

Report of Mandy Sawyer, Head of Neighbourhood Services, Housing Management

Report to Housing Advisory Board

Date: 11 November 2014

Subject: Tenant Engagement Update including focus on Tenants and Residents Associations (TRAs)

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

When the housing management service transferred into the Council in October 2013, it was necessary to develop a citywide Tenant Engagement Framework in order to ensure consistent approaches to engagement practices and to embrace new opportunities for greater strategic involvement of tenants.

Housing Leeds has developed a new staffing structure to support its tenant involvement and community development activity and a new structure has recently been implemented.

Housing Leeds currently recognises over 70 Tenants and Residents Associations (TRAs) as well as providing support to many other community and voluntary organisations. This is one of a number of ways that Housing Leeds work with tenants and residents, involving them in the design, delivery and evaluation of services, and empowering and improving our neighbourhoods.

Reflecting one of the largest areas of engagement activity, it has been recognised that a consistent approach must be taken to support and encourage the sustainability of TRAs across the city. TRAs work in partnership with Housing Leeds and other statutory and voluntary and community providers to improve services for tenants and residents.

This report examines the current position on developing the new engagement service, in particular the approach Housing Leeds will take when working with TRAs. It also

describes the ambition for the service which will be developed in a number of key ways whilst considering some of the challenges in achieving this.

Recommendations

That Housing Advisory Board note and comment on the contents of the report, in particular the suggested approaches for supporting TRAs across the city.

1 Purpose of this report

1.1 To update the Housing Advisory Board on:

- The development of the engagement service, and our progress against delivering the new Tenant Engagement Framework;
- How the service proposes to support and strengthen (new and existing) TRAs, ensuring they remain the foundation of large scale involvement practice; and
- The broader service ambitions we want to achieve and to bring to the board's attention some of the challenges in delivering this.

2 Background information

2.1 Following the transfer into Leeds City Council on 1 October 2013, the three tenant involvement teams have been working together on the tenant engagement agenda, seeking to adopt common and consistent practices to deliver an effective single service. The opportunities of this single service and how we engage with tenants was the theme of the first city-wide tenants conference – 'Better Together'.

2.2 A key priority for Housing Leeds is to develop a tenant engagement and community development framework which builds on the positive work carried out by the former ALMOs, but based on one citywide involvement framework. Officers are in the process of working with tenants to develop a citywide tenant involvement approach which gives tenants a stronger strategic influence in decision making than has previously been the case.

2.3 In designing a single tenant engagement service, we are also able to make a number of improvements to give tenants a greater opportunity to influence service delivery at a local level.

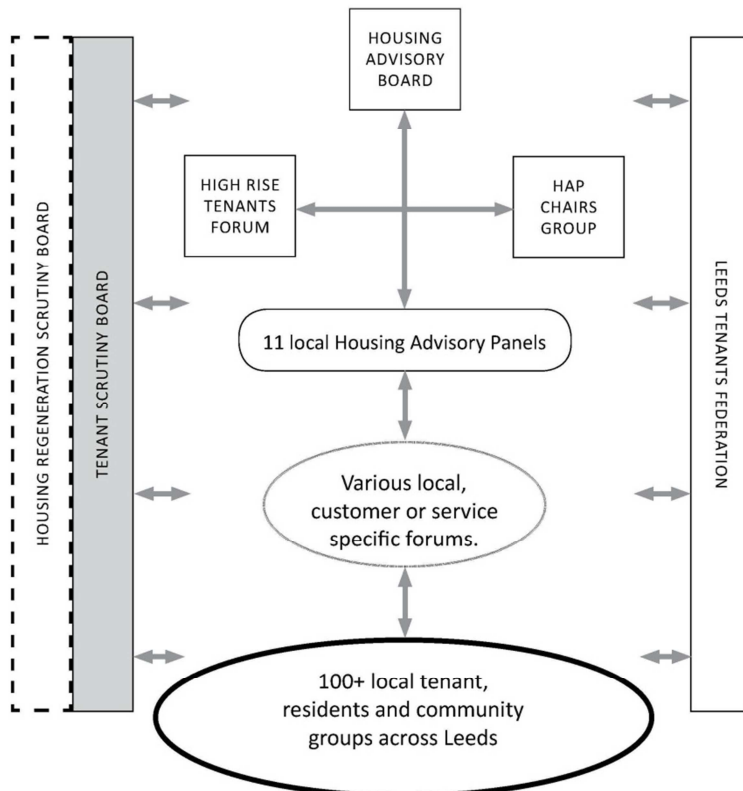
2.4 Tenants and Resident Associations play a major role in the design, delivery and evaluation of services within Leeds. Officers are currently developing a city wide approach to recognising and funding TRAs and will shortly begin consultation with tenants groups about this and the enhanced level of support that can be offered.

