

Report of Tenant & Community Involvement Service

Report to Housing Advisory Board

Date: 20 May 2015

Subject: Tenant Engagement Framework Update

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

Over recent months, Housing Leeds has continued to develop the city wide tenant involvement service to ensure that it gives tenants a real opportunity to influence the way that Housing Leeds delivers its services, at both a local and strategic level.

This report examines the current position with the service; it also describes our ambition for the service whilst also considering some of the challenges that we face in achieving this.

The main focus of service developments over recent months has been as follows:

- Developing a city wide offer to tenants with a varied menu of involvement to suit all.
- Developing a suite of citywide groups and forums to create consulted and involved tenants.
- Progressing the review of the relationship with Leeds Tenants Federation.
- Developing a Strategic Tenants Body to provide overall leadership and direction to the tenant involvement framework.
- Strengthening the role of the Housing Advisory Panels.
- Developing a robust service offer to TARA's - this has been developed in partnership with tenants.

The report will also focus on how we plan to increase the opportunity of younger tenants to get involved in service developments.

Recommendations

That the Housing Advisory Board:

- Supports the development of the Strategic Tenant Body in accordance with principles outlined in this paper.
- Approves that the 3 current Tenant representatives on Housing Advisory Board be replaced with 3 representatives of the Strategic Tenant Body.
- Supports the work undertaken to develop groups and forums to complement the tenant involvement framework
- Supports the approach to increasing opportunities for our younger tenants

1 Purpose of this report

1.1 To update the Housing Advisory Board on:

- The development of the tenant involvement service, and our progress against delivering the new Tenant Involvement Framework;
- How the service proposes to support and strengthen its role and give opportunity for a strategic voice for tenants.
- How the service will look to increase the opportunity for young tenants to influence the way that services are provided.

2 Background information

2.1 Over the last 18 months Housing Leeds has made a significant amount of progress in developing its citywide tenant involvement framework. We have now fully implemented the staffing restructure and are well on our way to embedding the tenant involvement structure within the Housing Management Service.

2.2 The findings of the Survey of Tenants and Residents (STAR) survey undertaken during late 2014 show that while overall levels of satisfaction have remained constant, there are issues with how we communicate and engage with tenants. There was a reduction in satisfaction with how we keep tenants informed, the opportunity for tenants to make their views known and how we listen and act on tenant views. The survey also highlighted that there were particularly low levels of satisfaction from younger tenants.

- 2.3 The Tenant Involvement Framework has an important role to take in improving levels of satisfaction with how we communicate and engage with tenants. It also has an important role to take in improving levels of satisfaction on younger tenants.

3 Update on progress to date

- 3.1 The tenant involvement framework is now taking shape and has seen improvements and new ideas being driven forward and implemented at a fast pace.

- 3.2 The development of the different groups and forums can be seen in this update:

- 3.3 **Housing Advisory Panels (HAPs) and the Cross City Chairs Group (CCCG)** continue to work well. During 2014/15 the panels supported 280 projects to a value of £1,244,240 (94% of their funding allocation of £1.32m). The HAPs are gaining a good reputation locally, and are increasingly becoming known as local forums that are able to deliver local change.

A joint tenant and staff year-end review of the HAP activity has taken place and priorities identified for 2015/16. A big priority for HAPs this year is to strengthen their wider role in the local area – reviewing local performance and management activity, and developing stronger links with other groups in the local area.

Through CCCG, chairs have continued to develop a consistent approach and shared a range of good practice examples, raising awareness of HAP funded projects that could be developed in other areas of the city. For example, the last Chairs group meeting received a presentation from Probation Services about the community payback scheme.

