

**HOUSING INITIATIVES WORKING GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 11 JANUARY 2011 at 2.30pm**

Present:- Councillors E L Bellingham-Smith, J E Menell, D J Morson and S V Schneider.

Tenant Forum representative: Mr S Sproul.

Officers in attendance: Jack Burnham (Housing Enabling and Development Officer); Roz Millership (Divisional Head: Housing and Environmental Services), Liz Petrie (Housing Management Manager), Rebecca Procter (Democratic Services Officer), Nicole Shephard-Lewis (Tenant Participation Officer) and Judith Snares (Housing Options/Homelessness Manager).

HWG24 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN FOR MEETING

Councillor Schneider was elected Chairman for the meeting.

HWG25 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R Chamberlain and J Hudson.

HWG26 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 October 2010 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

HWG27 GOVERNMENT'S HOUSING REFORM CONSULTATION

The Divisional Head of Housing and Environmental Services referred Members to the consultation document and draft responses prepared by the Interim Housing Strategy and Planning Policy Manager, who was not able to attend today's meeting due to another commitment. The views were sought of the Housing Initiatives Working Group and of the Tenants' Forum (which had met briefly the previous day and would hold a further meeting on 13 January). The Council's response to the consultation was required to be submitted before the deadline of 17 January 2011.

Members considered the draft responses to the consultation as prepared by officers and asked various questions which were answered in detail by officers. In particular, Members wished it to be flagged up that the question of tenant involvement in the decision-making process was important. This question would be raised at the next meeting of the Constitution Working Group. Additions and changes to the draft responses were made as noted below.

Q5	Do you agree that the Tenancy Standard should focus on key principles? If so, what should these be?
A	Yes and to include:

	<p>Statutory rights including a right to exchange; a right to take in lodgers and (with the Landlord's consent): rights to have repairs carried out; and rights to consultation and information, grounds for eviction etc. This should also take into account any potential equality issues.</p> <p>Right to Buy – it may be contradictory to give landlords freedom to set a flexible tenure in order to manage stock more effectively but still give tenants the Right to Buy on flexible tenancies? Should it only apply to secure tenancies?</p> <p>Sub Letting –Flexible Tenants should not be given the right to sub-let.</p>
Q8	What opportunities as a tenant would you expect to have to influence the landlord's policy?
A	Members of the Tenant Forum should sit on the Housing Working Group with full voting rights.
Q9	Is two years an appropriate minimum fixed term for a general needs social tenancy, or should the minimum fixed term be longer? If so, how long should it be? What is the basis for proposing a minimum fixed term of that length? Should a distinction be drawn between tenancies on social and affordable rents? If so, what should this be?
A	Two years is the minimum, so Council would prefer to determine a longer period – a longer period would give tenants more incentive to maintain their home, integrate into the community etc so the Council would need to consider these issues. The cost of reviewing tenancies every two years could also be prohibitive and wasteful of resources that might be better spent on maintenance etc. This policy will be different for urban, rural and inner-city authorities.
Q11	Do you think that older people and those with a long term illness or disability should continue to be provided with a guarantee of a social home for life through the Tenancy Standard?
A	Yes for people with a long term illness/disability – we would need to consider what the age entry point for older persons would be.
Q12	Are there other types of household where we should always require landlords to guarantee a social home for life?
A	Yes, at Landlord's discretion, but in accordance with the tenancy standard/policy in order to not discriminate or conflict with equalities legislation.
Q19	What opportunities as a tenant or resident would you expect to have to influence the local authority's qualification criteria?
A	Members of the Tenant Forum should sit on the Housing Working Group with full voting rights.

Minutes of Previous Meeting

Housing Initiatives Working Group, 3 March 2011, item 3

Q29	Is the framework set out in the 1985 Housing Act fit for purpose? Are any detailed changes needed to the enforcement provisions in the 1985 Act?
A	The standard assumes all living rooms can be used for sleeping purposes: this is unrealistic and should be modified to exclude at least one living room from the room based standards as per the Housing Department's current standards.

The meeting ended at 3.40pm.