2.5 Whilst TRAs are individually constituted groups, fully independent of the Council, Housing Leeds regularly supports and works in partnership with these groups, in order to give tenants a voice in service provision, and improve our communities. It is also recognised that many tenants actively involved with TRAs are also involved in other local or strategic tenant engagement forums. The support we

therefore give to TRAs is crucial in ensuring the health of much wider tenant engagement activity.

3 Update on progress to date

3.1 A high level tenant engagement framework was shared with the Housing Advisory Board on the 3rd June. This shows the key components of the engagement structure and their relationship with each other. A tenant friendly version of this framework, with a description of what each parts role is, was included as a special insert in June's tenants newsletter.



3.2 At a strategic level the Tenant Scrutiny Board (TSB) have reviewed a range of performance and service information and have prioritised a number of areas for future scrutiny and updated their annual work programme. The focus of the TSB's current enquiry is the services approach to annual tenancy visits. The TSB have been in dialogue with the Centre for Public Scrutiny to identify future training and development needs and they are keen to tap into this resource to share good practice with other scrutiny bodies and make sure all scrutiny members have the same level of understanding about the role and their responsibilities. The TSB have contributed to the tenants' newsletter and have a clear website presence to share key messages about their work with tenants and vice versa.

3.3 Housing Advisory Panels (HAP) to date have supported 167 projects to the value of £716,451 or 54.2% of their total budget of £1.32m. Individual HAPs have drafted local 'plans on a page'. These highlight Best City priorities, the themes of the new housing strategy and, by reviewing a range of local demographic,

economic, performance and satisfaction data, have set their own service and funding priorities to focus their activity and decision making. An event for all HAP members has been scheduled for the 7th October to share progress and key messages about wider LCC initiatives such as the new Council Housing building programme.

- 3.4 During October and early November all HAPs are being consulted on the HRA funded environmental estate improvement programme to help influence the range of works to take place.
- 3.5 The Cross City Chairs Group continues to meet monthly and is working well as a group. The Chairs have recently agreed a common recruitment and selection process, and following a special focus on HAPs in the tenants newsletter, the service has received 30 expressions of interest from tenants thinking about applying to become a panel member.
- 3.6 HAP members met as a single group on the 7th October, at an event at the Civic Hall. The event heard from two groups who received panel funding in the past and the difference this has made to their community, an update from the Chair of the Cross City Chairs Group and guest speakers covering council house investment and the new approach to lettings. Attendees were also asked to give their views on creating a training and development programme and how HAPs network and communicate more effectively with other tenant forums and the wider community. These two topics are now a focus of the Cross City Chairs Group who are due to evaluate the 7th October at their meeting on the 22nd October.
- 3.7 The Leeds High Rise Group recently consulted with high rise residents by sending out a survey to all 7,000 households across Leeds, the findings of which (from 40%) are currently being analysed to HAP and block level. Officers are developing a communications plan for residents, staff and Ward Members and the first update will shortly be on display in communal areas. Information will also be posted to the dedicated high rise area on the Leeds City Council website. The group have taken a bus tour to familiarise themselves with the variety of high rise construction types and the different solutions being taken to tackle common problems. Findings from the survey are to be presented at two City Wide forums on the 18th and 24th November.
- 3.8 The service has been working with the Leeds Tenants Federation (LTF) to review the role of the federation and it's relationship within the overall Tenant and Community Involvement Service. Housing Leeds remains committed to supporting a citywide tenants forum which will work with us to influence the service's strategic direction and priorities for the future. We are therefore reviewing the roles and responsibilities of LTF in fulfilling this strategic role and how relationships will be developed in order for LTF to become more integrated into the overall tenant involvement framework. The review will conclude in autumn 2014 and an implementation plan will be developed in order to support LTF to manage the transition to it's new responsibilities and relationships.
- 3.9 The engagement service is making joint use of a mobile office, branded through a partnership with Leeds Federated Housing Association as the 'HUGO' (Helping U Get Online) bus. HUGO is a digitally enabled bus bringing an internet style cafe

to tenant's doorsteps, flooding free Wi-Fi across the area it visits. The type of work with tenants can vary, but often includes:

- Help with setting up email accounts;
- Information on basic IT training courses or general access that is available for free at local libraries and other community buildings;
- Information on summer activities for children;
- Information on the Credit Union and general debt advice;
- Telling residents about Housing Advisory Panel funding and the opportunity to become a panel member; and
- Giving applications to join Leeds Tenants Federation and informed individual on the services that they provide.

