

## **Tenant Involvement Group (TIG) Meeting Minutes 16.1.25**

### **Attendees:**

Paul Thomas, Assistant Director – Housing

Ritchie Thomson, Housing Maintenance Service Manager

Kevin Green, Finance Service Manager, Housing

Cllr Steve Davies, Portfolio Holder, Housing and Homelessness

**Tenant Representatives:** Ann Cox, Alaine Willis, Brenda Freeborn, Brian Isaacson

Melyvn Uttley, Paul Woodroof, Sally Titley

**Tenant Engagement Team**

**Apologies from:** Chris Reynolds, Jane Cantillon

<b>Symbol</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>?</b>	Tenant question (for RI team to obtain answer to)
<b>R</b>	Tenant Recommendation
<b>D</b>	Tenant Decision
<b>A</b>	Action (for RI team / Tenant Representatives / NFDC Officers)

### **Welcome and introductions.**

### **Report being reviewed: Housing Revenue Account Budget and Housing Public Sector Capital Expenditure Programme 2025/26**

The tenant Involvement group was able to review the HRA budget and housing public sector capital expenditure programme prior to the meeting. The suggestions below were raised by the group as they would like more of an overview on:

- The 2.7% rent increase
- The spend on future council housing, new builds and decarbonization improvements.
- The increase spends on housing maintenance.

Paul T confirmed that a lot of work has been carried out over the last year to produce a budget for the next financial year. A specialised consultant has been employed for the last 12 months to consult on the HRA and budget. The outcome is that NFDC is in one of the best positions that it can be in the country and is one of the few Councils that have got a balanced housing revenue account.

The main highlights being recommended were that from 1 April 2025 Cabinet agree to:

- i. an increase in dwelling rents of 2.7% from the 2024/25 weekly rent level, in accordance with Government guidelines

- ii. an increase in garage rents of 2.7% from the 2024/25 weekly rent level
- iii. an increase in shared ownership property rents of 3.2% from the 2024/25 weekly rent level, in accordance with Government guidelines of RPI +0.5%, be agreed, and that the weekly rent of one additional property sold under previous legislation be increased by 2.7%

Paul explained that the increase in rent is in accordance with Government guidelines and that the increase would ensure the council is able to increase and maintain the quality and safety of tenant's homes. In addition, because NFDC loses properties through the Government's 'right to buy' scheme and due to the tightening of the eligibility criteria to the scheme the council has seen an increase of interest from tenants to buy their homes, so a budget was needed for new developments and buy backs to maintain or increase the council's level of housing stock.

**? How does this rent increase compare to other councils and social housing rent increases?**

- The council doesn't investigate what other councils and housing association are planning to increase their rent by. The decision for the amount the council will increase the rent is based on the amount of rental income we require to continue to provide safe quality housing to our tenants, as well as continuing to provide new affordable housing.

**? Is the council considering other heating options other than air source heat pumps?**

- Yes, the council takes into consideration all options when improving the energy performance of the housing stock. The council are always looking into new technologies that will improve properties whilst meeting the Government's energy performance targets. Each property will be assessed on an individual basis and improvements won't necessarily be the same for each property.

**? What is the breakdown of how the council will increase the housing stock? Are they mostly buybacks, new developments, or new builds?**

- It is always a mix of buybacks, developments that the council will develop and buying property off developers. The majority of the planning program is not currently on our own housing land due to the council having very limited housing owned land. The council doesn't have much of its own land for housing to purchase so most new build projects will come from private landowners or private developers.

**? Why has the budget on reactive maintenance increased so much?**

- The budget for reactive maintenance has only increased by around 2/3% which covers the increase cost of staff, materials, supplies, and the cost of external contractors. The increase is based on the costs that were identified during the last financial year so have only increased due to inflation.

**? How many voids does the council turn around each year?**

- Annually the council see around 400 voids per year.

**? If the average turn around for a void is 15 days, why are properties left empty for weeks and months at a time?**

- The 15-day void turn around is an average time frame, there could be some voids that take longer to turn around due to the need of major repairs compared to some properties that need a few checks and are completed in a few days. The delays to reletting the property is not on the maintenance side but usually due to the complicated allocation process. The process is often held up due to the lengthy process of waiting on prospective tenants bringing in documents and providing proofs for example, then the team reviewing the documents, uploading the documents, and due to the demand of social housing the team then must justify why they have allocated the property to the right tenant.

