

Resident (Tenant and Leaseholder) Engagement Strategy

Housing Committee Tuesday, 24 January 2023

Report of: Head of Housing

Purpose: For decision

Publication status: Unrestricted

Wards affected: All

Executive summary:

At Tandridge we want to improve our approach to listening to and working with tenants and leaseholders. The proposed Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy will provide an additional mechanism for continuous service improvements, with the aim of increasing tenant and leaseholder satisfaction. It will set out a range of methods to improve meaningful engagement and introduce challenging targets against which delivery can be measured.

This report supports the Council's priority of:

Building a better Council

Creating the homes, infrastructure and environment we need

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Recommendation to committee:

- a) That Members approve the request for Officers to consult on the Engagement Strategy and Action Plan for tenants and leaseholders as set out in **appendix A** for a six-week period.
- b) That each political group, nominate a member to attend and participate in the Engagement Working Group to review performance.

Reason for recommendation:

To promote a culture that values tenant and leaseholder engagement and places the voices of our customers at the centre of strategic decision making, it is proposed that Officers will consult on a draft Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy.

The Social Housing Regulation Bill will further strengthen the requirement for landlords to listen to tenants through effective engagement. It is anticipated that the Regulator of Social Housing will require landlords to show how they have considered ways to improve tenant engagement and to report against a series of new key performance indicators to include tenant satisfaction with engagement.

An Engagement Strategy with clear objectives and measurable targets is expected to help identify and address weaknesses in service delivery, providing an additional mechanism for continuous and challenging service improvements. This in turn will lead to increased customer satisfaction.

Introduction and background

- 1 The Regulator of Social Housing requires landlords to ensure that tenants are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in the development of policies and decision making. The Social Housing White paper, which informs the upcoming Social Housing Regulation Bill was published in November 2020 and outlines proposals to further strengthen the consumer standard and to require landlords to listen to tenants through effective engagement. It is anticipated that registered social landlords will be required to demonstrate they have sought out and considered ways to improve tenant engagement and tailored their engagement for their local circumstances. Additionally, better engagement should enable the concerns of leaseholders to be heard. A measure on respectful and meaningful resident engagement is expected in the new suite of performance indicators being developed by the regulator, along with proposed satisfaction measures on repairs, safety, complaints, and neighbourhood management. They should include both objective quantitative measures and tenant perception measures.
 - 1.1 Demonstrating a commitment to listening to tenants and leaseholders and evidencing how their views have been taken into account is expected to increase satisfaction. There is a strong business case for meaningful engagement with tenants and leaseholders as the information obtained leads to targeted investment, more effective processes, efficiency savings, better services, increased satisfaction and motivated staff, all part of a cycle of continuous improvement.
 - 1.2 Traditional forms of involvement have tended to result in a 'one size fits all' approach that fails to gather useful data and can be expensive for the landlord to administer, with few tangible outcomes. The Engagement Strategy is intended to provide a framework in which a range of methods are used to engage with specific groups of residents to meet a defined objective.

The proposed strategy

- 2 The draft Engagement Strategy can be found at Appendix A. The objective of the Strategy is to set out the Council's commitment to listening to tenants and leaseholders and to taking account of their views by:
 - Providing a range of opportunities to engage, with appropriate support systems to meet the diverse needs of tenants and leaseholders and by removing barriers to engagement.
 - Including methods to encourage as many tenants and leaseholders as possible to participate, particularly from groups who are currently underrepresented.
 - Improving insight into tenants and leaseholders' experience of our services.
 - Demonstrating that we welcome feedback, sharing results and giving examples of where we have learnt from engagement and made changes.
 - Setting out training for Officers and recruitment of Officers to be engagement champions.
 - Creating opportunities for tenants and leaseholders to be empowered and aim for the co-creation of policies and services.
 - Measuring specific outcomes with targets for example increase in profiling data, feedback provided, evidence of service improvements initiated etc.
- 2.1 Performance against these targets will be reported quarterly to the Working Group and then more fully to the Council's Housing Committee as part of the annual review of the implementation of our strategy.
- 2.2 Integral to ensuring the Strategy is fit-for-purpose will involve the Working Group assessing the current performance of the housing service and allowing future improvements to be captured. Benchmarking against other Surrey Districts and Boroughs will also be key to assessing our performance.
- 2.3 The Action Plan sets out the steps proposed to meet the Strategy objectives by 2025, to be implemented by a Working Group. Actions include:
 - Collect and refresh profiling data as part of investment in the IT system functionality and using all available interactions with customers for example Tenancy Audit visits and new tenant sign-up interviews.
 - Develop a menu of opportunities, with creative and appropriate use of methods, language and tools to form a clear view of our customers' priorities and our progress in addressing them.
 - Remove barriers to engagement, for example training to support digital uptake and by providing information in plain and appropriate language.

