q3 and is being investigated
- **BPI 34 – Percentage of properties with a valid gas certificate**
- These are 17 homes as of 31/12/24, which are subject to the legal process
- **BPI 34 – Percentage of properties with an electrical certificate**
- The performance was 98.45% against a target of 100%
- These small number of homes are subject to the legal process



Q3 Complaints

- The performance for complaints has improved in Q3 by over 20% compared to Q2
- Stage 1
 - 620 stage 1 complaints received between 1 April and 31 December 2024
 - The percentage of stage 1 complaints responded to within target has increased in Q3 compared to Q2
- Stage 2
 - 102 stage 2 complaints have been received between 1 April and 31 December 2024
 - The percentage of stage 2 complaints responded to within target is similar in Q3 as in Q2



Housing Ombudsman Complaints

- There were no determinations (decisions) received from the Housing Ombudsman in Q3
- Two cases went to full investigation with the Housing Ombudsman
- There are 9 open cases that we are waiting on outcomes from the HO



Complaints – Improvement Plan Update

- Annual complaints report was considered by Cabinet in January 2025
- Housing Ombudsman now confirmed compliance with reporting for this year
- Looking to improve lessons learned reporting
- Undertaking monthly quality checks



Questions



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Revised Tenancy Agreement

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Minute Item 75



Tenancy Agreement

- Tenancy agreements set out the terms and conditions to occupy and reside at rented homes
- Most of our tenancy agreements are secure
- tenancy agreements
- The agreement has been revised and updated to clarify landlord and tenant obligations further
- The proposed revised tenancy agreement is in Appendix 1 of the report



Proposed Changes – Landlord Obligations

- Detailed in Appendix 3 of the report and summarised in paragraph 3.7
- Clarifies the landlord responsibilities such as:
 - New information about when we require access to the property
 - Sections 6.2 to 6.4 are new sections setting out our repairs obligations
 - New section stating we will provide information about our housing services, standards, management policies and performance
 - Focuses on the council's obligations to the tenant
 - New section explaining when the council will consult with tenants
 - Focuses on right to information about tenancy, repairs, consultation, allocation and landlord performance
 - Gives details of the Housing Ombudsman



Proposed Changes – Tenant Obligations

- Detailed in Appendix 3 of the report and summarised in paragraph 3.7
- Clarifies the tenant responsibilities such as:
 - New section explaining tenant’s right to occupy
 - Adds information on how the tenant is expected to give notice and what they need to do before moving out
 - Amended wording, including not sub-letting whole property
 - Amended wording to include what action will be taken if there is a breach of tenancy
 - New section specific to ASB and noise
 - New section on damage caused by tenant
 - Makes clear it is tenant’s responsibility to insure the property