3.10 The service continues to commit to a number of citywide forums, customer and service focussed. Other progress includes creating a new single tenant expenses policy, in consultation with a number of tenants groups, to ensure no tenants are out of pocket as a result of getting involved.

4 Focus on Tenants and Residents Associations

4.1 There are currently 74 tenants and residents associations working across Leeds, representing approximately 40% of all council homes. This amounts to several hundred actively engaged tenants contributing many hundreds of hours carrying out voluntary association activity.

4.2 Not all areas have a TRA presence. For those areas without active TRA representation this may be due to a number of reasons.

- **Rural geography** - The outer areas of Leeds, in particular Otley, Rawdon and Horsforth have fewer TRAs as these are dispersed areas with fewer Council homes. The socio-economic makeup of the areas might also mean that individuals are more likely to be in full time employment (of working age) and less likely to have time to commit to this form of participation.
- **Historical fluctuations** - Over recent years many groups have either closed down or re-started as tenants who are particularly active and tend to hold the group together step down, or new tenants move into the area and get more actively involved.
- **Improvements in service provision** - Often a TRA will come about as a result of a group of individuals looking to improve services or campaign for a particular project such as a community garden or for double glazing installation. Once the core task has been put in place the groups may begin to meet less regularly as their original objective has been met.
- **Recognition** - In some areas the TRAs prefer not to be recognised and apply for annual funding, choosing to operate within their area independently.
- **Alternative representation is in place** - In areas which do not have a TRA group, the engagement service will actively recruit an 'Area Representative' to carry out a similar role.

- **Neighbourhood champions and Tenant Inspectors** also fulfil part of the role that a TRA would traditionally offer for example, participating in estate inspections and completing customer surveys at housing offices.
- **General appeal** – a contributing factor in the overall number of groups increasing or decreasing may be about the general appeal and accessibility of this engagement method. Many tenants may prefer to engage with us electronically or through methods that are less structured that fit in with their other family, work or social lives.

4.3 In particular, disabled tenants and those in sheltered schemes may be less likely to commit to a TRA as there are specialised cluster forums organised to cover any concerns and address ideas and projects at these meetings.

4.4 Where there is insufficient interest to form a residents group, or where a group has ended we will support an individual who wishes to become an Area Representative. These are representatives that act as a link between the housing service and residents. Close working relationships with local housing officers helps identify problems at an early stage and assist in monitoring local service standards as well as identifying investment needs.

4.5 **Existing support for TARA's currently provided by Housing Leeds**

- **The Annual Support Grant** - A contribution towards a committees running costs; including items such as telephone, printing, stationery, travel and training costs. Grants to TRAs vary dependent on number of homes represented, ranging from £100 - £500.
- **Constitutional Support** – Particularly relevant for new groups, the service advises on setting up a new group, constitutional aspects such as how to run a group and advice with key documentation.
- **Funding Portal** - free access to an easy to use on-line Funding Portal (<http://www.open4community.info/lcc/>) where any group in Leeds can search for grants and funding.
- **An Annual 'Health Check'** – A visit to talk to each group about what their goals are, if they have any training needs and to make sure the service is supporting them. This is in addition to the day to day support on constitutional matters, planning AGM's, discussing ideas for projects, funding bids, training opportunities, good practice, celebrating group achievements etc.
- **Training** - To help tenants to make informed decisions and effectively run their group, Housing Leeds provide bespoke training sessions and 1-2-1 support for all tenant groups that request it, at no cost to the group. Further support and training can be sourced on recurring issues such as Chair Training, Finance, Planning Community Events etc.
- **Referral and Sign-posting** – adopting a flexible and responsive approach to telling groups about the work of others including TPAS, Doing Good Leeds (Voluntary Action Leeds), Leeds City Credit Union, the Citizens Advice

Bureau, Leeds Tenants Federation and any other active group specific to an area, for example elderly action, 'Friends of' or 'In Bloom' groups.

