

**Report for: Homes Policy Development Group**

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Date of Meeting: 26 September 2023

Subject: **TENANT INVOLVEMENT AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY ACTION PLAN**

Cabinet Member: Cllr Simon Clist, Cabinet Member for Housing and Property

Responsible Officer: Simon Newcombe – Corporate Manager for Public Health, Regulation and Housing

Exempt: None

which are Exempt from publication under paragraph 3, Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) as it contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)

Wards Affected: All

Enclosures: Annex A – Tenant Involvement & Engagement Action Plan

**Section 1 – Summary and Recommendation(s)**

In line with the provisions of the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard, all Registered Providers of social housing (RPs) are required to ensure that tenants are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in policy development work; decision-making in relation to service delivery; scrutiny of their landlord's performance; and the setting of strategic priorities.

The Standard also sets out an expectation that RPs will provide support to tenants to build their capacity to be more effectively involved. The new tenant involvement and empowerment action plan sets out how Mid Devon Housing (MDH) intends to focus activity to ensure that these outcomes are met.

## **Recommendation(s):**

- 1. That the PDG note the Tenant Involvement and Engagement Action Plan set out in Annex A.**
- 2. That the PDG provides any additional suggestions which support the action plan directly or tenant involvement and engagement more broadly.**

## **Section 2 – Report**

### **1 Introduction**

- 1.1** The Regulator for Social Housing (RSH) expects RPs to deliver the required outcomes and the specific expectations set out in the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard. As a result, RPs are expected to offer a wide range of opportunities to tenants to enable their voices to be heard and their views to be taken into account, ensuring that their needs are at the heart of the work to deliver landlord services.
- 1.2** The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 has received Royal Assent. The provisions of the Act are designed to strengthen the regulatory framework for social housing and introduce a new proactive, consumer-led regulation regime focussed on meeting the needs of tenants. As part of this, the RSH has issued a consultation on the new regulatory standards for social housing and the draft Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard sets out the requirements with regard to tenant involvement and engagement going forward.
- 1.3** The new standards have been designed to ensure that those living in social housing feel safe and secure in their homes, can get resolution in respect of any problems before they spiral out of control and understand how well their landlord is performing. The aim is to ensure that tenants will have a strong voice and to ensure that landlords listen to any issues raised by them.
- 1.4** As a further part of the new consumer regulation regime, from April 2023, the RSH has already introduced a series of 22 new, mandatory Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) through the creation of a new TSM consumer standard. This has enabled a new system for assessing how well social housing landlords in England are doing at providing good quality homes and services. These measures include those based on tenant perception surveys, for example, setting out tenants views on their overall satisfaction with MDH and our performance as a landlord.
- 1.5** A pilot TSM survey was completed by MDH in late 2022 ahead of the TSMs being formally adopted and the results for the tenant perception questions are set out below. These results provide some context on historic performance and are a benchmark for future consideration:

- TP01: overall satisfaction – 70%
- TP02: satisfaction with repairs – 69%
- TP03: satisfaction with time taken to complete the most recent repair – 65%
- TP04: satisfaction that the home is well maintained – 65%
- TP05: satisfaction that the home is safe – 71%
- TP06: satisfaction that the landlord listens to tenant views and acts upon them – 50%
- TP07: satisfaction that the landlord keeps tenants informed about things that matter to them – 61%
- TP08: agreement that the landlord treats tenants fairly and with respect – 66%
- TP09: satisfaction that the landlord's approach to handling complaints – 30%
- TP10: satisfaction that the landlord keeps communal areas clean and well maintained – 53%
- TP11: satisfaction that the landlord makes a positive contribution to neighbourhoods – 47%
- TP12: satisfaction with the landlord's approach to handling anti-social behaviour – 47%

1.6 Information relating to complaints handling will also be reported as part of the new regime and there are two TSMs generated from management information which are of direct relevance:

- CH01: Complaints relative to the size of the landlord
- CH02: Complaints responded to within Complaint Handling Code timescales

## **2 The new Tenant Involvement and Engagement Action Plan**

2.1 The Customer Engagement team consists of 1x Full Time Equivalent (FTE) Customer Engagement Co-ordinator, 1x FTE Housing Policy Officer and 1x FTE Tenant Involvement Officer (job share role).

