

Briefing Note for Housing Committee

At its meeting on 18 June 2014, Stroud Council Housing Forum (SCHF) asked that this briefing note should be prepared, summarising the main points of the discussion should be conveyed to the Housing Committee on 24 June 2014.

At the meeting of SCHF on 18 June 2014, the Forum was asked to confirm that it was satisfied that the proposed Tenant Photo Identity scheme to counter tenancy fraud, is of value in preventing, detecting and addressing tenancy fraud.

The Tenancy Enforcement Officer introduced the report detailing the proposed scheme for Tenant ID cards. The following points were made:

- A new Act of Parliament has been passed to prevent social housing fraud.
- SDC has therefore been considering the introduction of photo ID cards to be sure who is using Council housing.
- Close attention has been given to ensuring that tenants' data will be kept securely and in line with the Data Protection Act.
- Photo ID cards will not be forced on tenants who can choose to opt out of the scheme.
- If a tenant is unable to present their ID card they will not be denied any council housing service, but the fact that they are unable to present an ID card would be noted.
- Officers cannot take a centrally held paper ID record out of the office for data security reasons, so a central photo ID database is not the most useful tool for checking ID as officers cannot access it remotely. Ultimately it is hoped that secure PDAs would enable staff in the field to be able to access tenant ID information and ensure that housing is being used by the right people. However as yet, this technology is not readily available. Therefore the proposal for ID cards is a cost effective way of being able to check ID of tenants on the doorstep.

In response the concerns raised by the Forum in response to the proposed scheme are as follows:

- The level of tenant fraud within SDC is unknown.
- There was concern that council housing tenants were being singled out for ID cards, over and above the general population, for questionable benefits.
- The format of the card has not yet been decided. The forum was concerned that it was likely that names would be recorded alongside photographs on the ID card.
- Some tenants will inevitably lose the card and then be charged for a replacement.
- The Forum was concerned about data protection and would like tenants to be supplied with the Data Protection Act to understand its provisions.

Some Forum members are very opposed to photo ID cards due to concerns about the safety and security of vulnerable tenants. There was concern that ID cards could be stolen, or used as a device in a distraction burglary. For example a tenant who has been fraudulently asked for their ID card by someone posing as a housing

officer, may leave the door open whilst they go to find it, making themselves vulnerable to burglary.

In conclusion, the SCHF was unwilling to approve the report and proposals for a tenant photo ID scheme and wishes the Housing Committee to consider the objections of the SCHF outlined above.