

Title: Communications and Engagement Update

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1. Purpose

- 1.1 To update the Board on recent communications and engagement activity.

2. Background:

- 2.1 The 2023 Social Housing (Regulation) Act introduced four updated Consumer Standards, including the [Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard](#) (TIA) standard, which sets out a strengthened requirement for social landlords to be open with tenants and treat them with fairness and respect so that they can access services, raise complaints, influence decision making and hold their landlord to account.
- 2.2 Following consultation with residents, drawing insight from our analysis of our Tenant Satisfaction Measures results and taking further feedback from staff and the board into account, the service now has in place an updated Communications and Engagement Policy. This gives the service a clearer and more consistent approach to communications and engagement activity across Housing Leeds and helps us more robustly comply with the TIA Consumer Standard.
- 2.3 Since the end of November, senior managers within the service have been tasked with self-assessing their parts of the service against the new policy and throughout 2025 we anticipate identifying a number of additional actions and improvements to improve communications, customer care and our resident engagement activity.

3. Update on communications activity

- 3.1 The **website continues to develop** in response to resident feedback and to help strengthen regulatory compliance. In recent months, a [Social Housing Regulation](#) page has been created which provides information to customers about our regulatory responsibilities, including our Tenant Satisfaction Measure (TSM) performance. There have also been updates to our [repairs pages](#), making timescales for completion clearer, giving more information on our landlord responsibilities and tenant's own responsibilities and additional information about window safety, damp and mould advice and gas and electrical repairs.
- 3.2 In addition, we have updated our resident engagement pages explaining the ways residents can have a say and influence what we do and created a new '[Housing policies](#)' page that collates our key policies into one area, so residents are more easily able to access information about us and our work. The [Housing disrepair claims](#) campaign page has been refreshed with more recent case studies, highlighting some of the risks to residents

and encouraging residents to contact us with any outstanding repairs so we can put them right.

- 3.3 In September the service increased its promotion of the **Tenant Portal** as residents can now book repairs and confirm an appointment. The communication to date includes features in our regular bulletins and newsletters, social media posts, within the latest rent statement letter and promotion when a new tenancy starts. We are also focussing on day-to-day contact as an opportunity to increase the use of the portal with support from colleagues in the Contact Centre/Community Hubs also signposting.
- 3.4 At a more local level, a Tenant Engagement Officer is currently trialling holding drop-in surgeries to help residents access the portal in local community locations. We have also done bespoke emails to those who had already registered but may not be aware of the new functionality.
- 3.5 Between September and November 2024, we had almost 800 new registrations on the Portal, compared to less than 200 for the same period the previous year. Along with being able to book a repair, the portal can also be used to check a person's rent account, make a payment, download a rent statement, and request some types of permissions.
- 3.6 In terms of our communication activity with **high-rise residents**:
- a) In October, following input from high rise residents on the Tenant Voice Panel, we released our second [high-rise building safety newsletter](#). This ensures all residents, including leaseholders, receive a hard copy newsletter with key building safety information. The content was informed from the results of the 2nd Building Safety Residents Survey, which has been previously reported to the board.
 - b) We continue to issue bi-monthly high-rise e-bulletins to 5,100 residents, recent editions being on the [25 October](#) and [6 December](#). Within these, we have promoted the new [High-Rise Safety Advice](#) booklet from West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service and now include as a standard a short e-form asking any resident to tell us if they may need help to self-evacuate.
 - c) Our communications continue to promote the [Building Safety Hub](#). Since it's inception on the 1 November 2023, the Hub has been visited just over 4,000 times, with 400 views of the page once logged in, giving residents access to building safety information about their home and block.
 - d) Over the summer we increased our window safety messaging, sending short text reminders during hot spells and in the run up to summer school holidays to remind of the importance of window safety. A standard window safety leaflet, in addition to block specific information already provided, has been translated into eight community languages and was used to support local engagement at

the Oatland blocks in Little London. We have also updated [window safety information](#) content on our website.