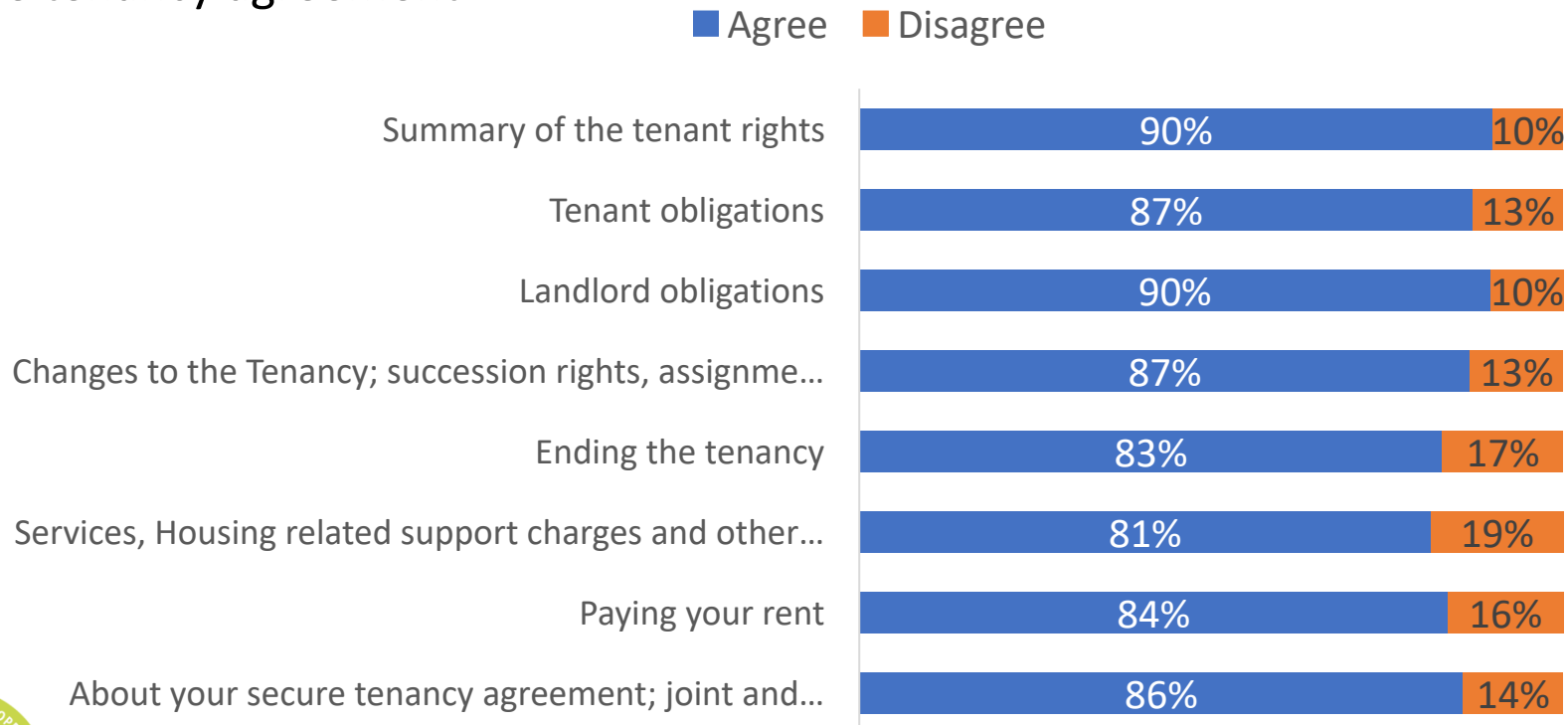
Consultation with Tenants

- A consultation was carried out with all tenants (around 8,800 tenanted properties) in January 2025 on the proposed revised tenancy agreement
- The tenant panel was also consulted
- An online survey was placed on the council's website
- 10,475 letters (with FAQs) promoting the survey were posted out
- Joint tenants were written to individually
- There were 232 hard copies of the survey posted out with a pre-paid return envelope, which included 2 versions in large print
- 3 translations into Polish were requested
- Some consultations were completed on the telephone



Consultation Results

- There were 1,085 responses to the survey
- 1,021 online responses and 64 hard copy responses
- There was a very high level of support (over 81%) for the proposed changes to the tenancy agreement



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Consultation Comments – Common Themes

Concerns about rent increases or other charges being imposed

- Some tenants concerned about rent increases due to the cost of living and other comments with concern there was going to be further rent increases that had not been specified
- Concern about other charges being imposed (eg service charges)

Changes not understood

- Comments that some tenants did not understand what the changes were and what the implications of the proposed changes to the agreement



Consultation Comments – Common Themes

Lack of detail (in the agreement)

- All the information was available on the website consultation page and assistance was given by telephone also
- Comments that there was not enough detail in the tenancy agreement about the changes (misunderstanding that these are the terms and conditions of the tenancy agreement)

That the tenant just disagreed

- Either didn't agree with the changes or felt that the tenancy agreement did not amending



