

 Executive 11th March 2015		Agenda Item No. 10
Title	Housing Advisory Group – Terms of Reference	
For further information about this report please contact	Abigail Hay - Housing Strategy & Development Manager Telephone: 01926 456044 Email: abigail.hay@warwickdc.gov.uk	
Wards of the District directly affected	All	
Is the report private and confidential and not for publication by virtue of a paragraph of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006?	No	
Date and meeting when issue was last considered and relevant minute number	Council Meeting 25 th June 2014 - Minute Number 14 Council Meeting 19 th November 2014 – Minute Number 54	
Background Papers	None	

Contrary to the policy framework:	No
Contrary to the budgetary framework:	No
Key Decision?	No
Included within the Forward Plan? (If yes include reference number)	Yes - 656
Equality Impact Assessment Undertaken	No

Officer/Councillor Approval		
Officer Approval	Date	Name
Chief Executive/Deputy Chief Executive	17.02.15	Bill Hunt
Head of Service	01.02.15	Andy Thompson
CMT	17.02.15	
Section 151 Officer	17.02.15	Mike Snow
Monitoring Officer	09.02.15	Graham Leach
Finance	06.02.15	Mark Smith
Portfolio Holder(s)	06.02.15	Councillor Norman Vincett
Consultation & Community Engagement		
The Constitution Working Party has met to agree the Terms of Reference. The Portfolio Holder and Head of Housing & Property Services have met with the Tenants Panel Executive to agree the proposals. A briefing note has been circulated to the Interim Housing & Property Board.		
Final Decision?		Yes
Suggested next steps (if not final decision please set out below)		

1. Summary

- 1.1. This report seeks approval for the future working arrangements of the Housing Advisory Group, including the group's Terms of Reference.
- 1.2. The Housing Advisory Group will not make any formal decisions; these will be reserved to the Council, Executive and Officers as outlined in the Constitution of the Council.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. That the Housing Advisory Group Terms of Reference (ToR), attached at Appendix A, is approved.
- 2.2. That the Interim Housing and Property Board is dissolved, and its remit is absorbed within the Housing Advisory Group.

3. Reasons for the Recommendation

- 3.1. During the debate on the Motion presented to Council on 25th June 2014 (attached at Appendix B), concern was expressed that there may be a lack of opportunities for active engagement by Councillors in the development and delivery of the Council's housing and housing related services.
- 3.2. A Working Group established after that meeting has explored the options open to the Council to address this, including the formal proposal made at the meeting to establish a Housing Committee.
- 3.3. As a consequence of the group's work in November 2013 the Council approved a recommendation to establish a Housing Advisory Group with a remit to consider and advise on policy and practice relating to the way the Council designs and discharges its housing duties and responsibilities. This approach was designed to increase the opportunities for engagement in the Council's housing services but to avoid the need for constitutional changes by not giving the Housing Advisory Group formal decision making powers. These remain with the Executive.
- 3.4. The members of the Working Group have since met to develop a Terms of Reference for the Housing Advisory Group, attached as Appendix A.
- 3.5. The purpose of the Housing Advisory Group is to consider and advise Housing & Property Services on policy and practice relating to the way the Council discharges its duties and responsibilities. The Housing Advisory Group will be chaired by the Housing & Property Services Portfolio Holder. Membership will be made up of 10 Councillors (including the portfolio holder) allocated by group leaders on a proportionate basis, with up to three tenant representatives. The Head of Housing & Property Services and the Housing Strategy & Development Manager will not form part of the Housing Advisory Group but will be required to attend each meeting.
- 3.6. The Housing Advisory Group will meet four times per year, with the inaugural meeting taking place in June 2015.
- 3.7. Up to three members of the Housing Advisory Group are proposed to be drawn from the Council's municipal housing tenants. This is to make sure that the group is able to draw upon the expertise and experiences of those who live in

the Council's homes. However, the Council already has in place a Tenants' Panel formed in 2010 and it will be necessary as the Housing Advisory Group develops to clarify the role of and purpose of the Tenants' Panel.

3.8. When the Tenants' Panel was initially formed, its main focus was on monitoring the delivery of the department's then current Service Improvement Plan. A number of sub-groups from the Tenant's Panel were set up to focus upon specific elements of the service including Repairs, Tenancy Management and Complaints.

3.9. The Tenants' Panel has achieved a number of positive outcomes including:

Carried out a programme of estate walkabouts involving tenants, councillors, Neighbourhood Services, and Housing & Property Services staff which has been able to improve the way issues of local importance are understood and managed

We have expanded our social media presence including opening Facebook and Twitter accounts as a way to reach out to more and different tenants

We have promoted the Environmental Improvement Project in which Tenant Panel members have been involved in the decision making for allocating budgets to community projects and improvements

We have developed action plans for each of the sheltered schemes in relation to improving participation, especially in light of the changes that have been implemented as part of the Tier II redesign.

