

This Report will be made public on 6 April 2021

Report Number **C/20/89**

To: Cabinet
Date: 14 April 2021
Status: Non key decision
Responsible Officer: Helen Sudbury – Housing Operations Lead Specialist
Cabinet Member: Cllr Godfrey - Cabinet Member for Housing, Transport and Special Projects

SUBJECT: TENANT ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

SUMMARY: This report outlines the draft Tenant Engagement Strategy and Action Plan for the Housing Service.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

Cabinet is asked to agree the recommendations because:

- a) This is the first tenant engagement strategy since bringing the housing service back in house and it is important that members are aware of, and approve the approach to tenant engagement. .
- b) There are several regulatory requirements that housing providers must adhere to:
 - i. The Council must follow the requirements of the Regulator of Social Housing's Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard 2017. This document enables this involvement.
 - ii. The 2020 Housing White Paper 'The Charter for Social Housing Residents' was produced following the lessons learnt from the Grenfell Tower fire. A key lesson was for tenants to 'have your voice heard by your landlord' and that engaged tenants should be a key part of any landlord's governance arrangements. In approving the Tenant Engagement Strategy members are agreeing a framework through which the tenant's voice will be heard.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. To receive and note report C/20/89.
2. To approve the Tenant Engagement Strategy.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The housing management service transferred from East Kent Housing to the Council on 1 October 2020. The Council is fully committed to building a world class housing service where officers work together with tenants and councillors to deliver the best possible housing outcomes. As part of this journey, tenant engagement is key and this Strategy describes how we will do this.

2. REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

2.1 Regulator of Social Housing Standards:

There are several regulatory requirements that housing providers must adhere to. For the purposes of tenant engagement, the Council must follow the requirements of the Regulator of Social Housing's Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard 2017. The following are the three required outcomes for all social housing providers:

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

2.2 The Charter for Social Housing Residents

The 2020 Housing White Paper 'The Charter for Social Housing Residents' was produced building on the lessons learnt from the Grenfell Tower fire. The part of this document that is important to tenant engagement is 'To have your voice heard by your landlord'. The key themes are that:

- Engaged tenants should be a key part of any landlord's governance and scrutiny arrangements.
- Tenants who don't want to attend formal meetings or join a formal group need to have ways to feedback to their landlord to ensure their voices are heard and their needs are identified.
- Engagement opportunities are tailored to tenants' needs and interests, encouraging and supporting greater involvement.

This Charter also enforces that information should be published and available to tenants on how their landlord is performing in key areas of service delivery.

3. THE TENANT ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

- 3.1 The Strategy (Appendix 1) has been developed to ensure the Council complies with the regulatory requirements. It describes what tenant engagement is, how we will support tenants and staff to deliver our vision and how we can reduce barriers to engagement. It states how we will communicate with tenants and share our performance information with them.

An Action Plan (Appendix 2) has also been developed to show how the Strategy will be delivered over the next three years.

The Strategy illustrates the engagement structure, based on four streams of activity:

- 3.2 **The Tenants' Voice** – this is the formal, strategic group of involved tenants, who will work with senior managers to ensure the housing service is compliant and continually improving. The chair will meet regularly with the Director of Housing and Operations and the Cabinet Member for Housing, Transport and Special Projects to hold councillors to account with regard to its housing service.
- 3.3 **Your Choice** - will draw on the pool of residents who have expressed an interest in active engagement. It will include smaller groups of tenants who come together to do specific tasks such as reviewing a service or process.
- 3.4 **Your Choice Plus** - will involve seeking the views of as many tenants as possible either on issues that affect all tenants or more locally based issues, in ways that are accessible, convenient and do not require ongoing commitment. This could include satisfaction surveys or quick polls using social media.
- 3.5 **Business Insight** - is making good use of all the data and information that we possess about tenants or receive from tenants about services and satisfaction and includes learning from best practice in other organisations. We use this information to improve services.

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 The development of the Tenant Engagement Strategy has been supported by TPAS (Tenant Participation Advisory Service) who are experts in tenant engagement. Officers from across the housing service have had an input into the Strategy as members of a tenant engagement project group.
- 4.2 Alongside this we consulted with the current Tenant and Leaseholder Board, and directly with a larger cohort of tenants who have expressed an interest to be involved. The wider tenant community were informed of the Strategy consultation, which ran from 17 February to 12 March 2021, via the website and the Tenant Newsletter (delivered to all tenants and leaseholders). We received seven comments about the Strategy, none of which affected a change to the document.
- 4.3 Feedback on the draft Strategy was also given by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in February and again in March, following the consultation. Members' feedback included:
 - Sharing performance reports regularly with tenants
 - Encouraging individual tenants to be engaged as well as groups

- Acknowledging the barriers to engagement and that tenants want different levels of involvement
- That the tenant and leaseholder board were a key conduit for tenants and the Council
- Ensuring an excellent relationship with tenants and that they genuinely have a voice

All of these elements are captured in the Strategy.

5. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

5.1

Perceived risk	Seriousness	Likelihood	Preventative action
The Strategy is not approved or is not implemented, therefore the Council will not be compliant with the Regulator	High	Low	Thorough consultation at an early stage will lead to the Strategy and Action Plan being approved.
Tenant and Leaseholder Board not willing to embrace the new structure	Medium	Low	Informal and formal consultation process set up to allow plenty of time for meaningful feedback.

6. LEGAL/FINANCIAL AND OTHER CONTROLS/POLICY MATTERS

6.1 Legal Officer's Comments (NM)

The Tenant Engagement Strategy and Action Plan will need to be monitored and reviewed to ensure it continues to meet the regulatory requirements as set out in the report.

6.2 Finance Officer's Comments (CI)

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

6.3 Diversities and Equalities Implications

There are no diversities or equalities implications arising directly from this report

7. CONTACT OFFICERS AND BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Councillors with any questions arising out of this report should contact the following officers prior to the meeting:

Helen Sudbury, Housing Operations Lead specialist
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Appendices:

Appendix 1: Draft Tenant Engagement Strategy

Appendix 2: Tenant Engagement Action Plan