Consultation Comments – Common Themes

That the tenant had signed a lifetime agreement

- Some misunderstanding that the agreement might change the security of tenure (ie lifetime secure tenancies)
- Misunderstanding that secure tenancy agreements can be revised as needed

Issues with the webpages/website

- Concerns raised about the formatting of the information on the website, or small text or could not find the information
- Where residents contacted us to say they were having difficulties reading the materials on their phones or the webpage we sent out PDF versions



Next Steps

- Having considered the feedback from the consultation, no amendments to the tenancy agreement were considered necessary
- However, the comments are being looked at in more detail so that there is improved information on the website to assist the understanding of the tenant agreement for tenants
- If the revised tenancy agreement is recommended by CHP to Cabinet, and is approved:
 - would be to write to tenants giving the required notice varying their tenancy agreement



Questions?



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Tenant Satisfaction Measures Survey Action Plan Update

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TSM survey

- A themed action plan was developed to address the feedback from the tenant's satisfaction survey which took place in 2023/24
- Further progress with the action plan is updated in Appendix A of the report - Some actions completed, and all actions are progressing
- Will also provide an update on the Q3 TSM results for 2024/25



Safe and well-maintained Homes

Stock condition surveys –

- Initial data collated up to Sept 2024 is formatted and ready to load
- EPC data due to be loaded on to our MRI early Feb.
- Uploads complete by end of March
- Data will then be analysed to determine future investment programmes



Safe and well-maintained Homes

Communal areas –

- The Social Housing Communal Areas Maintenance **Task and Finish Group** will report to OSC in March 2025
- Have reviewed **grounds maintenance** arrangements and are in discussions with the contractor as to how resources can be deployed to better suit needs
- **New Housing Estates Manager** started and **Estate inspections** in progress



Repairs Service

Review of services –

- **Improvement Plan** provided with milestones to improve performance on voids turnarounds, routine and urgent repairs. Improvement against these targets has/is being seen.
- Performance being **tracked and monitored** weekly
- Review of the **customer journey for repairs** is underway



Communication

Communication with tenants –

- **Communication and engagement plan** updated (see Appendix B) including social media campaigns, housing events and training opportunities.
- **“You said, We’re Doing”** a regular feature in the Community Edit newsletter (next edition due in March).
- **ASB comms** – Social media campaign ran during ASB Awareness week (18-14 November 2024). Team have reviewed communication around closing cases and gathering feedback.



Neighbourhoods

Promote what council is doing –

- Round up of Neighbourhood Improvement Bids/Community Catch-ups and other initiatives are publicised in the Community Edit newsletter
- Planning for 2025/26 Community Catch-ups has started. Comms for these events will start in spring
- Nicer Neighbourhoods task force is up and running



Complaints

Complaint handling –

- Refreshed **customer services training** for staff planned for Spring 2025
- More **detailed complaints and ombudsman complaints data** was presented to **OSC** in November 2024
- **Housing Complaints data** now included in the quarterly performance report to CHP



TSM results 1 April to 31 Dec 2024

Satisfaction Measures	2023/24	2024/25 (To 31 Dec)	Trend
Overall Satisfaction	60%	66%	↑
Satisfaction with repairs service over last 12 months	61%	65%	↑
Time taken to complete most recent repair	56%	66%	↑
Satisfaction home is well maintained	54%	67%	↑
Satisfaction home is safe	60%	75%	↑
WHBC listens to your views and acts on them	42%	58%	↑
WHBC keeps you informed	53%	70%	↑
WHBC treats you fairly and with respect	63%	74%	↑
Made a complaint in the last 12 months	26%	22%	↓
Satisfaction of WHBC's approach to complaint handling (% of those who have made a complaint)	26%	21%	↓
Communal areas are clean and well maintained	47%	49%	↑
WHBC makes a positive contribution to the neighbourhood	45%	58%	↑
Approach to handling ASB	41%	56%	↑

Questions?