3.10. However in June 2014 the Tenants Panel Executive, selected by the wider Panel, decided to temporarily suspend activity so that the Housing and Property Services redesign could be implemented and new working arrangements embedded. As the redesign has progressed, a discussion with the Executive of the Tenants' Panel in October 2014 concluded that a fresh approach to participation was required with a more localised approach, including meet and greets and localised newsletters would be better.

3.11. This has been taken on board in designing the new Housing and Property Services Priority Action Plan - including an end user orientated Performance Management Framework - that has a clear focus on how people find, secure and enjoy their homes regardless of tenure.

3.12. In addition, the Housing and Property Services team has, as part of its recent redesign, increased its capacity to encourage and respond better to individual tenants. This is to allow for greater flexibility in the way tenants as individuals can contribute to the way the Council operates as a landlord. Examples include the introduction of bi-annual tenancy visits and localised newsletters and greater support for the successful programme of Estate Walkabouts.

3.13. The Working Group considered that bringing together the work of the Tenants' Panel within the Housing Advisory Group presented an excellent opportunity to make sure that tenants can be better involved in working alongside Councillors and Officers to shape and improve the design and delivery of housing services.

3.14. The Housing Advisory Group provides a further opportunity to move forward the way tenants can better contribute to the way all the Council's housing services are shaped and delivered. Further discussions with the Tenants' Panel on how the work it does can best be provided in the context of, subject to approval of the recommendations in this report, there being in place Housing Advisory

Group with tenant representation will take place before the first meeting of the Housing Advisory Group.

- 3.15. The tenant representatives for the Housing Advisory Group will be selected by tenants themselves. An invitation will be sent to all tenants to put themselves forward for the position and then all tenants will be invited to select the tenants that they would wish to be represented by. This gives the existing involved tenants the opportunity to put themselves forward but also allows other tenants to become involved with shaping and improving the service delivered by Housing & Property Services.
- 3.16. The Interim Housing & Property Board (IHPB) was set up following the implementation of Housing Revenue Account Self Financing. The *raison d'être* of the IHPB is set out at Appendix C.
- 3.17. The IHPB is chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Housing & Property Services and membership is comprised of: Portfolio Holder for Finance, the Shadow Portfolio Holders for Housing & Property Services, a Tenants Panel Representative, Head of Housing & Property Services, Housing Strategy and Development Manager and the Housing Revenue Account Principal Accountant.
- 3.18. The Working Group considered that the IHPB is too narrowly focussed on financial matters, that its membership is not wide enough to facilitate effective engagement and involvement of Councillors with the Housing & Property Service and that there are no links from this group to the wider Member body.
- 3.19. The Working Group view is that the Housing Advisory Group should absorb the functions of the IHPB that are still relevant so that the Housing Advisory Group has an all-encompassing view of housing and property services.
- 3.20. Bringing together into the Housing Advisory Group the IHPB and the Tenants' Panel will create a single, all embracing body able to make a better, more informed contribution to the way the Council develops and provides housing services. Such a rationalisation will avoid the risk of any organisational confusion that may arise from having a number of advisory bodies and the duplication and inefficiency that would be created by the servicing of separate governance groups.

4. Policy Framework

- 4.1. The Housing Advisory Group may impact upon the Council's approach to the way it operates in respect of the discharge of its housing duties and responsibilities and achieving its strategic objectives as set out on the Housing strategy 2014-17. This is because the Housing Advisory Group would allow for a wider range of contributions to be made to the development of policy and practice which can then be taken into account by the Executive during its deliberations and decision making.
- 4.2. The Housing Advisory Group will be able to contribute to the delivery of the Councils Fit for the Future (FFF) corporate strategy through shaping policy and practice which is targeted at improving services for customers and achieving balanced budgets through stronger oversight of resources.
- 4.3. The Housing Advisory group will play a role in addressing the need to improve the communication between Housing and Property services and Members and residents. It will add to and complement other work already under way to raise

the quality of communications by Housing and Property Services through the Priority Action Plan and Performance Management Framework. The Priority Action Plan and Performance Management Framework will enable to service to review and monitor its performance against key objectives as set out in the 2014-17 Housing Strategy.

5. Budgetary Framework

- 5.1. There will be no budgetary implications in establishing the Housing Advisory Group. The ongoing administrative support for the Housing Advisory Group to operate can be undertaken within existing resources.

