



Environment, Housing & Regeneration Select Committee Review Scoping Report - 2021

Draft Title: “Our engagement with tenants and leaseholders - improving participation and feedback to improve service and satisfaction”

1. REVIEW OBJECTIVES

Aim and background to review

At its meeting on 08 June 2121, the Select Committee approved as its first review the topic of ‘how to improve feedback from residents of social housing’. Reference was also made to the use of the Better Neighbourhood Fund to improve estates. The Better Neighbourhood Fund is one of a number of ways that Council tenants and leaseholders can influence what takes place on Council housing estates.

This review will support the work of the Council’s landlord function to help shape and update its approach to tenant and leaseholder engagement. Last year’s Social Housing White Paper set out the areas that require more regulation with issues of safety and in the foreword, the Prime Minister stated how fundamental it is to ‘give social housing tenants a voice and ensure that it is listened to.’ The accompanying **Charter for Social Housing Residents**, which aims to “raise the standard of social housing and meet the aspirations of residents throughout the country,” set out the government’s [post Grenfell Tower] Regulatory vision for social housing.

As the work to support the aim of Regulatory compliance, including a ‘step change’ in approach to resident engagement, is at an early stage the Committee is in the unique position to help steer the future direction of the Council’s approach to tenant and leaseholder engagement. This can include direct feedback from residents along with

best practice and innovation identified from other local authorities which in turn will inform the resultant recommendations to Cabinet.

Terms of Reference

1. To understand Hillingdon's current engagement approach with tenants and leaseholders and the planned work programmes and activities that the Council engages with them on, e.g. Better Neighbourhood Fund.
2. To learn from residents of their experiences and interaction with the Council and their satisfaction;
3. To review other best practice and identify any improvement to tenant and leaseholder engagement and satisfaction going forward, including from any new legislation / regulation, e.g. the Charter for Social Housing Residents, and how the Council can best adapt to meet this;
4. To identify any gaps and opportunities to draw together different strands of activities by the Council to ensure the overall service we provide is one-stop, agile and responsive to the needs of tenants and leaseholders; and
5. To make practical, prudent recommendations to Cabinet from the Committee's findings.

2. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Key information and issues

Regulation & Engagement Team

The Team is currently made up of:

- 1 x FTE Regulations and Engagement Manager
- 2 x FTE Senior Customer Engagement Officer

Current approach to resident involvement and feedback

What we do

Customer engagement means talking to residents and using their views to improve services and includes:

- Telling people about services;
- Asking people for their views;
- Discussing issues and identifying priorities;
- Working together to improve and design services;
- Maintaining working relationship based on a partnership approach.

The Community Engagement Team are responsible for planning and coordinating consultation and engagement activity across the Council. This includes:

- Conferences, assemblies and forums;

- Focus and service user groups;
- Surveys;
- Impact assessments;
- Statutory and non-statutory consultation.

How services can be supported

Community engagement is a key activity for all services. Whether a service deals with external or internal customers, engagement can help to improve services and increase customer satisfaction by:

- Providing support and advice to teams to help plan and deliver engagement activity with their customers;
- Providing training and support for teams around specialist engagement, such as:
 - Holding in-depth interviews, face to face discussions and virtual meetings;
 - Designing and facilitating focus groups and forums;
 - Designing qualitative and quantitative surveys;
 - Analysing results of consultation.
- Coordinating engagement activity across the Council to avoid duplication of work and survey fatigue and ensure quality and consistency of engagement;
- Working with partners to share and promote best practice.

Business benefits

Using the Community Engagement Team to assist with engagement activity can provide the following business benefits:

- Improved value for money from customer engagement practice via:
- Improved identification of performance issues from the customer perspective;
- Improved identification and recording of service improvements as a result of customer engagement;
- Better quality decisions made by service teams;
- Efficiencies from reduced use of consultancy time due to improved staff skills on engagement.
- Consistent customer engagement practice across the organisation.
- Improved perception of departmental services.
- Demonstration of the Council's vision to put residents first.

