

<b>Committee(s)</b>	<b>Dated:</b>
Housing Management and Almshouses Sub	18/01/2016
<b>Subject:</b> The City of London Housing Tenants' Agreement and Handbook	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Director of Community & Children's Services	<b>For Decision</b>

### Summary

This report, which is for decision, presents Members with the updated City of London Housing Tenants' Agreement and Handbook.

The document has been updated to reflect changes in legislation and government guidance such as the Localism Act and welfare reform policy, to bring it in line with developing local housing management practice, policy and procedures, and to reflect the City's refreshed Allocations Scheme.

The main updates relate to the additional types of tenancies the City of London can offer and revert to, welfare reform and in particular universal credit, sheltered housing and the revised Complaints and Pets policies.

Tenant members of the Housing User Board were consulted during November 2015. Responses received support the updates proposed.

The Tenants' Agreement and Handbook are 'live' documents, which are subject to changes in legislation and policy. It will need to be revised later in 2016 to take into account the changes proposed in the new Housing Bill. As there is no timescale yet for those changes to be adopted, we are presenting the current changes now, but will bring more revisions back to Members as the new measures are confirmed.

### Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Approve the updated City of London Housing Tenants' Agreement and Handbook.

## **Main Report**

### **Background**

1. The previous Tenants' Agreement and Handbook was approved by Members and formally introduced to City of London Housing Revenue Account tenants in August 2000. The document was subsequently revised and updated in September 2006.
2. The Tenants' Agreement and Handbook provides comprehensive and detailed information about being a City of London tenant as well as providing useful information about keeping a home in a good and safe condition. It also signposts tenants to whom they should contact if they should experience a problem or difficulty.

### **Current Position**

3. To reflect changes in legislation and government guidance such as the Localism Act and welfare reform policy, to bring it in line with developing local housing management practice, policy and procedures, and to reflect the City's refreshed Allocations Scheme, it has been necessary to update the document further.
4. A consultation exercise was carried out during November 2015 on the proposed updates. All tenant members of the Housing User Board were e-mailed the Agreement and invited to take part by commenting on the document. The Agreement was available on-line, with paper copies being sent on request.
5. Responses received during the consultation were complimentary of the Agreement and supportive of the proposed updates. Some of these responses suggested further revisions. Where practicable, these revisions have been incorporated in the updated Agreement.

### **Changes to the Agreement and Handbook**

6. By far the most significant changes to the Agreement are those contained within the section on Rent, Universal Credit and Housing Benefit. This section has been updated to reflect the changes made by the 2012 Welfare Reform Act.
7. From March 2015, Universal Credit started to replace a wide range of benefits and tax credits for people of working age. It is a single, monthly payment that includes help with a tenant's rent and which is paid direct to the individual claimant.
8. Universal Credit brings together six benefits and tax credits and replaces them with a single monthly payment. It is replacing the following:
  - Income based Jobseekers Allowance;
  - Income related Employment and Support Allowance;

- Income Support;
- Child Tax Credit;
- Working Tax Credit;
- Housing Benefit.

9. Changes have also been made to the section on Sheltered Housing. Whilst not driven by any Acts, legislation or guidance, this section has been updated to reflect local housing management good practice, policy and procedures within our sheltered schemes.

10. In a limited number of circumstances the City may now offer a Flexible Tenancy to new tenants or a Demoted Tenancy to existing tenants.

11. A Flexible Tenancy can be offered for a fixed-term period following an introductory tenancy. The City supports the limited use of fixed-term flexible tenancies where they are appropriate to local or scheme-based approaches. Examples of circumstances in which fixed-term, flexible tenancies may be offered include:

- schemes targeting low income households in employment;
- schemes linked to a specific support programme;
- properties that are only available for a limited period such as those subject to major works or demolition;
- some new developments using a local lettings policy to achieve one or more of the objectives for their use set out in the City of London Allocations Policy;
- where this is a condition of a grant received from the Greater London Authority.

12. If a secure tenant engages in anti-social or illegal behaviour, we may apply to the court to 'demote' their tenancy. A Demoted Tenancy is similar to an introductory tenancy. If there are any further problems with the tenancy then we may take action to evict the tenant from their home subject to the right of the tenant to seek a review of this decision. If 12 months pass without any further action being taken against the tenant they will automatically become a secure tenant again.

13. Other changes include reference to the new Complaints and Pets Policies endorsed last year by your Committee and more general amendments to reflect other housing management guidance and good practice.

Table of changes

Previous Agreement	Proposed Agreement
<p><u>Tenancy Agreement.</u></p> <p>Reference only to Introductory, Secure and Non-secure tenancies</p>	<p><u>Tenancy Agreement.</u></p> <p>Flexible and Demoted Tenancies have been added.</p>

<u>Rent and Housing Benefit</u>	<u>Rent, Universal Credit and Housing Benefit</u>  This section has been updated to reflect the changes made to personal benefits by the Welfare Reform Act 2012 and in particular the introduction of Universal Credit
<u>Services for the elderly and disabled people</u>	<u>Sheltered Housing</u>  This section has been rewritten and re-titled to reflect good management practice in sheltered housing.  Reference to disable decorations allowance has been moved to the Repairs and Maintenance section
<u>Code of Customer Care</u>  This section previously included the Complaints process	<u>Making a Complaint</u>  This is a new section specifically detailing the process by which residents can make a complaint
<u>Living with your Neighbours</u>  The department's Pets Policy was included in this section. The previous policy did not allow cats or dogs	<u>Living with your Neighbours</u>  This section now includes the revised Pets Policy, allowing up to 2 house cats

### **Corporate & Strategic Implications**

14. The proposed updates will help continue to deliver one of the five strategic priorities of the Department of Community and Children's Services. This is:

- Homes and Communities : Developing strong neighbourhoods and ensuring people have a decent place to live.

### **Resource Implications**

15. As a result of reproducing a document of this size there will be a small financial implication due to reprinting the Agreement and Handbook. Whilst every effort will be made to issue the Agreement electronically, it is inevitable that hard copies will be required by some new tenants. An estimated budget of £5000 will therefore be required. This will be met from local risk budgets.

## **Legal Implications**

16. The Comptroller and City Solicitor has been consulted in the preparation of this report and throughout the process of updating the Agreement, and has no further comment to make.

## **Conclusion**

17. This report presents the updated Tenants' Agreement and Handbook. The updates have been necessary as a result of changes in legislation, good practice and government guidance. These changes have been consulted upon and endorsed by the Housing User Board.

## **Appendices**

- Appendix 1 – Tenants' Agreement and Handbook - sent electronically by email to Members.

## **Robert Jacks**

Head of Estates – Housing and Neighbourhoods

T: 020 7332 1916

E: [robert.jacks@cityoflondon.gov.uk](mailto:robert.jacks@cityoflondon.gov.uk)