2.2 The current tenant involvement strategy, which was adopted in February 2022, contains a number of objectives:

- Our tenants recognise us as an approachable landlord who will actively listen to their views
- As a natural inclusive part of our service we ensure equal access and fair delivery of services
- We provide support opportunities for tenants to develop their knowledge and skills
- We develop effective communication between officers and residents

- Residents have access to developing skills and confidence to influence decisions
  - Mutual respect to allow understanding for all involved in participation
  - Enhanced satisfaction for residents with their homes and neighbourhoods
- 2.3 These objectives will require review to ensure that they are aligned with the new regulatory standard for Transparency, Influence and Accountability once it is finalised (currently under formal consultation).
- 2.4 The Tenant Involvement Strategy contains an action plan which set out how we would endeavour to deliver the outcomes required to meet our objectives. This was agreed over a year ago and is therefore in need of review. The new action plan builds on the work already completed to date in the achievement of the previous plan. It provides a more detailed programme of activity which is designed to enhance our offer to tenants, setting out how MDH will endeavour to inform and engage with them over the coming year.
- 2.5 A review of activity associated with the plan will be undertaken during 2024 and a report presented to the PDG during Q3 of that year, with proposals for a new plan to take account of work during the following year. The plan will continue to be reviewed and updated on this rolling basis going forward.
- 2.6 The action plan also makes reference to a communication plan. The aim is to provide an operational plan for officers to refer to which is devised a year in advance. This will set out the requirement for some routine posts on social media and also how we will try to get the same messages out to those tenants who are not regular users of the internet. As examples, we will endeavour to provide regular posts and messages regarding opportunities to get involved in activity to improve the service offered by MDH; and also to ensure that there is regular information provided setting out what training opportunities are available to upskill tenants to enable them to get more involved.
- 2.7 Whilst the Customer Engagement team will be responsible for delivering the actions required in connection with the plan, all MDH staff are expected to promote tenant involvement activity and to feedback the views of tenants to inform future service developments. There are also wider opportunities for Customer First and our Communications Teams to support and promote this work. To this end, the Customer Engagement team will deliver training to colleagues to ensure that the need to grow our involvement offer is at the forefront of their minds as they undertake activity related to service delivery.
- 2.8 Members, too, can play a part in supporting the delivery of our strategy, by promoting opportunities to get involved, encouraging tenants to do so, and reporting any feedback, good or bad, from those tenants who live in their wards. More information is set out in Section 3.

- 2.9 It should be noted that MDH are seeking to move away from largely a meeting-based model of engagement to a more flexible one whereby tenants can communicate and meet with us in a variety of ways. This does not mean that there will not be any formal or less formal meetings; rather that our strategy enables us to engage with tenants online or in virtual meetings. Hopefully, this will be more attractive to some people, for example, those with caring responsibilities, because it reduces the need for them to leave home, the time involved in making a contribution and the need to arrange for transport if they do not have their own. Although there is a limited budget for tenant transport for meetings, we acknowledge that the issues associated with rural isolation can sometimes be a barrier to greater engagement and that, after the pandemic, a lot of people are now more comfortable with engaging with others in video calls.
- 2.10 If there is a demand for in-person meetings this will influence our future involvement activities, especially where it is effective for a specific consultation or engagement activity. Nonetheless, we will continue to build on our existing strategy, by, for example, setting up a Reading Group online, which will enable tenants to become more involved in policy development and the publication of annual reports and newsletters.

### **3 Member Involvement in Tenant Engagement Activity**

- 3.1 The RSH takes a co-regulatory approach and has made clear that this will continue once the regulatory standards have been updated following the current consultation. This means that Members, and especially those on this Homes Policy Development Group (PDG), which has a specific responsibility for MDH, has a key role in ensuring the service is meeting the regulatory standards and is open and accountable with regard to meeting its objectives.
- 3.2 Section 4 entitled: "Our approach to regulation" in the Guide to Regulation of Registered Providers, published online by the RSH (see link in Background Papers), states that co-regulation also requires RPs to support tenants in the shaping and scrutinising of service delivery and in holding members to account.
- 3.3 At the last meeting of the PDG, Members were concerned about a lack of feedback from tenants following a consultation on the revised draft neighbourhood management policy.
- 3.4 In the future, members of the PDG will be directly notified when new policies have gone out to consultation and are encouraged to work with tenants in their wards to ensure that their voices are heard with regard to any new policy proposals. This may involve collecting views and providing feedback, or simply encouraging specific tenants to engage with Officers directly in person, by telephone, in writing or by email to respond to consultations on new or revised policy documents.

3.5 More broadly, the new tenant involvement and engagement action plan offers a number of opportunities for Members to support greater tenant engagement. For example, Members can:

- Encourage tenants to volunteer for tenant champion roles, or to join the reading panel or a specific focus group
- Attend Neighbourhood Walkabouts taking place in their wards to support the Neighbourhood teams in their work engaging with tenants in order to identify any potential health and safety issues and with the aim of improving the green and other communal spaces surrounding the homes in our management
- Promote and support planned community clean ups to ensure that as many local tenants as possible are engaged with the initiative
- Publicise training opportunities for tenants
- Support any ad hoc surgeries set up by the Customer Engagement team by promoting and attending these
- Providing relevant information to housing officers regarding issues on the estates which we manage or relating to any particular tenant with the aim of achieving resolution of these issues, in line with MDH policy and procedure and to deliver compliance with appropriate legislation and regulations.