- Regular feedback to residents to demonstrate the value of their input, providing examples of where we have learnt from engagement and made changes, for example 'you said, we did.'
- 2.4 Recent service users will be encouraged to give feedback on their experience to enable the collection of good quality data on what is working well and what is not. Such surveys will increasingly use digital technology, but all engagement will be targeted and involve other methods including face-to-face conversations as appropriate.
 - 2.5 In addition to introducing a range of transactional surveys of customers using our housing services to identify our strengths and weaknesses, it is proposed to regularly carry out the industry-standard Satisfaction of Tenants and Residents (STAR) survey. Together this will track improvements to satisfaction ratings over time.
 - 2.6 It is anticipated that initiatives such as focus groups will provide insight into residents' priorities and views on how services are developing. A scrutiny panel will look at specific issues in more detail, examining evidence about service performance, making recommendations for service improvements and reviewing outcomes.
 - 2.7 Up-to-date contact information is vital to the success of these initiatives. Improved insight will promote effective targeting of communications including seldom heard groups and aid effective service planning by ensuring services are developed to meet the needs of tenants based on evidence rather than anecdote. The strategy will detail actions to identify and fill gaps in current contact and profiling data and ensure relevant data is kept accurate. As above this will be facilitated using all available interactions with customers for example tenancy audit visits and new tenant sign-up interviews.

Consultation and next steps

- 3.1 It is proposed that, subject to Committee approval, Officers will begin immediate consultation with stakeholders on the draft Engagement Strategy. This will include tenants, leaseholders, prospective tenants, staff, elected Members, other social landlords and tenants' organisations such as TPAS. Methods will include the Council's website, social media and the housing e-newsletter.
- 3.2 The strategy incorporating feedback from the consultation will be presented to this Committee for approval in March 2023 for immediate adoption. It is proposed to formally launch the Strategy in April, with correspondence being delivered to tenants and leaseholders soon after.

Resource implications/value for money

- 4 A key line of enquiry within the Housing Services Service Review being undertaken as part of the Future Tandridge Programme is to restructure the service to ensure compliance. As a result, a Resident Engagement Officer post has been created to lead on the delivery of this strategy and ensure compliance with the forthcoming Social Housing Regulation Bill.

- 4.1 The Resident Engagement Officer will be supported by other roles within housing such as Housing Officers, Scheme Co-Ordinators Visiting Officers and the repairs service. The Resident Engagement Officer will report to the Head of Housing and will play a key role in the newly developed Housing Leadership Team.

Key implications

Comments of the Chief Finance Officer

There are no additional revenue or capital financial implications of this report to either the general fund or the Housing revenue account. The costs will be officer time in managing and attending meetings regarding matters of housing management with both leaseholders and tenants.

Comments of the Head of Legal Services

The Council is obliged by section 105 of the Housing Act 1985 to consult with secure tenants on matters of housing management such as changes to policy and practices. This obligation is extended to introductory tenants by section 137 of the Housing Act 1996.

The feedback and involvement of tenants and leaseholders will be critical in shaping the priorities and actions in the Strategy and Action Plan.

The creation and implementation of a new Resident Engagement Strategy and Action Plan, will ensure social housing residents are safe in their homes, are able to assess the performance of the Council as landlord and seek redress through a formal complaint process where necessary. The Strategy and Action Plan will need to be evolving documents with elements of further feedback, monitoring and review to meet the requirements of the Social Housing Regulation Bill as it continues to progress through parliament.

Equality

In line with its Public Sector Equality Duty, the Council must consider the need to advance equality of opportunity. The proposed strategy will aim to extend meaningful engagement opportunities to groups who have previously been underrepresented. An Equality Impact Screening Assessment of the proposed draft strategy will be carried out.

The strategy will promote social inclusion. Data Protection issues will be addressed in line with legislation and best practice. A Communications Plan will be agreed, in consultation with the Head of Policy and Communications.

Climate change

There are no significant environmental / sustainability implications associated with this report.

Appendices

[Appendix 'A'] – Draft Resident (Tenant and Leasehold) Engagement Strategy

Background papers

None

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