

Meeting Cabinet
Portfolio Area Housing and Housing Development
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RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY AND FRAMEWORK

KEY DECISION

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1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to introduce a new Resident Engagement Strategy 2024-2027.
- 1.2 A Resident Engagement Framework has been developed with residents to inform how the Council will meet the aims and commitments of the draft Resident Engagement Strategy 2024-2027.
- 1.3 The report also includes a Scrutiny Implementation Plan, which outlines the Council's proposed approach to delivery in this key area of resident engagement and influence.
- 1.4 The report also highlights how the Council will be compliant with the new Consumer Standards, in particular the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard, as introduced by the Social Housing Regulation Act 2023.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Cabinet note the duty placed on the Council to provide a broad range of resident engagement and influencing opportunities that *'give genuine consideration of tenants' views and provides equitable opportunity to be involved in influencing and scrutinising strategies, policies and services and to foster a strong organisational culture of fairness, courtesy and respect where tenants are listened to and that they trust their landlord.*
- 2.2 To acknowledge previous resident engagement delivered through the Council's Co-operative Neighbourhood Model.
- 2.3 That the draft Resident Engagement Strategy 2024-2027, as seen at Appendix A is approved and adopted.
- 2.4 That delegated authority be given to the Strategic Director (RP) after consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing to approve the Resident Framework of Engagement and the Scrutiny Implementation Plan after further consultation with residents. Appendix C and Appendix D.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Following a review of tenant involvement in 2020/21, a Tenant and Resident Involvement Strategy report was approved by the Executive in June 2021, that proposed new arrangements for ensuring that Stevenage residents had a range of opportunities to participate in the management of their homes and neighbourhoods.
- 3.2 The report was in response to the Social Housing White Paper (SHWP), **A Charter for Social Housing Residents** that was published in November 2020 and set out key measures to deliver transformational change for residents and to implement a new regulatory framework to ensure social housing landlords could be held to account. This was following the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower in 2017 and other high-profile events.
- 3.3 Recommendations included using the Co-operative Neighbourhoods operating model as a vehicle to deliver meaningful engagement with residents of the Councils social housing based on 'engaging, listening and acting' and included a revised scrutiny model and a new participation and engagement framework for residents living in homes provided by Stevenage Borough Council.
- 3.4 The Tenant and Resident Involvement Strategy report also referenced an independent review undertaken by TPAS¹ in 2020 which recommended that scrutiny reviews took place in a more dynamic manner and to disband the existing customer scrutiny panel, which presented a number of challenges as the number and diversity of individual tenants was limited as well as;
 - Existing structures for customer scrutiny demanded a term of 3 years commitment from residents, with a significant time investment required to undertake scrutiny reviews. This was also identified as a challenge in recruiting new members.

¹ A nationally respected organisation that works with tenants and landlords across the country to improve resident engagement.

- Digital platforms had not been developed to encourage a more diverse range of tenants and residents actively engaging with the council in a more convenient manner.
 - Consultations had often been narrow in scope and did not broaden to consider wider neighbourhood issues for tenants and leaseholders.
- 3.5 Successful resident related engagement and scrutiny has taken place within this wider co-operative approach often on a case-by-case basis, with recent work including the development of the new Allocation Policy, Build a Better Bedwell Community Project and the Housing Repairs Improvement Project. With engagement and involvement also influencing and framing the Council's approach to improving safety in high rise and sheltered blocks, block improvements and garden improvements in Sheltered Housing Schemes.
- 3.6 The Council also secured funding from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to support innovative methods of engagement which targeted over 3500 households, 24% of whom were Council tenants. Residents provided feedback on the area in which they lived and included how we tackle graffiti, enhancement of community facilities and walkway maintenance. This has helped to shape neighbourhood priorities and targeted activities and residents have been kept updated through digital neighbourhood newsletters.
- 3.7 Feedback is also obtained through a range of perception and user surveys including those for ASB, Domestic Abuse, Sheltered Schemes, and property works, and these are used to inform and develop services, along with learning from complaint handling and wider community engagement.
- 3.8 In relation to scrutiny, the Council also trialled a successful bootcamp style scrutiny event and attracted over 50 tenants and 10 leaseholders, many of whom had not engaged with the council before. This event was effective and drew a diversity of resident voices and saw a partnership approach in terms of facilitation across the Housing and Community Development teams.
- 3.9 The Tenant and Resident Involvement Strategy Report to the Executive in June 2021 recommended that a co-operative customer scrutiny model for housing functions that mirrored the successful bootcamp approach should be adopted. Due to Covid 19, this was difficult to establish as it highlighted digital exclusion issues as alternative virtual meeting arrangements were not a possibility for a number of involved tenants and residents.
- 3.10 Member led scrutiny has been taking place as part of the work programme of the Community Select Committee, including on void management, responsive repairs and damp and mould, which included resident voice. However, one of the key priorities of the Strategy is to ensure resident-led scrutiny is embedded into the Council's engagement framework and can be facilitated in collaboration with Member-led scrutiny.
- 3.11 The Social Housing Regulation Act 2023 has since introduced updated Regulatory Consumer Standards that were published in February and came into

