

Housing Policies – Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Board

Report to Cabinet on 13 May 2025

Background

1. The Overview and Scrutiny Board met on 7 May 2025 to consider the submitted report which set out a number of Housing Policies which had been rewritten following the transfer of the Council's Housing stock from TorVista Homes Ltd to the Council as well as a new Right to Buy Policy which did not apply under the previous arrangements and responded to questions together with the Managing Director, Liam Montgomery and Housing Manager, Anita Merritt.
2. Members asked questions in relation to what happened to tenants who caused damage to properties or were poor neighbours; what was the role of Councillors in supporting people with complaints and what impact could they have; why does it say the person responsible for monitoring complaints was the Director of Regeneration; where did we get the definition of 'vulnerable tenants' from, the person may not be at risk of being harmed but may have mental health illness; how did the Council prioritise dealing with problems with damp and mould; had we had any applications for Right to Buy and was it likely that this would increase; and the Rent Arrears and Debt Recovery Policy mentions a sympathetic approach, what does this look like.
3. In response to around tenants, Members were informed that there were several steps and triggers to support a tenant with issues relating to behaviour or rent arrears. The main priority was to work with the tenant to support them and ensure that they can sustain their home but not have a negative impact on their neighbours. A sympathetic approach was taken where tenants were in arrears with their rent, one to one conversations were held and payment plans agreed, where appropriate. The final stage would be to go through the court to gain possession of the property which may result in the tenant becoming homeless and being referred to the Homelessness Team for support. It was highlighted that the Housing Team works with new tenants at the start of their tenancy to understand any health or social issues they have and to support them to complete the forms to access any eligible benefits and signpost them to external help and support e.g. Step Change. The definition of vulnerable tenant had been developed with other sector professionals and the Council's Partnership and Inclusion Manager.

4. The Board noted that there had not been any applications for Right to Buy partly due to the small number of properties owned by the Council, currently around 30, expecting to rise to less than 200 over the next few years, and partly due to the reduced discount, market value less £30,000. It was not expected for the Council to have many applications for Right to Buy.
5. In response to questions around complaints, Members were advised that the Complaints Policy (Housing) was for tenants or members of the public to use to complain about issues relating to the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the Council, its own staff or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual tenant or group of residents. This was controlled by Regulator of Social Housing to ensure consistency of a two stage process, with rights to complain to the Housing Ombudsman where appropriate. Complaints from tenants or members of the public about existing tenants were currently dealt with under the TorVista Homes Ltd Antisocial Behaviour Policy (it was agreed that a copy of this Policy would be shared with all Councillors) which would also be reviewed and updated in the future. Members are able to support tenants and members of the public with complaints. There is the Complaint's (Housing) Policy, referred to above, which Councillors can signpost residents to for wider complaints where they feel that issues have not been resolved at a service level. Member can support complainants with complaints but cannot act on their behalf. The responsible person for complaints was the Director of Regeneration as that was where the Service fits within the current structure.
6. The Board was advised that as soon as a tenant reported an issue with damp or mould it would be reviewed by the Housing Team. If an issue requires more specialist advice then a member of the in-house Property Services Team will visit the property to resolve the issue and a new leaflet was currently being updated to share with tenants on this issue. Due to the small numbers of properties there was detailed knowledge of each property and tenant. Damp and mould was also reported through the performance reporting and the action taken to resolve the issue.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 The Board reflected and debated the information provided to them, both verbal and written and formed the following recommendations to the Cabinet. On being put to the vote, the motion was declared carried unanimously.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1 That the Overview and Scrutiny Board recommend to the Cabinet:
 1. that the Housing Policies set out in Appendices 1 to 8 of the submitted report be adopted by Torbay Council, and the Director of Regeneration be given delegated authority, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Finance, to review the policies and make changes as appropriate and in line with any changes to legislation, including consideration around the wording of the definition of 'vulnerable tenants'; and

2. that the Monitoring Officer be requested to make a technical amendment to the general limitations within the Officer Scheme of Delegation in relation to property disposals not applying in relation to the Right to Buy Policy and the Director of Finance be given delegated authority to dispose of property in accordance with the Right to Buy Policy.

Background Papers

[Agenda for Overview and Scrutiny Board on Wednesday, 7 May 2025, 5.30 pm](#)