- e) The electronic noticeboards installed at Cottingley Heights and Towers, are displaying information however, we are having intermittent connectivity issues. We have ongoing enquiries with EE as the network provider and the supplier to resolve and will seek resident feedback once able to benefit from the full functionality.
- 3.7 During 2023 we made changes to the **options given to residents when they ring the Contact Centre or contact a local housing team** directly. If a customer rings a local housing office about repairs, they will be directed to the Contact Centre. Similarly, if a resident calls the Contact Centre about rent matters, this is directed to the local housing team. This ensures customers are directed and speak to the teams best placed to deal with their enquiry at first point of contact. This also helps us give more consistent levels of service and advice to residents, and additional support for rent related calls can be more easily identified and put into place.
- 3.8 The service continues to issue **monthly e-bulletins** to all residents with an email address, recent examples being those sent on the [4th October](#) and [1st November](#). November's message was sent to 42,440 recipients, with 44% (18,150) of recipients opening the message. 600 of these residents then went on to view our 'manage your tenancy online' page of our website.
- 3.9 Reflecting the changes within the Tenant Engagement Team, local Tenant Engagement Officers have consolidated their local **Facebook pages** and have launched new pages reflecting their current roles and areas of responsibility. You can view the [links to these new pages and other changes to our engagement offer](#) on our website. These are in addition to the Housing Leeds citywide Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) pages

4. Communication priorities for the year ahead

- 4.1 Throughout 2025 we will be monitoring the completion and delivery of the improvements identified from the communication and engagement **self-assessments**. An additional temporary dedicated resource to support this activity is in place.
- 4.2 Plans are underway to review the **Council Housing and Leeds Homes web pages** so that they include information relating to all key service areas, and meet the requirement of the TIA Standard, adopting a more standardised layout.
- 4.3 Linked to the above, any changes made to website content need to be reflected in the **Tenant Handbook**. We are currently undertaking informal interviews with tenants who have recently started a new tenancy and have received the Handbook to ask for their feedback on what they find the most useful. We envisage the majority of a future Tenant Handbook being made available online, with hard copy information for

those who need this.

- 4.4 One of our priorities is to finalise our **Individual Needs / Reasonable Adjustments Policy**. We have undertaken initial consultation with partner agencies and their reference groups (like the Autism Partnership Board) and are currently developing our consultation plans for residents more widely. This consultation will help us develop the policy ahead of publication and implementation. The policy when finalised will give staff clearer guidance on how to support residents accessing services and to ensure reasonable adjustments are in place where possible. The policy will also aim to improve resident confidence in the service, build trust and improve the customer experience for all residents.
- 4.5 Our Communications and Engagement Policy outlines the **standards of customer care** residents can expect when contacting us by phone in particular, as is the most common way residents engage with us. To ensure the consistency of service and high levels of customer care we are currently reviewing the content of the Customer Excellence training course that is given to all new Customer Services Officers within the Contact Centre and Community Hubs. This training is delivered through a mixture of group exercises, discussions, presentations and video's and is followed up with regular coaching sessions to ensure the techniques and messages in the training are embedded. There may be useful content within this that Housing Leeds staff can also benefit from.
- 4.6 Much of our **high-rise specific communication** is now 'business as usual'. However, there are other enhancements the service would like to explore, for example, the use of sharing key messages by using short video clips, holding block safety action days in blocks with traditionally less engagement and engaging with more ethnically diverse residents to get feedback on how well our communications work and their ideas for key safety messages to be given differently so they are more accessible and understood.
- 4.7 Further **promotion of the tenant portal** is planned for the year ahead as we encourage residents who can access the portal to do so, helping us to focus resources on supporting residents with more complex enquires.

5. Update on tenant engagement activity

- 5.1 **The Tenant Voice Panel** - since the last update, membership of the panel has increased from 194 to 333 members. There is widespread geographical representation, with 98 residents living in high-rise homes and 24 living in retirement life accommodation.
- 5.2 In October the service created new content about the [Tenant Voice Panel](#) within the [Housing Leeds feedback website](#) and this is used to support ongoing promotion of how residents can join and be invited to take part in various activities and consultations. Digital promotion of the panel is supplemented with flyers and posters for community noticeboards and other community locations and is something local Tenant Engagement

Officers promote when meeting residents or residents groups in person.