6. Risks

- 6.1. The primary risks are as follows:

Risk	Mitigation
Perception that concerns persist about lack of engagement opportunities for Members in the Council's housing role	Regular updates to the Executive on the work of the Housing Advisory Group
	More housing and property related content in Core Brief
	Encourage Members to regularly consult the Priority Action Plan (available on the Intranet)
Possible confusion over the future respective roles of the Executive, Portfolio holders and members of the Housing Advisory Group	Briefing to all Members of the role of the Housing Advisory Group
	Targeted and focused communications strategy explaining the way the Housing Advisory Group works
Tenants do not feel adequately represented on the Housing Advisory Group	The Housing Advisory Group to consider how to make sure that the tenant members are representative of a wide body of tenants and tenant interests.
There is insufficient interest from tenants to be members of the Housing Advisory Group.	The inclusion of the Housing Advisory Group and the existing Tenants Panel executive in decision how we select the tenant representatives will assist in ensuring that the process is fair and transparent.
	A publicity campaign will take place to promote the opportunity and gain interest from the wider tenant's body.

7. Alternative Option(s) considered

- 7.1. The Executive could suggest an alternative terms of reference that it considers appropriate. The Constitution Working Party, along with the Housing & Property Services Portfolio Holder and Head of Service have worked together to reach agreement on how the group will operate to meet the objectives as set out in the original Council motion. The proposed Terms of Reference are felt to fulfil those objectives.

- 7.2. The Executive could decide that the IH&PB should be retained. However, the Housing Advisory Group will absorb the functions previously delivered by the board. In addition by retaining the two bodies could create duplication and inefficiencies.

Appendix A –Housing Advisory Group Terms of Reference

1. Purpose

- 1.1.** The purpose of the Housing Advisory Group (HAG) is to consider and advise Housing & Property Services on policy and practice relating to the way the Council discharges its duties and responsibilities.

2. Role

- 2.1.** The HAG will help shape and influence policy and practice across the whole portfolio of Housing & Property Services activity.
- 2.2.** The HAG will provide an opportunity for Members and officers to share their experiences of receiving and providing services to inform and shape service development and delivery.
- 2.3.** The HAG will provide an opportunity for Members to feed into service development and delivery the knowledge, experience and proposal they receive from constituents.
- 2.4.** The HAG will allow the opportunity for all Ward members, through the elected members sitting on HAG, to have a role in shaping and influencing policy development and delivery.
- 2.5.** The HAG will provide support and advice as necessary to inform Performance and Budget Management of Housing & Property Services

3. Operational

- 3.1.** The HAG will meet four times a year. Additional meetings may be held as necessary.
- 3.2.** The HAG will be chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Housing & property Services and membership will consist of:
 - ▽ Ten Councillors allocated by the group leaders on a proportionate basis (including the portfolio holder).
 - ▽ Up to three tenant representatives – selection to be determined by the tenants.
- 3.3.** Four councillors will form a quorum at each HAG meeting.
- 3.4.** The Head of Housing & Property Services and the Housing Strategy and Development Manager will not form part of the Housing Advisory Group but will attend each meeting.
- 3.5.** Responsibility for servicing the board sits with the Housing Strategy and Development Team.

- 3.6.** The attendance of other Councillors, staff members or third parties will be by agreement in advance with the chair.

Appendix B – Motion Passed by Council June 2014

The notice of motion passed by Council, in June 2014, was as follows:

“This Council regrets that, under the current committee structure, the provision of Housing Services has become remote from elected members. It also recognises that provisions in the Localism Act provide greater flexibility for the Council to determine its own committee structure.

This Council calls upon the Chairman of the District Council, as custodian of the Constitution, to bring forward proposals for members to consider at the November 2014 Council meeting to amend the constitution to enable the introduction, at the earliest possible opportunity, of a new Housing Committee.”

Appendix C – Raison D’etre of the Interim Housing & Property Board

1. To oversee the service wide governance review and propose preferred governance model to Executive for Executive Approval.
 - a. To ensure the governance review meets as far as possible elected member and customer expectations including best practice
2. Oversee the development of the emerging Housing & Property Services Strategy
3. Until the governance review is implemented to direct the services affairs including the following functions predominantly in relation to the Landlord Service:
 - a. The Interim Housing & Property Board has no delegated authority. All decisions will be made by Executive and the board will provide a mechanism to provide cross party support.
 - b. High level monitoring of performance across key business areas
 - c. To create the structures and environment for risk management to operate effectively, satisfying itself that risk is managed effectively
 - d. To agree interim governance structure and key business areas
 - e. To receive high level exception reports on business area performance
 - f. To manage the Interim Housing & Property Board Project Plan