

Report of Chief Officer Housing Management

Report to Housing Advisory Board

Date: 28 February 2017

Subject: Tenant Engagement Framework

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input 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

Housing Leeds has been working in partnership with VITAL to develop an updated Tenant Engagement Framework that recognises the importance of:

- **Tenant Engagement** –improved two-way communication with all tenants on issues that matter to them so that tenants feel connected with Housing Leeds, wider Council services and their community.
- **Tenant Involvement** – working with a smaller number of tenants who want to be more actively involved, making greater use of customer insight to enable tenants and officers to work together to improve services, performance, customer care and overall satisfaction.
- **Community investment** – working with communities, community groups and partners to identify and deliver programmes or projects which help build the skills and resilience of communities.

The framework takes into account the wider context of needing to offer a broader range of engagement activity (including digital engagement), appealing to a more diverse spectrum of tenants, wider research and learning from the sector, opportunities to work more closely with LCC services and ensuring the framework is relevant and value for money by linking activity to the themes of Housing Strategy.

Recommendation

That HAB support Housing Leeds to continue to work with tenants to develop the detail of the updated framework and to plan the transition, with a view to full implementation from 1 April 2017.

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.2 To update the Housing Advisory Board on the development of a new Tenant Engagement Framework, illustrated with examples of positive new engagement practices.

2 Background information

- 2.1 Housing Leeds previously formalised a Tenant Involvement Framework during 2014/15, which included:

- VITAL - the strategic tenant body to advise Housing Leeds on policy and strategic development and oversee the effectiveness of all our engagement activity.
- Citywide groups – to advise on service specific policy development, e.g. High Rise Advisory Group, Repairs Groups and VOLT (Voice of Older Leeds Tenants).
- Housing Advisory Panels – localised decision making and service monitoring.
- Tenants and Residents Associations – supporting local community groups to respond to local issues.
- Community projects – responding to particular community circumstances by offering additional programmes, activities and support in partnership with others.
- A Tenant Scrutiny Board – an independent group offering evidenced based scrutiny of Housing Leeds services.

- 2.2 Alongside this Housing Leeds has also enhanced its digital engagement offer, so all tenants have available more information and the opportunity to influence service delivery in a less formal way. Examples are:

- Improvements to the Housing web pages to improve the quality of information provided to tenants.
- The creation of [local Housing Team web pages](#) to improve the relevance of information provided about the local area.
- The use of e-surveys and social media to support targeted consultation.
- Use of more tailored email communications, consulting with particular customer groups.
- The successful procurement of a new Housing ICT Solution which includes a “Tenants Portal”. The new system will aid ‘channel shifting’ (changing the means by which services are delivered) and getting tenants to ‘self-serve’ – for example by accessing services 24/7 via a website or smartphone app as well as receiving information by SMS and email. The move is part of LCC’s ‘digital-first’ approach allowing tenants to answer queries (such as interrogate

their rent account or waiting list bid), update their tenancy information, make payments, arrange appointments and access service information directly. The benefits of self-serve include more tenant control, quicker responses, better quality data and real-time feedback. Therefore there is provision for training to encourage the widest use of digital solutions.

2.3 Over the last few months Housing Leeds and VITAL have supported a review of the existing framework, acknowledging the context of:

- The existing framework has been in operation since 2014/15 and there was an opportunity to evaluate the outcomes for tenants.
- The framework in its current form supports a number of formalised involvement groups that risks the service acting on the views of a minority.
- The opportunity to offer a broader range of engagement activity appealing to a larger and more diverse spectrum of tenants
- Wider research, in particular the Chartered Institute of Housing '[Working together to challenge the future of tenant involvement](#)' (June 2016) and [Family Mosaic – Changing Places – how can we make resident involvement relevant?](#) (June 2015) – arguing current involvement has issues with reputation and credibility, value and relevance. Therefore landlords needed to develop models that offer greater influence to more tenants, greater use of digital communication, evidenced based involvement, and increased efficiency and value for money.
- Other landlords are developing alternative approaches to engagement. Examples of good practice including Halton Housing's engagement plan is around achieving 90% tenants being connected to tenants in the home and Adactus Housing increasing the availability of digital diagnostics.
- The opportunities to work more closely with existing LCC teams and resident engagement platforms. For example, linking with the existing Equality Hubs and making greater use of established mechanisms to engage with residents such as the Citizens Panel, an online panel of 5,000 Leeds residents who have volunteered to give their views.
- How our approach to involvement and engagement activity helps deliver the themes of the recently adopted 2016-2021 Housing Strategy.
- The Councils Locality Review, which aspires to deliver a more joined up approach with the new Communities and Environment directorate.
- The requirements of the service that we make any changes to the framework in line with the expectations set out in the Regulatory Framework for Social Housing's [Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard](#).

