



Public Document Pack

Cambridge City Council

HOUSING MANAGEMENT BOARD

To: **Scrutiny Committee Members:** Councillors Blackhurst (Chair), Blencowe, Bird, Brierley, Johnson, Pippas, Price and Rosenstiel

Alternates: Councillors Tucker

Tenants and Leaseholders: Diane Best (Vice Chair – Leaseholder Representative), Kay Harris (Tenant Representative), John Marais (Tenant Representative), Terry Sweeney (Tenant Representative), Diana Minns (Tenant Representative) and Allen Champion (Tenant Representative).

Executive Councillor for Housing: Councillor Smart

Despatched: Thursday 21 February 2013

Date: Tuesday, 5 March 2013

Time: 5.30 pm

Venue: Committee Room 1 & 2 - Guildhall

Contact: James Goddard

Direct Dial: 01223 457013

AGENDA

1 APOLOGIES

To receive any apologies for absence.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members are asked to declare at this stage any interests that they may have in an item shown on this agenda. If any member of the Committee is unsure whether or not they should declare an interest on a particular matter, they should seek advice from the Head of Legal Services **before** the meeting.

3 MINUTES *(Pages 1 - 12)*

To approve the minutes of the previous meeting. *(Pages 1 - 12)*

4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

(See information below).

Items for Decision by the Executive Councillor, Without Debate

These Items will already have received approval in principle from the Executive Councillor. The Executive Councillor will be asked to approve the recommendations as set out in the officer's report.

There will be no debate on these items, but members of the Scrutiny Committee and members of the public may ask questions or comment on the items if they comply with the Council's rules on Public Speaking set out below.

Items for Debate by the Committee and then Decision by the Executive Councillor

These items will require the Executive Councillor to make a decision after hearing the views of the Scrutiny Committee.

There will be a full debate on these items, and members of the public may ask questions or comment on the items if they comply with the Council's rules on Public Speaking set out below.

Executive Councillor for Housing

Items for Decision by the Executive Councillor, Without Debate

- 5 STANDARD ITEM: WRITE-OFF OF FORMER TENANT ARREARS**
(Pages 13 - 18)

Items for Debate by the Committee and then Decision by the Executive Councillor

- 6 HOUSING PORTFOLIO PLAN 2013/14** *(Pages 19 - 30)*
- 7 PROGRESS REPORT FROM RESIDENTS' HOUSING REGULATION PANEL ON THEIR INSPECTION OF SERVICES** *(Pages 31 - 60)*
- 8 REGULATORY CHANGES TO THE OMBUDSMAN SYSTEM FOR HANDLING TENANTS' UNRESOLVED COMPLAINTS ABOUT THEIR LANDLORD, AND LOCAL ACTIONS REQUIRED TO IMPLEMENT THOSE CHANGES** *(Pages 61 - 80)*

Information for the Public

Location The meeting is in the Guildhall on the Market Square (CB2 3QJ).

Between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. the building is accessible via Peas Hill, Guildhall Street and the Market Square entrances.

After 5 p.m. access is via the Peas Hill entrance.

All the meeting rooms (Committee Room 1, Committee 2 and the Council Chamber) are on the first floor, and are accessible via lifts or stairs.

Public Participation Some meetings may have parts that will be closed to the public, but the reasons for excluding the press and public will be given.

Most meetings have an opportunity for members of the public to ask questions or make statements.

To ask a question or make a statement please notify the Committee Manager (details listed on the front of the agenda) prior to the deadline.

- For questions and/or statements regarding items on the published agenda, the deadline is the start of the meeting.
- For questions and/or statements regarding items NOT on the published agenda, the deadline is 10 a.m. the day before the meeting.

Speaking on Planning Applications or Licensing Hearings is subject to other rules. Guidance for speaking on these issues can be obtained from Democratic Services on 01223 457013 or democratic.services@cambridge.gov.uk.

Further information about speaking at a City Council

meeting can be found at;

<http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/public/docs/Having%20your%20say%20at%20meetings.pdf>

Cambridge City Council would value your assistance in improving the public speaking process of committee meetings. If you any have any feedback please contact Democratic Services on 01223 457013 or democratic.services@cambridge.gov.uk.

**Filming,
recording
and
photography**

The Council is committed to being open and transparent in the way it conducts its decision-making. Recording is permitted at council meetings, which are open to the public. The Council understands that some members of the public attending its meetings may not wish to be recorded. The Chair of the meeting will facilitate by ensuring that any such request not to be recorded is respected by those doing the recording.

Full details of the City Council's protocol on audio/visual recording and photography at meetings can be accessed via:

www.cambridge.gov.uk/democracy/ecSDDisplay.aspx?NAME=SD1057&ID=1057&RPID=33371389&sch=doc&cat=13203&path=13020%2c13203.

Fire Alarm

In the event of the fire alarm sounding please follow the instructions of Cambridge City Council staff.

**Facilities for
disabled
people**

Level access to the Guildhall is via Peas Hill.

A loop system is available in Committee Room 1, Committee Room 2 and the Council Chamber.

Accessible toilets are available on the ground and first floor.

Meeting papers are available in large print and other formats on request prior to the meeting.

For further assistance please contact Democratic Services on 01223 457013 or

democratic.services@cambridge.gov.uk.

Queries on reports If you have a question or query regarding a committee report please contact the officer listed at the end of relevant report or Democratic Services on 01223 457013 or democratic.services@cambridge.gov.uk.

General Information Information regarding committees, councilors and the democratic process is available at www.cambridge.gov.uk/democracy.

This page is intentionally left blank

HOUSING MANAGEMENT BOARD

8 January 2013

5.30 - 7.30 pm

Present:

Scrutiny Committee Members: Councillors Blackhurst (Chair), Bird, Blencowe, Brierley, Johnson, Pippas, Price and Rosenstiel

Executive Councillor for Housing: Councillor Smart

Tenant/Leaseholder Representatives: Diane Best (Vice Chair), Allen Champion, John Marais, Diana Minns and Terry Sweeney

Officers:

Director of Customer & Community Services: Liz Bisset

Head of Revenues and Benefits: Alison Cole

Head of City Homes: Robert Hollingsworth

Area Housing Manager: Andrew Latchem

Business Manager & Principal Accountant: Julia Hovells

Resident Involvement Facilitator: James Bull

Committee Manager: James Goddard

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL**13/1/HMB Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillor Pogonowski and Mrs Harris.

Councillor Blencowe attended as an alternate for Councillor Pogonowski.

13/2/HMB Declarations of Interest

Name	Item	Interest
Councillor Blackhurst	13/5/HMB	Personal: Occupies a former council house.
Councillor Rosenstiel	13/5/HMB	Personal: Council garage tenant. Did not vote on recommendation (iii).

13/3/HMB Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 September 2012 were approved and signed as a correct record.

13/4/HMB Public Questions

There were no public questions.

13/5/HMB Housing Revenue Account Budget Setting Report (HRA BSR)**Matter for Decision**

At this stage in the 2013/14 budget process the range of assumptions on which the HRA Business Plan Mid-Year Update was based need to be reviewed, in light of the latest information available, to determine whether any aspects of the strategy need to be revised. This will then provide the basis for the finalisation of the 2012/13 revised and 2013/14 budgets.

The HRA Budget-Setting Report provided an overview of the review of the key assumptions. It set out the key parameters for the detailed recommendations and final budget proposals.

Housing Management Board scrutinised the detailed rent, and service charge proposals and revenue bids and savings proposed, The Executive Councillor noted the support of the recommendations by Housing Management Board, gave provisional approval to the recommendations and will formally record a decision in respect of recommendations (i) to xiii) at a meeting of Strategy & Resources on 15th February 2013

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

Following scrutiny and debate at Housing Management Board the Executive Councillor provisionally, with the decision to be formally recorded at the meeting of Strategy & Resources on 15th February 2013.

Review of Rents and Charges

- (i) Approved the proposed charges for Housing Revenue Account services and facilities, as shown in Appendix B of the HRA Budget Setting Report.

- (ii) Approved that council dwellings rents be increased in line with rent restructuring guidelines to seek to achieve convergence with formula rent by 2015/16, with a maximum in individual increases of inflation (RPI at September 2012 of 2.6%) plus half percent (0.5%) plus £2.00 per week with effect from 1 April 2013, in accordance with the latest government guidelines.
- (iii) Approved inflationary increases of 2.4% in garage rents for 2013/14, in line with the base rate of inflation for the year assumed in the HRA Budget Setting Report, pending future recommendations in respect of garage pricing structures following the findings of the Garage Working Group.
- (iv) Approved that service charges for gas maintenance, door entry systems, lifts and electrical and mechanical maintenance are increased by a maximum of inflation at 2.6% plus 0.5%, if required, to continue to recover full estimated costs as detailed in Appendix B of the HRA Budget Setting Report.
- (v) Approved that caretaking, communal cleaning, estate services, grounds maintenance, window cleaning, temporary housing premises and utilities, sheltered scheme premises, utilities, digital television aerial and catering charges continue to be recovered at full cost, as detailed in Appendix B of the HRA Budget Setting Report.
- (vi) Approved revised leasehold administration charges for 2013/14 as detailed in Appendix B of the HRA Budget Setting Report.
- (vii) Approved the revised Rent Write Off Policy, as detailed in Appendix A(1) of the HRA Budget Setting Report.
- (viii) Approved the revised Rent Policy, as detailed in Appendix A(2) of the HRA Budget Setting Report.

Revenue – HRA Revised Budget 2012/13:

- (ix) Approved with any amendments, the Revised Budget items shown in Appendix D of the HRA Budget Setting Report.

Budget 2013/14:

- (x) Approved with any amendments, of the Non-Cash Limit items shown in Appendix E of the HRA Budget Setting Report.
- (xi) Approved with any amendments, of the Unavoidable Revenue Bids and Savings shown in Appendix F of the HRA Budget Setting Report.
- (xii) Approved with any amendments, of the Priority Policy Fund (PPF) Bids shown in Appendix G of the HRA Budget Setting Report.

Treasury Management

- (xiii) Approved the continued approach to determining the most appropriate borrowing route in respect of any additional HRA borrowing requirement, as outlined in Section 6 of the HRA Budget Setting Report, delegating responsibility to the Director of Resources for the final decision, in consultation with the Executive Councillor, Chair, Vice Chair and Opposition Spokesperson for HMB.

Reason for the Decision

As set out in the Officer's report.

Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

Not applicable.

Scrutiny Considerations

The Committee received a report from the Business Manager & Principal Accountant regarding the Housing Revenue Account Budget Setting Report (HRA BSR).

The Business Manager & Principal Accountant requested a change to the recommendations. She formally proposed that instead of making a decision at HMB, the Executive Councillor for Housing would take final decisions in respect of recommendations (i) to (xiii) at a meeting of Strategy & Resources in February 2013.