- 3.4 **High Rise Advisory Group** continue to meet monthly to discuss issues around the capital programme, cleaning performance and housing management matters which affect high rise properties. Two citywide forums were held in November which were well attended and raised particular issues around heating and insulation which have created real issues of fuel poverty for tenants. A further citywide forum will be held in June to discuss the High Rise Project and outcomes from the STAR survey.
- 3.5 **Older Persons Housing Group** held their first citywide forum in February 2015. The forum produced good insights into sheltered housing issues and received very good feedback on social media. An Older Persons Housing Group has now been established, which will meet bi-monthly to represent the views of tenants living in sheltered housing. It will perform an advisory role on the quality of service delivery and influence change in the way that services are provided to older people.
- 3.6 **Rainbow Roofs (LGBT)** continues to meet monthly and has been supporting Housing Leeds with project work to influence how Leeds Housing works with LGBT customers to meet their needs. A recent project that the group has supported is around perceptions of LGBT tenants amongst older people, and the group has worked with the Sheltered Housing Service to design some training for Sheltered Support Officers.

- 3.7 **Equal Access Forum** held their first citywide forum in April 2015. Over 70 tenants attended and identified their main priorities relating to their housing and environment. The biggest priorities identified were around accessibility, parking and communications. A citywide group will soon be established; this will be an important group to ensure that the views of disabled customers are taken into consideration in order to ensure inclusive and accessible services.
- 3.8 **Service Improvement Volunteers (SIV's)** have replaced the former role of Tenant Inspectors. We are now launching the Service Improvement Volunteers programme which will be a key part of how we empower local tenants and leaseholders to help shape and improve local housing services and the environment. Volunteers can choose what activities they want to take part in and be involved as much or as little as they like, in their local area or in other parts of the city if they choose to do so. Activities will include mystery shopping, estate walkabouts, completing surveys, providing comments on new leaflets and spot checking repairs, voids and accessibility to our offices.
- 3.9 **Young Persons group** Consultation meetings with work placement university students and a young HAP member have taken place to gain insight into effective ways of communicating with young people. An initial meeting has also taken place in April 2015 with a small number of young tenants who work for Housing Leeds, to understand reasons why young tenants are not currently engaged. The next steps are to explore with younger tenants how we can improve the way that we communicate with and involve younger tenants in service improvements, putting a greater focus on the use of social media.

We are also developing relationships with already established groups for young people, e.g. Youth Point who engage with young persons in the Hyde Park Area. In early May, we are attending an event hosted by Flagship which will provide a gateway to their young person's consultation group. Flagship acts as an umbrella for a number of housing providers for young persons who are or will become council tenants. By engaging with young people at this early stage, we hope to attract them to work with us on our Housing Advisory Panels, youth forum or other specialist forums.

In November we will be linking into National Youth week to promote our service offer to young people. Tenant involvement can offer young people is the chance to show on their CV's the voluntary work they have undertaken with LCC and provide them with character references where we can with a view to them gaining employment.

- 3.10 **The Leaseholder Forum** is currently on the forward plan to be established.
- 3.11 **Repairs Focus groups** The 3 area based groups have recently been re-established to perform an advisory role on the quality of the repairs service and influence change in the way that services are provided. An area based approach has been undertaken to reflect the different repairs contractual arrangements within the areas.