Better Neighbourhood funding

Each year, the Council allocates £156,000 from the Housing Revenue Account 'Works to Stock' budget to facilitate council tenants and leaseholders, Ward Councillors, and Council employees suggesting improvements to their housing estate. This is known as the Better Neighbourhood Fund, managed by the Community Engagement & Town Centre Improvements (CETCI) Team.

Criteria

Anyone aged 18 or over living in Hillingdon Council owned accommodation can propose an improvement. Ward Councillors and Council officers are also welcome to submit a suggestion.

Better Neighbourhood funding is available for the provision of or enhancement to facilities on housing owned land or buildings and/or demonstrate that the majority of beneficiaries will be Council tenants and leaseholders.

The proposal should be for 'one-off' capital funding of up to £10,000 without creating any additional ongoing financial commitment from the Council.

Applications for funding must be supported by the majority of residents (those that are likely to be affected by the project). This must be evidenced in order to proceed fully and is the subject to leasehold consultation and recharging where appropriate.

The proposal must clearly demonstrate an improvement or benefit to the residents on the estate and support the Council's objectives. This could include proposals which support local priorities such as:-

- Protecting and enhancing the environment
- Promoting strong and active communities
- Making Hillingdon safer

Funding can also be paid as a direct grant to the tenant and resident associations who are fully constituted and hold a bank account.

Better Neighbourhood funding cannot be used for:

- Projects placing long term and additional financial demand on the Council;
- Alley gating private land, highways or public rights of way, or
- Installing new playgrounds

Applications will be considered by the Cabinet Member for Environment, Housing and Regeneration.

This information is set out for residents on the Council website at [Better Neighbourhood funding - Hillingdon Council](#).

Photographic examples of recent uses of the Better Neighbourhood Fund are attached as Appendix B.

Areas for improvement

Potential areas for improvement that the Committee may choose to focus on include:

- How can the current approach to engage with residents be improved?
- What role can the Better Neighbourhood Fund play in the wider engagement strategy as part of improving the quality and appearance of estate environments?
- How can a future engagement strategy 'reach out' to all sections of the tenant and leaseholder population, including 'harder to reach groups'.
- What is the role of new technology and the Council's digital offer to support efficiency of approach and maximise feedback?

Extract from Tenancy Services – Service Plan 2021/22

Work across Tenancy Services is already underway, as reflected in the Service Plan for 2021/22, in the wider context of engagement and involvement.

Objective	Task	Target
To be safe in your home	Develop and implement a [statutory] engagement strategy for residents in 'higher risk buildings'	Q4
To know how your landlord is performing	Produce and publish a 2020/21 Tenant & Leaseholder Annual Report	Q2
	Collate and submit 2020/21 HouseMark data	Q1
	Prepare for the implementation of [Draft] Tenant Satisfaction Measures to support compliance with the Charter for Social Housing Residents and set a baseline.	Q4
To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly	Introduce a documented approach to compliance with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code following the December '20 self-assessment.	Q2
	Ensure processes are in place to capture [draft] tenant satisfaction measures associated with complaints handling: and set a baseline.	Q4
To be treated with respect [backed by strong consumer regulation]	Self-assess services against the [new] Consumer Standards and accompanying Code of Practice	Q4
To have your voice heard by your landlord	Develop a tenant and leaseholder engagement strategy.	Q4
	Implement processes to Improve levels of customer insight across the	Q4