The Business Manager & Principal Accountant formally proposed to withdraw the following recommendations from the her report:

The Executive Councillor recommended to Council:

Revenue – HRA Revised Budget 2012/13:

- (ix) *Approval with any amendments, of the Revised Budget items shown in Appendix D of the attached HRA Budget Setting Report.*

Budget 2013/14:

- (x) *Approval with any amendments, of the Non-Cash Limit items shown in Appendix E of the attached HRA Budget Setting Report.*

- (xi) *Approval with any amendments, of the Unavoidable Revenue Bids and Savings shown in Appendix F of the attached HRA Budget Setting Report.*
- (xii) *Approval with any amendments, of the Priority Policy Fund (PPF) Bids shown in Appendix G of the attached HRA Budget Setting Report.*

Treasury Management

- (xiii) *To approve the continued approach to determining the most appropriate borrowing route in respect of any additional HRA borrowing requirement, as outlined in Section 6 of the HRA Budget Setting Report, delegating responsibility to the Director of Resources for the final decision, in consultation with the Executive Councillor, Chair, Vice Chair and Opposition Spokesperson for HMB.*

The following recommendations were formally proposed:

Revenue – HRA

Revised Budget 2012/13:

- (ix) *Approve with any amendments, the Revised Budget items shown in Appendix D of the attached HRA Budget Setting Report.*

Budget 2013/14:

- (x) *Approve with any amendments, the Non-Cash Limit items shown in Appendix E of the attached HRA Budget Setting Report.*
- (xi) *Approve with any amendments, the Unavoidable Revenue Bids and Savings shown in Appendix F of the attached HRA Budget Setting Report.*
- (xii) *Approve with any amendments, the Priority Policy Fund (PPF) Bids shown in Appendix G of the attached HRA Budget Setting Report.*

Treasury Management

- (xiii) *Approve the continued approach to determining the most appropriate borrowing route in respect of any additional HRA borrowing requirement, as outlined in Section 6 of the HRA Budget Setting Report, delegating responsibility to the Director of Resources for the*

final decision, in consultation with the Executive Councillor, Chair, Vice Chair and Opposition Spokesperson for HMB.

The Committee unanimously approved amending the recommendations.

The Committee made the following comments in response to the report:

- (i) Labour Councillors and Tenant Representatives expressed concern at the above inflation rent rises.
- (ii) Labour Councillors and Tenant Representatives expressed concern regarding the right to buy policy. They felt Central Government policy would lead to a reduction in City Council housing stock as tenants could purchase their properties at a faster rate than replacements could be built.
- (iii) Tenant Representatives referred to comments from a member of the public at the 19 June 2012 HMB regarding Tenant Representatives voting stance on rent rises. Tenant Representatives were placed in a difficult position as their role on HMB was to represent tenant and leaseholder views. Tenant Representatives abstained from voting on increasing rents as they had reservations about the rise, but recognised that not increasing the rents would lead to consequences in terms of the ability to deliver services, due to Central Government assumptions on rent increases in the HRA Self-Financing Settlement.

In response to Members' questions the Head of City Homes plus Business Manager & Principal Accountant confirmed the following:

- (i) A charge of £10 was imposed for retrospective consent for improvements. This was intended only to be a disincentive, thus encouraging leaseholders to obtain permission in advance, and was not set to recover the costs associated with giving the required permissions. If the direct costs for all approvals were to be recovered, other methods were available to reclaim these.
- (ii) The Council had 19 cases between 2009 – 2012 where retrospective permission was sought.

The Head of City Homes undertook to liaise with the Executive Councillor for Housing and Mrs Best regarding a future report to HMB on possible amendments to the £10 charge. Also ways to avoid penalising tenants/leaseholders who sought approval when others may undertake work without seeking approval in order to avoid being charged.

- (iii) A blanket policy was not in place for void property rent increases. Rent would increase for properties where work had been undertaken to improve energy efficiency as the reduced energy bills should help to offset rent increases. Rent would not move directly to target for all properties.
- (iv) The Housing Needs Register was revised in line with national property guidelines and would be reported to 17 January Community Services Committee.
- (v) The Council preferred to house people on a short term basis in its temporary housing stock rather than bed and breakfast accommodation where possible. Maintenance costs were higher than other council housing stock due to the high turn over of residents. The Council had 63 temporary housing units that it owned or managed. More had been taken on as a way to house people in the City instead of sending them elsewhere or placing in bed and breakfast accommodation as had sometimes occurred in the past. The Housing Team reviewed individual circumstances to place families and workers in Cambridge where possible.
- (vi) The Business Manager & Principal Accountant undertook to clarify Disabled Facilities Grant plus Private Sector Housing Grants and Loans figures with Councillor Bird post HMB. A reduction was proposed in response to less demand in 2012/13.

In response to Members' questions the Executive Councillor for Housing and Director of Customer & Community Services confirmed the following:

- (i) The impact on tenants from the proposed redevelopment of Water Lane and Aylesborough Close was implicit in the 11 October 2012 Community Services Committee report, but was made more explicit in the report being taken to 17 January 2013 committee meeting.
- (ii) Noted Labour Councillors and Tenant Representatives concerns regarding the right to buy policy. The Council had a right to replace housing stock as of April 2012.

The Business Manager & Principal Accountant said that under the new right to buy policy, for any right to buy sales over and above those assumed in the Self-Financing settlement, the authority is able to retain a proportion that relates to the debt associated with the dwelling. The authority has also signed an agreement with Communities & Local government to be able to retain any balance remaining, as long as it is invested in the delivery of new social

housing. The right to buy receipt can only form 30% of the funding required to build or acquire a new social housing dwelling, with the balance to be met from Council resources or through additional borrowing.

The Council could buy back existing dwellings in the city, but Central Government encouraged the development of new housing, wherever Councils are in a position to do so.

The Chair decided that the recommendations highlighted in the Officer's report should be voted on and recorded separately:

The Committee considered and endorsed recommendations (i), (iv), (v), (vi), (vii), (ix), (x), (xi), (xii) and (xiii) by 8 votes to 1.

The Committee considered and endorsed recommendation (ii) by 4 votes to 0.

The Committee considered and endorsed recommendation (iii) by 3 votes to 0.

The Committee considered and endorsed recommendation (viii) by 4 votes to 0.

The Executive Councillor noted the recommendations, and deferred considering for approval until the special Strategy & Resources Committee meeting 15 February 2013.

Conflicts of Interest Declared by the Executive Councillor (and any Dispensations Granted)

Not applicable.

13/6/HMB Rent Arrears Policy and the Housing Related Debt Policy

Matter for Decision

The Rent Arrears Policy was last approved in 2010.

The Housing Debt Related Policy has been amended since approval in 2010 and extends the term of repayment to six months and a reduction of the original debt by 50%.

The Officer's report sets out information regarding the performance of current and former tenant arrears, plus the City Council's approach to supporting tenants' affected by the Welfare Reforms.

The expected benefit cap has been deferred to September 2013. A wealth of changes was expected from Central Government, the Council would support tenants through the process.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- (i) Approved the revised Rent Arrears Policy.
- (ii) Approved the revised Housing Debt Related Policy.

Reason for the Decision

As set out in the Officer's report.

Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

Not applicable.

Scrutiny Considerations

The Committee received a report from the Area Housing Manager regarding the Rent Arrears Policy and the Housing Related Debt Policy.

The Committee made the following comments in response to the report:

- (i) Suggested that Tenant Representatives could be further involved in officer communication with tenants to ensure messages were expressed in plain English.
- (ii) Labour Councillors felt rent arrears levels were high and the Council were unlikely to get all monies back.
- (iii) The Executive Councillor for Housing was trying to strengthen and signpost credit unions as part of the portfolio of rent arrears preventative measures.

In response to Members' questions the Director of Customer & Community Services, Head of City Homes, Head of Revenues and Benefits plus Area Housing Manager confirmed the following:

- (i) It was currently understood that payments of universal credit would not be backdated. Therefore a proactive process was required to prevent tenants slipping into arrears.
- (ii) The Council was currently monitoring the impact of benefit reforms for trends as changes are introduced, so the Council could provide

guidance and support. Officers were visiting tenants to get a clearer idea of their housing needs as benefits are changed, instead of waiting passively to be contacted.

- (iii) Some tenants were downsizing in response to benefit changes, the associated reduction in rent cost could reduce possible rent arrears.
- (iv) Rent arrears were the same in January 2013 as they were 26 years before (1987). The Council was in the best position it could be prior to the implementation of benefit changes. The Council would work with tenants to better structure debt repayments.
- (v) Rent arrears could arise from delays in tenants receiving benefits prior to paying rent. Pathfinder authorities were reviewing the impact of benefit delays on rent arrears as part of the benefit change process, but it was expected they would form a small proportion of the overall figure. Officers were concerned that issues may arise as universal credit would be paid one month in arrears from the date of claim, hence the Council was proactively working with tenants to anticipate and overcome issues where possible in advance.
- (vi) Rent collection rates were good as officers picked up on debt at an early stage. Officers proactively engaged with tenants when arrears started to arise.
- (vii) Tenants could sub-let their properties, but this would impact on their benefits.
- (viii) The Council did not have a policy to turn down potential tenants, which is why it some times took on people with rent arrears. The expectation was that debts should be cleared prior to the Council taking former tenants back as new tenants. The Rent Arrears Policy proposed that if the debt could not be paid as a lump sum, payment by instalments was expected instead. An instalment repayment plan based on individual circumstances was the preferred option to making people homeless; the Council only evicted people as a last resort. The Council preferred to give people time to resolve money issues, which was why arrears arose. Decisions regarding actions to take on rent arrears were made on an individual (tenant) basis, there was no blanket approach.
- (ix) There were no rent discounts for properties adapted for disabled need. The property tax band would be changed instead.

The Head of Revenues and Benefits undertook to provide further information to Councillor Bird who asked if a person would/would not be affected by the benefit cap if they, their partner or a dependant child who is living with them received benefits.

- (x) Tenant arrears include debt accrued over six years, none of which has been written off.
- (xi) The new Rent Arrears Policy would cover any new tenants the Council took on, the old policy would cover existing tenants.

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

Conflicts of Interest Declared by the Executive Councillor (and any Dispensations Granted)

Not applicable.

13/7/HMB Update on Resident Involvement Facilitator Post

Matter for Decision

A report was brought to HMB in September 2011 outlining recommendations for providing an Independent Tenants' Voice. This report was written by an external consultant and included a thorough review of past and existing Resident Involvement arrangements, plus a number of recommendations.

One key recommendation from the report, approved by the Executive Councillor for Housing at the September 2011 HMB, was the creation of a 'Resident Involvement Facilitator' post. A candidate was recruited to this role in August 2012. The Officer's report provided an update on the post and specific work being carried out.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

Approved the 2013 Resident Involvement Facilitator work plan (developed in consultation with the HMB tenants and leaseholder reps), set out in Appendix 2 of the Officer's report.

Reason for the Decision

As set out in the Officer's report.

Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

Not applicable.

Scrutiny Considerations

The Committee received a report from the Resident Involvement Facilitator regarding the Update on Resident Involvement Facilitator Post.

In response to Members' questions the Resident Involvement Facilitator confirmed the following:

- (i) The Resident Involvement Facilitator engaged with tenants through various means including Streets & Open Spaces Officers, resident associations and Street Champions.
- (ii) Residents associations were an effective way of engaging tenants, but the most active groups were formed when people had specific reasons for coming together. Resident associations had varied longevity ie some stayed in place longer than others. This depended on support/interest. Officers would engage with resident associations as required.
- (iii) Part of the Resident Involvement Facilitator's role was to facilitate the formation of resident associations in future and to engage a spectrum of people of all ages. Also to train and support tenants as resident involvement representatives.
- (iv) A residents forum would be a useful means in future for HMB representatives to liaise with tenants.

The Committee resolved unanimously to endorse the recommendation.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendation.

Conflicts of Interest Declared by the Executive Councillor (and any Dispensations Granted)

Not applicable.