effect on 1st April 2024. The Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard places obligations on the Council to demonstrate that it:

- Treats residents with fairness and respect.
- Considers the diverse needs of residents and take action to deliver fair and equitable outcomes in relation to the housing and landlord services it provides.
- Engages with residents, taking their views into account when making decisions about how landlord services are delivered.
- Communicates and provides information on what tenants can expect from the Council and how to hold their landlord to account.
- Collects and provides performance information to support effective scrutiny.
- Ensures complaints are addressed fairly, effectively and promptly.

3.12 The draft Resident Engagement Strategy 2024-2027 and supporting documents have been developed to ensure that the Council can meet the duties placed upon it by the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH), which is to deliver effective engagement and to be able to demonstrate that residents have a range of meaningful opportunities to scrutinise, influence and shape the services that they receive.

4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED ACTIONS AND OTHER OPTIONS

4.1 The RSH's Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard places significantly enhanced expectations on social landlords. Social Housing Providers must demonstrate genuine consideration of tenant's views and take steps to ensure that all tenants have an equitable opportunity to be involved in influencing and scrutinising strategies, policies and services and to foster a strong organisational culture of fairness, courtesy and respect where tenants are listened to and that they trust their landlord.

4.2 Specific requirements include:

- Understanding the diverse needs of residents and their aspirations
- Offering a wide range of meaningful opportunities to influence and scrutinise landlord strategies, policies and services.
- Adopting a tailoring approach to delivering services including tenant engagement.
- Providing tenants with accessible information about landlord services and how to access them and standards of safety and the quality that residents can expect from their homes and communal spaces.
- How landlords meet regulatory requirements and legal obligations in connection with homes and services.
- Providing information on how landlords are performing and acting to improve services.
- Demonstrating that residents' views have been taken into account to improve landlord services and the outcomes for residents.