	managed housing stock which can be readily extracted and can contribute to service development and discussions on 'disproportionality'.	
	Develop a framework for consulting residents on health & safety.	Q4
	Introduce mechanisms so residents in 'higher risk buildings' can quickly, easily and effectively feedback any safety concerns.	Q4
	Implement a rolling programme of STAR surveys to inform changes to services and improvement.	Q4
	Test the 'new tenant experience' and bring forward rolling outcomes which improve the effectiveness of service delivery, positively impact on the concept of 'no surprises', support long term tenancy sustainment and capture 'satisfaction with the Allocations & Lettings process' [HouseMark]	Q4
	Formally capture and review customer insight on their experience of DA casework.	Q4
To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in	Identify a pilot estate and work with residents to scope the definition of a 'decent estate' and scope the extent of management and maintenance responses to achieve 'decent estate' compliance.	Q4
	Establish clear standards for the communal areas of estates and bring forward options and measures to demonstrate compliance with a 'decent estates' standard.	Q4
	Bring forward options and structures for tenants and leaseholders to influence investment decisions.	Q4
	Develop a pictorial based output standard for Caretaking Services and Green Spaces on housing estates.	Q4

	Explore the potential use of HouseMark photo book as an affordable solution to real-time, instant inspection reporting.	Q4
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Current data, best practice and research

Best practice is the most continuous effective way of engaging with customers locally to deliver an effective service, meet the needs of the business and evidence regulatory compliance. This may vary depending on the target audience and other key factors (i.e. cultural, religious beliefs, age, ethnic background or level of digital/online knowledge) Our aim is to work with the residents to provide bespoke service through co-production and co-regulation. Research shows that organisations tailor their approach to engagement based on common practices that can be applied locally but heavily based on the involvement of their customers and stakeholders.

An example of best practise approach is evidenced in the recent engagement activities carried out by the team in securing a Yes vote for the Hayes regeneration project. The outcome of the ballot highlights how effective our approach has been.

Customer Engagement Team is a member of the West London Resident Engagement Group (WLREG). The group brings together resident involvement/engagement practitioners based within the West London area to share good practice and identify opportunities for joint working.

Legislative / national context

Under section 105 of the Housing Act 1985 the Council has a legal obligation to consult with its secure tenants on matters of housing management such as changes to the management, maintenance, improvement or demolition of homes let by them, or changes in the provision of amenities. Under section 20 of the Landlord & Tenant Act 1985 as amended, the Council also has a legal obligation to consult with leaseholders regarding certain qualifying works and services where the Council intends to pass on the cost of works and services to leaseholders under the terms of their leases. These legal obligations should be seen as a statutory minimum. Moving forward the government has clear expectations regarding a 'step change in approach' which will see engagement and involvement as a 'golden thread' running through services delivered by social housing providers.

The policy paper 'The Charter for Social Housing Residents: Social Housing White Paper', published 17 November 2020, sets out the actions the government will take to ensure that residents in social housing are safe, are listened to, live in good quality homes, and have access to redress when things go wrong. The full document is linked within the 'background papers' section below.

Appendix A contains a summary of the White Paper prepared by the Housing Quality Network. An excerpt detailing the aims of the proposed charter is provided:

The stated aim of the new Charter for Social Housing Residents is to “raise the standard of social housing and meet the aspirations of residents throughout the country.”

The Government says it will strengthen the Regulator of Social Housing to create new consumer standards for landlords to be measured against. These appear to be in line with how the regulator measures governance and financial standards (G and V ratings). This will be monitored by a new ‘arm’ of the regulator which will “proactively regulate on consumer standards including quality of homes, repairs, meaningful engagement with tenants and complaints handling.” Inside Housing has highlighted that this was a role previously delivered by the Tenants Service Authority until it was scrapped in 2010.

The Housing Ombudsman will also get more powers on tackling complaints while the Decent Homes Standard will be reviewed.