The meeting ended at 7.30 pm

CHAIR



To: Executive Councillor for Housing (and Deputy Leader): Councillor Catherine Smart
Report by: Director of Customer & Community Services
Relevant scrutiny committee: Housing Management Board 5/3/2013
Wards affected: All Wards

WRITE-OFF OF CURRENT AND FORMER TENANT ARREARS

Not a Key Decision

The background information used in the preparation of this report is exempted from publication by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

1. Executive Summary

This report sets out details of eleven cases of current and former tenant arrears together with a summary of the action taken to try to recover these debts.

2. Recommendations

The Executive Councillor is recommended:

- 2.1 To approve that the three case of current tenant arrears totalling £6,479.73 detailed in the attached appendix be written off, due to the expiration of a Debt Relief Order.
- 2.2 To approve that the eight cases of former tenant arrears totalling £24,188.51, also detailed in the attached appendix, be written off due to recovery activity being exhausted.

3. Background

- 3.1 The former tenant arrears cases have been subject to the standard rent arrears recovery process.
- 3.2 The current tenant arrears cases have been subject to the standard rent arrears recovery process applicable before the Debt Relief Orders were granted.
- 3.3 In April 2009, the UK Government introduced the Debt Relief Order, as a simplified, quicker and cheaper alternative to bankruptcy as a

debt relief solution. Debt Relief Orders are run by The Insolvency Service in partnership with skilled debt advisers and do not involve the courts. A Debt Relief Order (DRO) enables debtors to repay their debt without the need to file for bankruptcy, which is a more costly solution. The current cost of a Debt Relief Order is £90.00, which must be paid in advance before an application will be considered.

3.4 Debt Relief Orders are suitable for people who cannot pay their debts and do not own their own home, have little surplus income and assets and have no prospect of the situation improving.

3.5 *Application Conditions of a Debt Relief Order*

- The debtor must be unable to repay their debts.
- The debtor must owe less than £15,000.
- The debtor can own a car to the value of £1,000 but the total value of other assets must not exceed £300.
- After taking away tax, national insurance contributions and normal household expenses, the debtors' disposable income must be no more than £50 a month.
- The debtor must be domiciled (living) in England or Wales, or at some time in the last 3 years have been living or carrying on business in England or Wales.
- The debtor must not have been subject to another DRO within the last 6 years.
- The debtor must not be involved in another formal insolvency procedure at the time they apply.

Effects of a Debt Relief Order

3.6 Debt Relief Orders usually last for 12 months, however these can be extended and the individual is:

- Protected by enforcement action from many of their creditors
- Obligated to co-operate with the Official Receiver
- Expected to repay their creditors if their circumstances improve

3.7 While the DRO is in force the debt will be subject to a moratorium. During this time, creditors named on the order cannot take any legal action to recover their money without permission from the court.

3.8 Debtors should not make any payments towards any debt contained within their DRO but should continue to pay ongoing commitments such as rent and utility bills that occur after the DRO has been approved.

- 3.9 At the end of the moratorium period, if the debtor's circumstances have not changed, they will be freed from the debts that were included in their order, as they should be written off and creditors may not take any action for repayment of the debts.
- 3.10 If the debt forms part of a joint debt, action can be taken against any other joint debtor, unless they too are subject to a DRO or other insolvency process.
- 3.11 If the moratorium is extended, ended early, or if the DRO is cancelled, creditors will be sent notice by the official receiver.

Process

- 3.12 During the 12 months that the order is in place, City Homes transfer the debt to a sub account within the tenancy in order that arrears action is not undertaken against the amount specified.
- 3.13 At the end of the 12 month period if the debtors circumstances are unchanged, the council has no option but to write the debt off.
- 3.14 Any tenant who has had a DRO is unable to apply for another one within a 6-year period.

4. Implications

(a) Financial Implications

Provision for writing off of bad debts has been made in the Housing Revenue Account.

(b) Staffing Implications (if not covered in Consultations Section)

There are no staffing implications associated with this report.

(c) Equal Opportunities Implications

An Equalities Impact Assessment has not been undertaken in respect of this report, as each case has been individually considered prior to submission for write off.

(d) Environmental Implications

There are no environmental implications associated with this report.

(e) Procurement

There are no direct procurement implications associated with this report.

(f) Consultation and communication

This report considers individual cases for write off. A number of attempts will have been made to contact the tenant concerned prior to the preparation of this report.

Members and tenant and leaseholder representatives are reminded that they are welcome to spend time with City Homes officers to gain further insight into the arrears recovery and write off process.

(g) Community Safety

There are no environmental implications associated with this report.

5. Background Papers

The background papers used in the preparation of this report are exempt from publication as they contain information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person.

6. Appendices

The following appendix is included as part of this report:

- Appendix 1: Individual arrears cases and action taken.

7. Inspection of Papers

If you have a query on the report please contact:

Author's Name: Cherie Carless
Author's Phone Number: 01223 - 457824
Author's Email: cherie.carless@cambridge.gov.uk

Area Team	Ward	Amount	Action Taken To Recover Debt	Reason for Write-off
North	East Chesterton	£2,237.86	Debt Relief Order	The tenancy has been live for the period December 2009 to present, and the debt comprises outstanding rent arrears. In September 2011 the tenant applied for a Debt Relief Order against the outstanding debts that they held, which included £2,237.86 to the City Council. The moratorium period has now passed so the debt is to be written off.
South	Abbey	£2,052.37	Debt Relief Order	The tenancy has been live for the period April 2001 to present, and the debt comprises outstanding rent arrears and court costs. In October 2011 the tenant applied for a Debt Relief Order against the outstanding debts that they held, which included £2,052.37 to the City Council. The moratorium period has now passed so the debt is to be written off.
South	Abbey	£2,189.50	Debt Relief Order	The tenancy has been live for the period April 1986 to present, and the debt comprises outstanding rent arrears and court costs. In December 2010 the tenant applied for a Debt Relief Order against the outstanding debts that they held, which included £2,189.50 to the City Council. The moratorium period has now passed so the debt is to be written off.
Current Tenants		£6,479.73		
North	East Chesterton	£2,133.00	Debt not Recoverable	The tenancy was for the period August 2004 - April 2007. The debt comprises arrears and associated court costs that accumulated over the period of the tenancy. The tenant stopped paying their rent in October 2006. No contact received from tenant regarding arrears. Tenant failed to attend appointments. Eviction Notice served due to suspected abandonment of property. No known forwarding address. Passed to East of England & returned marked 'Activity Exhausted'.
North	East Chesterton	£4,633.53	Debt not Recoverable	The tenancy was for the period June 2006 - April 2008. The debt comprises arrears & associated court costs that accumulated from the period May 2007 when benefits stopped, to the termination of the tenancy. Passed to East of England & returned marked 'Activity Exhausted'. No contact received from tenant regarding arrears until late 2010 when tenant wanted to be re-housed, agreed to pay £5 per week, but only paid £30 in total, and then disappeared again and has not responded to any subsequent contact at last known address.
North	East Chesterton	£2,415.96	Debt not Recoverable	The tenancy was for the period December 2009 - June 2011. The debt comprises arrears & associated court costs that accumulated from the period January 2011, when benefits stopped, to the termination of the tenancy. No contact received from tenant regarding arrears. Passed to East of England who were unable to trace their whereabouts & returned marked 'Gone Away'
North	Arbury	£4,462.58	Debt not Recoverable	The tenancy was for the period October 2007 - March 2011. The debt comprises arrears & associated court costs. No contact received from tenant regarding arrears. Sent to Bailiffs for recovery action, however, there were insufficient goods. Passed to East of England & returned marked 'Activity Exhausted'
South	Coleridge	£2,038.05	Tenant Deceased	The tenancy was for the period October 1991 - April 2006, however the tenant didn't live at the property after January 2005 as they moved into residential care. The tenant had been receiving full housing benefit, however this was clawed back in March 2006 creating a large arrear on the rent account. The tenants son dealt with the notice to quit and confirmed that the tenant passed away in 2008 with no monies in the estate.
South	Coleridge	£2,855.75	Tenant Deceased	The tenancy was for the period August 2011 - April 2012. The debt comprises outstanding rent arrears and associated court costs. The tenant passed away sometime after Jan 2011 as this is when the last payment was received on the rent account. Neighbours became concerned in May 2011, when the police were informed. The tenants sister, c/o her foster carer, was contacted and dealt with the notice to quit, however no further contact by the sister has been made regarding the estate.
North	South Cambs	£3,291.34	Tenant Deceased	The tenancy was for the period September 2002 - June 2012. The debt comprises a HB overpayment, outstanding rent arrears and associated court costs. The tenant passed away sometime prior to 23 May 2012, when concerns were raised with the Police. The tenants mother was contacted and dealt with the notice to quit, the mother stated in writing that there wasn't any money in the estate. The tenant was in receipt of full HB prior to death.
South	Coleridge	£2,358.30	Tenant Deceased	The tenancy was for the period March 2009 - August 2011. The debt comprises arrears that accumulated after the tenant passed away in December 2010. No family & no contact received from registered next of kin. Notice served & tenancy ended in August 2011, no monies in the estate.
Former Tenants		£24,188.51		

This page is intentionally left blank



To: Executive Councillor for Housing (and Deputy Leader): Councillor Catherine Smart
Report by: Liz Bisset, Director of Customer & Community Services
Relevant scrutiny Housing 5/3/2013
committee: Management Board
Wards affected: All Wards

DRAFT HOUSING PORTFOLIO PLAN 2013-14 Key Decision

1. Executive summary

1.1 This report covers the draft Housing Portfolio Plan 2013-14, which sets out the strategic objectives for the portfolio for the year ahead, describes the context in which the portfolio is being delivered and details the activities required to deliver the outcomes and the vision. Performance measures and risks are also shown for each strategic objective.

2. Recommendations

2.1 The Executive Councillor is recommended:

To approve the draft Housing Portfolio Plan 2013-14

3. Background

3.1 This is the third year in which Cambridge City Council has produced Portfolio Plans. The aim of the Portfolio Plans is to set out how each of the seven Portfolios will contribute to the delivery of the vision outlined in the Council's vision statement.

3.2 The draft Housing Portfolio Plan for 2013-14 has been developed by officers and the Executive Councillor, in parallel with the budget planning process. In comparison to previous years, the draft Housing Portfolio Plan for 2013/14 sets out a limited number of high-level, strategic objectives for the Portfolio, along with the broad activities required to achieve these objectives.

3.3 The services that will deliver the strategic objectives set out in the Plan are each developing more detailed Operational Plans. These will function as management tools to ensure the tasks that deliver the strategic objectives are planned and managed effectively.

4. Implications

(a) Financial Implications

The financial implications of this plan are set out in the budget for the portfolio.

(b) Staffing Implications (if not covered in Consultations Section)

Staff will be allocated personal objectives to ensure the tasks and activities to deliver the objectives are managed. Staff will be supported in the learning and development activities they need to deliver their contribution to the plan.

(c) Equal Opportunities Implications

The activities set out in this plan aim to support the Council's equality and diversity objectives. Equality impact assessments will be carried out on decisions and projects related to this plan as appropriate.

(d) Environmental Implications

The actions in the plan that aim to ensure that new affordable housing meets Level 4 of the Code for Sustainable Homes should have a medium positive environmental impact.

(e) Procurement

Some of the actions involved in the Plan will involve procurement by the Council. Separate reports on the procurement elements of actions included in the Plan will be provided at an appropriate time.

