

**DECENT & AFFORDABLE HOMES PDG
16 JUNE 2015**

THE TENANT INVOLVEMENT POLICY

Cabinet Member Cllr Ray Stanley
Responsible Officer Housing Services Manager

Reason for Report: The existing tenant involvement policy was approved in January 2012 and is now due for review.

RECOMMENDATION(S): That the Cabinet approves the revised Housing Services tenant involvement policy.

Relationship to Corporate Plan: The Council must run the Housing Service efficiently and effectively and in accordance with the provisions of the regulatory framework. The Corporate Plan includes a pledge entitled: "Better Homes" where the long term vision is to ensure that the housing needs of our residents are met through the provision of good quality housing. It also contains a pledge relating to the empowerment of our communities.

Financial Implications: The Housing Service has set aside a budget for tenant involvement activities.

Legal Implications: The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard within the Regulatory Framework for Social Housing sets out a number of required outcomes and specific expectations which the Housing Service, as a Registered Provider (RP) of social housing is expected to meet.

Risk Assessment: The regulator holds Boards and Councillors responsible for ensuring that registered providers meet the consumer standards, including the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard. Failure to deliver the outcomes and expectations required could lead to reputational risk and some tenant dissatisfaction.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) is responsible for the regulation of social housing. The regulatory framework is underpinned by the principle of co-regulation which means that, in the case of a local authority such as the Council, with retained stock, Councillors are responsible for ensuring the standards are met and that others such as tenants, MPs and other elected representatives have a role in scrutinising that this is delivered.

1.2 The regulatory framework consists of a number of standards and these are divided into those relating to economic issues and those relating to consumer issues. The Council is only required to comply with the consumer standards; the economic standards apply to housing association and other RPs.

1.3 The Tenant Involvement & Empowerment Standard specifies that tenants must be given a wide range of opportunities to influence service delivery and to be involved in scrutinising all the work undertaken by the Housing Service.

2.0 **The Revised Policy**

2.1 The revised policy refers to the regulatory framework and also to the Council's statutory obligations which arise because it has retained stock.

2.2 It acknowledges that not all of our tenants will want to get involved and respects their right not to do so. This is particularly important because last year, all tenants were consulted on their views in relation to tenant involvement. The results demonstrated a high level of apathy. Over 3000 households were sent a questionnaire survey but only 122 responses were received either by post or online. 29 tenants were invited to attend a focus group to give us their views, but, unfortunately, this was not very well attended, with only 3 attending. Of the tenants who responded to the survey:

- Almost 50% said that they would find it easier to get involved with more online opportunities
- 54% said that they did not want to attend meetings
- 66% said that they were unable to attend a meeting very easily
- 48% said that they did not feel comfortable meeting new people

2.3 Whilst the revised policy contains a commitment to working in partnership with tenants to deliver service improvements, it states that the Housing Service will gather feedback by various methods and use a variety of different methods to communicate with tenants.

2.4 It describes how we will offer tenants opportunities to participate and to scrutinise all aspects of service delivery.

2.5 The revised policy was discussed at the last meeting of the PDG on 17 March 2015 but it was agreed that a decision should be deferred to this meeting of the PDG due to the fact that the draft policy was not sent out to Members at the appropriate time, due to an oversight.

3.0 **Equality & Diversity**

3.1 The revised policy contains a statement which sets out the statutory obligations of the Council as a Registered Provider of social housing.

3.2 In particular, it states that we will not tolerate any discriminatory remarks or actions and that we will challenge anyone who behaves in that manner. This is important so that tenants from every section of society feel comfortable because they are aware that meetings are inclusive and that they can attend meetings or other events in the knowledge that any offensive behaviour will be dealt with firmly.

3.3 In practice, in order to ensure that any tenant who wants to get involved can do so, the service is tailored to the needs of those who are involved. For example, meetings of the Scrutiny and Improvement Group (the SIG), now

known as the Tenants Together Group, are held at Phoenix House, an accessible venue. Tenant representatives are reimbursed for any costs associated with work undertaken on behalf of the Council and this will include travel costs, childcare and the cost of telephone calls.

3.4 Training is offered to those tenants who express an interest and a variety of different options are on offer, including online and residential training, which means that it is accessible to most people who wish to participate.

4.0 **Tenant Involvement**

4.1 The SIG reviewed this revised policy at their meeting on 12 February 2015 and did not seek any changes to the wording.

