

Our engagement with tenants and leaseholders - improving participation and feedback to improve service and satisfaction - 1st Witness Session

Committee name	Environment, Housing & Regeneration Select Committee
Officer reporting	Rod Smith – Residents Services
Papers with report	Appendix A - Current engagement framework with CET Appendix B - Options for engagement
Ward	All

HEADLINES

This report sets out the need for the Council's landlord service to have a documented involvement and engagement strategy for its tenants and leaseholders, and presents information to the Select Committee on the range of involvement and engagement options for consideration as part of its review.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Committee:

- 1. Note the requirement for the Council's landlord service to have a documented approach to tenant and leaseholder engagement under the Regulatory regime for social housing.**
- 2. Consider the potential range of options to include in a tenant and leaseholder involvement and engagement offer**
- 3. Following feedback from witnesses and Officers, make recommendations regarding the content of the Council's Tenant & Leaseholder Engagement Strategy**

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Introduction

The Council's landlord service is entering a new period of Regulatory scrutiny as set out in the 'Charter for Social Housing Residents; Social Housing White Paper' which was published in November 2020. The government's clear intention is to make effective use of the Regulator of Social Housing 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.

Ensuring that residents in social housing have a 'voice' and are listened to is seen as key. The government, through the Regulator of Social Housing, 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. To align itself with these expectations the Council is developing a 'Tenant & Leaseholder Engagement and Involvement Strategy'.

This presents the Environment, Housing & Regeneration Select Committee with an opportunity to shape the development of the Strategy at a very early stage.

Hierarchy of tenant & leaseholder engagement

Figure 1 below sets out a simple hierarchy of involvement across five distinct layers. It is important to recognise that approaches to engagement and involvement should not be a 'one size fits all' and as such accessible opportunities should be available to residents at a pace and level which they find meaningful and useful.

Figure 1 – Hierarchy of involvement



At the very base of the hierarchy is good quality and timely information. This may be enough to meet the needs of a wide group of residents, but it is important to note that the provision of this information is essentially 'one-way'.

Within this hierarchy, we currently produce the Tenants and Leaseholders Annual Report that informs how the council is performing as a landlord. We include messages on rent statements, direct mailing and also use our social media platforms including the website to share information. In line with the council's push towards digital inclusion, the aim is to continue to keep our residents informed and encourage participation to the level where they feel empowered to influence decisions and shape the services on offer.

Moving up the hierarchy, consultation necessitates the provision of information and feedback. At its most basic level, 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 are a statutory minimum. Consultation at this level, albeit basic, can clearly be extended and applied more widely.

Consultation in all cases stem from information received for feedback, especially where changes to services are being considered that will directly impact on our tenants and leaseholders. The council through its obligation carry out a number of statutory consultations, these include the Council's Annual Budget Consultation, Housing Strategy Consultation and Sheltered Housing Service Consultation. Other options are through the STAR (Survey of Tenants and Residents) survey, undertaken by tenants and leaseholders to seek feedback about the areas they live in and the services they receive. The next STAR survey is scheduled to run from October to December with a report to be produced in January. Customer Engagement Team is currently working with managers to put together a series of questions that would form the survey. The aim is to get as many tenants and leaseholders involved in the process. The Council also consults with its Housing Forum members (Senate) mainly through scheduled meetings (twice a year) where they get to interact and discuss with various service managers and senior management with the view to influence decisions on various service areas.

Most recently the council ran a successful consultation seeking residents views on a proposal to regenerate two estates in the Hayes area. The outcome was very positive and has resulted to the council committing to redevelop both estates for the residents living in the area. The proposal was successful for a number of reasons, mainly because of the hierarchy of involvement approach that was used. Residents were informed and consulted through various ways and platforms, got involved and worked in collaboration to shape and produce the Landlord Offer which sets out the commitments of the council to the residents. The council continues to work in collaboration with stakeholders and residents to finalise the design of properties to be built. Feedback so far has been positive and residents have been given the opportunity to have a say every step of the redevelopment process which creates that sense of empowerment and ownership for residents.

Involvement by its very nature implies that there is participation and a positive communication climate where there is a two-way flow of information. Moving up the hierarchy of involvement a natural extension of 'involvement' is 'collaboration'. A collaborative approach to engagement and involvement implies partnership working on key aspects of service which matter to residents, and which builds trust and capacity.

At the pinnacle of the hierarchy of involvement it would be appropriate to see greater levels of empowerment and even 'control', underpinned by strong partnership working.

In summary terms, any engagement and involvement strategy will need to clearly set out the extent of any 'offer' across the various layers of the involvement hierarchy.

Potential offers under the ‘hierarchy of involvement’

In recent years the Council has generally operated towards the lower end of the involvement hierarchy. The focus has been on informing and engaging with tenants and leaseholds at a more basic level, including ‘statutory consultation, which had limited scope to inform or shape services. The ‘step-change’ in approach envisaged by the Regulator of Social Housing and identified by the Landlord Service as part of its own ‘self-assessment’ against the emerging regulatory standards, will necessitate the landlord offer moving up the hierarchy of involvement in a managed way.

The aim is to develop an Engagement Strategy in consultation with a selection of tenants, leaseholders, service managers and stakeholders including recommendations from the Select Committee that would help shape the final strategy. The strategy will consider the common barriers to resident engagement, hard to reach groups, BMEs, single parent and young people. The strategy will be an evolving document with elements of monitoring and review and will be delivered at three levels based on time commitment over three years fulfilling regulatory requirements of social housing providers. The recent pandemic has slightly steered engagement with residents towards the non-traditional ways of engaging and this will be considered when developing the strategy and options for engagement.

Creating a menu of options for residents to be involved in various ways will increase participation. They will get involved at their own pace and frequency suitable to them. Please see attached Appendices with options.

Appendix A – Current Engagement Framework

Appendix B - Options for Engagement

IMPLICATIONS ON COUNCIL RELATED POLICIES

A role of the Select Committees is to make recommendations on service changes and improvements to the Cabinet who are responsible for the Council’s policy and direction.

The Council’s Landlord Service is in the process of developing a Tenant & Leaseholder Engagement Strategy.

HOW THIS REPORT WILL BENEFIT HILLINGDON RESIDENTS

The opportunity presents to incorporate appropriate recommendations into the emerging Tenant & Leaseholder Engagement Strategy. This will benefit the Council’s tenants and leaseholders by clearly setting out to them the full spectrum of involvement and engagement opportunities available to them which will improve transparency and help to shape and improve the landlord services they receive.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications arising from this report. However, the establishment of a

Tenant & Leaseholder Engagement Strategy which supports meaningful opportunities to tenants and leaseholders to tailor services and to ensure the Council has a clear focus on services which matter to residents makes good business sense.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The Social Housing Charter