HOMES & COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE
18 JANUARY 2021

HOUSING OMBUDSMAN COMPLAINT HANDLING – SELF ASSESSMENT

1.0   Purpose of Report

1.1   To update Committee on the results of the self-assessment of the newly revised and approved Customer Feedback Policy against the Housing Ombudsman Effective Complaints Handling Self-Assessment.

1.2   Committee will recall approving the revised Customer Feedback Policy at November 2020 meeting.

2.0   Background Information

2.1   In July 2020, the Housing Ombudsman Service published a Complaint Handling Code and as part of this the Council is required to undertake a self-assessment by 31 December 2020.

2.2   The Complaint Handling Code provides a framework to promote high quality complaint management, in particular:

    i.   greater and easier routes of access for tenants and residents with faster resolutions
    ii.   Use and share the learning from complaints to drive service improvements or amendments

2.3   An in-house desktop review has been completed, followed by consultation with our involved tenants.

2.4   The Housing Advisory Group have also input into the self-assessment process and provided feedback on the findings.

3.0   Proposals

3.1   The self-assessment has highlighted that the Council is partially compliant, with a number of areas for improvement, further consideration and a mechanism for continued monitoring.

3.2   The proposals for areas of improvement are:

    i.   Include the full definition as suggested by the Housing Ombudsman in the Policy
    ii.   Increased reporting regarding complaints, including satisfaction with outcome and capturing and sharing what learning has been gained.
    iii. The subsequent sharing of this learning (where appropriate) with SLT, residents and tenants via the website, the Housing Advisory Group and this committee.
    iv.   The formation of a Reasonable Adjustments Policy to ensure full compliance with the Equality Act 2010 to accommodate an individual's needs
    v.   The assignment of a person or team to take responsibility for complaint handling; the code uses the term "complaints officer". It is acknowledged that for smaller organisations this role may not be wholly dedicated to complaint handling.

vi. The discontinuation of a stage 3 within the Policy. The Housing Customer Feedback Policy did have an additional option stage that the tenant could request that the Tenants Panel reviews their complaint. The Housing Ombudsman does not believe a third stage is necessary as part of a complaints process but if a landlord believes strongly it requires one the reasons why should be detailed in the self-assessment. The self – assessment details this and following consultation with the Housing Advisory Group and involved tenants an alternative approach is proposed. It is proposed that if a complaint escalates to Stage 2, for Council Tenants only, the complainant will be given the option to involve a tenant representative from either the Housing Advisory Group or the cohort of involved tenants in the review of their complaint. This will allow for an objective tenant perspective to be gained when looking for a resolution to the complaint. A visit to the complainant by the tenant with the lead officer will be encouraged as part of this overview. This will be done within the existing time frames set out in the Policy

3.3 Continued monitoring of complaint handling with an annual review and completion of the self-assessment, including the publication of the assessment with parties detailed in 3.2 ii above.

3.4 A procedure guide and templates are currently being progressed, along with the proposal for training sessions for all those involved in complaint handling.

4.0 Digital Implications

4.1 Customers have the option of submitting their feedback online. This functionality is a requirement of the self-assessment. We will be investing in our various digital platforms to give a wide variety of options for residents to feed back.

5.0 Equalities Implications

5.1 Consideration should be given to the establishment of a reasonable adjustment policy as mentioned previously in the report. We already have in place the option for tenant and residents to appoint a representative on their behalf.

6.0 Financial Implications – FIN20-21/5120

6.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

7.0 Community Plan – Alignment to Objectives

7.1 The wider Customer Feedback Policy so be default the self-assessment will also align with the following objectives:

i. Increasing participation with the Council
ii. Increase residents satisfaction with the Council

8.0   Comments of Director

8.1   Comments from the Housing Advisory Group that took place on 21 December 2020 and views of involved tenants are included in this report and the Self-Assessment.

8.2   The Housing Advisory Group agreed the current process is too long winded but it is important to keep a tenant perspective on complaints. They requested a programme of communications to tenants to ensure all are aware of how to make a complaint, how to provide feedback and the process involved.

8.3   Feedback and learning from complaints should be reported to the Tenant Scrutiny panel at suitable regular intervals.

9.0   RECOMMENDATION(S)

9.1   That members approve the proposals outlined in Section 3.2.

9.2   That members approve the amendments to the Policy, principally to remove the tenant panel stage of the complaint process and for complainants to be offered the option for an involved tenant to be involved in Stage 2 complaint investigations.

9.3   That Member approve the creation of a reasonable adjustment policy to support our equalities commitments.

9.4   The production of communications plan to promote the new feedback policy as outlined in section 8.2

Reason for Recommendation(s)

To ensure the Customer Feedback Policy fully complies with the Complaint Handling Code and reflects the feedback of tenants.

Background Papers

Nil

For further information please contact Julie Davidson – Business Manager Housing Management on 5542

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