

TENANTS PANEL
4 JUNE 2024
COMMITTEE ROOM, TOWN HALL

Attended by: Carol McDougall (Chair), Mary Humm, Sheila Jones, John Cole, Malcolm Carpenter, Iris Peacock, Muna Smith and Patrick Gafney .

Also in attendance: Councillor Andy Baker (Portfolio Holder for Housing). Damian Williams (TDC), Emma Norton (TDC), Matthew Wicks (TDC), Tim Clarke (TDC), Steve Pearce (TDC), Jennie Wilkinson (TDC) and Andy White (TDC).

1. Welcome and introductions

Carol McDougall welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked Panel members and TDC representatives for attending the meeting.

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were noted for Hazel Harris

3. The Council's garage stock and future proposals for repair and redevelopment

Matthew Wicks gave an overview of the number, type and locations of garages within the Council's housing portfolio and outlined the current repair and maintenance issues in relation to these.

In response to a query from Iris Peacock, Matthew Wicks confirmed that the majority of the Council's garages are of a smaller size and that, in some instances, these may not accommodate modern larger vehicles. Where existing garages have been demolished and then rebuilt, sites are typically accommodating a smaller number of larger garages. For example in Wargrave Road in Clacton when the previous 12 garages have been replaced with 10 new ones.

Following a general discussion, Damian Williams confirmed that the findings of the stock condition survey of the Council's garages would be reported to a future meeting of the Panel for agreement as to the future action to be taken in respect of these.

4. Tenant Satisfaction Measures

Emma Norton advised members of the Panel of the Council's performance against the Regulator of Social Housing's Tenant Satisfaction Measures for 2023/4 and confirmed that this information would need to be submitted to the Regulator by the end of June 2024.

Councillor Baker explained the performance figure in relation to the Decent Homes indicator and advised how the findings of the stock condition surveys being carried out are either being addressed on an individual basis or are being used to inform further repairs and maintenance works.

5. Housing Complaints Performance

Emma Norton advised members of the Panel of performance in relation to complaint handling and against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

Councillor Baker advised that, despite an increase in complaints, he was satisfied with the complaints position and that the number of complaints is not necessarily an indicator of satisfaction with services. Instead, this could be a reflection of our promotion of complaints processes and residents confidence in complaints handling.

Emma Norton advised that the Council's assessment of its position against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code needs to be reported to the Ombudsman by the end of June 2024.

6. Neighbourhood Management Policy

Matthew Wicks summarised the content of the draft Neighbourhood Management Policy, which will be subject to approval by the Council's Cabinet in September 2024.

A copy of the full draft Policy is available on request and members of the Panel were encouraged to submit any comments they may have in connection with this draft.

In response to a query from Carol McDougall, Matthew Wicks confirmed that the Tenancy Management Officers are still working in all areas of the district and are now carrying out more proactive tasks, as well as responding to complaints.

Matthew Wicks advised that, previously, carpets have been removed from empty properties due to the future liability if these were left in situ when a property was next let. However, in accordance with the recommendations of the Housing Ombudsman, carpets are now let in situ where they are in a reasonable condition, subject to the incoming tenant signing a waiver accepting responsibility for these.

7. Transfer Incentive Scheme

Emma Norton provided an overview of the Council's exiting transfer incentive scheme and outlined the proposed changes and the reasons for these.

In response to a query from Iris Peacock, Councillor Baker advised of the need to encourage a turnover of tenancies to ensure that the Council makes best use of its housing stock and can meet identified housing needs. Councillor Baker also advised that priority is currently being given to making the Council's current housing stock decent rather than acquiring more properties and so the need to make best use of the stock is important.

Councillor Baker also informed the Panel of the intention to consult tenants, potential tenants and other stakeholders later in the year on the proposed introduction of fixed term tenancies which would replace secure or lifetime tenancies for new tenancies.

Muna Smith expressed a view that the potential of a lower rent and lower bills is not sufficient to encourage tenants to downsize and Damian Williams agreed that a reasonable incentive scheme was required to encourage a turnover of tenancies.

Emma Norton agreed to bring the proposed Policy back to a future meeting of the Panel for further discussion and agreement.

8. Spendells House and Honeycroft redevelopment

Jennie Wilkinson gave an update on the redevelopment at Honeycroft and presented drone photos of the site. Subject to weather conditions, completion on site is anticipated to be at the end of October 2024.

In response to a query from Muna Smith, Jennie Wilkinson provided details of the off-site construction methods used and confirmed that the lifespan of these buildings are comparable to those of a house of standard construction. The new bungalows are fully accessible and highly energy efficient.

Several members of the Panel expressed concerns regarding the standard of grass cutting at the Honeycroft site and Damian Williams confirmed that he would undertake a site visit and feedback these comments to the Council's Open Spaces team.

Steve Pearce gave an update on the conversion works being carried out at Spendells House and advised that completion is expected at the end of August 2024.

In response to a query from Iris Peacock, Councillor Baker confirmed that this property will be used to provide temporary accommodation for up to 31 homeless households – providing these households with better facilities than those offered in hotel accommodation and reducing the Council's spend on temporary accommodation.

Emma Norton confirmed that two Homelessness Accommodation Officers have already been employed and they will be based at Spendells House as soon as the works are completed.

Members of the Panel expressed their support for the provision of this accommodation.

9. Update on other housing policies

Emma Norton advised the Panel that the Council's Cabinet has recently approved the implementation of three housing policies relating to reasonable adjustments, vulnerability and unacceptable customer behaviour and summarised the content of each of these

All of these policies have been written to meet legal and regulatory standards for performance and were previously provided in draft form for members of the Panel.

Councillor Baker advised that, to date 13 new or amended policies have been produced and gave credit to the officers involved in producing these.

All approved policies are published on the Council' website on the Housing Strategies and Policies page.

10. Any other business

Sheila Jones enquired about the level of contact that members of the Sheltered Housing team have with residents. Matthew Wicks advised what the frequency of contact would normally be and Damian Williams confirmed that, when the works at Honeycroft are complete, the Community Room will be used as an office base for sheltered and other housing staff. Housing drop ins / surgeries will also be held in this location for residents in the local area.

In response to a query from Malcolm Carpenter, Damian Williams and Jennie Wilkinson explained how the allotments would be operated and it was agreed that this would be subject to review.

Steve Pearce responded to a report of potential damp in his property from Malcolm Carpenter and confirmed that an inspection would be arranged.

11. Date and time of next meeting

The next meeting of the Panel will be held in the Committee Room, Town Hall, Clacton – date and time to be confirmed.