- Providing accessible information on the landlords' approach to complaint handling.
 - Landlords referring themselves to the RSH where they are not complaint or may become non-compliant with the consumer standards.
- 4.3 The RSH sets standards that all social housing landlords must meet. If the standards are not met, the RSH can take action. In order to demonstrate compliance with the standards, the RSH has imposed a set of Tenant Satisfaction Measures which are a core set of performance indicators that the Council must publish annually. There are 12 tenant perception measures and 10 management information measures.
- 4.4 In order to demonstrate further compliance with the standards, the RSH will also conduct on-site inspections of landlords to gain assurances that social landlords are compliant with the Regulatory reforms.
- 4.5 Three of the twelve satisfaction measures relate specifically to resident engagement and include perception on whether landlords are listening and acting on tenants' views, keeping tenants informed and treating tenants fairly and with respect.
- 4.6 Through the Tenant Satisfaction Surveys that officers conducted during 2023-2024 residents have told the Council that they feel that they are treated fairly and with respect but that as a landlord it needed to do more to ensure that they are satisfied, are better informed and to demonstrate that the Council listens and acts on what they have said.
- 4.7 The draft Resident Engagement Strategy 2024-2027, as seen in Appendix A sets out the Councils vision to become an exemplary landlord and to deliver against the obligations set out within the social housing regulatory framework and new Consumer Standards.
- 4.8 It is important to the Council that it builds trust by sharing information, tackling the stigma of social housing and putting it right when things go wrong. The future vision of the strategy includes:
- Building upon the Council's Co-operative Neighbourhood's engagement model but at a deeper level specific to social housing residents. This is to provide a high-quality housing service that meets the aspirations and changing needs of tenants and leaseholders and wider communities.
 - Engaging with more residents by knowing who they are, removing barriers and creating opportunities to feedback their views and experiences in ways that suit their needs and preferences.
 - Offering a wider framework of meaningful opportunities to scrutinise and influence the delivery of our housing policies and services.
 - Meeting the Regulatory Standards and key legislation on engaging and listening to residents to provide exemplary services and safe homes and neighbourhoods.
 - Improving the way the Council communicates and interacts with residents by adopting a clear communications plan and developing and using digital platforms.
- 4.9 As a Co-operative Council it is important that the Resident Engagement Strategy 2024-2027 is delivered in synergy with the Co-operative Neighbourhood Model to ensure that the Council continues to support local communities and neighbourhoods and to ensure it reflects local priorities across all workstreams.

4.10 The proposed strategy sets the following 5 key commitments to ensure that residents are at the heart of service delivery and that it can demonstrate residents' influence and the outcomes for them:

4.11 ***Enhancing the value of resident engagement***

- Creating a culture where residents are actively encouraged to be involved in scrutinising and influencing the shape of services to increase satisfaction.
- Identify which groups of residents are not currently sharing their ideas and experiences and identify how the Council can encourage them to become involved.
- Provide a menu of opportunities for residents to engage with the Council and influence what the organisation delivers.
- Provide skills, training and resources so residents get the most from engagement opportunities and to deliver maximum impact.
- Consult at least once every three years on the best way to involve residents in the scrutiny and governance of housing services.
- Tell residents what happens or changes because of their feedback, input and influence. 'You said, we did'.

4.12 **Ensuring more effective scrutiny**

- Commit to formalising resident scrutiny arrangements by seeking to re-establish a Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Panel.
- Train and develop residents to undertake effective scrutiny and use TPAS as an independent friend of the Scrutiny Panel to help them form their approach.
- Put in place arrangements to co-ordinate scrutiny functions between Member scrutiny and that which is resident led.
- Provide wider opportunities for 'boot camp' style scrutiny on an ad-hoc basis to develop services more quickly.
- Develop a forward plan of scrutiny that is agreed on an annual basis, and which reflects service review delivery and housing transformation workstreams.

4.13 **Understanding more about our residents**

- Build a clearer picture of who lives in council owned homes and what their needs and aspirations are for the housing service.
- Find out how residents prefer to be contacted and the easiest ways for them to get in touch and be kept informed.
- Use data capture, complaints, compliments, transactional surveys and consultation to help us better understand and use the information from tenant feedback to improve and enhance services.
- Promote equality and equal relationships within the Council's housing service to remove barriers where they exist.
- Move beyond the mechanics of engagement to focus on the outcomes of influence and what the positive impacts of change has meant to Stevenage residents.

4.14 **Improved communication**

- Enhance communication to keep tenants up to date on what matters to them, using a range of approaches tailored to tenant preferences.
- Make better use of social media and on-line methods to make it easier for residents to have their say.
- Recognise that whilst online methods will be a preference for some residents that in many cases a phone call, meeting or face to face discussion will be more helpful and appropriate.
- Publish clear information on the roles and responsibilities of senior staff, including named people who are responsible for ensuring legal and regulatory standards are met.
- Provide fair and easy access to our services and keep residents up to date on their enquiries.
- Publish clear service standards, policies and tenant information and what to do if residents do not agree with decisions.
- Engage with residents to produce to an annual report which will give details on the impact of resident engagement, how income has been spent, resident satisfaction and performance.
- Share performance data and how the Council is doing as a landlord, including Tenant Satisfaction Measure results and what is to be improved, as well as how the organisation learns from complaints.

