

TITLE OF REPORT: Resident Influence Strategy and Framework

REPORT OF: Colin Huntington – Strategic Director Housing,
Environment and Healthy Communities.

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek formal approval of a new Resident Influence Strategy and Framework.

Background

2. Following the decision to bring together housing services within the Council we commissioned TPAS, a not-for-profit national tenant organisation to work with tenants, leaseholders, and employees to design a Resident Influence Strategy for Gateshead.
3. In drafting this strategy, it acknowledges tenants and leaseholders desire expressed during the Housing review that they can influence decisions, shape policies, and recommend service improvements. Furthermore, that the Council communicates with residents, is transparent and that they listen to them.
4. The strategy will underpin and support the Council in responding to the challenges and requirements of the Social Housing White Paper. It will also help to ensure that we meet the current and future requirements of the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard (one of the 4 Consumer Standards of the social housing regulatory framework). The anticipated Building Safety Act will also place an enhanced requirement on landlords to engage with residents.
5. The strategy and framework have been drafted based on the findings and recommendations from the work with TPAS.

Proposal

6. The Resident Influence Strategy is set out in Appendix 2 of this report.
7. It includes seven clear objectives:
 - We will provide a wide range of accessible opportunities for residents to engage, feedback and influence.
 - We will use all forms of customer insight and feedback to improve the services that matter most to customers.
 - When promoting influencing opportunities, we will explain clearly what it is, what it will entail and how the outcomes will benefit them.

- We will use existing data analysis to identify and understand key themes. This will help target listening activities, and by doing so get a clear understanding of the customer experience.
 - We will monitor and review the impact on residents and the organisation.
 - To ensure that residents get a clear understanding of how we have used their feedback to make changes and the impact it has had we will adopt a closed loop feedback approach.
 - We will ensure that our tenants and leaseholders are supported to participate and engage in both regional and national opportunities to have their voice heard.
8. To oversee delivery of the strategy a new Resident Influence Panel (RI Panel) has been established. The RI Panel comprises a mix of tenants, leaseholders and employees. It aims to meet on a monthly basis and a tenant representative from the Strategic Housing Board is also invited to maintain a link between both. This approach aims to help to embed a collaborative approach with residents and employees working together to co-design service delivery.
9. The RI Panel has two main aims:
- To make sure that residents' experiences are influencing service design and delivery
 - To make sure we act on what customers tell us through formal engagement, but to also make sure that we proactively listen and gather feedback from the wider resident base
10. One of the first tasks the RI Panel has completed is to draft a Resident Influence Framework that sets out how we will deliver on the first objective to provide a range of accessible opportunities for residents to engage, feedback and influence.
11. The key features include:
- Establishment of three formal groups; Resident Influence Panel, Multi Storey Building Safety Group and Equality Diversity and Inclusion Group.
 - Resident Insight and feedback to inform engagement and scrutiny
 - Adopt a single issue, task, and finish approach
 - Greater use of digital engagement methods to reach the wider resident base alongside more traditional methods.
12. A copy of the Framework is included in Appendix 3 of this report.

Recommendations

13. Cabinet is asked to recommend to Council that the Resident Influence Strategy and Framework as set out in Appendices 2 and 3 be approved.

For the following reasons:

- (i) To ensure that the Council delivers on resident expectations following the Housing Review.
- (ii) To ensure we are meeting all current and future statutory and regulatory requirements.

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APPENDIX 1

Policy Context

1. The Resident Involvement Strategy and Framework has been developed within the context of a national regulatory framework. The Regulator of Social Housing regulates registered social housing providers including local authorities and housing associations. It is a stand-alone non departmental public body of government. Their role through regulation is to promote a viable, efficient, and well-governed social housing sector able to deliver homes that meet a range of needs.
2. The Regulator of Social Housing sets four Consumer standards that applies to all registered social landlords including local authorities. Consumer standards are set so that tenants, landlords and stakeholders know the outcomes that are expected. They play an important role in supporting tenants to hold landlords to account effectively.
3. The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment standard is one of the four Consumer standards. It sets out clearly the requirement that registered providers shall ensure that tenants are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in:
 - the formulation of their landlord's housing-related policies and strategic priorities
 - the making of decisions about how housing-related services are delivered, including the setting of service standards
 - the scrutiny of their landlord's performance and the making of recommendations to their landlord about how performance might be improved
 - the management of their homes, where applicable
 - the management of repair and maintenance services, such as commissioning and undertaking a range of repair tasks, as agreed with landlords, and the sharing in savings made, and
 - agreeing local offers for service delivery.
4. The 2020 Social Housing White Paper outlined the Government's plans for social housing residents, including shared owners and leaseholders. It sets out the Government's expectations, and the detailed provisions that they expect to implement. This includes a number of measures that seek to strengthen the landlord and tenant relationship including:
 - To be safe in the home – this includes supporting the development of statutory and good practice guidance on engaging residents in all tenures on safety issues