(f) Consultation and communication

This is a strategic document covering a number of different objectives. There has therefore been no consultation on this plan per se, although there will be consultation on those elements of it that have a significant impact on residents at the appropriate time, in accordance with the Council's code of practice on consultation and community engagement, and our statutory duties for consulting tenants.

(g) Community Safety

There are no significant community safety issues associated with the strategic actions set out in the Portfolio Plan.

5. Background papers

N/a

6. Appendices

Appendix A - Draft Housing Portfolio Plan 2013-14

7. Inspection of papers

To inspect the background papers or if you have a query on the report please contact:

Author's Name:	Liz Bisset
Author's Phone Number:	01223 - 457801
Author's Email:	liz.bisset@cambridge.gov.uk

This page is intentionally left blank

Cambridge City Council

Housing Portfolio Plan 2013-14

Portfolio Holder: Catherine Smart

Page 23

Accountable Officer: Liz Bisset

Email address: liz.bisset@cambridge.gov.uk

Phone number: 01223 457801

Introduction

The local economy centred on Cambridge remains resilient and the number of new homes planned and needed is anticipated to remain high. We will make sure that the expansion of Cambridge creates new homes and communities that people want to live in. Market house prices and rents remain high in Cambridge and we will continue to make the case for investment in a range of sizes, types and tenures of housing for local residents, including Affordable Housing. We will also continue to invest in, and make best use of, the existing homes within the City, taking account of the need to tackle climate change and ensuring the existing communities can benefit from the planned growth.

In 2012 we approved a revised Housing Strategy and introduced our first Tenancy Strategy. Early in 2013 we will revise our Lettings Policy in response to new national guidelines. 2013 will also be significant in seeing the first batch of new housing on the Southern Fringe growth site contributing to the completion of over 300 Affordable Housing for the first time for a number of years. This new housing will be timely as we will need to monitor carefully the worst impact on households of the implementation of welfare reforms.

We will continue to work with partner local authorities, housing associations and others across the sub-region around Cambridge to demonstrate the need for investment in local housing and how this is critical to the success of other local policy requirements such as social care; health; and local economic growth.

Virtually all of the Council's service divisions contribute to the achievement of this Plan's Objectives but the main Teams involved are Housing Strategy; Private Sector Housing; Housing Development; Housing Options and Homelessness; Home Aid; City Homes; Repairs and Maintenance and Safer Communities.

Vision Statements applicable to this portfolio

The vision statements most pertinent to this portfolio are:

- A city which recognises and meets needs for housing of all kinds - close to jobs and neighbourhood facilities
- A city in the forefront of low carbon living and minimising its impact on the environment from waste and pollution.

Strategic Objectives 2013-2014

Vision Statement:	<p>A city which recognises and meets needs for housing of all kinds - close to jobs and neighbourhood facilities</p> <p>A city in the forefront of low carbon living and minimising its impact on the environment from waste and pollution.</p>
Strategic Objective HSO1:	<p>Maximise the delivery of new sustainable housing in a range of sizes, types and tenures - at least maintaining current standards and driving energy efficient homes for residents.</p>
By March 2014 we will have:	<p>HS01.1 Worked with developers, Registered Providers (housing associations) and planners to ensure that the city's social and market housing (including private rented housing) stock continues to grow, including 40% Affordable Housing in most new developments and the delivery of the Council's own new build programme.</p> <p>HS01.2 Worked with Registered Providers to ensure the current standard of new build housing is maintained in terms of size, construction, layout and to at least Level 4 of the Code for Sustainable Homes.</p> <p>HS01.3 Established the extent that new specialist housing is supported by the new Health and Well-being Board; the Local Health Partnership and the County Council in terms of the prioritisation of revenue funding.</p> <p>HS01.4 Assessed the potential for the provision of additional Gypsy and Traveller sites,</p>

	as part of the local plan development and in discussion with South Cambridgeshire District Council and the County Council.
Lead Officer:	Alan Carter, Head of Strategic Housing
Performance Measures:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. New Affordable Housing on the strategic growth sites. Completions – 176 2. New Affordable Housing on other sites. Completions - 176 3. Site(s) identified for 10 additional travellers pitches either for transit or emergency use. 4. Sustain percentage of new Affordable Homes built to at least Level 4 of the Code for Sustainable Homes – it is estimated that 100% will be completed to Level 4 of the Code in 2012.13 compared with an estimated 17% in 2011.12.
Delivery Risks:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. National policy drivers could impact on the ability to deliver policy aspirations for example, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the introduction of Affordable Rents changes the tenure mix of housing on new housing sites restricted choice of housing options for some lower income groups. • changes to the benefit system could adversely impact on the ability of the Council to plan under-letting of some new homes in the Growth areas to foster mixed and sustainable communities 2. The availability of development finance and mortgage finance slows up the delivery

	of new housing.
Strategic Objective HSO2:	Make the best use of existing homes.
By March 2014 we will have:	<p>HS02.1 Increased staff capacity in City Homes to mitigate the most adverse impact of welfare reforms and to settle people moving on to alternative housing from existing housing that is to be redeveloped.</p> <p>HS02.2 Completed our annual planned maintenance programme of works that ensure City Homes continue to be maintained to the best possible standard.</p> <p>HS02.3 Maintained and promoted services to take action effectively against private sector landlords that do not comply with housing health and safety matters as well as landlord and tenant issues</p> <p>HS02.4 Prioritised bringing back into occupation long standing empty homes in the private sector.</p>
Lead Officer:	Robert Hollingsworth, Head of City Homes (HS02.1), Bob Hadfield (HS02.2) Jas Lally (HS02.3; and HS02.4)
Performance Measures:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 120 people settled in suitable alternative housing to enable the Council's new build programme to progress Increase number of long term vacant properties returned to residential use from 15 to 25 a year.

Delivery Risks:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. More detailed analysis shows that there are complex reasons why a number of homes stay empty and the investment required to bring them back into use does not represent good value for money. 2. The availability of suitable alternative accommodation in areas of the residents choice will dictate the pace at which people can move
------------------------	---

Strategic Objective HSO3:	Deliver good quality housing related advice to help prevent homelessness.
By March 2014 we will have:	<p>HS03.1 Focused our housing advice to keep homelessness to a minimum and help prevent homelessness by offering early advice on alternative housing options.</p> <p>HS03.2 Increased the range of temporary housing available to minimise the impact on households who become homeless or who are threatened with homelessness and reinforced our work with partner organisations to support people with a history of homelessness to find a settled home.</p>
Lead Officer:	Alan Carter, Head of Strategic Housing
Performance Measures:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Number of Rough Sleeping estimates average no more than 10 2. Combined number of households in and waiting for temporary accommodation no more than 95 (measured through quarterly snapshot) 3. Homelessness preventions to be above average for region ie 300 per annum

	4. Verify all Home-Link applications within 28 working days of receipt of all information required
Delivery Risks:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Local Housing Allowance levels restrict access for some households to housing that meets their needs within the city. 2. New national policy initiatives such as the new 'Affordable Rents will restrict access to new housing provided by housing associations (Registered Providers).

Background Information:

- Housing Strategy 2012-15
- Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document
- Developing Affordable Housing Policy Guide
- Charter for New Affordable Housing
- Private Housing Stock Condition Survey
- Strategic Housing Market Assessment
- Cambridge Local Investment Plan 2012



To: Housing Management Board
Report by: Marella Hoffman
Relevant scrutiny committee: Housing Management Board 5-3-2013
Wards affected: Wards containing Council housing

Progress report on residents' co-regulation, introducing an update from residents' Housing Regulation Panel to the Housing Management Board

Not a key decision

1. Executive summary

In 2010, the Housing Management Board approved the creation, with the help of the Chartered Institute of Housing, of a residents' co-regulation panel in Cambridge. This report introduces (as Appendix 1), a progress report on the positive outcomes achieved by residents' Housing Regulation Panel in their second year of activity, and looks ahead to the next steps.

2. Recommendations

The Executive Councillor is recommended:

- 2.1 To note the positive outcomes achieved by residents' Housing Regulation Panel in their second year of activity
- 2.2 To continue to support residents' co-regulation and the constructive challenge provided by residents' Housing Regulation Panel

3. Background

Co-Regulation under the Localism Act

3.1 The 2011 Localism Act replaced the inspection regime of the Audit Commission with a two-prong system of 'Co-Regulation'. One prong is the requirement that social landlords regulate themselves through Annual Reports to Tenants, transparent publishing of performance information, a robust, well-publicised complaints system and a culture of self-assessment.

3.2 The other prong of Co-Regulation involves trained panels of local service-users inspecting the performance of the landlord-related services they receive. A government paper in 2011 emphasised that local tenant panels are now expected to be at the heart of landlords' regulation arrangements.

3.3 Co-regulation is not about panels of residents working in isolation, but rather about involving residents in the whole cycle of performance monitoring so that:

- a) Resident representatives are involved in setting service-standards and performance-targets
- b) Clear information on performance, benchmarking and complaints is published to all customers regularly, with residents empowered to scrutinise it independently
- c) A trained residents' panel, with clear reporting lines and powers, inspects and challenges standards of service delivery in a way that improves services for all
- d) Service staff and managers understand the authority of this residents' panel, taking action to improve services if the panel shows that they are below agreed standards

Cambridge as a centre for positive practice in co-regulation since 2011

3.4 Cambridge residents' Housing Regulation Panel (HRP) had the advantage of starting in 2009 before others around the country, and evolving a rigorous framework that they co-created with the Chartered Institute of Housing.

3.5 The period 2011-2013 has seen a peak of focus on Cambridge as a centre of positive practice for residents' co-regulation. In February 2012, the national Customer Service Excellence Standard commended HRP's activity as an example of national best practice. Over the past fifteen months, resident representatives, councillors and resident involvement staff from fifteen different local authority landlords have visited to learn from the Cambridge system. What they come to study is:

- a. How residents' Housing Regulation Panel have achieved so many measurable positive outcomes, in terms of helping to improve services
- b. The constitution, code of conduct and set-up framework of HRP, which outline the Panel's role, responsibilities, reporting-lines and powers
- c. The forms and templates created and used by HRP's for inspecting services, reporting on those inspections, and getting signed agreements

from service-managers that the necessary service-improvements will be made

- d. The role of the six elected residents on HMB, which still - eleven years after its creation - remains a national pioneer in having tenants and leaseholders elected by their peers citywide, with equal voting rights on a local authority housing committee
- e. The reporting-lines of residents' Housing Regulation Panel up to HMB (because co-regulation requires a decision-making board like HMB to whom the residents' panel could report if they failed to get a satisfactory response from service-managers)
- f. The active communication and feedback-loops maintained through Open Door magazine between resident representatives and the residents they represent on estates

3.6 As well as the visitors, Cambridge residents too have described as invaluable this chance to exchange tips, challenges and methods directly with residents from other providers. Such links of mutual empowerment and information sharing across the tenants of different landlords were very much an aspiration of the 2011 Localism Act.

Balancing specialised roles and grassroots in resident involvement

3.7 Co-regulation essentially means that the quite specialised volunteer inspectorate described above replaces the professional regulatory apparatus that used to soak up a lot of public sector resources ie the Audit Commission and the intricate process of preparing for Audit Commission inspections.

3.8 So co-regulation's resident panels are a considerable asset to the business in terms of ongoing efficiencies and savings. (HRP residents alone give over 500 volunteer hours to the business each year, or 66 working days, equivalent to three months of work for a full-time employee. This is the type of 'Big Society' activism envisioned by the Localism Act.)