4.2 The PDG is asked to recommend that the Cabinet approves the revised Tenant Involvement policy.

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Circulation of the Report: Councillor Ray Stanley, Management Team

List of Background Papers: The Tenant Involvement & Empowerment Standard (part of the Regulatory Framework for Social Housing)

Mid Devon District Council

Tenant Involvement

Policy Number: HSG v3

February 2015

DRAFT

Version Control Sheet

Title: Tenant Involvement Policy

Purpose: To inform residents of our approach to tenant involvement

Owner: **Housing Services Manager**
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Date: February 2015

Version Number: v3

Status: Review of Policy

Review Frequency: 3 yearly

Next review date: **February 2018**

Consultation **This document was sent out for consultation to the following:**

Cabinet Member
Scrutiny and Improvement Group
Management Team
Decent and Affordable Homes PDG

Document History

This document obtained the following approvals.

Title	Date	Version Approved
Head of Service		
Management Team		
Cabinet Member		
Decent and Affordable Homes PDG		
Cabinet		

1. INTRODUCTION

All registered providers must meet the Homes and Communities Agency's (HCA) consumer standards. One of these standards is the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment standard, as set out in the regulatory framework for social housing in England from April 2012. The regulatory framework for social housing required outcomes for this standard relate to:

- Customer service
- Choice and complaints, Involvement and empowerment
- Understanding and responding to the diverse needs of tenants

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to how we will develop greater involvement of tenants in the decision-making processes of the Housing Service leading to service improvement and improved tenant satisfaction.

3. RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Tenancy Agreement
- Section 105 of the 1985 Housing Act
- The regulatory framework for social housing in England

4. The POLICY

This policy demonstrates our commitment to tenant involvement and to providing better homes and communities. The aim of this policy is to develop our structure to ensure we have effective involvement with tenants, and include leaseholders, in developing and improving services to meet their needs, ensuring that tenants have a chance to scrutinise the work of the housing service, and to strengthen our communities.

- This policy has been developed to ensure that the regulatory framework, set out in the National Standards informs the work of the Housing Service. We will demonstrate this by:
- Working in partnership with tenants in all aspects of housing management, by offering a menu of involvement shaped around the diverse needs of our tenants and offering opportunities to review the work of the Housing Service and to make recommendations to elected members
- Creating and developing a culture of mutual trust, respect and partnership between all parties at all levels

Making the best use of the resources available being mindful of the need to spend funds available wisely

We will involve tenants in housing management by a wide range of methods including:

- Making information easy to access, written in Plain English and, where possible, jargon free

- Acknowledging that many tenants do not wish to get involved and respecting their right not to do so. We will provide formal involvement methods, whilst promoting maximum inclusion through other less formal methods
- Finding the most appropriate way to consult individually and collectively and being clear about the choices on offer

5. INFORMATION

Tenants will be provided with information in a variety of ways, regarding the following:

- Issues affecting their homes and tenancies
- Housing management policies and practice
- Any proposals for change
- Rent increases

6. CONSULTATION

The Council is obliged to consult secure tenants on certain aspects of housing management. Section 105 of the Housing Act 1985 requires public sector landlords to have arrangements to inform and consult secure tenants who are likely to be affected by some proposed changes in matters of housing management. We also have a commitment to keeping tenants informed about other matters and to offering choices and opportunities to make recommendations to elected members. We will therefore provide information about:

- Major improvement or repair programmes
- Changes to policy and strategies
- Performance targets and priorities
- Activities for tenant involvement
- The timetable for newsletters
- The Annual Report

7. PARTICIPATION

Tenants will have ample opportunity to participate and play an integral part in:

- Scrutinising and challenging how services are managed and provided
- Giving us their opinion on how to improve service delivery

8. SUMMARY

Establishing meaningful involvement is not always about attending a meeting or saying yes to every idea put forward. It is about working in partnership to make better decisions in the work that we do to improve our housing service for all tenants. Tenants will be able to give us their views by various methods:

- Social Media and email
- Face to face
- Telephone
- Written
- Tenant involvement events

9. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

As a registered provider of social housing, the Council has an equality duty and is bound by the provisions of the Equality Act 2010. This means we must ensure that there will be no discrimination or unfair treatment on the grounds of gender (or gender reassignment), background (e.g. gypsies and travellers, asylum seekers) race, colour, ethnicity or national origin, faith, sexual orientation, marital/civil partnership status, age, disability, social position, politics, trade union membership or social disadvantage. We will not tolerate any discriminatory remarks or actions and will challenge anyone who behaves in that manner. Tenants will be excluded from any further involvement if they continue to behave in an offensive or discriminatory manner.

10. REVIEW

This Policy has been written in line with and meets current relevant legislation. Unless there are changes to such legislation beforehand, the next review of this policy is due February 2018.