

**HOMES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP  
22 MAY 2018**

**REVIEW OF HOUSING SERVICE TENANT INVOLVEMENT POLICY**

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

**Reason for Report:** The Housing Service's tenant involvement policy was due for review in April 2018. This work has been completed and the draft strategy takes account of changes to the regulatory framework, and new means of consulting with stakeholders.

**RECOMMENDATION:** The Homes PDG is asked to agree the revised policy 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 and to ensure 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 the consultation of tenants and reference is made to these in the Council's standard tenancy agreements. 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 should 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 take on board their views could result in increased complaints, which if 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 policy relating to tenant involvement requires review. It was agreed in 2015 and was due for review in April 2018.

1.2 The revised version (version 4) is shown in Appendix 1 with tracked changes showing what has been deleted from the existing policy 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 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 Regulator of Social Housing's 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 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.

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

2.7 The specific expectations set out in the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard 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.

2.8 The fire at Grenfell tower last June occurred in a block of flats managed by a Tenant Management Organisation (TMO). Since the fire, residents of the TMO have stated that they raised concerns about fire safety and other issues which were ignored by their landlord.

2.9 Informed commentators are now suggesting that the Government may act as a result of this to ensure that tenant involvement is given higher priority by RPs, in future, and cite the roadshows undertaken by the previous Minister with responsibility for Housing, Alok Sharma, as evidence of this (Campbell, 2018). In addition, there are suggestions that the regulatory framework is

likely to be amended to strengthen the requirement for RPs to organise meaningful engagement with tenants.

### **3.0 PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE POLICY**

3.1 The proposed changes to the existing Tenant Involvement policy are shown in Appendix 1 as tracked changes.

3.2 Members will note that only a few changes have been made.

3.3 The revised draft policy more closely reflects the strategy set out in the revised draft Tenant Involvement Strategy, also on the agenda for decision at this meeting.

3.4 In particular, reference has been made in the revised draft policy, to the use of new technologies for engaging with tenants, in the summary at paragraph 8. The world has changed since 2015 and we are aware that technological advances will continue. The way in which many people access the news, for example, has changed, with many people using social media channels such as Twitter and Facebook to do this (Wakefield, 2016). For this reason, the Housing Service intends to continue using social media, and any other new channels which may be developed in the future, for promoting matters deemed to be of importance to tenants.

3.5 This approach has been working; the insights tool on Facebook gives us some useful information regarding posts on our MDDC Housing page. There are 579 people following the page. We advertise homes for rent using the tag line: "Property of the Week". These posts routinely reach 400 - 700 Facebook users. A post on 9 April 2018 regarding scams also reached approximately 1800 people.

3.6 Further changes to the revised draft policy can be found in section 9 which relates to Equality and Diversity. This section now includes reference to the Tenant's Expenses Scheme and other adjustments which can be made to enable people from different sections of society to participate in tenant involvement activity.

### **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.

**Contact for more Information:** Claire Fry, Group Manager for Housing, Telephone 01884 234920 [cfry@middevon.gov.uk](mailto:cfry@middevon.gov.uk)

#### **Circulation of the Report:**

#### **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](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/628396/Tenant_Involvement_and_Empowerment_Standard.pdf)

Social media “outstrips TV” as news source for young people – Jane Wakefield, BBC website, 15 June 2016

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-36528256>

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>