- **Free membership of the Tenant Participatory Advisory Service (TPAS) -** TPAS (www.tpas.org.uk) is the leading national tenant involvement organisation and works closely with landlords and central government to effect positive change for tenants. A recent agreement with TPAS to ensure TRAs can access high quality resources enabling them to strengthen the operations of their group. Membership includes: attendance at regional events, briefings and information sheets, access to the TPAS help-line and information service, training and support.
- **Free accounts preparation and checking (WYCAS) -** a partnership agreement with West Yorkshire Community Accounting Services (WYCAS) to visit groups, check their accounts in preparation of a groups AGM and offer simple day to day advice on how to record their transactions.

5 Future support to help sustain and grow TRAs

5.1 In addition to the support currently provided, the following provisions will be put in place:

5.2 Short Term Priorities:

- 5.2.1 **Full Implementation of the Housing Management restructure.** A dedicated citywide Tenant Involvement and Community Development service which gives tenants a genuine opportunity to influence the quality of services provided, both within localities, and at a citywide strategic level. The service includes officers dedicated to tenant involvement and community development within a particular area of the city. These officers co-ordinate more focussed support to Housing Advisory Panels and TRAs for a particular area, whilst also working with housing offices, partners and ward members to identify opportunities for community development within the area. Implementation of the new structure is now largely complete. For those officers in new roles or areas the service is ensuring appropriate handovers and support during the transition.
- 5.2.2 **Best practice** from across the city and other housing providers will be established to inform the new service. There are a number of areas of good practice across the city, e.g. engaging with younger tenants and their families whilst tackling environmental appearance through Junior Warden schemes. The targeted recruitment of under-represented groups through the use of email, texting and social media and the use of dozens of tenants extra 'ears' and 'eyes' acting as Tenant Inspectors. The new service will look to include these and a number of other practices.
- 5.2.3 **Enhanced support to TRAs.** In addition to the existing support, Housing Leeds will work to develop a package of support for groups spanning the life-cycle of a TRA. For example, setting up and running a TRA, development and sustainability, good governance and issue resolution and more common communication and contact. Housing Leeds is currently working with TRAs to review the sustainability and support needs of all groups.

- 5.2.4 Closer working with Leeds Tenants Federation (LTF) to review funding and recognition for TRAs. One city-wide policy will be developed to ensure that TRAs are assisted financially.
- 5.2.5 **Capacity Building** – a comprehensive training programme will be developed in partnership with LTF to ensure that tenants are able to participate fully, and are equipped with the skills to make informed decisions and ensure their TRA is sustainable and follows good governance principles.
- 5.2.6 **Widening our reach** – Being clear what support and resources we give to informal groups e.g. sheltered social committee, gardening groups, informal residents groups. This will be examined in line with the harmonisation of the tenant involvement service.
- 5.2.7 **Accountancy support** – Housing Leeds have brokered an agreement with the West Yorkshire Community Accountancy Service (WYCAS) to ensure that TRAs receive support with their annual accounts. Workshops have been held to help TRAs develop their skills in this area and one to one sessions have taken place for TRAs who require a more personalised service. WYCAS can offer advice on value for money and are a preferred provider of accounting services to the voluntary and community sector in Leeds. There is potential to source additional funding for TRAs through an affiliation with WYCAS.
- 5.2.8 **Tracker Software** – Arena Tracker has been adopted as the primary software tool for tenant involvement. This tool allows us to track tenant participation and monitor outcomes. Tenant Involvement Officers will conduct a feasibility study looking at the allocation of rewards for tenants and TRAs who are most active in their areas, bringing about positive change for all our tenants.
- 5.2.9 **Closer links with the Community Committees** – Involvement Teams are beginning to work more closely with Community Committees to ensure local priorities are best met, for example, by working in partnership to address issues such as community cohesion, or by submitting a partnership bid with the voluntary and community sector to the Housing Advisory Panel. There are some good emerging examples of this, for example in working jointly to develop winter warmth packages for more elderly and vulnerable tenants. The service is currently arranging joint workshops with area based staff to help build relationships and to improve understanding of each other's roles.
- 5.2.10 **Closer links with Town and Parish Councils** – it is a priority for the service to develop closer relationships with town and parish councils to ensure that the needs of smaller rural communities are taken into account.
- 5.2.11 **Continuation of engagement with Councillors and MP's** – it is essential to continue to have positive working relationships with both the Lead Member for Housing and Ward Councillors. Engagement teams and Housing Offices will work with ward members to ensure that the service develops to meet the needs of localities.
- 5.3 **Long Term Priorities:**