- To know how a landlord is performing, including on repairs, complaints, and safety, and how it spends its money, so that residents can hold their landlord to account.
 - To be treated with respect, backed by a strong consumer regulator, and improved consumer standards for tenants.
 - To have the resident voice heard by the landlord, for example through regular meetings, scrutiny panels or being on its Board. The Government will provide help, to ensure landlords listen to their tenants.
5. The Resident Influence Strategy and Framework has been designed to ensure that Gateshead Council meets existing and future regulatory requirements.

Background

6. At The Gateshead Housing Company, in addition to surveys and seeking transactional feedback, resident influence had been sought through a framework of formal resident groups including the Customer Scrutiny Panel, Service Improvement Groups and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group. The estate walkabout programme provided the opportunity to engage with tenants and leaseholders in their communities.
7. However, it was acknowledged that there were some issues with a reliance on formal structures including:
- A minority of residents are involved, and those that are involved are not representative, frequently sitting on numerous groups, which can lead to consultation fatigue and a narrow base of experiences
 - A minority view may therefore be more influential than it should be, in the absence of anything else and the voices of residents placing higher demand on services are often unheard
 - Formal mechanisms set up to enable resident influence can sometimes be a barrier to involvement.
8. To meet the existing and future regulatory requirements and to deliver on expectations of tenants and leaseholders following the Housing Review it was decided that a re-design of resident engagement was required. By engaging TPAS we were able to access expert advice and guidance to help shape a new strategy and framework.

Consultation

9. The Resident Influence Strategy and Framework have been developed collaboratively, in partnership between tenants, leaseholders and employees. The initial project with TPAS involved a number of joint workshops including with Directors and the Cabinet Member for Housing.
10. The Resident Influence Strategy and Framework was co-designed with the Resident Influence Panel. This included a joint workshop on 12 October 2021 with tenant members of the Strategic Housing Board.
11. The strategy has also been shared in draft form on the Council's website for comment and promoted via social media and the Housing E-Newsletter.

12. The draft Resident Influence Strategy and Framework has been shared with and commented on by the Strategic Housing Board. Updates on progress in delivering on the new strategy will be taken to the Strategic Housing Board and Resident Influence Panel.

Alternative Options

13. The alternative to approving a new Resident Influence Strategy and Framework would be to continue with the existing tenant engagement arrangements that transferred from the housing company. However, that would not address the issues raised by TPAS and it would not future proof our approach for the anticipated enhanced regulation.

Implications of Recommended Option

14. **Resources:**

- a) **Financial Implications** – The Strategic Director, Resources and Digital confirms there are no additional financial implications arising from the strategy and framework. An existing budget supports delivery of resident engagement activities.
- b) **Human Resources Implications** – Delivery of this strategy will be overseen by the Tenant Involvement team although all Housing services will have a role in its delivery. Employee briefing sessions will be held with different services and regular updates will be included in the employee newsletter.
- c) **Property Implications** - there are no specific property implications.
15. **Risk Management Implication** - The Resident Influence Strategy has been developed to mitigate the risks associated with failure to comply with the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard and the requirements of the Social Housing White Paper.
16. **Equality and Diversity Implications** - An Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) has been completed for the proposed Resident Influence Strategy to identify potential implications and impacts related to protected characteristics identified in the Equality Act 2010. The IIA is attached as Appendix 4
17. **Crime and Disorder Implications** – there are no specific crime and disorder implications arising from the strategy and framework.
18. **Health Implications** – activities relating to the delivery of the strategy can have health benefits.
- Engaging with peers and being active can lead to an improvement in mental health.
 - Confidence of attendees can grow when attending meetings/events by increasing their skills and knowledge.

- Increased skills and knowledge of attendees by learning more about housing and external services, ICT skills are transferrable outside of the meetings and can help people engage and interact more with friends, family and hobbies resulting in improved mental health.

19. **Climate Emergency and Sustainability Implications** - the strategy and review will contribute to the achievement of having sustainable communities and neighbourhoods within Gateshead
20. **Human Rights Implications** - There are no direct human rights implications arising from this report.
21. **Ward Implications** – Whilst the Resident Influence Strategy focuses on our relationship with Council tenants and leaseholders it also recognises that housing estates and communities across Gateshead are now multi-tenure, and the Council needs to have effective engagement channels in place.

Background Information

- [Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard](#)
- Social Housing White Paper ([The Charter for Social Housing Residents](#))