The Charter covers seven key areas that social housing tenants should expect:

- 1. To be safe in your home. We will work with industry and landlords to ensure every home is safe and secure;*
- 2. To know how your landlord is performing, including on repairs, complaints and safety, and how it spends its money, so you can hold it to account;*
- 3. To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly, with access to a strong Ombudsman who will give you swift and fair redress when needed;*
- 4. To be treated with respect, backed by a strong consumer regulator and improved consumer standards for tenants;*
- 5. To have your voice heard by your landlord, for example through regular meetings, scrutiny panels or being on its Board. The Government will provide help, if you want it, to give you the tools to ensure your landlord listens;*
- 6. To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in, with your landlord keeping your home in good repair;*
- 7. To be supported to take your first step to ownership, so it is a ladder to other opportunities, should your circumstances allow.*

Connected work

The Council is now actively working on the development of its Housing Revenue Account [HRA] Business Plan. The HRA Business Plan is essentially the Council’s strategy for spending and borrowing; to maintain the stock, operate services for tenants and leaseholders and build new Council homes. As with any business plan it must show that the Council has clear proposals for achieving its objectives and that these are financially viable in the short, medium and longer term.

Typical sub-sections of the plan will include, but not be limited to:

- **Services for residents** including; tenants, leaseholders, sheltered tenants, extra care and community engagement

- **Looking after homes** – including an evidence-based investment strategy
- **Fire safety** – as a ‘standalone’ investment priority, perhaps alongside other compliance needs
- **Estate improvements** – recognising the extensive shared area investment needs of our estates
- **Resident participation and engagement** - to include resident oversight and scrutiny
- **Providing for new and existing communities** i.e. development and new build
- **Governance and monitoring**
- **Financial information and scenarios** [around HRA cashflows and borrowing]
- **Risk Management**

The Government and the Regulator of Social Housing expects Council’s to manage their HRA businesses using a 30-year Business Plan backed by an Asset Management Plan. These should be prepared in consultation with interested parties, especially tenants and leaseholders.

Executive Responsibilities

The Cabinet Member responsible is Councillor Eddie Lavery, Cabinet Member for Environment, Housing & Regeneration.

3. EVIDENCE & ENQUIRY

Lines of Enquiry

Members may wish to explore with potential witnesses what their experience has been of the way in which the Council has engaged and consulted with them regarding significant issues affecting their homes and where they live. This could include but not be limited to:

- The methods of obtaining views and feedback
- The ease of accessing engagement opportunities
- The way in which involvement and engagement was undertaken against the backdrop of covid-19 and social distancing rules
- Resident perceptions regarding the value the Council places on resident feedback and whether the Council ‘listens to’ and acts upon the views of residents

Potential witnesses

The Council has recently been engaging with a wide cross section of residents on two estates in Hayes [Hayes Town Centre and Avondale Drive] as part of its regeneration workstream. This recent and extensive programme of engagement culminated in a very positive turnout and ballot outcome. The next stage of the engagement process is to work with residents on more detail design matters.

Given the extent of this programme it would be timely and appropriate to bring forward two residents as potential witnesses who have been working closely with the Council as part of the consultation programme.

Surveys, site-visits or other fact-finding events

Potential 'Informal meeting with tenants'.

Future information that may be required

Further information may be identified as the review progresses.

4. REVIEW PLANNING & ASSESSMENT

Proposed timeframe & milestones for the review:

Meeting Date	Action	Purpose / theme	Witnesses / officers attending
22 July 2021	Agree Scoping Report	Information and analysis	
14 September 2021	Witness Session 1	Officer attendance - current service offering and future plans. Areas identified that require improvement / challenges to service	
13 October 2021	Witness Session 2	Feedback from current service users / residents Best practice / innovations identified from outside Council	
25 November 2021	De-brief and emerging findings	To discuss key findings and identify potential recommendations	
20 January 2022	Approval of draft final report	Proposals – agree recommendations and final draft report to Cabinet	

Resource requirements

None.

Equalities impact

TBC.

Background reading

[The charter for social housing residents: social housing white paper - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/the-charter-for-social-housing-residents)
(www.gov.uk)

Appendices

Appendix A - HQN Social Housing White Paper Summary Note

Appendix B – Examples of recent uses of the Better Neighbourhood Fund