

## **Housing Scrutiny Board**

**29 September, 2016**

### **Summary of Matters Considered at the Board**

#### **Report of the Chair, Councillor P Hughes**

The Scrutiny Board met on 29 September, 2016 and the following items were considered. I have selected the main points of the discussion which I feel members of the Council will be particularly interested to know more about. For more detail, a copy of the minutes is available on the Committee Management Information System (CMIS) via the Council's website at <http://cmis.sandwell.gov.uk/cmis5/>

#### **Update on Tenant Involvement**

The Board noted an update on tenant involvement activities in the borough.

A Service Level Agreement (SLA) is in place with Sandwell Community Information and Participation Service (SCIPS) to support tenant and resident associations (TRAs), other tenant groups and community based groups. SCIPS has gathered baseline information on the support required by TRAs to inform its delivery plans. The Board noted the key areas of the SLA and requested a further report setting out the baseline information gathered by SCIPS and detailing how outputs are delivered and monitored to ensure that the Council receives value for money.

There is a varied menu of involvement activities for tenants, in addition to attending meetings, and increasing involvement remains a priority. The Board has requested data on involvement to date to determine where there are gaps in representation. The Board discussed ways of targeting individuals and different groups to increase participation, including talking to constituents who take part in neighbourhood walkabouts with ward representatives. SCIPS has also been asked to support this work by encouraging tenant and resident associations to connect with their wider community.

The Tenant Review Panel is currently looking at legislative changes expected as a result of the Welfare Reform and Housing Act.

The Board recognises that it is still early days in relation to our tenant involvement activities and looks forward to receiving updates in the future.

### **Update on Housing Adaptations Policy Review**

The Board was informed that a working group has been established to look at the Council's policies on aids and adaptations following the introduction of the Care Act 2014. The Council has general duties under the Act but is also mandated to make certain provisions.

A draft policy has been circulated to service managers and directors and will be submitted to the Cabinet early in 2017. The Board is keen to contribute to the development of this policy before it is submitted to the Cabinet and has established a member working group to lead on this piece of work. It is recognised that this is an area that overlaps with the terms of reference of the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board and so this will be a joint piece of work with Vice-Chair, Councillor Lloyd, and another member of that Board (to be identified). To inform this work and understand how the service is delivered, the Board has requested a plan setting out the pathway from referral to completion of works, with timescales and examples.

The Board has also recommended that all councillors are consulted so that their views and experiences can be taken into account in reviewing the policy.

The Board also discussed the links with this piece of work and the allocations policy. The Board expressed concern about the financial contribution made by housing associations to adaptations and feels that this should be addressed, given the Council's financial position.

### **The Impact of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 and Welfare Reform on Housing**

The Board noted a briefing on the anticipated impact of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 and the reform of welfare provision.

The Housing and Planning Act received royal assent in May 2016 and introduces a number of measures which reinforce the Government's drive to promote home ownership, including the extension of Right to Buy to housing association tenants; the sale of higher value local authority homes; the introduction of starter homes; mandatory use of fixed term tenancies and pay to stay/mandatory higher rents. The Act also makes provision to tackle rogue landlords operating in the private sector.

Relevant codes of guidance are still awaited and the Department for Communities and Local Government has indicated that implementation of the Act will be deferred until April, 2018.

The Board notes that the forthcoming changes to housing legislation, together with the on-going welfare reform, will have a profound impact on the Council stock and wider social housing tenure in Sandwell and will continue to monitor the progress of these changes.

### **Work Programme 2016/2017**

The Board agreed to carry out a piece of work to gather information at a town level on housing issues. Board members have taken responsibility for their own respective towns and will liaise with their town managers, as well as other appropriate officers, on this piece of work.

The Board will be monitoring the enactment of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 and will receive reports on this at appropriate times.

The Board is also looking at the impact of welfare reform on housing in Sandwell.

In addition to these larger pieces of work the Board will consider other issues throughout the year as appropriate.

**Councillor P Hughes**  
**Chair**