- 5.3.1 **Social media** - We will develop an online forum for TRAs to communicate with each other and Housing Leeds, accompanied by a set of frequently asked questions dealing with typical enquiries and issues. We will develop a set of factsheets on areas of common interest such as how to set up a TRA, identifying risk, insurance for the voluntary and community sector, and how to run a community event.
- 5.3.2 **Increasing representation** – we will work to ensure that under-represented groups are encouraged to participate, and that Housing Advisory Panels, TRAs and other forums members are representative of their local communities. We will develop a targeted recruitment campaign and work with community leaders and the voluntary and community sector to raise awareness of opportunities for involvement.
- 5.3.3 **A more joined-up approach** – we will explore closer working with other Council services (in tandem with Community Committees) that directly impact on our tenants, such as Waste Management, Parks and Countryside etc, to ensure that the needs of our communities are best met.
- 5.3.4 **Shared learning** – Affiliations with providers such as Doing Good Leeds to share learning and value for money initiatives with similar providers. To share also the achievements and skills of TRAs from across the city at networking events.
- 5.3.5 **Service Standard review** - We will work with TRAs to review our service standards outlining how Housing Leeds will communicate with tenants allowing us to best meet the needs of local residents.
- 5.3.6 **Awards and accreditations** – it is important that Housing Leeds raise the profile of success to inspire and encourage TRAs and other tenant groups to get involved. By participating in external accreditations such as TPAS (Tenant Participation Advisory Service) Tenant Involvement Accreditation and the LGA (Local Government Association) SHEF (Social Housing Equality Framework) we can continually test our service to ensure we are delivering an excellent standard of service to our tenants.
- 5.3.7 **Diversity of Opportunity** - It is important to recognise that for younger tenants and BME tenants, TRAs may not always be the most attractive way to engage and work with the community. This may be because TRAs tend to be formal or potentially time-consuming, or there may be language or other barriers such as confidence or skills.
- 5.3.8 **Worklessness Agenda** – an exchange scheme to encourage representation from younger tenants and those not currently in education, employment or training, would see participation in their local community or TRA exchanged for support with their CV or interview practice with Leeds City Council Officers and Contractors.

6 Wider engagement service areas for development:

- 6.1 During January and February a consultation exercise about the future of the engagement service took place involving over 400 tenants. The themes of the

responses were explored in more detail at a tenants conference of 130 tenants at the end of February 2014. Key messages tenants have told us about how we should develop the engagement service are:

- Offering more choice and opportunities for involvement;
- Promoting and reflecting community diversity in involvement activities;
- Engaging more young people and black and minority ethnic groups;
- Make involvement activities more 'family friendly';
- Communicate and give better feedback on the difference we have helped make.
- Communicate more about what Housing Advisory Panels and other community groups are doing;
- Meet local and city wide priorities;
- Ensure that engagement is accessible;
- Raise awareness of funding opportunities and help tenants to access these;
- Help tenants share and learn more from others; and
- Ensure that involvement is a core value of Housing Leeds.

6.2 The above statements from tenants capture well the qualities of an excellent engagement service.

6.3 Taking on board tenants views and looking beyond recent work to develop the strategic forums and the Tenant Engagement Framework, there are a number of broader themes or elements to consider.

- **Representation** – within our engagement framework there are key customer groups under-represented. In a city as diverse as Leeds, how do we improve this and/or offer better access and opportunities for engagement that attract a more diverse range of residents?
- **Acting locally – thinking strategically.** The service has committed to retaining a local focus in responding to resident feedback and our own service intelligence and a culture of local accountability and responsiveness needs to work in tandem with the strategic direction and influence of tenants citywide.
- **Communication** – Key engagement forums are starting to communicate to each other, however, to improve the legitimacy and confidence in all forums, the service needs a communications strategy to link all engagement elements together and to make sure all tenants have the opportunity to influence and engage with local or strategic activities. The service as a whole needs to explore a more pro-active approach to communication at all levels to create culture of success, raising the expectations of staff and tenants.
- **Closer working within LCC services** – taking advantage of the skills, resources and engagement activities of a range of council services to benefit communities as a whole (often services focusing on the same communities wanting to tackle similar issues). This will include closer working with Community Committees, engagement with Councillors and developing a more consistent relationship with Town and Parish Councils.