3.9 Nonetheless, it is worth recalling that, for a well-balanced resident involvement service, these specialised, formal volunteer roles that involve a lot of knowledge about housing must, as they are in Cambridge, be balanced with:

- a. Consistent, resident-friendly communications that are published to all tenants and leaseholders, keeping them in touch with, and feeding back into, what resident representatives are doing on their behalf

- b. Strong grassroots outreach to our estates, with diverse and welcoming platforms of involvement for residents from their homes and from estate-level, for those who are not interested in taking up the formal, regulatory roles described in the HRP report appended here.

3.10 Stakeholder feedback confirms that Open Door magazine, which has attracted increasingly positive feedback over the past couple of years, provides the former - a strong communications platform linking resident representatives back to the estates. And in January 2013, HMB unanimously approved proposals from the newly appointed Resident Involvement Facilitator to supply the latter - a revitalised outreach programme for grassroots residents in their homes and on their estates. Appendix 7 illustrates this integrated, joined-up approach, which is recognised nationally as part of the positive practice approach in Cambridge.

4. Implications

- (a) Financial - Nil
- (b) Staffing - This work is part of the routine duties of existing staff.
- (c) Equal Opportunities - Advances Equal Opportunities by actively empowering a diverse range of residents, including Black and Minority Ethnic representatives.
- (d) Environmental - Nil
- (e) Procurement - Nil
- (f) Consultation and communication - Makes a significant contribution to the Council's overall positive practice on consultation and community engagement. The material in this report is published on the Council's website, communicated to customers through Open Door magazine and shared at a broad range of meetings and consultations with residents.
- (g) Community Safety - Nil

5. Appendices

1. Progress report from residents' Housing Regulation Panel (HRP)
2. Inspection forms for caretaking inspection, designed and used by HRP
3. Results of HRP's inspection of the caretaking service
4. HRP's report on their caretaking Inspection

5. HRP's recommendations for improvement, and actions taken by City Homes
6. HRP's article on their caretaking inspection in Open Door magazine for council tenants and leaseholders, winter 2012
7. Main levels of resident involvement in Cambridge

6. Inspection of papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

If you have a query on the report please contact:

Author's Name: Marella Hoffman
Author's Phone Number: 01223-458325
Author's Email: Marella.Hoffman@cambridge.gov.uk

This page is intentionally left blank

**Housing Regulation Panel (HRP) Progress Report 2012/2013
to Housing Management Board**

Presented by: Chair of Housing Regulation Panel, Mr. Stan Best

1. Introduction

- 1.1 At the meeting of the Housing Management Board on 6 March 2012, the Executive Councillor resolved to congratulate the residents' Housing Regulation Panel on their first year of activity and to continue to support residents' co-regulation and the constructive challenge provided by the Housing Regulation Panel.
- 1.2 This report is to inform Housing Management Board of the Housing Regulation Panel's activities during the year 2012/2013.

2. The Role of the Housing Regulation Panel

- 2.1 The Panel is a group of trained tenants and leaseholders who independently inspect the standards of Cambridge City Council's landlord services. It has the authority to challenge any services that are falling below the agreed service standards.
- 2.2. The Panel provides a residents' view about service, performance and business direction.

3. Housing Regulation Panel's programme of activities 2012/2013

- 3.1 The Panel reviewed its own practices and procedures to make them appropriate for specific activities within its programme.
- 3.2 In addition to inspecting a specific Landlord Service, it has widened its role to obtain an over-view of the services provided by the landlord. This helps to inform its forward plan.
- 3.3 Representatives of the Housing Regulation Panel are involved in:
 - a) Voids Best Practice Group
 - b) Repairs and Maintenance Improvement Plan Scrutiny Group
 - c) Grounds Maintenance and Communal Cleaning Liaison meetings
 - d) Citywide Garages Review Working Group
 - e) South Replanting Programme
 - f) Estates and Facilities Service Plan
 - g) Judging the annual Residents' Garden Competition

- 3.4 During the year Housing Regulation Panel representatives have been involved in:
- a) Recruitment and appointment of the Resident Involvement Facilitator
 - b) Recruitment and appointment of the Resident Involvement Communications Officer
 - c) The tour of potential housing redevelopment sites
 - d) Study visits with representatives from other housing providers to share good practice
- 3.5 The Housing Regulation Panel independently appraises the Tenant Initiative Scheme (TIS) bids from residents and makes recommendations for approval or not to City Homes Management Team.

4. Housing Regulation Panel Inspection of the Caretaking Service

- 4.1 The purpose of the investigation was to determine:
- If the service being provided is in accordance with the service level agreements
 - If the service is being provided consistently across the city
 - If the service provides value for money
- 4.2 The Housing Regulation Panel commenced its inspection with an information briefing from City Homes Area Housing Managers and Estate Champion.
- 4.3 It proceeded to collect information about the service from a variety of documented sources.
- 4.4 It developed a Caretaking Service Inspection form (Appendix 2) for site visits using the Council's Caretaking Service Agreement leaflets and the Housemark Estates Services Peer Review Photo Book.
- 4.5 When requested by the Housing Regulation Panel, City Homes (South) Area Housing Manager, Estate Champion and City Homes (North) Housing Officer made site visits with HRP during the inspections to provide clarification of issues arising.
- 4.6 The Housing Regulation Panel collated the results from all the site inspections (Appendix 3)
- 4.7 On completion of the inspection the Housing Regulation Panel presented the report of its findings and recommendations for improvement (Appendix 4) to City Homes.

4.8 Together, City Homes and the Housing Regulation Panel agreed the improvements for the service which are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timed (SMART).

4.9 In January 2013 City Homes reported back to the Housing Regulation Panel on the actions taken to improve the service as agreed.

(Appendix 5 lists HRP's recommendations for improvements together with the actions taken by City Homes).

5. Next service-inspection by residents' Housing Regulation Panel

Residents' Housing Regulation Panel have commenced their next inspection process, which is on the communal window-cleaning service. The Panel also have a more detailed Forward Plan through which they consider which services to inspect after window-cleaning. In 2014 HRP will report back to HMB with the results, outcomes and impacts of all the service-inspections they have done in the meantime.

6. Keeping tenants and leaseholders informed

The Housing Regulation Panel gives regular updates to all tenants and leaseholders in the quarterly Open Door magazine. The Winter 2012 edition featured the full findings and results of the inspection of the caretaking service. (Appendix 6)

7. Housing Regulation Panel support and recruitment

7.1 The Housing Regulation Panel Chair has regular meetings with the Resident Involvement team to support the independent work of the panel.

7.2 The work programme of the Resident Involvement Facilitator includes strategies for the recruitment of more residents to become involved. A number of newly-involved resident representatives are being developed to progress on to HRP in 2013.

This page is intentionally left blank

Caretaking Service

Inspection Form

Location.....

Block number.....

Date.....

Names of HRP members inspecting site.....

(To score each area of inspection, tick inside the relevant box)

Area of inspection	A	B	C	D	Notes
Stairs, landings, stairwells Walkways and corridors	All in good condition. No dirt or litter, swept, mopped and clean.	Condition ok. No dust, dirt and litter.	Dust in edges & corners. Little evidence of recent sweeping or mopping.	Very poor. Dirty. Evidence of alcohol & drug use.	
Handrails, ledges & banister rails	Very clean, dust free. Obviously wiped & dusted regularly.	Little dusty. Small bits of dirt present.	Dirty lower section. Old cobwebs & litter.	No evidence of wiping, dusting or cleaning.	
Cleanliness of walls in communal areas	Very clean. No scuff marks.	A few scuff marks on walls.	Very dirty, stained walls.	Very dirty throughout.	
Bin chambers	No litter, no leaves. Evidence of disinfectant used.	Few leaves, no litter or food on floor.	Rotting food & litter on floor & under bin.	Burst plastic sack on floor, dirty walls, flies.	
Rubbish chutes	Clean chute & floor.	Small bits of dirt on hopper, no rotten food.	Chute almost blocked by rubbish.	Hopper blocked with rubbish, rotting food in hopper.	
Graffiti	No graffiti.	A little evidence of graffiti.	Graffiti in many places.	Excessive & offensive graffiti.	

Area of inspection	A	B	C	D	Notes
Light fittings and cobwebs	Excellent condition.	Few cobwebs.	Old cobwebs, dirty light surface.	Poor cleanliness, broken light covers.	
Fly tipping Bulky rubbish & items	Area clear.	Single item on landing, stairwell, or walkway.	Furniture etc or other rubbish on landing, stairwell or walkway	Unsecured fridge etc on landing, stairwell or walkway	
Litter in external areas and bin stores Recycling area: Dumped rubbish & items	No litter.	Some litter.	High build up of litter, cans, newspapers etc.	Excessive amount of litter, some hazardous e.g. broken glass, sharp objects.	
Lifts: (where applicable) Cleanliness of floors, doors, panels and frames	No dirt in corners or stuck on floor. Floor appears to have regular cleaning. Clean door.	Small bits of dirt present. Clear corners. Door clean but with some marks.	Lower walls and corners dirty. One filthy door, dirt comes off in hands. Other doors clean.	Dirt and pieces of broken glass mopped into corners. Doors on several floors dirty.	

Additional comments

Laundry (where applicable)	Minor communal repairs required	Other comments

This page is intentionally left blank



Caretaking Service

Inspection Results

Inspection
Scores

Location	A	B	C	D	Comments
Hanover Court	7	3			Some graffiti on the wall of the stairwell Dryer in the laundry not used Floor cleaning machine to be repaired
Princess Court	10				
Anstey Way	8	1			"No Smoking" signs not displayed
East Road: Hilderstone House	1	8			Fire notice torn so needs replacing
Wheaton House	2	8			Back stairwell very dirty: needs steam cleaning Rubbish chute door needs replacing
Amblecote House	1	6	1	1	Rubbish chute broken Shed area used by street life people as a toilet
Fazeley	1	6	2		Fire notice missing Rubbish chute blocked and broken
Ashley Court	1	6			Area under the stairs used by street life people for drinking alcohol, sleeping and toileting
Kingsway	4	10			Damaged rubbish chute Community Room needs a deep clean Edging strip removed/lifted on lower stairs of Block 4 Ground floors being used for storage
Arbury Court	3	6			
Cockerell Road	5	12	2		Floors and stairs would benefit from a deep clean Bad odour
Rutland Close	7	10	2		Graffiti on the shed windows

					Paint on the entrance wall Stairs and walkways would benefit from steam cleaning
Fordwich Close	5	4	1		Floors and stairs would benefit from steam cleaning
Bermuda Terrace	19	9	10		Walkways would benefit from steam cleaning "No Smoking" signs not displayed Items such as paint tins and a chest of drawers in cupboard Bicycles outside some flats
Borrowdale		1	2		Furniture and bicycles on some landings
Hazelwood Close	13	6	1		Bicycles outside some flats A buggy storage shed has a ramp which is potentially a trip hazard "No Smoking" signs not displayed A barbecue under the stairs Motorcycle in stairwell A shed has been built into the area between a stairwell and outside door
Molewood Close	13	15	8	5	Bags of rubbish outside some flats Motorcycle in stairwell Items outside some flats include chairs, TV, drawers and bicycles
Carlton Terrace	3	4			Small amount of accumulated rubbish



Caretaking Service Standard

Report

September 2012

Introduction

The role of the Housing Regulation Panel is to monitor the standards of Housing Services to ensure they are quality services which give value for money. It monitored the Caretaking Service Standard during the period March 2012 to July 2012, evaluated the results and made recommendations for improvement. The caretaking service standard is described in the CCC set of leaflets "Caretaking Service Agreement" for

- Hanover and Princess Courts (including Russell Court)
- Anstey Way
- East Road (5 locations)
- Kingsway
- Arbury Court, Cockerell Road, Rutland Close, Fordwich Close
- Bermuda Terrace, Gilbert Close & Borrowdale, Frances Darwin Court, Perse Way, Aylesburgh Close
- Hazelwood Close, Molewood Close, Carlton Terrace, Brackley Close

Monitoring

The Housing Regulation Panel met with the Area Housing Managers and the Estate Champion for a Caretaking Service briefing and update on 13 March 2012 prior to commencing its monitoring of the service.