## **4 Recommendations**

4.1 The following recommendations are made:

1. That the PDG note the Tenant Involvement and Engagement Action Plan set out in Annex A.
2. That the PDG provides any additional suggestions which support the action plan directly or tenant involvement and engagement more broadly.

## **Financial Implications**

The landlord service is funded through the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) which is a ring-fenced account. The main income into this account is derived from the rent paid by tenants, and the HRA must balance. There is a specific budget set aside within the HRA for tenant involvement activity and this includes funds for staffing, consultations including the annual survey to collect data associated with the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs), the annual report and regular newsletters, tenant training and expenses. It should be noted that the Department of Housing, Levelling Up and Communities (DHLUC) paid a new burdens grant to the Council this year to assist with the setting up costs associated with the collection of the data required as part of the need to provide information associated with the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs)

## **Legal Implications**

The Housing Act 1985 sets out the basis of the relationship between landlord and tenant and contains some requirements with regard to consultation. In addition, the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard within the regulatory framework for social housing (enforced by the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH)), requires Registered Providers of Social Housing (RPs) such as the Council, to work with tenants on the offer to them in terms of service delivery: policy development and the formulation of strategic priorities. RPs are also required to ensure that tenants have opportunities to get involved in scrutinising performance activity and recommending service improvements, and must facilitate training to help tenants to build their capacity so that they can get more actively involved.

## **Risk Assessment**

MDH has an agreed strategy on Tenant Involvement. Working with tenants to deliver high quality services which meet their needs is good practice. Failure to do so could result in the RSH commencing formal action to inspect and/ or fine RPs where tenant involvement is not a fundamental strand of their approach. It could also result in failure to meet other statutory and contractual obligations.

The RSH has issued a consultation on a revised and strengthened regulatory framework and, in line with the proposals, if an RP is failing to meet any of the requirements as set out in any of the four standards, they will be expected to take action to remedy the breach and to put things right quickly.

Having a programme of activity which is designed to deliver increased tenant involvement, in place, should provide assurance to Members and other stakeholders, including tenants, that there is a genuine desire to take on board the views of tenants, putting them at the heart of what we do in our role as a landlord.

## **Impact on Climate Change**

The Tenant Involvement Strategy provides a menu of involvement so that tenants can get involved as much or as little as they like. There are also opportunities to get involved in online meetings, focus groups and reading groups which work via email. This is a significant move away from the situation whereby Officers and tenants were expected to travel some distance to attend meetings in person, as occurred pre-pandemic.

Within the Tenant Involvement Strategy, tenants are encouraged to come forward and take on the role of De-carbonisation and Zero Carbon Champion, if they have a particular interest in this area of work, and wish to be consulted on initiatives designed to deliver our targets for de-carbonisation and zero carbon.

## **Equalities Impact Assessment**

MDH collects data on the diversity of tenants and endeavours to tailor services to meet the needs of all tenants. Section 5 of our Tenant Involvement Strategy addresses how MDH will overcome barriers and contains a commitment relating to the development of different ways of involving residents so that different groups of people are not

excluded. It states that we will discuss tenant involvement during our sign up process for new tenants and also by raising awareness of involvement opportunities through our media platforms. There is a menu of involvement meaning that tenants are offered a fair and equal opportunity to get involved at all levels. The Strategy also sets out how we will keep tenants informed to ensure that they receive good quality, up to date information which is accessible to everyone and free of jargon.

### **Relationship to Corporate Plan**

A stated aim of the Council is to deliver sustainable communities.

### **Section 3 – Statutory Officer sign-off/mandatory checks**

**Statutory Officer:** Andrew Jarrett

Agreed by or on behalf of the Section 151

**Date:** 12 September 2023

**Statutory Officer:** Maria De Leburne

Agreed on behalf of the Monitoring Officer

**Date:** 12 September 2023

**Chief Officer:** Simon Newcombe

Agreed by or on behalf of the Chief Executive/Corporate Director

**Date:** 23 August 2023

**Performance and risk:** Steve Carr

Agreed on behalf of the Corporate Performance & Improvement Manager

**Date:** 01/09/2023

**Cabinet member notified:** Yes

### **Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers**

**Contact:** Claire Fry, Operations Manager for Housing Management Services or  
Simon Newcombe, Corporate Manager for Public Health, Regulation and  
Housing

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### **Background papers:**

MDH policies including the Tenant Involvement Strategy:

<https://www.middevon.gov.uk/residents/mid-devon-housing/help-and-support/strategies-and-policies/>



The current Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard regulated by the RSH:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tenant-involvement-and-empowerment-standard/tenant-involvement-and-empowerment-standard-2017>

The RSH consultation relating to the new regulatory standards for social housing:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-the-consumer-standards/consumer-standards-consultation-what-we-are-proposing-and-how-to-have-your-say-summary-accessible-version#the-proposals-transparency-influence-and-accountability-standard>

A guide to regulation of Registered Providers:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/brief-guide-to-regulation-of-registered-providers/a-guide-to-regulation-of-registered-providers>