- **Closer working with partners and the third sector** – proactive relationships with those outside of LCC that can help us achieve our objectives. This may include partnering contractors, local social enterprises and charities and citywide initiatives.
- **Regional and national learning and influence** – having a confident, outward looking service that is open about sharing success and recognising areas for improvement. Skilled and experienced officers and tenants that are able to share good practice to others and learn / network through established national and regional bodies e.g. the Tenant Participatory Advisory Services.
- **Measuring outcomes and our success** - being able to present to others the contribution the service has made in helping the council achieve its priorities, increase tenant satisfaction and improve performance. Are we able to develop models capturing the outcomes of what the service achieves that demonstrates its worth and social value?

7 Corporate Considerations

8 Consultation and Engagement

- 8.1 How we engage with tenants and develop the new service offer were discussed with tenants at the 'Better Together', tenants conference on the 27th February 2014 following a consultation exercise with over 400 responses. The service also now benefits from key tenants forums to consult with in our future service design.
- 8.2 In terms of the future support for TRAs, a consultation plan is currently being developed and the creation of the wider tenant engagement strategy will include tenants from a diverse range of forums and groups.
- 8.3 The new tenants expenses policy was drafted and shared with all key tenant engagement forums for comment.

9 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 9.1 Equality and diversity considerations will be taken into account in developing both the overall service and our approach to supporting TRAs, including:
- 9.2 Equality monitoring of engaged tenants to understand the extent to which the diversity of tenants is represented, as per tenant feedback at the "Better Together" conference held in February 2014 where tenants recommended – "targeted recruitment in any under-represented groups for local and city-wide forums".
- 9.3 Ensure that tenant groups understand the demographic of the areas they represent so they can seek to involve the groups highlighted;
- 9.4 The development of a marketing and communications strategy, integrated with our engagement structure, that will consider how key messages are communicated to and from all our tenant engagement forums and that are accessible by a diverse range of customers;

- 9.5 A training and development programme for all involved tenants that will raise awareness of equality issues;
- 9.6 Meeting the needs of specific customer groups in our programme of community development work, supporting tenants into work, skills and training; and
- 9.7 Supporting the large network of tenants, residents and community groups to adopt open and accessible practices.

10 Council policies and City Priorities

- 10.1 The service's tenant engagement activity helps us to deliver the Best Council objective to 'ensure high quality public services- improving quality, efficiency and involving people in shaping their city.'
- 10.2 The service also helps to support the Best City for Communities priority to increase the sense of belonging that builds cohesive and harmonious communities.

11 Resources and value for money

- 11.1 Tenant engagement and community development activity is a key priority for the new Housing Leeds service as it is essential to the delivery of an effective housing management service and a sustainable housing stock. Sustainable communities offer an opportunity for reduced service costs, e.g. in tackling ASB and tenancy management issues. They also offer an opportunity for reduced service costs in other council service areas, e.g. Environmental Services, Adult Social Care and Children's Services. By working in a coordinated and consistent fashion for the new strategic forums officers are also able to streamline the provision of information and reports.

12 Legal Implications

- 12.1 The engagement structure has been developed in line with The Regulatory Framework for Social Housing 2012. In particular: 'Providers are expected to engage meaningfully with their tenants and offer them opportunities to shape the tailoring of services to reflect local priorities. Tenants should have the ability to scrutinise their provider's performance, identify areas for improvement and influence future delivery'.

13 Risk Management

- 13.1 The main risk in the development of the Tenant Engagement Framework is that the framework does not deliver to its full potential the expectations of tenants and leaseholders, and doesn't deliver sustainable communities within Leeds.
- 13.2 In order to minimise this risk a Tenant Engagement and Community Development Service has been established within Housing Leeds, which will co-ordinate tenant engagement activity across the city. A key role of this service will be to work with tenants within the framework to identify and act on issues, review the framework on a periodic basis and ensure ongoing service improvement.

14 Conclusions

- 14.1 Significant progress has been made to date to develop the Tenant Engagement Framework and key structures are now in place. A priority for the next few months is to support groups to deliver consistent tenant engagement and community development activity across the city and to engage with our established forums to help them continue to shape the new service.
- 14.2 Housing Leeds is committed to strengthening support provided to TRAs to ensure that groups needs are met and they are able to achieve sustainability into the future.

15 Recommendations

- 15.1 That the Housing Advisory Board note the contents of this report and discuss any matters arising, in particular the suggested future activity for supporting TRAs.

Background documents

None