Information was collected from the following sources:

- City Homes, including site visits and follow-up meetings with officers when requested by HRP
- The Customer Service Centre
- The Business Development Officer
- Minutes of the City Homes Residents' Partnership and the Leaseholders' Consultation
- Housing Regulation Panel site inspections:
These were carried out by HRP members working in pairs. The locations for inspections were selected where possible for the day following the scheduled delivery of the service.

The caretaking service is delivered at 24 locations across the city. Hanover and Princess Courts, Anstey Way, East Road and Kingsway have "on site" caretakers. The other areas receive a mobile caretaking service. HRP inspected the caretaking service standard at 18 (75%) of the 24 locations.

Evaluation

- The leaflets describing the Caretaking Service Agreement are only available on request from the City Homes Area Offices.
- No specific performance information (benchmarking, complaints information etc.) is kept for the service apart from the cost of staff.
- The delivery of the service is inconsistent, partly due to the difference in the agreements for the delivery of the mobile service and the "on

site” service. The inconsistency is also partly due to obstructions left by residents in walkways, stairwells etc. which prevent the caretakers delivering the service in full.

- Across the city there appears to be a problem with broken doors and blockages in rubbish chutes.
- In many of the locations there are no “No Smoking” signs or Fire Notices. There are no notices giving information about the caretaking service.
- Some of the badly stained stairs, stairwells and walkways would benefit from steam cleaning.
- Kingsway Community Room needs a deep clean.
- The welfare facilities, equipment, storage facilities and work wear for the caretakers are appropriate, but more storage facilities for equipment would be beneficial. The caretakers in the south of the city are not issued with ID badges.
- At recent meetings, the residents of Hanover and Princess Courts have been very complimentary about the improved standard of the caretaking service, which they really appreciate.
- The main strength of the service is that the caretakers are in touch with the residents on site. They are the “face” of City Homes.
- The main weakness of the service is the level of contact and communication with City Homes.
- Overall the caretaking service, when delivered in full, provides good value for money.

Recommendations for improvement

- The Caretaking Service Agreements should be made more widely available to tenants and leaseholders. This could be achieved by including them on the Council’s web site, and putting them in leaflet stands at the Customer Service Centre Reception and Area Office Receptions. They should be included in the new tenants’ pack if the property receives a caretaking service. This would help to give a higher profile to the caretakers as part of City Homes.
- A system for keeping caretaking service performance information needs to be developed.
- The Caretaking Service Agreement for Molewood Close should include sweeping the front door areas and the service charge to residents should be amended to take account of this.
- The procedure for caretakers to report issues (obstructions and damage) which prevent them from carrying out their duties in full should be used much more robustly and monitored.
- Broken doors of rubbish chutes must be replaced and chute blockages cleared.
- Deep clean of Kingsway Community Room.
- Replacement is needed of “No Smoking” signs and Fire Notices where they are not displayed. (HRP is aware that Estates and Facilities are in the process of producing new fire safety notices).
- Caretakers in the south of the city should be issued with ID badges.
- The problems caused by “street life” people (urinating, drinking alcohol etc.) and leaving the evidence behind in some of the communal areas

of East Road and Bermuda Terrace flat blocks, affects the caretaking service and needs to be addressed by City Homes in liaison with other agencies.

Recommendations for improvement when funding is available

- A steam cleaning programme for identified stairs, stairwells and walkways.
- Pressure washer for the caretaking at Hanover and Princess Courts.
- Notices giving the details of the caretaking service and the name of the caretaker with contact details.

The Housing Regulation Panel would like to thank City Homes Officers: Sandra Farmer, Andrew Latchem, Will Beavitt and Nacer Dali for their support with this inspection..

Housing Regulation Panel

Stan Best (Chair)

Anna Vine-Lott (Vice Chair)

Faiza El-Neil

Archie Ferguson

Lewis Wilbur

Housing Regulation Panel

Caretaking Service Standard

Recommendations For Improvements	SMART Requirements for Improvements	How this will be evidenced to HRP by (date)	ACTIONS TAKEN (email confirmation from City Homes)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caretaking Service Agreements made more widely available to tenants and leaseholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaflets available at the Customer Service Centre Reception • Leaflets available at the Area Offices Receptions • Caretaking Service Agreements easily accessible on the Council's website • Leaflets included in the new tenant pack on sites which have caretakers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HRP Chair notified that leaflets are available by 30 November 2012 • Update report for HRP meeting 8 January 2013 • Confirmation to HRP Chair by City Homes, by 30 November 2012, that leaflets are included in the new tenant pack 	<p>SOUTH Service agreements updated. A new section created and added to the web. Leaflet pdfs passed to staff for one-off prints. Leaflet to be made more design friendly.</p> <p>NORTH Caretaking Service Agreements are clearly displayed in the reception area, and copies available for tenants to take. Copies are also enclosed with</p>

			letters to tenants receiving the Caretaking Service. Copies also included in the new tenants' pack.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caretaking Service performance information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • System developed for keeping performance information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update report for HRP meeting 8 January 2013 	Green Inspector information to be recorded separately. Caretakers site tab made on Estate Liaison spreadsheet.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caretaking Service Agreement for Molewood Close amended 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caretaking Service to include sweeping the front door areas (AL verbally confirmed these areas are not communal but individual) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update report for HRP meeting 8 January 2013 	NORTH Leaf blower purchased and all front entrances cleared on this occasion. Residents being advised to take responsibility for these areas once cleaned.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procedure for caretakers to report issues which prevent them from carrying out their duties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City Homes to record data to include issues reported and action taken 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence report including data for HRP meeting 8 January 2013 	SOUTH Estate Champion will report issues preventing

<p>in full to be used robustly and monitored</p>			<p>caretakers from carrying out their duties. NORTH Agreement with Customer Service Centre that should caretakers report fly-tipping, obstructions etc., to get these removed without seeking permission from the Housing Officers. This is working well.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repair/replacement of broken rubbish chute doors and clearance of blockages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chute doors and blockages attended to when reported by caretaker/residents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of chute doors and blockages attended to notified to HRP Chair by 30 November 2012 	<p>SOUTH East Road caretaker has reported the bin chute for repair and has recorded the date and job number.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deep clean of Kingsway Community Room 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean carried out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HRP Chair notified that the clean has been carried out by 30 November 2012 	<p>NORTH Kingsway Community Room cleaned in November 2012 and cleaning being kept up.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replacement of “No Smoking” signs and Fire Notices where they are not displayed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signs and notices displayed where required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Details of replacements notified to HRP Chair by 30 November 2012 	<p>SOUTH Caretakers supplied with “No Smoking” signs. Hanover/Princess Courts caretaker uses these in the lifts. East Road has acrylic signs fitted.</p> <p>NORTH No Smoking signs are being replaced as and when required or identified.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ID badges for South City Caretakers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ID badges issued and caretakers reminded to wear them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HRP Chair notified that these have been issued with the reminder by 31 October 2012 	<p>SOUTH ID badges and cards issued to South Caretakers</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problems caused by “street life” people at East Road flat blocks addressed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Details of agencies City Homes liaise with together with some examples of action taken 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update report for HRP meeting 8 January 2013 	<p>SOUTH East road garages gate repaired so nuisance vagrants cannot access.</p> <p>NORTH To tackle ASB in East Road and Bermuda Terrace there are</p>

			regular meetings with PCSOs who report issues to Street Life Officers, reporting back to City Homes when required.
--	--	--	--

SMART Improvements discussed on 9 October 2012, amended, and then agreed by Area Housing Managers with HRP Chair on 26 October 2012

City Homes

Sandra Farmer and Andrew Latchem
(Area Housing Managers)

Housing Regulation Panel

Stan Best
(HRP Chair)

This page is intentionally left blank

Residents' Panel inspect caretaking

Resident inspectors give their verdict on your caretaking service

Residents' Housing Regulation Panel are volunteers who test the quality of your housing services. If they find any below the agreed standard, they have the power to get them improved. They recently inspected the Caretaking Service by:

- doing unannounced inspections at 18 of the 24 sites that receive the service
- examining performance information and service feedback provided by residents and staff

Improvements required by the Residents' Panel

The Council has agreed to make the following deadlined improvements

required by the resident inspectors:

- repair broken doors on rubbish-chutes and clear chute blockages
- ensure *No Smoking* signs and *Fire Notices* are displayed
- make *Caretaking Service Agreements* more widely available (eg. on the Council's website, at housing receptions and in new tenants' packs)
- provide transparent performance information on caretaking
- ensure caretakers wear identity badges
- create better procedures for caretakers to report issues that obstruct their work (like dumped obstructions or damage)
- address problems caused by people



Residents' Housing Regulation Panel members inspect an estate

loitering in communal areas and drinking, urinating, etc.

- clean Kingsway Community Room

these improvements have been made, and will let you know in a forthcoming edition of *Open Door*.

Resident Inspectors' Verdict

Main weaknesses

- ❌ **Main weakness:** poor communication system for caretakers to link back to City Homes
- ❌ The quality of the service is inconsistent
- ❌ Leaflets showing what the caretaking standard should be are only available on request from City Homes offices
- ❌ No information is available on caretaking performance (eg. about complaints, comparisons with other councils, etc.)

Main strengths

- ✅ **Main strength:** the caretakers are in touch with residents, as the 'face' of City Homes on estates
- ✅ Hanover and Princess Court residents are very complimentary about the improved standard of their caretaking
- ✅ On estates where it is being properly delivered, the caretaking service provides good value for money

Other improvements recommended by the Residents' Panel

If funds are available...

- provide on-site notices showing the caretaking provided, with the caretaker's contact details
- steam-clean stairways and walkways as needed
- provide a pressure-washer for Hanover and Princess Courts

What's next?

