



FED UPDATE

Following the Councils scrutiny meeting on the 17th October where our local Councillors rejected the Councils proposal to take back in house our housing, the Federation had been told nothing.

We invited Mike Gatrell, Chief Executive of South Essex Homes to our January meeting and he explained that South Essex Homes were having talks with the Council officers and future does not look so bleak .

The Council set up a Task and Finish Group comprising of nine Councillors taken from all parties to obtain the views of residents and to look at South Essex Homes future plans for new business.

Mike was confident that they can obtain more business and at the moment they do quite a lot of work for different Councils their new business team are very good and are working hard to achieve this goal.

Mike went on to say although they are looking at new business it will not affect the service you receive and the money earned will go towards improving your homes.

Mike and Phil Lyons Chair of South Essex Homes Board are both optimistic that a new contract with the Council can be achieved and praised both the Federation and residents for their support.

The Federation also invited Southend Borough Council's Counter Benefit Fraud Team to attend a meeting.

Two members from the team came along and explained that they now with the help of a Government fund they will be able to put more resources into benefit fraud. Thurrock Council have successfully returned fifty properties back on the housing list from tenants who had taken out tenancy agreements but never lived in the property just rented it out sometimes charging high rents. As from April 2013 these people can get a criminal record as well as being made to pay back the money and if it is a very large amount involved could also get a prison sentence. Southend are looking for a similar success, as the need for homes is greater than the stock on offer .

With the advent of the "Welfare Reform Bill" going live in April there will be a lot of

residents struggling, Phil Lyons Chair of South Essex Homes Board explained to the Federation that if residents are struggling please ring contact Revenue Services on **0800 0234 057** who will be able to advise you.

The Universal Credit Scheme is due to come in place in Southend in October this is where all your benefits are paid directly to you with one cheque. The staff are trying to contact everyone who is likely to be affected by this, they have devised a survey called "Help Us To Help You" if you have been missed please contact the Revenue Services Team.

None of these changes affect pensioners who are currently receiving state pension and other help like carers allowance and DLA also pension credit stays the same. The proposed £145 per week for pensioners which is due in is for people who are due to receive their pension in the coming year. Due to people having to work longer to receive their State Pension this system was brought in and will be implemented by age.

Call Customer Services on 0800833160 or contact the Citizens Advice Bureau if you would like further details of the changes.

Phil Warren came along to explain the Councils new policy on "Choice Based Lettings. As from the 1st May Any resident in band D will be considered as adequately housed and will no longer be able to bid.

We were assured that residents in this band have been contacted by letter and had until April 26th to reply. The Council say by doing away with band D this will potentially take 3000 residents of the waiting list which has just under 6000 people on it.

Under the Localism act Southend have taken the recommendation that anyone applying for housing must have Southend connections .

*If you
Currently
receive State
Pension at the
present there
will be no
change in any
Benefits*

Carol Thipthorp
Secretary STRF