- 5.3 Whilst the overall numbers of residents on the panel has increased, there is a slight over-representation of residents within the 45-64 age range, and slight under-representation in the 18-29 age range (there are 19 residents within this age group). Similarly, there are 51 residents from an ethnicity other than White British which is below the proportion of non-white tenants. One in four panel members have some form of disability or impairment. The more the panel grows, the generally more representative the panel becomes.
- 5.4 In recent months, different members of the panel through a combination of surveys and online, hybrid or in-person meetings have:
- a) Been appointed to the Leeds Housing Board
 - b) Given feedback to our tenants insurance provider on the accessibility of their online application form
 - c) Influenced a new ASB and Communications and Engagement Policy
 - d) Given feedback on the design and accessibility of our Lettings Standard
 - e) Been invited to take part in our consultations about setting new standards of customer care of our contractors and research into how we reduce the number of 'no access' appointments.
 - f) Taken part in our consultation with residents about how we strengthen our local tenant engagement activity that is now reflected in our new communications and engagement policy.
 - g) Helped shape the content of September's second annual High Rise Building Safety Newsletter, with more emphasis on how residents can report anti-social behaviour included as a result.
 - h) Four Tenant Voice Panel members have joined the Tenant Scrutiny Board, to help them with their next review.
- 5.5 The Equality Impact Assessment for the new Communications and Engagement Policy has identified a number of actions, including improving the equality monitoring of panel membership to better understand who is taking part and to identify gaps in any representation of certain customer groups.
- 5.6 In December, the **Tenant Scrutiny Board** (TSB) completed their latest review on complaints, focussing on ensuring all customers have a complaint response within timescales, how we learn from complaints and how this learning is shared back with residents. We are in the process of sharing this more widely with residents on social media, in the citywide tenant email and with tenants, residents and community groups.
- 5.7 There are 13 recommendations that are presented to Housing Leeds, the specific content of which is included within a separate complaints management update. During their review the TSB also met with Gateway Housing Association, and in addition to this being a useful source of information to help identify recommendations, it also highlighted different approaches to scrutiny that the board will reflect on early in the New Year

ahead of selecting their next topic.

- 5.8 The report is now being considered by the service and our response will be formally presented back to the TSB. They will then track the delivery of the recommendations throughout 2025. Future communication and engagement policy updates to the Leeds Housing Board will include a position statement on the delivery of the recommendations from this and future reviews that are captured on a recommendations tracker. The board are now reviewing a range of performance, satisfaction and complaints information and will be speaking to senior officers and the Executive Member for Housing to help identify their next topic for review.
- 5.9 Alongside undertaking their review into complaints, the TSB have also received regular updates on the outcomes of the Consumer Standards Self-Assessments, sharing and discussing with the board our respective areas of strength and areas for improvement to enable us to more robustly comply with the regulator's requirements. The board have found this useful to raise their general awareness of the activity and current improvement actions and are minded to ask for a further update on progress so can be used to inform their next topic for review.
- 5.10 At the beginning of October the service launched a **new engagement website** '[Housing Leeds Feedback](#)', a website that allows us to host online engagement with residents. Since it's launch, through our communications and engagement work, the site has been visited by 4,422 residents, with 320 respondents making 553 contributions in the form of completing surveys or making comments on suggestions or proposals. Of these 200 residents have also subscribed for updates which means they receive email alerts when a page is updated, when a news item or new consultation is added.
- 5.11 This has enabled us to host consultations on anti-social behaviour, our approach to communications, safeguarding, how we can reduce 'no access' appointments and how residents can influence new standards of customer care of our repairs contractors. We are also able to post feedback to residents on the difference their input has made and share this feedback more widely using the 'news' items – for example, publishing what we did, what you told us and what we've done in response, [related to the ASB consultation](#).
- 5.12 To ensure we capture the views of residents who may not or who are not confident in being online, the local Tenant Engagement Officers have been visiting residents meetings, coffee mornings etc and talking to tenants to capture their views – using a combination of hard copy surveys and using i-pads to sit with residents to take part in the live consultations.
- 5.13 We are now in a regular pattern of undertaking quarterly satisfaction surveys in line with the Regulator for Social Housing's '**Tenant Satisfaction Measures**' or **TSMs**. The approach to collecting this information and the most recently available results are provided separately to the board. We have used, or are currently using TSM data

to:

- a) Inform service planning and priorities for 2025/26
 - b) Share with the Tenant Scrutiny Board to help them understand the current tenant experience of services to influence the selection of their next topic.
 - c) Monitor the effectiveness of a number of key strategies including our approach to high rise engagement
 - d) Feed residents' priorities into the 2025/6 budget setting consultation process.
- 5.14 The tenant satisfaction measures are reported quarterly in our tenant email bulletin, presented on our website and highlighted on our social media. The autumn rent statement mailing included a hard copy insert, summarising Quarters 1 and 2 information and a summary of our end of year performance is also included in our annual report.
- 5.15 Local engagement continues through our support of the 60 **tenants, residents and community groups**. Our 'Communities on Top' service offer is used as the basis for more supportive conversations with groups across the city, with ABCD principles part of this. In October we provided further funding to West Yorkshire Community Accounting Service (WYCAS) to enable them to undertake free accounts checks for local groups so they can manage their money well and be better able to successfully attract funding. A number of groups are also scheduled in the New Year to have 'Treasurer' training as part of this arrangement.
- 5.16 Alongside Voluntary Action Leeds and Leeds Community Foundation and other key council services, we continue to support the promotion of [Funding Leeds](#). This gives third sector groups free access to local, regional and national funding opportunities. During November 2024, the site was visited 13,760 times by 399 different groups to undertake 505 funding searches.
- 5.17 **Twice yearly walkabouts** continue to be undertaken by local housing teams with invitations to local Ward Members and tenants, residents and community groups to attend. The service are currently improving the monitoring of walkabout activity so that we can better report back to residents our activity.
- 5.18 The **mobile office** has been used by various teams and services to help meet with residents. Examples of recent use include providing a focal point for the Selective Licencing consultations, and being used to carry out housing surgeries in response to local issues.
- 5.19 As described, the new Communications and Engagement Policy self-assessment will highlight the opportunities to engage with residents on a wider range of issues and we are anticipating many teams and services will wish to undertake some form of consultation in the year ahead. To help us manage and communicate these opportunities with residents we are now maintaining a **consultation forward plan**. This also ensures consistency in terms of making sure all methods/approaches to seeking

feedback are used and are promoted widely.

6. Engagement priorities for the year ahead

- 6.1 The Engagement Team are developing an updated '**virtual walkabout**' model reflecting the move to a different resident engagement platform. The principal remains that residents living within the walkabout area will be invited to give feedback by dropping a pin and leaving a comment in a particular location where they live at a time of their choosing whilst the walkabout is open for comments. This can coincide with an in-person walkabout or can be in addition to, at a different time of the year.
- 6.2 Whilst our overall high-rise communication and engagement improved in response to the Building Safety Act, there are a number of additional opportunities for more engagement focussing on specific issues and/or locations where resident engagement has historically been lower. A draft high-rise communication and engagement plan is in development for 2025 based on resident feedback during 2024.
- 6.3 Following consultation with residents about our local tenant engagement offer and in consultation with the Chairs of the local Community Committees, there is an opportunity for Housing Leeds to take a more proactive role to **support Community Committee activity**. In the year ahead we're looking to develop more localised information sharing with residents, allowing them to have greater insight into our work including sharing with residents local Community Committee activity, inviting residents, especially those on the Tenant Voice Panel, to be more involved. The service looks forward to also reviewing the outcomes from the LCC review of Community Committee so we can align our future activity with the outcomes of this.
- 6.4 In line with the TIA standard, and recommendations from the Tenant Scrutiny Board, to create **new online content** that shares with residents examples of our learning from complaints, and content summarising our changes as a result of using resident feedback – a 'you said we did' approach. We will seek resident input into the content and host these new pages on our Housing Leeds Feedback website, so that all content about open and available consultations and consultation feedback is in one place.
- 6.5 To more proactively share with residents the outcomes of our engagement activity, we are developing an '**impact dashboard**'. We anticipate sharing this with Quarter 3 data, at the beginning of 2025, that presents a summary of our communication and engagement activity along with some examples or highlights of the different resident feedback has made. Designed as a customer facing pdf, this can be shared in our email bulletins, to tenants, residents and community groups, with the Tenant Voice Panel, the Tenant Scrutiny Board and with the Leeds Housing Board and on social media.

7. Items for discussion

- a) Are there any parts of the report that the board would like further information on?
- b) Is there anything missing in terms of our communication and engagement activity that the board would like to see reported?
- c) We will use feedback from Tenant Voice Panel members when developing new customer facing material – to what extent would the board, and particularly Tenant Board members like to be involved in helping shape new content?

8. Recommendations

- 8.1 The Leeds Housing Board are requested to note and comment on recent activity related to tenant engagement and offer support/comment.