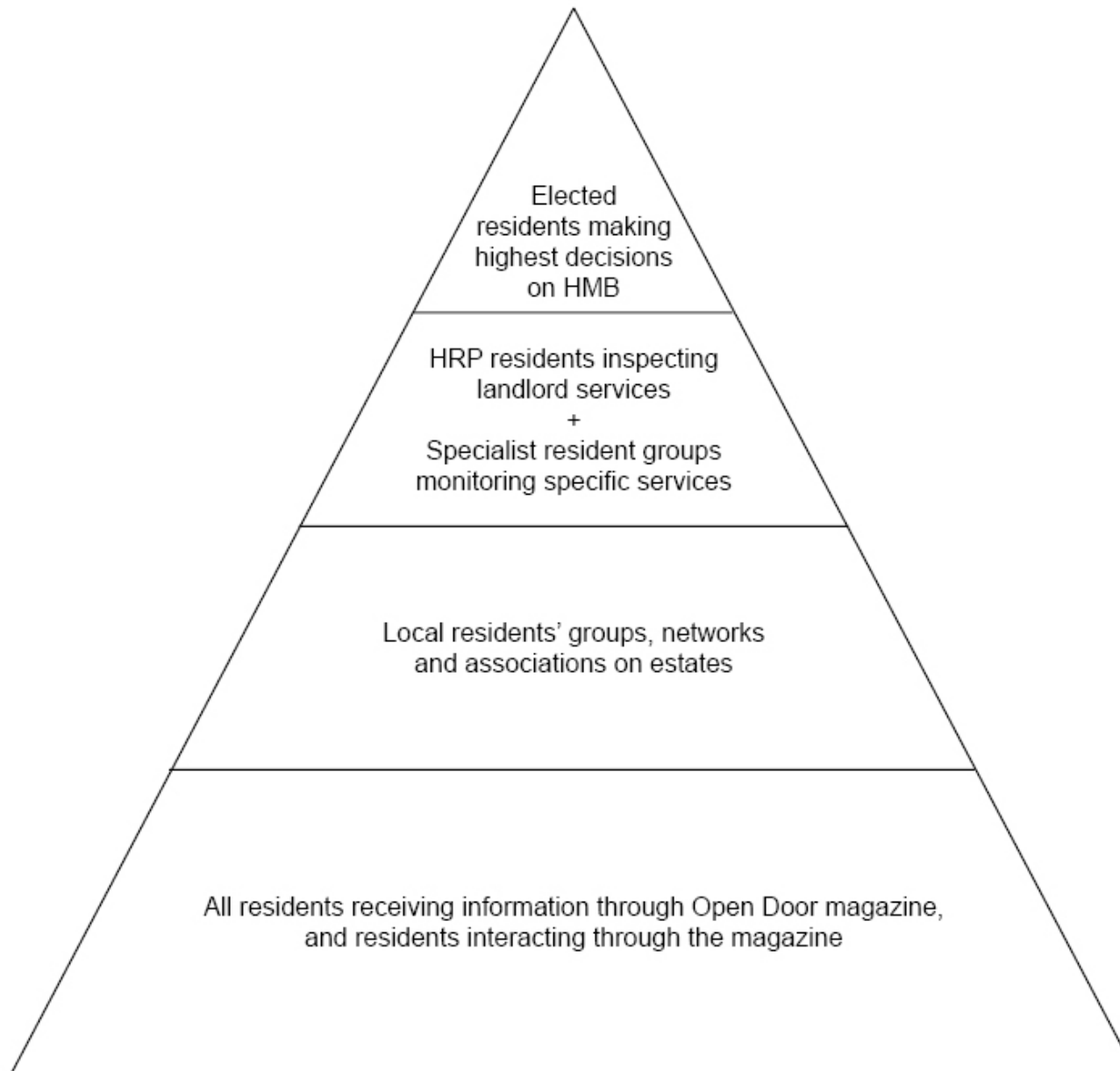
The Council agreed to make the improvements requested by the *Residents' Panel*. The *Panel* will check that

Independently, the *Residents' Panel* have decided that their next inspection will be on the quality of the Council's window-cleaning service. They have informed the Council, begun their inspection process, and will report their findings to you in *Open Door*.

Become a resident inspector

If you're interested in monitoring services in your block or estate or joining the *Residents' Panel*, just phone 01223-458323 or email yourhomeyoursay@cambridge.gov.uk

This page is intentionally left blank



This page is intentionally left blank



To: Housing Management Board
Report by: Marella Hoffman
Relevant scrutiny committee: Housing Management Board 5-3-2013
Wards affected: Wards containing Council housing

Regulatory changes to the Ombudsman system for handling tenants' unresolved complaints about their landlord, and local actions required to implement those changes.

Not a key decision

1. Executive summary

From April 2013, there will be two regulatory changes to the system for handling tenants' unresolved complaints about their landlord, namely that:

- a. Local authority tenants will now take their unresolved complaints to the Housing Ombudsman (rather than to the Local Government Ombudsman, as they used to do)
- b. There will be a new middle stage or local 'buffer' between tenants and the Ombudsman, technically referred to as a 'Designated Person', who can be a local councillor, an MP or a designated Tenant Panel

This report explains the changes and makes recommendations for how the Council might implement the regulatory requirements locally. It explains that any steps taken locally would be in line with the Council's corporate complaints procedure.

2. Recommendations

The Executive Councillor is recommended:

To approve the following plan of action as a way forward for Cambridge under the new scheme:

- a. Run a Freepost postal survey in the spring 2013 edition of Open Door magazine, sent to all Council tenants, asking whether they want a Tenant Panel for complaints

- b. Work with resident representatives to design a Tenant Panel for complaints, if the Open Door residents' survey indicates that tenants want one.

3. Background

3.1 In December 2012, the government announced the changes described above, to be put into place from April 1st, 2013. The short turnaround time was caused by delays in ironing out the details of the scheme since it was first proposed as part of the 2011 Localism Act. These governmental delays are acknowledged in the light-touch requirements expected of landlords in the first phase of the scheme from April 2013 onwards.

3.2 The scheme is timely for Cambridge as it dovetails with improvements that we already intended to make to our approach to complaints. Satisfaction with complaints returned one of the lower scores in our 2012 Tenant Satisfaction Survey. As a result, we have started a project to use residents' survey feedback and involvement to drive up customer satisfaction over the coming two years. The separate actions proposed in this present report to respond to the national changes in complaints systems will gel with and enhance this local improvement drive.

The new 'Designated Person' stage of a complaint

3.3 As illustrated in the sequence below, the new scheme means that once a complainant has exhausted their landlord's own complaints procedure, they can then take their complaint to a local 'Designated Person' (an MP, councillor or designated Tenant Panel), rather than having to go straight to an Ombudsman as they did before:

Landlord's own Complaints Procedure → 'Designated Person' →
Housing Ombudsman

3.4 It is worth noting that complainants already use local MPs and councillors in this way as a 'middle stage' and will continue to do so. So the only real change is the introduction of the designated Tenant Panel as another alternative, in addition to local MPs and councillors.

3.5 The new scheme does not oblige complainants to use the Designated Person stage. They can still go straight to the Housing Ombudsman, but only after a 'cooling off' period of eight weeks has passed since they exhausted their landlord's internal complaints procedure:

Landlord's own Complaints Procedure → Direct to Housing
Ombudsman, but only 8 weeks later

3.6 Any Tenant Panel created in Cambridge for the 'Designated Person' stage would not interfere with the Council's corporate complaints procedure, which, as part of our one-Council approach, is the same across all parts of the Council, including the landlord service.

Purpose of the new scheme

3.7 The Housing Ombudsman has made it clear that the main purpose of the changes is to reduce the number of tenant complaints reaching the Ombudsman, and to resolve them locally instead. The new scheme is firmly part of the localist agenda in that its stated purposes are to:

- a. Resolve most social housing tenant complaints locally from now on
- b. Ensure that tenants' complaints lead directly to service-improvements
- c. Shorten the time and bureaucracy it takes to resolve complaints
- d. Be part of the Co-Regulation regime introduced by the Localism Act, whereby landlords and local residents now regulate their landlord service together, in the absence of a government inspection regime

3.8 The Housing Ombudsman states that from now on, they will only investigate cases that they believe simply could not be resolved locally, cases where, as they put it, "we can add value that will not be achieved through local resolution".

The designated Tenant Panel

3.9 These are the basic rules defining the new Tenant Panel role:

- a. Landlords are not obliged to have a Tenant Panel, but must give it support and recognition if their tenants want one.
- b. The definition, expectations, selection, training and procedures of the Tenant Panel must all be designed locally. Neither the Localism Act nor the Housing Ombudsman will give any guidance or frameworks for the setting up of Tenant Panels.
- c. The Housing Ombudsman will merely hold a register of these Tenant Panels ie a record of their existence and contact details.
- d. Importantly, these Tenant Panels will have no 'powers', and no authority over the landlord or its procedures. Their role is a mediatory one only, seeking consensus and reconciliation between the landlord and complainant. They can also, if they wish, play a supporting, informing role for the complainant, helping them to understand the landlord's systems in order to achieve resolution of their complaint.

- e. They can only give advice and make recommendations. They cannot make 'judgements' or decisions as an Ombudsman does, and cannot get involved in any aspect of litigation or compensation around complaints.
- f. There will be no central control or regulation of the Tenant Panel role. Their function is purely local.

The landlord's regulatory obligations

3.10 These are the landlord's regulatory obligations in relation to the new scheme:

- a. By April 2013, the landlord must have a process planned for how they will, across 2013, decide with tenants whether and how to create a local Tenant Panel under the new scheme. National guidance underlines that it is neither expected nor desirable that Tenant Panels be 'rushed in' locally so as to be up and running for April 2013.
- b. The landlord must have what the Ombudsman calls an "audit-trail" showing that in the local process to decide whether or not to create a Tenant Panel, the landlord got a "wide consensus with a cross-section of tenants" on whether and how a Tenant Panel should be formed, and how it should work. From April 2013, if a complaint comes to the Ombudsman about a landlord, the Ombudsman may require to see this "audit-trail" of the landlord's consultation about forming a Tenant Panel.
- c. The landlord must support the creation of a Tenant Panel if tenants want one, must let tenants lead on how it is created, and once it is up and running, must respond to the Tenant Panel in a "timely and constructive way".
- d. The landlord must ensure that all tenants see ongoing, positive promotion and publicising of the landlord's own Complaints Procedure, and of the Tenant Panel for complaints if there is one.
- e. The landlord must have a robust in-house Complaints Procedure and good management of the complaints process, with:
 - Transparent monitoring of complaints trends
 - Transparent monitoring of performance information on complaints (eg. turnaround times for resolving complaints, satisfaction rates of complainants after their complaint process, proportion of complaints that lead to service improvements, etc.)
 - Regular publication to all customers of the ways in which they can make a complaint without feeling daunted or anxious about it

Examples of details to consider in the design of a local Tenant Panel for complaints

3.11 If a Tenant Panel for complaints were set up in Cambridge, stakeholders would give careful thought as to where the panel would fit into or around the processes of the Council's internal complaints procedure. (For information, it can be noted that the Council's corporate complaints procedure has three main stages. At stage one, a complaint can be made to any member of staff in person or by phone, letter, email or online form. The Council will reply within 7 days. If the complainant is not eventually satisfied with the Council's full response to their complaint, the complaint can go to stage two, to be reviewed by management. If the complainant is not satisfied with management's final resolution of their complaint, they can take it to stage three, which is the Council's Independent Complaints Investigator. The response from the Council's Independent Complaints Investigator currently includes advice on how to access the Ombudsman if the complainant is still dissatisfied.)

3.12 Together, landlords and resident representatives are also expected to ask themselves questions like the following, so as to tailor any Tenant Panel to local needs and circumstances:

- a. How many complaints about our landlord get referred to the Ombudsman currently? So how many might we expect to go to a Tenant Panel? How can we design the Tenant Panel so that it is proportionate to this need? (Landlords and resident representatives are encouraged not to invest excessive time or resources in the creation of a Tenant Panel, beyond the proportionate need.)
- b. Which existing resident representatives could be on the Panel, and which roles would have a conflict of interest? (For instance in Cambridge, elected residents on the Housing Management Board, as co-managers of the business being complained about, would not be on a panel reviewing complaints about the business. But national guidance suggests that resident groups like our Housing Regulation Panel - whose existing role is to inspect, scrutinise and challenge the standards of their landlord service - would have no conflict of interest and could act as, be part of or dovetail with a Tenant Panel for complaints.)