- 3.12 **Leeds Tenants Federation (LTF)** Housing Leeds has been working with LTF for a number of months to review it's relationship with LCC and redefine the role of LTF within the Housing Leeds Tenant Involvement Framework. This review is nearing completion, and an updated role for LTF has been developed. LTF will now:
- Provide strategic leadership to Housing Leeds TARAs by sharing good practice, promoting a consistent approach and identifying common / emerging themes across groups via a citywide TARA Forum.
 - Co-ordinate awareness campaigns on behalf of tenants, e.g. welfare change / fuel poverty.
 - Represent the views of non Housing Leeds tenants.
- 3.13 **Tenants and Residents Associations (TARAs)** There are currently 74 TARAs operating locally across Housing Leeds communities, 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. Over recent months, a consistent citywide package of support has been developed for groups spanning the life-cycle of a TARA, e.g. setting up and running a TARA, development and sustainability, good governance and issue resolution and more common communication and contact. This new package of support will be launched at a citywide event for TARAs planned for 3 June 2015. This event will be a partnership event between Housing Leeds and LTF, and promote LTFs new role in the tenant involvement framework.
- 3.14 **Tenant Scrutiny Board** completed it's first inquiry on Annual Tenancy Visits (now Annual Home Visits) in early 2015. The inquiry involved gathering evidence on the current process and consulting with tenants around the customer experience. The key findings from the inquiry and recommendations are included within a separate paper on this agenda. Recruitment is currently on-going to strengthen the membership before they begin their next inquiry.
- 3.15 **Other notable developments include;**
- The service has recently launched 'In the Loop', a monthly email bulletin of news, opportunities, useful links and dates for diaries for all our 400+ involved tenants.
 - 'Arena Tracker' is currently being tested within the Tenant and Community Involvement Team. This software, used by over 60 other landlords, will help the service monitor and evaluate all our tenant and community involvement activity across Leeds. This will specifically help with the reporting on the health and effectiveness of all our activity, who is involved (and therefore the gaps) and what the benefits and outcomes are.
 - The HUGO (helping u get online) project delivered from the mobile office in partnership with Leeds Federated Housing, has been shortlisted for the TPAS national awards in the 'excellence in digital inclusion' category.

- From a more community needs orientated perspective, a parenting programme, called 'Positive Families', delivered in partnership with Together Women Project, is currently recruiting parents in the Bramley area for a six week course.

4 Focus on a new Strategic Tenants Body

- 4.1 Over recent months, as we have worked with tenants to develop the role of the citywide groups, it has emerged that there are a number of different groups which are undertaking a strategic advisory role to Housing Leeds, but in a fragmented way. There is currently little communication between groups, and there is no overall leadership and co-ordination of the overall tenant involvement framework.
- 4.2 On this basis, we established a small working group of tenants and officers to consider how tenant groups could work more effectively together within the tenant involvement framework. From this group, a proposal was agreed to develop a Strategic Tenant Body, which would provide leadership to the overall tenant involvement framework, and co-ordinate the work of all tenant involvement groups.
- 4.3 A map of the HUB model has been developed to outline the overall tenant involvement framework, see Appendix A. The model shows tenants at the centre, leading to local tenant involvement, then area forums, and then citywide forums leading out to a single strategic tenant body. This model provides clear channels for communication between the different involvement forums.
- 4.4 The main identified role of the Strategic Tenant Body are as follows:
- To influence priorities for and contribute towards Housing Leeds policy development and service improvements.
 - To oversee relationships with all groups in the tenant involvement framework and ensure clear channels for communication / escalation of issues.
 - To co-ordinate communications with tenants.
 - To direct awareness campaigns and information to all tenants, e.g., relating to welfare change, fuel poverty.
 - To review the value for money and effectiveness of elements of the tenant involvement framework in order to inform ongoing developments and improvements.
 - To represent tenants of the wider rented sector at a more strategic level.
- 4.5 We propose that the membership of the group is made up of the chairs and vice chairs of each of the citywide tenant involvement groups – LTF, CCCG, High Rise Advisory Group, Older Persons Housing Group, Rainbow Roofs, Access Forum, Repairs Forums, Young Persons Forum and Leaseholder Forum – and independent tenant members, to ensure even representation from all areas of the city.

- 4.6 Currently, the 3 tenant representatives on the Housing Advisory Board are the chair of CCGG and High Rise Advisory Forum, and a representative of LTF. It is proposed that this representation is changed so that 3 tenant representatives of the Strategic Tenant Body sit on Housing Advisory Board.
- 4.7 The first meeting of the Strategic Tenant Body took place in late April, and regular meetings are now planned to support the development of the group. The main priorities for the group for the next few months include delivering a training and induction programme for the group, developing a communication plan which focuses on a launch of the group and strengthened relationships between all tenant groups and supporting Housing Leeds on new policy developments, e.g. Community Lettings Policies.