2.4 The Tenant and Community Involvement Team also participates in two national engagement networking groups. Like Housing Leeds, most social landlords want to develop further their digital and community engagement activities to help build sustainable communities, focussing formal tenant involvement on a partnership approach to service improvement. This shift in the sector also takes into account a landlords need to ensure the best possible value for money.

3 Main issues

3.1 The evaluation of the existing framework identified a number of points:

- VITAL has become well established as the strategic tenant body, and has provided a positive input into strategic policy changes. As VITAL representatives attend the Housing Advisory Board, there is a clear link into influencing the strategic direction of the service.
- There has been mixed success of the some of the citywide groups. VOLT (the Voice of Older Leeds Tenants) has been successful in contributing towards the development of our services to older tenants, but the High Rise Advisory Group and Equal Access Groups have struggled to demonstrate outcomes.
- The Housing Advisory Panels (HAPs) continue to bring together officers, tenants and local ward members to help respond to local issues, and prioritise funding for local projects.
- TARAs are an important part of local involvement and accountability, although their interests are often about wider community issues, not just housing.
- There is a lot of different community engagement activity taking place not part of the formal framework, including fun days, summer galas, action days, and support for community groups to tackle local issues. It is this activity about which we receive the most positive feedback from tenants, Ward Members and community stakeholders.
- While we have developed our digital engagement activity, it is not fully embedded within the service, and there are greater opportunities to increase the quality and relevancy of our communications.
- With the exception of community engagement the formal elements of the framework are good at hearing the views of a small number of ‘involved’ tenants, but is not effective at interpreting and acting on the views of all tenants.
- There is already a lot of customer insight that exists from surveys, complaints and day to day interactions with tenants, and we could be using this more effectively to drive service improvements.
- The Tenant Scrutiny Board currently risks working in isolation to the wider involvement framework.
- Some elements of the existing Tenant Involvement Framework are very resource intensive and doesn’t represent good value for money.

4. Outline of Proposals for the future of Tenant Engagement

- 4.1. With support from VITAL, officers have developed initial proposals on the change of approach.
- 4.2. It is proposed that a new framework (**see appendix 1**) is developed following the six themes of the Housing Strategy. This ensures all activity is relevant to and focussed on supporting the delivery of the Housing Strategy, as well as continuing the strategic input of tenants in the monitoring of its delivery.
- 4.3. VITAL has an important role as the strategic tenant body, offering strategic input into policy development. VITAL will remain responsible for overseeing the Tenant Engagement Framework overall, ensuring that it remains fit for purpose and good value for money.

4.4. In developing the Tenant Engagement Framework we have begun to define 3 distinct elements of activity as follows:

4.5. **Tenant Engagement** – by adopting much of what we learned from YAGi, improved two-way communication with all tenants on issues that matter to them so that tenants feel connected with Housing Leeds, wider Council services and their community. In practice this means:

- Improved website content, giving regular updates and sharing opportunities for tenants to provide feedback and be aware of activities in their neighbourhood.
- Diversifying our digital approach to include – information films, relevant and two way social media, for example online Universal Credit Q&A, using the Citizen’s Panel and other online surveys and feedback opportunities.
- Smarter communications, using targeted emails to seek views on particular issues from different customer groups and better use of community notice boards, screens in offices and the flow of information through new and developing Community Hubs.
- Greater use of ‘pop-up’ consultations, the mobile office and tapping in to events and activities already going on in local communities – an ‘us coming to you’ approach.
- Adopting a culture of engagement, exploring how we listen and respond to issues during day to day interactions with tenants, whether this be repairs, estate walkabouts, annual home visits or housing surgeries.
- Exploring closer working with partners who already have engagement channels in place, e.g. the Older Persons Forum and Young Lives Leeds.