Recommended action plan

3.13 As summarised above on page one, section 2, under Recommendations, the following actions are proposed as a potential way forward for Cambridge under the new scheme:

a) Run a Freepost postal survey in the spring 2013 edition of Open Door magazine, which is sent to all Council tenants and leaseholders, to:

- Ask whether residents would like a Tenant Panel for complaints or not
- Thus get the “wide consensus with a cross-section of tenants” that the Ombudsman will require as a permanent “audit-trail”
- Invite suitable volunteers to come forward to participate in the setting-up process
- Show residents that we have taken on board their 2012 Tenant Satisfaction Survey feedback about low satisfaction with complaints, and that we are taking steps to improve this area substantially for them

b) Work with resident representatives to do a review or audit of the way we, as a landlord, currently manage and learn from complaints. It is recommended that we use the free Complaints Toolkit provided by the Housing Quality Network to help providers get their approach to complaints up to standard for the new scheme (attached, for information, as Appendix 1).

c) Form a working group with resident representatives to design a resident panel for complaints, if the Open Door residents’ survey indicates that they want one.

d) Update HMB on progress after the first year, as part of ongoing resident involvement reporting to HMB in 2014.

4. Implications

(a) Financial - Nil

(b) Staffing - This work is part of the routine duties of existing staff.

(c) Equal Opportunities - Should advance Equal Opportunities by empowering diverse or vulnerable residents who may currently feel too intimidated or uninformed to pursue a complaint.

(d) Environmental - Nil

(e) Procurement - Nil

(f) Consultation and communication - If the project to form a Tenant Panel for complaints goes ahead, it will be communicated in full to customers through Open Door magazine and the Council’s website. The project would make a significant contribution to the Council’s overall positive practice on consultation and community engagement with services.

(g) Community Safety - Nil

5. Appendices

Toolkit for Complaints Procedures, from the Housing Quality Network

6. Inspection of papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

If you have a query on the report please contact:

Author's Name: Marella Hoffman
Author's Phone Number: 01223-458325
Author's Email: Marella.Hoffman@cambridge.gov.uk

This page is intentionally left blank

Complaints toolkit

The Homes and Communities Agency has taken a significant step away from intervening directly in cases where the regulatory consumer standards have been – or may have been – breached. The HCA has said that, while they set the consumer standards, the primary responsibility for resolving issues with these is between landlords and their tenants at a local level. The HCA will only intervene in cases of serious detriment that have caused, or are likely to cause, harm.

From April 2013, there will also be a significant change to the way that individual complaints about service failure are dealt with. Tenants of registered providers will be able to request that their complaints be considered by a ‘designated person’ once they complete the internal procedure of their landlord. Such a person can be an MP, a local Councillor, or a recognised Tenant Panel. The designated person may help resolve the complaint directly, may refer the complaint to the Ombudsman, or may decline to do either. In the latter case the complainant may approach the Ombudsman for his consideration of the complaint. The complainant may also approach the Ombudsman directly if more than eight weeks have elapsed since the completion of the internal procedure of the landlord, without the need to involve a designated person first.

Providers therefore need to ensure they have measures in place to respond to these changes:

- How will you ensure that you can identify issues before they may come to the attention of the regulator?
- Are your processes robust enough – and flexible enough – to ensure that you can do everything necessary and reasonable to resolve a complaint at the earliest stage possible?
- If complaints are escalated to a designated person or to the Ombudsman, are your arrangements robust enough to ensure that you work positively and proactively with them to resolve the complaint and learn any relevant lessons?








In this fully updated toolkit, we tackle all of these issues. If you can evidence meeting the standard set down in the following pages, the chances are that your complaints process is sufficiently robust. If you cannot, then this toolkit should help you identify improvements that you can put in place now that reflect positive practice in this area.

Suggestions for using this toolkit

You will no doubt have your own ideas as to how to complete this toolkit. You might want to work through it in a group, bringing together those people involved in dealing with complaints. Alternatively, a number of you could complete the toolkit separately, then come together to compare views and evidence, rate the risks and work together on an action plan. Discuss the reasons for any differences constructively and re-consider your views. We would also recommend that you consider involving your tenants and residents in working through this toolkit.

If you require any assistance in completing this toolkit or would like an independent evaluation of the robustness of your complaints process, please contact Anna Pattison on 01904 557150 or anna.pattison@hqnetwork.co.uk

Appendix 1

Assessment standards	Evidence for meeting the standard	Improvements identified	Priority – red, amber, green
Access to the complaints service			
<p>The complaints process is widely promoted, eg:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">  Office receptions  Website  Newsletter  Handbook  Leaflet  Social media  At key locations, eg, community centres 			
Complaints are welcomed from all customers, advocates on behalf of customers and non-customers affected by the organisation’s services or residents			
Complaints can be made in a range of ways, including verbally, by telephone, email, online, via social media, etc			
There is a standard complaints form, which is widely available and is clear, straightforward and fit for purpose			
Internal and/or independent support or advocacy is available for customers who need it. This is well promoted and there is evidence of use			

Appendix 1

Page 72

Assessment standards	Evidence for meeting the standard	Improvements identified	Priority – red, amber, green
Complainants are asked how they would like to see the complaint resolved			
The organisation encourages customers to provide positive feedback and suggestions for improvement. These are recorded, reported and acted on and can be seen to make a difference			
There is a comprehensive complaints policy that covers the relevant issues contained within this toolkit The policy is produced in summary form			
Recording, monitoring and reporting on complaints			
There is a clear definition of what constitutes a complaint, as opposed to a service request. It is clear which complaints can and can't be dealt with			
All complaints are recorded (whether classified as 'formal' or 'informal'). Complaints are logged at first point of contact			
Staff are trained to identify and respond to complaints in a proactive manner – focusing on resolving the complaint at the first opportunity			

Appendix 1

Assessment standards	Evidence for meeting the standard	Improvements identified	Priority – red, amber, green
There are mechanisms in place to identify, escalate and deal with issues or service failures that might potentially result in serious detriment			
Board member/councillor/MP enquiries are recorded and dealt with separately and differently (if appropriate)			
Processes are in place to cross reference and ensure consistency when dealing with councillors and MPs acting as designated persons and when they are representing constituents in other enquiries			
Anonymous complaints are recorded and investigated where appropriate			
There is a centralised, IT-based management system on which complaints are logged and allows complaints to be properly investigated and reported on. Ideally, the system is part of or linked to a customer relation management (CRM) system (this helps to minimise human error and resources)			
Regular quality checks are made to ensure that staff know how to use the system and that adequate records are kept			

Appendix 1

Assessment standards	Evidence for meeting the standard	Improvements identified	Priority – red, amber, green
A set of performance indicators (PIs) has been developed to monitor performance and satisfaction. PIs include numbers received and upheld, response times, trend analysis, including by diversity, outcomes and satisfaction			
There is a hierarchy of reports on the above information with an appropriate level of detail going to customers, managers and board/councillors. Relevant reports include how the organisation is learning from complaints			
Customers are involved in monitoring complaints performance and reviewing processes			
Responding to complaints			
The policy, procedure and published information are reviewed with tenants on a regular basis or in the event of significant regulatory, statutory or other changes			
All complaints are swiftly acknowledged in an appropriate format (eg, by letter or email)			
The organisation's complaints procedure has a reasonable and logical number of stages, agreed with tenants			

Appendix 1

Assessment standards	Evidence for meeting the standard	Improvements identified	Priority – red, amber, green
The procedure clearly identifies the people responsible for allocating, and responding to complaints, and managing the complaints process			
Target dates for each stage of the complaints process are challenging but achievable and were agreed with tenants			
Where necessary, complainants are contacted to seek their agreement or provide reasons for extending the timescale			
There is a system to 'chase' complaints as they near target response dates. Where appropriate this includes escalation to the next stage of the process			
There is a standard template for responding to complaints that is flexible enough to allow personalisation			
Complaints are thoroughly investigated and responses explain what actions were taken to investigate. The complainant is routinely contacted as part of the investigation			
There is guidance on how to handle 'tricky' issues, eg, complaints about staff, where there is no evidence, or where there are policy issues			

Appendix 1

Assessment standards	Evidence for meeting the standard	Improvements identified	Priority – red, amber, green
Where the complaint is about a third party contractor, the organisation retains responsibility for investigating and responding			
<p>Response letters are comprehensive and include, where appropriate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ An apology, if appropriate, or an expression of regret ■ Summary of the complaint ■ The findings of the investigator ■ Whether the complaint has been upheld or not ■ Any actions the organisation proposes to take to resolve the complaint, any offer of compensation ■ Any lessons learnt from the complaint ■ Details of how the complainant can appeal the decision, where appropriate 			
Quality checks are made to ensure that responses meet the standard above, are in plain English, respond to each aspect of the complaint and are customer focused			
Customers are invited to attend in person any stage where a panel is considering a complaint or appeal against a complaint finding			

Appendix 1

Assessment standards	Evidence for meeting the standard	Improvements identified	Priority – red, amber, green
Customers are involved in the complaints process at appropriate stages, eg, sitting on a panel to consider appeals			
Board members/elected members play a role in monitoring the effectiveness of complaints handling			
The organisation responds positively to Ombudsman enquiries, investigations, and recommendations, as well as complies with his orders promptly			
There is a policy to deal with unreasonable behaviour by complainants			
The organisation works collaboratively with other organisations in complaint-handling and has consulted with tenants on the potential use of activities such as mediation and peer investigators, eg, from other organisations			
Implementing the new framework			
The organisation has reviewed its policy and procedures in light of the changes to complaints management introduced in the Localism Act 2011 and there is an appropriate action plan in place			

Appendix 1

Assessment standards	Evidence for meeting the standard	Improvements identified	Priority – red, amber, green
The organisation is clear how it will work with tenants panels, which may act as the designated person for complaints. Appropriate processes are in place to facilitate effective working both before and after the internal procedure is exhausted			
The organisation provides clear information to complainants on how they can escalate a complaint to a designated person (for example, if there is a Designated Tenant Panel, or a local agreement to involve specific Councillors)			
The organisation has arrangements in place to prepare, and train designated persons			
The organisation has effective arrangements in place to refer complaints to the designated person			
Staff, customers, board members and councillors (as applicable) have received briefings on the new framework			
A comprehensive policy on compensation			
The organisation has a clear policy on compensation, which includes all service failure (ie, not just legal minimum)			

Appendix 1

Assessment standards	Evidence for meeting the standard	Improvements identified	Priority – red, amber, green
The policy and approach has been agreed with customers and is publicised			
There is a budget for compensation and it is sufficient			
Compensation can be offered and paid out without lengthy bureaucracy or authorisation procedures			
Valuing and learning from complaints			
The organisation can demonstrate that complaints are welcomed and used as valuable feedback from customers. Staff understand that complaints should be encouraged			
There are clear linkages between complaints and service improvement planning			
Learning from complaints is promoted internally and to customers			
The organisation can demonstrate improvements made to the complaints process over time, (eg, fewer complaints of a certain type, responding to diversity issues, positive changes in policy, VfM)			

Appendix 1

Assessment standards	Evidence for meeting the standard	Improvements identified	Priority – red, amber, green
The organisation also uses compliments and suggestions as learning points, eg, they may have influenced training, service plans, priorities for review, procurement decisions			
Customer satisfaction with the complaints process is monitored and results are used to improve the way that the organisation does things			
The organisation regularly publicises how it has changed things as a result of complaints and other feedback, eg, 'you say, we did'?			