5 Focus on Younger Tenants

- 5.1 The recent STAR survey showed that while the overall level of satisfaction remained constant at 77%, levels of satisfaction varied significantly in accordance with age, with approximately 90% of tenants over 65 being satisfied, compared to only around 65% of tenants aged less than 35. This clearly indicates that there are improvements that can be made in the way that we provide services to our younger tenants.
- 5.2 The STAR survey findings showed that there was a strong correlation between levels of satisfaction and a tenant's financial situation, with those least satisfied finding their current financial situation difficult. The findings also showed that younger tenants were most likely to find it difficult to manage their finances and afford energy bills.
- 5.3 While it is important to Housing Leeds to deliver a consistent citywide service to tenants, it is also important that that service is customer focused and tailored to the needs of the individual tenant, whether based on age or other factors. There are a number of areas that Housing Leeds is looking to deliver service enhancements to some tenants, which will have a particular impact on younger tenants:

Housing Management Plus – a review is currently underway of the way that Housing Leeds provides support to tenants with additional support needs. The main focus of the review is as follows:

- On agreeing and delivering a support plan prior to tenancy commencement – including pre-tenancy training where required - so that a tenant receives appropriate support as they move into their tenancy.
- On strengthening relationships between the Housing Officer and support provider for existing tenants to ensure a more joined up service is provided to increase tenancy sustainability.

This Housing Management Plus offer will be delivered as standard to our youngest tenants.

Enhanced Income Offer – a proposal is currently being developed to deliver additional support to tenants who are experiencing financial difficulty, particularly

those affected by welfare changes. Additional support would be offered to tenants to improve their budgeting skills, to reduce levels of personal debt, to access cheaper energy, and to access employment. This would be delivered based on the pilot Multi Storey Flat Discretionary Housing Payment (MSF DHP) Project delivered to tenants living in MSFs who were affected by under occupation.

Community Lettings Policies – consultation will begin in June on the planned replacement of Local Lettings Policies (LLPs) with Community Lettings Policies. There are currently age related LLPs covering almost 7000 properties; these policies have made it particularly difficult for younger tenants to be re-housed in some areas of the city. In moving towards Community Lettings Policies there will be a focus on reducing the number of age policies in place, and where a letting policy enhancement is required, that the policy puts a greater focus on other factors, e.g. previous tenancy record, under occupation.

5.4 Housing Leeds is also looking to review its Communication Plan with tenants. A big focus of this review will be on how we modernise our communication methods with tenants, and develop more tailored communications for our younger tenants. This includes:

Social Media - Our social media offer, currently includes Facebook, Twitter and text services. As many young and working people do not wish to be restricted to communicating with us at a certain time and place, we are exploring the introduction of online forums so comments can be left at a time to suit. Forums may be for general comment or invites to specific Q &A sessions. Live twitter sessions linked to specific forums will also be created to ensure virtual involvement which ensures that persons are not missing out and can make their voice heard in a live environment. Other options are also being explored including YouTube, Flickr and pod casts and the introduction of a Housing App.

Tenant Involvement officers now have SMART phones, which enable them to upload pictures and events to Facebook and twitter as they happen, providing a much more interactive service to tenants.

Housing Website – a review is currently underway to improve the housing web pages to make them more customer focused, with more general information about services that tenants want to access on line.

Customer Contact Portal – linked to the Customer Contact Portal (CCP) Project an IT development is planned which will allow tenants to log onto their housing account and change their personal details, view their rent account etc. The scope of this project is currently being scoped, but in the longer term it will allow applicants and tenants to manage many aspects of their communication on-line.

Newsletter – as levels of satisfaction with the newsletter reduced by 7% in the STAR survey consideration being given to alternative ways of keeping tenants informed. This includes:

- Greater use of the website and social media to communicate with tenants.

- A review of the quarterly tenant newsletter is currently underway and consideration being given to more bespoke newsletters, whether based on area of the city or property type, e.g. high rise / sheltered.