4.6. **Tenant Involvement** – working with a smaller number of tenants who want to be more actively involved. Introducing the interpretation of customer insight to enable tenants and officers to work together to improve services, performance, customer care and overall satisfaction. In practice this means:

- Analysing STAR results to inform service specific improvements and help set wider tenant engagement priorities.
- Utilising less staff time supporting the formal involvement activity, in order to support an increase in our broader engagement agenda.
- Undertaking more task and finish projects, to seek tenant views on particular issues rather than standing forums.
- Ensuring representation and equality considerations are taking into account in the development of policy and housing practices by linking to existing Council forums, such as the Equality Hubs.
- Work with existing involved tenants, on ideas and ways to make our formal involvement more flexible and attractive for more people to participate in.

4.7. **Community investment** – working with communities, community groups and partners to identify and deliver programmes or projects which help build the skills and resilience of communities. In practice this means:

- Continued investment in activity, which is focused on the particular needs of communities and in support of Best Council priorities and any Breakthrough Projects, e.g. collaborative work with Library Services to improve digital skills.
- Close working with the new Communities and Environment directorate to develop community engagement and investment proposals, for example the targeted Green Up initiative to a cluster of high rise blocks in East Leeds.
- Strengthened links with other community engagement activity in the Council and third sector to ensure a collaborative and efficient approach.
- Using customer insight more generally so community action is focussed in the places where benefit can be greatest, e.g. acting on the mapping of digital access, self-service portal access or direct debit take up.
- Being more aware of Asset Based Community Development principles helping us understand and respect the existing strengths of a community and what it can offer, as a joint response to local issues. An opportunity to work with communities in this way is currently ongoing on the Wyther Estate, working closely with colleagues from Citizens and Communities.

5. Delivering the new approach – work to date

- 5.1. The review highlighted the duplication between the East, South and West Repairs Groups. This forum has now been consolidated into a single citywide Repairs and Investment Group with a clear focus on working with Property and Contracts Teams on service improvements. The forward plan includes reviewing new repairs information films and helping identify areas of future work like this, an in depth analysis of why Leeds proportionally raises more costly emergency orders than other landlords and a critical friend review of our collective learning from the delivery of capital investment schemes.
- 5.2. VOLT already closely align their forward work programme and are committed to working with the Sheltered Service to help define and deliver the different support models for sheltered housing for older people. The High Rise Group is about to review its forward work programme, shifting the focus to support the service to design and delivery the High Rise Strategy. There are significant opportunities to communicate different messages to high rise tenants in different ways depending on the future model for the block and the group have a key role to play in helping shape this.
- 5.3. The service is shifting its approach to incorporating equality within the new framework by no longer having a separate disability themed Equal Access Forum, rather ensuring tenants and residents are active participants within the various Equality Hubs e.g. the hubs for disability, Carers, LGB&T*, BME and Older People. In addition, VITAL are keen to incorporate representatives from these groups on VITAL itself, or wider membership of VITAL from under-represented groups to ensure equality is part and parcel of the influence tenants have.
- 5.4. To support the Housing Growth programme, a task and finish exercise was recently undertaken to get the feedback from some of the new tenants that moved into our new council housing stock. A one off face to face workshop resulted in tenants giving some clear preferences for design and colour scheme options for bathrooms and kitchens that will be used in our forthcoming developments. In addition, the

involvement team supported a targeted online survey campaign, seeking the specific views of residents who are now living in our newest homes to get their feedback on how we can build and design future schemes that meet tenants' needs. A general theme emerged around wishing us to provide more space for appliances and storage space, especially from families.

