

HOUSING CABINET MEMBER MEETING

Agenda Item 29

Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject:	Tenant Handbook Review		
Date of Meeting:	7 July 2010		
Report of:	Director of Housing, Culture & Enterprise		
Contact Officer:	Name:	Diane Hughes	Tel: 29-3841
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Key Decision:	No		
Wards Affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE/

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 To present the results of the tenant led Chairman's Working Group review of the tenant handbook for tenants living in council housing.
- 1.2 To present a proposed draft of the new tenant handbook.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (1) That the Cabinet Member for Housing notes the conclusions of the working group outlined in this report.
- (2) That the Cabinet Member for Housing agrees to the implementation of the new tenant handbook attached at appendix 1.
- (3) That the Cabinet Member for Housing agrees that minor changes may be required and made to the tenant handbook between the Housing Cabinet meeting and printing to ensure it reflects the latest local context, with significant changes requiring approval from the Director of Housing, Culture & Enterprise.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

- 3.1 The Chairman's Working Group undertook a review of the tenancy agreement which was agreed at Housing Cabinet on 14 January 2010 and which was implemented in May 2010 for all council introductory and secure tenants.
- 3.2 The tenant handbook was last updated in April 2006 and the group wished to ensure that the handbook complimented the revised agreement, that tenants were aware of their rights and responsibilities and that tenants have updated and relevant information.
- 3.3 The group considered the current version of the tenant handbook and noted the following points:
- the handbook was in one document which made it easy to access and ensured all the information was held in one place
 - the handbook had a logical, clear layout and covered the main areas of tenancy management
 - the handbook had a useful contents and index section
 - the handbook could benefit from more pictures and colour
 - the handbook provided a good basis on which to expand upon.
- 3.4 The group also considered examples of handbooks from local housing providers and high performing authorities (including Southampton, Poole Housing Partnership, Derby Homes and City West Homes). The presentation of the handbooks varied. Some key areas included:
- separate booklets as opposed to a single document
 - use of pictures and leaflets to break up the content
 - good use of colour
 - the level of detail varied considerably from basic information to very lengthy documents
 - some examples used a 'question and answer' approach.
- 3.5 The group therefore decided to revise the handbook using the current handbook as a structure, whilst taking into account key features of colour, pictures and questions and answers from other examples. The group agreed to organise the handbook around the five sections of the tenancy agreement, whilst adding additional sections where appropriate to cover extra information, for example resident involvement.

The group reviewed the contents of the handbook and also included further information on issues that were important to tenants including resident involvement, succession, how to end the tenancy in the event of the death of the tenant, rechargeable repairs, sustainability issues and being a good neighbour. The group also agreed to begin each section with a photograph and use colour tabs to allow for easy navigation.

- 3.6 A draft of the tenant handbook is attached at appendix 1, which if agreed will then be delivered to all tenants during summer 2010.

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 During the tenancy agreement consultation in August and September 2009, tenants raised a number of issues and questions where they wanted further information or advice. For example on permission for pets and succession. The group have ensured that these issues have been reflected in the draft handbook.

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 5.1 The costs related to the production of the Tenant Handbook including design, printing and distribution will be met from the HRA revenue budget and included within the Targeted Budget Management (TBM) projections for 2010/11.

Finance Officer Consulted: Gary Driver

Date: 12/05/10

Legal Implications:

- 5.2 Although not legally required to issue a Tenant's Handbook, a combination of powers in the Housing Act 1985 and Local Government Act 1972 provide sufficient authority for the same. The council must take the Human Rights Act into account in respect of its actions but it is not considered that any individual's human rights act rights would be adversely affected by the recommendations in this report.

Lawyer Consulted: Liz Woodley

Date: 19.05.10

Equalities Implications:

- 5.3 The development of the revised tenant handbook has been taken with due regards to equalities and diversity issues and will be available in a range of formats to meet to meet tenants needs. Feedback from the consultation on the tenancy agreement has been used to finalise the Equality Impact Assessment on the revised tenant handbook.

Sustainability Implications:

- 5.4 An effective tenant handbook providing clear information on rights and responsibilities will contribute to the development of sustainable communities.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.5 The revised tenant handbook will positively contribute to preventing crime and the fear of crime by stating the types of anti social behaviour and harassment that is prohibited and the enforcement action that the council can take should such behaviour occur.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 5.6 None

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 5.7 The introduction of a revised tenant handbook will have citywide implications for council tenants.

6. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):

- 6.1 Continue with the existing tenant handbook. However this is not recommended, as it does not allow the council to take advantage of developments in best practice and does not reflect the wishes of tenants. We need to ensure we have a comprehensive handbook, which compliments the revised tenancy agreement, covers information across the range of housing management services we provide and reflects the information that is important to tenants.

7. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 To provide the Cabinet Member for Housing with the results of the Chairman's Working Group's review of the tenant handbook. To seek the Cabinet Member for Housing's agreement to the implementation of the revised tenant handbook, attached at appendix 1. To seek agreement that minor changes may be required and made to the tenant handbook between the Housing Cabinet meeting and printing to ensure it reflects the latest local context with significant changes requiring approval from the Director of Housing, Culture & Enterprise.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Draft Tenant Handbook

Documents In Members' Rooms

None

Background Documents

None