Involvement in Service Delivery – targeted recruitment is planned to attract younger tenants in getting involved in influencing service delivery, both at a local and strategic level. Some younger tenants have recently become involved in Housing Advisory Panels, and these tenants have brought a new perspective to identifying local priorities, and breaking down barriers between younger and older tenants in communities. In showcasing some of this work in our targeted recruitment of younger people, we hope to develop more balanced representation on tenant involvement forums.

6 Corporate Considerations

6.1 Consultation and Engagement

6.2 A number of citywide tenant forums, such as the access forum, high rise forum and sheltered forum have taken place during 2014/15 to consult with wider tenants on the creation of the wider tenant involvement framework.

6.3 Tenants have been asked for their opinions via the STAR survey, to give us insight into their satisfaction and priorities within our services. The key findings from the survey have been used to inform service plan priorities for 2015/16.

6.4 Tenants have been at the heart of the development of the Strategic Tenant Body and its role in the overall tenant involvement framework. Tenants from the CCCG and LTF took a particularly active role in developing the detailed proposal for the Strategic Tenant Body.

7 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

7.1 Recruitment in any under-represented groups for local and city-wide forums is being addressed with some targeted recruitment aimed at younger tenants. Although HAP membership continues to grow slowly (from 71 to 80) the average age of members remains 50+. 2 new tenants in their 20's have recently being recruited and these new tenants have brought a different perspective to these groups.

7.2 The development of a marketing and communications strategy, integrated within our involvement structure, considers how key messages are communicated to and from all our tenant involvement forums and that are accessible to a diverse range of customers.

7.3 We ensure that tenant groups understand the demographic of the areas they represent so they can seek to involve underrepresented groups.

8 Council policies and City Priorities

8.1 The service's tenant involvement activity contributes towards the delivery of the Best Council plan priorities of supporting communities and tackling poverty and becoming a more efficient and enterprising council.

8.2 The service also helps to support the Best City for Communities priority to increase the sense of belonging that builds cohesive and harmonious communities.

9 Resources and value for money

9.1 During late 2014 Housing Leeds contributed to the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) 'Tenants Leading Change' review, which found that investing in tenant involvement can produce financial, service, social and community benefits. It can also result in improved tenant satisfaction. A number of examples of our community development work were provided as part of the review, such as Digital Inclusion projects and the benefits this had seen in getting some tenants back to work.

9.2 The Tenants Leading Change (TLC) programme aims to identify the business case for tenant involvement, with a view to growing its reach, facilitating learning and helping more landlords to understand the value of involving their tenants. In turn this will enable more tenants to shape their services and create stronger communities.

9.3 The new Strategic Tenant Body will hold a key role in monitoring activity to ensure Value for Money.

10 Legal Implications

10.1 The involvement framework 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'.

11 Risk Management

11.1 The main risk in the development of the Tenant Involvement Framework is that the framework does not deliver to its full potential to meet the expectations of tenants and leaseholders, and doesn't deliver sustainable communities or provide city wide representation within Leeds.

11.2 In order to minimise this risk a Tenant Involvement 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 and through the new Strategic Tenants Body to identify and act on issues, review the framework on a periodic basis and ensure ongoing service improvement.

12 Conclusions

12.1 Housing Leeds remains very committed to strengthening tenant involvement and community development as part of the overall Housing Management service.

Significant progress has been made to date to develop the Tenant Involvement Framework and key structures are now in place.

- 12.2 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. This includes the creation and delivery of the Strategic Tenants Body.
- 12.3 A further priority is to develop the way that we involve and communicate with our younger tenants through a clear Communication Strategy. Targeted work will continue with younger people to develop this approach.

13 Recommendations

That the Housing Advisory Board:

- Supports the development of the Strategic Tenant Body in accordance with principles outlined in this paper.
- Approves for that the 3 current Tenant representatives on Housing Advisory Board be replaced with 3 representatives of the Strategic Tenant Body.
- Supports the work undertaken to develop groups and forums to complement the tenant involvement framework
- Supports the approach to increasing opportunities for our younger tenants