- 5.5. Leeds Tenants Federations (LTF) championing the interests of Tenants and Residents Associations (TARAs) and Area Reps has gathered pace through the use of its TARA Panel. The TARA Panel cascades information and new skills to local groups – having so far included sessions about fuel poverty and energy efficiency, including finding out about White Rose Energy, a session on debt management and Money Buddies and a workshop on Scams and Frauds Awareness. The TARA Panel representing a networking opportunity for like-minded community activists to share ideas and experiences and motivate and support each other.
- 5.6. More generally LTF continue to demonstrate a more mobile and cost effective way of working. They are due to withdraw from their permanent premises at the end of March and significant savings are realised as a result. LTF have also benefitted from a number of new Committee members who are supportive of LTFs new direction and officers have a productive partnership with them.
- 5.7. The emerging framework has been developed with input from the Tenant and Community Involvement Team and the objectives of the team will be reviewed and updated to take into account:
 - More activity to raise digital skills and improve access to the internet, to mitigate the income risks of future welfare changes as well as the wider benefits of being digitally enabled, with more information being used from the Annual Home Visit process.
 - A local focus – the streamlined formal elements of the framework helps focus resources on local communities, working with Communities Teams and playing an active part in the transition to any new working arrangements as part of the wider Communities and Environments Directorate
 - The need to become more skilled about sourcing funding to help community groups achieve their aims
 - More feeding back to tenants and communities about the local / smaller things that are happening in a community that matter to residents, especially taking a more proactive role in digital communications.
- 5.8. There are a number of areas of further work with VITAL and other tenant forums related to the new approach. This includes the creation of an updated performance framework, how we show the impact and results of our engagement and involvement activity and how we present and market this new approach to tenants as a whole.

The service will also work with VITAL to update its terms of reference, ensuring the new framework is monitored and it remains relevant and effective.
- 5.10. With HAB support, Housing Leeds will continue to work with VITAL and other tenants to develop the detail of the updated framework with a view to full implementation from 1 April 2017.

7 Corporate considerations

7.1 Consultation and engagement

7.2 The new framework has been developed collaboratively with Housing Leeds' Strategic Tenant Body - VITAL. By working closely with VITAL we were able to include the views of different customer groups, given that VITAL membership consists of representatives from the various tenant led groups that make up the existing framework.

7.3 The emerging framework has been shared with the Tenant and Community Involvement Team, who supports the overall approach, and added a number of useful suggestions and practical future actions.

7.4 One of the drivers for the review of the existing framework was the feedback from the broader tenant population (i.e. those not formally involved with the service). These tenants did not feel that they were being communicated with or that their voice was being heard with only 56% of tenants felt satisfied that Housing Leeds listens to their views and acts upon them. This prompted the approach to broaden engagement.

8 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

8.1 The new framework takes a broader view of equality; ensuring equality is embedded in terms of the diversity of membership for formal work and the nature of insight and feedback in our wider engagement that will inform local community development activity.

8.2 VITAL specifically identified the need to include the voices of LGB&T*, disabled, and BME and younger/working age tenants at a strategic level, and the future membership and terms of reference for VITAL will be updated to take this into account.

9 Council Policies and Best Council Plan

9.1 The framework is designed to support the delivery of the key themes of the Housing Strategy. Activity within the framework also supports a number of strategic Council documents, including the Best Council Plan, and Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

10 Resources and value for money

10.1 A consideration whilst undertaking the review of the framework has been to make best use of resources, including the time of officers and the time of volunteers that are involved. The changes to the framework have resulted in fewer formal meetings and less associated costs, and help support the shift in focus of the Involvement and Engagement Team to broader engagement activity, local activity as well as a strong central involvement function.

10.2 The service recognises that part of the development focus of the team is to enhance the support to local groups and work with local partners in gaining more external funding into the neighbourhoods of Leeds.

11 Legal Implications, access to information and call In

11.1 The report does not contain any exempt or confidential information.

12 Risk management

12.2 VITAL have developed the changes with the service, using a partnership approach, and in doing so help ensure that all forms of involvement and engagement activity have the opportunity to flourish.

12.3 VITAL will continue to monitor the successful delivery and performance of the framework, and will give regular updates to the Housing Advisory Board. The Tenant and Community Involvement Team will continue to seek and adopt new ways of working with partners and other council teams, a 'One Council' approach, to ensure residents are engaged with effectively.

13 Conclusions

13.4 In partnership with VITAL, the service has developed a new engagement framework that recognises the importance of:

- **Tenant Engagement** –improved two-way communication with all tenants on issues that matter to them so that tenants feel connected with Housing Leeds, wider Council services and their community.
- **Tenant Involvement** – working with a smaller number of tenants who want to be more actively involved. Introducing the interpretation of customer insight to enable tenants and officers to work together to improve services, performance, customer care and overall satisfaction.
- **Community investment** – working with communities, community groups and partners to identify and deliver programmes or projects which help build the skills and resilience of communities.

14 Recommendations

14.1 That HAB support Housing Leeds to continue to work with tenants to develop the detail of the updated framework and to plan the transition, with a view to full implementation from 1 April 2017.