**The group thanked senior managers and Cllr Davies for attendance to the meeting today.**

**TIG comments for inclusion in the report that is presented to Cabinet:**

*Members of the TIG were given the opportunity to review, scrutinise and challenge senior managers on the proposed HRA budget and report for 2025/26.*

*Members of the TIG understand the recommended rent increase and, notwithstanding the recognised impact on tenants, welcome continued input on the budget and budget setting. The TIG also understand that the majority of Councils and providers of social housing will be increasing rents by the allowed 2.7%.*

*Tenants feel the Council continue to take the 'tenant voice' and impact on tenants into account within budget setting and providing housing services.*

*The TIG group appreciate the Council's proposed focus on tenants' homes, reflected in the budgets outlined for both reactive maintenance and planned work, alongside a continued and appropriate focus on sustainability through the Council's decarbonisation and energy efficiency programmes.*

*Tenants also recognise the need for new Council homes and support the proposed budget to continue to provide much needed affordable homes in our communities.*

*Members of the TIG are reassured with the explanation from Officers of the Council, alongside answers to questions from the TIG, that the proposed budget and spend on tenants' homes and services has been thoroughly considered to ensure the right spend for both tenants and the Council.*

**Supplemental Update from Dave following the meeting 20.1.25**

Dave provided the above wording to all TIG members, including those that could not make the meeting and asked for feedback no later than 20.1.25. Some TIG members gave some suggestions and/or agreed with the wording. Upon final review

by Dave, the following was presented to Richard Knott for inclusion in the HRA Report to Cabinet:

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*Members of the TIG understand the recommended rent increase and, notwithstanding the recognised impact on tenants, realise the necessity and welcome continued input on the budget and budget setting. The TIG also understand that the majority of Councils and providers of social housing will be increasing rents by the allowed 2.7%.*

*Tenants feel the Council continue to take the 'tenant voice' and impact on tenants into account within budget setting and providing housing services.*

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**A Post presentation Action for Dave: Decarbonatization to be linked to our data collection exercise.**

## **Dave's afternoon update**

### **Complaint update**

#### **? How does a phone call become a complaint?**

- A complaint should be when a tenant state they are unhappy about the service they have received, the word complaint does not need to be used for it to be recorded as a complaint.

#### **? How many people review a complaint?**

- The complaint is reviewed by the corporate complaints team, there is a complaint officer in the team that take ownership of housing complaints. The officer will review the complaint and will pass it over to the relevant service manager that the complaint is based upon, it will be their responsibility to respond to the complaint.

#### **? How can a tenant make a complaint?**

- A complaint can be made several different ways. A tenant can give us a call, put it down on an email, in person at one of the information offices, or they can approach any staff member if they are out and about. If a tenant doesn't feel confident to complain directly to the council there are several different agencies that would be willing to help listen and pass on the details of the complaint, such as the Citizen Advice Bureau.

**TIG year planner proposal** – Dates for your diary will be sent out to confirm this year's TIG plans.

### **Text suggestion**

- ? **Is there any way of making the text more personal by using the tenants name? or dear tenant?**
  - The issue with making the text personal is around data protection in case a text was sent in error to the wrong number. But using 'dear tenant' would make it more personal and obvious it is from their landlord.
- ? **Could the text not include more information about the repair that has been raised?**
  - The text message system will have a limit to the number of characters that can be used in a text, this would be something that would need to be looked in to.

**ASB update on Website** – Chris Pike has updated the Website with the ASB information making it much more accessible and understanding for tenants.  
[Neighbourhood and antisocial behaviour - New Forest District Council](#)

**Housing compliance report** – The report was presented to EMT in November and will be shared with the TIG with the January minutes to read, any feedback is welcome.

**New ID badges** – Photos to be taken at the next TIG meeting to replace the old RI ID badges.

### **Next month's meeting – Kate Ryan**

Kate Ryan is due to attend the next TIG meeting on 5 February. Kate will give a presentation to the group and an update on latest news about devolution.

**Meeting ended**