4.15 Celebrate our neighbourhoods

- Provide local engagement opportunities, including officers speaking with tenants in their homes and neighbourhoods through tenancy and community visits and co-operative neighbourhood events.
- Working in partnership with residents, the wider community, our Councillors and other partners and community groups to set priorities for our neighbourhoods that improve and shape the areas that they live in.
- Maximise funding opportunities to deliver neighbourhood improvements and address social, economic and health inequalities, such as our 'Build a Better Bedwell' initiative.
- Create opportunities for Neighbourhood Champions, Resident Forums and Scrutiny Groups to come together to co-design services and implement tenant-led activities.
- Provide drop-in sessions at local venues for residents to meet their Co-operative Neighbourhood team on a regular basis.

4.16 The Strategy will be underpinned by a Resident Engagement Framework, as seen in Appendix C, that has been co-designed with residents with the help of TPAS – the tenant engagement experts – through a process of discovery, design and delivery. The Council is also engaging TPAS to commit to more formal resident scrutiny arrangements and to help us develop a new and independent approach, as outlined in the Scrutiny Implementation Plan at Appendix D.

4.17 It is recommended that delegated authority is given to the Strategic Director (RP) after consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing to approve the final Resident Engagement Framework and the Scrutiny Implementation Plan after further consultation with residents.

- 4.18 The effectiveness of the Strategy will be measured by a new set of key performance measures and by implementing an action plan that will undergo regular review and challenge by the Executive Housing Work Group as well as any formal residents groups that are established through the framework.
- 4.19 Given the new Regulatory requirements, the strategy proposes that the Council commits greater focus and resources to evolve and strengthen specific engagement with tenants and leaseholders to ensure their influence can be demonstrated and measured, whilst working in synergy with its Co-operative Neighbourhood model to bring communities and neighbourhoods together.
- 4.20 It is proposed that two new posts are created, in order for the Resident Engagement Strategy 2024-2027 and supporting framework to be implemented effectively, the resourcing requirements associated to the new roles is set out within the 4th Quarter Revenue Monitoring Report 2023/24, which is being considered alongside this report at the July 2024 Cabinet Meeting.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1.1 There will be a financial impact associated with the delivery of this strategy as the Council will need to consider additional resources and capacity to ensure that we effectively deliver the priorities as identified within the strategy and are compliant with the Consumer Standards. Staffing requirements for 2023/24 and ongoing are included within the 4th Quarter Revenue Monitoring Report 2023/24. Any additional resourcing requirements linked to the delivery of the emerging engagement framework will be incorporated within the HRA Medium Term Financial Strategy that will be presented to the Cabinet in October 2024.

5.2 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.2.1 The legal implications of been non-compliant with the Social Housing Regulations are outlined within the body of the report.

5.3 EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.3.1 There are positive implications for residents of social housing and wider communities in that understanding the diverse needs of residents and their aspirations will help to inform how we deliver services to meet their evolving needs and deliver fairer and more equitable outcomes. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed, as seen in Appendix B and will be reviewed annually alongside an annual review of the engagement framework.

5.4 RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 5.4.1 There are reputational risks to the Council if it is unable to demonstrate that it is meeting the Consumer Standards.
- 5.4.2 The Council has an embedded approach to risk management that mitigates any adverse effect on delivery of the Council's objectives and internal control processes and provides good governance assurance.

5.5 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.5.1 There are no direct climate change implications arising from this report.

5.6 OTHER CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.6.1 Implementing the priorities and improvement activity outlined in this report may impact on the development of future policy or procedure, which will be monitored through the formal policy/procedure sign-off process via the Senior Leadership Team (SLT).

6 BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- Co-operative Tenant and Resident Engagement Strategy 2021
- Working Co-operatively to give Residents a Voice
- Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard
- Tenant Satisfaction Measures Standard

7 APPENDICES

Appendix A: draft Resident Engagement Strategy 2024-2027

Appendix B: Equality Impact Assessment

Appendix C: draft Resident Engagement Framework

Appendix D: draft Scrutiny Implementation Plan