

HOMES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP
22 MAY 2018

REVIEW OF HOUSING SERVICE TENANT INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY

Cabinet Member(s): Councillor Ray Stanley
Responsible Officer: Claire Fry, Group Manager for Housing Services

Reason for Report: The Housing Service tenant involvement strategy is due to be reviewed in 2018. This work has been completed and the new draft strategy takes account of expected changes to the regulatory framework; it contains amended priorities which should deliver greater value for money.

RECOMMENDATION: It is recommended that Homes Policy Development Group review the revised Tenant Involvement Strategy relating to tenant involvement and to recommend to the Cabinet that it is adopted.

Relationship to Corporate Plan: The efficient and effective management of our housing stock is a priority within the corporate plan and this strategy supports work to achieve this. It ensures compliance with the regulatory framework for social housing.

Financial Implications: There is a budget in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) set aside for tenant involvement activity.

Legal Implications: The Housing Act 1985 contains provisions relating to tenant consultation and reference is made to this in the Council standard tenancy agreement. The regulatory framework for social housing contains a Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard which sets out a number of required outcomes and specific expectations.

Risk Assessment: The Housing Service must take account of the views of tenants, offering them opportunities to scrutinise performance and to comment on the service offer, in accordance with the regulatory framework for social housing. Failure to consider their views could result in increased complaints, which upheld, could result in reputational damage. The Regulator for Social Housing expects tenants to be offered opportunities to be involved and could order an investigation if there is evidence that regulatory obligations are being ignored.

Equality Impact Assessment: The Housing Service collects data on the diversity of tenants and endeavours to tailor services to meet the needs of all tenants. With regard to tenant involvement, our activities take into account the needs of those involved. For example, we have a tenant expenses scheme and the cost of childcare, travel or other reasonable expenses can be reimbursed in accordance with this in order to remove any barriers to involvement.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The existing strategy relating to tenant involvement requires review. It was agreed in 2015 and became due for review in January 2018.

1.2 The revised version (version 5) is shown at Annex A. A change of template has meant that the draft would not have been very easy to read with tracked changes. For this reason, the existing strategy and the new draft have been provided, and tracked changes will be made available upon request showing what has been deleted from the existing strategy and what has been included as part of the revision.

2.0 **CONTEXT**

2.1 Registered Providers (RPs) of social housing are regulated by the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH) which operates a regulatory framework. The framework consists of a number of regulatory standards and each of these includes a number of required outcomes and specific expectations.

2.2 The standards are divided into two groups: there are economic standards and consumer standards. Local authority landlords are obliged to ensure that they meet the needs of the consumer standards.

2.3 The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard is a consumer standard, as are the Home, the Tenancy, and the Neighbourhood and Community Standards.

2.4 The RSHs role is to set the consumer standards and to intervene where failure to meet the standards has caused, or could have caused, serious harm to tenants.

2.5 The RSH operates a co-regulatory approach. This means that Councillors who govern the Council's service delivery are responsible for ensuring that the Council is meeting the regulatory standards, and for being open and accountable in how the Council meets its objectives.

2.6 Co-regulation also requires providers to support tenants in the shaping and scrutiny of service delivery and in holding Councillors to account.

2.7 The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard states that RPs shall ensure that tenants are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in the work of their landlord. This will include the formulation of housing-related policies and strategic priorities, the making of decisions about how housing-related services are delivered, including the setting of service standards and agreeing local offers for service delivery.

2.8 In addition, landlords are expected to offer opportunities to tenants to enable them to scrutinise performance, and to suggest how performance might be improved.

2.9 The specific expectations set out in the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard relating to Involvement and Empowerment include the need for RPs to support their tenants to develop and implement opportunities for these areas; to consult with tenants on the scope of local offers for service delivery; and to consult tenants at least once every three

years on the best way of involving tenants in the governance and scrutiny of the organisation's housing management service.

3.0 PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE STRATEGY

- 3.1 The strategy was originally written on an earlier version of the corporate policy template and this has now been addressed.
- 3.2 Proposals are in hand to survey tenants about a variety of matters including the best way of involving them in the running of the Housing Service, and reference to this is made in the new draft strategy. There is a regulatory requirement to engage with all tenants on a regular basis.
- 3.3 The aims and objectives as set out in the existing strategy have been amended to ensure that they better reflect the requirements of the regulatory framework.
- 3.4 The new draft strategy acknowledges the need to ensure that there is a range of ways in which those interested in the work of the Housing Service can get involved. The menu of involvement remains unchanged allowing tenants to get involved as much or as little as they would like.
- 3.5 In the years since the existing strategy was agreed, the way in which stakeholders interact with the Housing Service has changed. Social media has assumed a greater importance as a channel of communication and 579 people now "follow" the MDDC Housing Facebook page. Most of our posts generally reach 100 to 400 people but there have been posts that have reached a lot more people. The strategy acknowledges that the way in which stakeholders wish to interact with the Housing Service is changing and, for this reason, there is a commitment to promote opportunities for tenant involvement using a variety of media channels, which will include print and other electronic means of communication.
- 3.6 The new draft strategy includes an additional paragraph entitled: "Increasing Involvement" which explains that the Housing Service will pay legitimate expenses to those who wish to engage in involvement activities. This demonstrates the commitment of the service to increasing involvement; in addition, it also means that our approach is inclusive. By covering expenses incurred as a result of tenant involvement activity, hopefully no tenant will feel excluded or unable to participate if they would like.
- 3.7 Paragraph 6.4 in the new draft strategy refers to the Code of Conduct which is used to ensure that anyone who is involved with the work of the Council is respectful of the views of others and does not make any comments which may be offensive. It also explains that our Scrutiny Group, Tenant's Together, has terms of reference which have been agreed by the Group.
- 3.8 The Housing Service has a newsletter, Housing News 4U, which is edited by tenants. In order to reduce the cost of production and despatch, the new draft strategy states that greater emphasis will be placed on sending this out electronically. Furthermore, it is understood that not all tenants will

necessarily see information published by the Housing Service via social media. However, as some of this may be useful, the new draft strategy contains a commitment to using the newsletter to bring together information circulated elsewhere, predominantly on the MDDC Facebook page.

3.9 There is no longer a regulatory requirement to publish an annual report. Last year, the information was published as an insert in Housing News 4U. The resources involved in putting together an annual report do not justify the outcome, especially as the Housing Service already publishes performance data. Therefore, the section in the existing strategy relating to the annual report has been amended to show that the Housing Service will publish annual performance information setting out how the Regulatory Standards have been met, in the future. This will be available on-line and other information will be made available to tenants using other channels of communication which may include Housing News 4U, the tenant newsletter.

3.10 The other changes to the menu of involvement are relatively minor.

4.0 **CONSULTATION**

4.1 The Tenants Together group will be consulted on the new draft strategy at their meeting on 10 may 2018 and the Group Manager for Housing will update the PDG as part of her verbal report on it, at the meeting on 23 may 2018.

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Circulation of the Report: Councillor Ray Stanley, Cabinet Member for Housing

List of Background Papers:

The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/628396/Tenant_Involvement_and_Empowerment_Standard.pdf

How should social housing landlords change after Grenfell? – Comment by Greg Campbell, Social Housing, 10 January 2018
<https://www.socialhousing.co.uk/comment/comment/how-should-social-housing-landlords-change-after-grenfell-53861>