

## HOUSING COMMITTEE

27 MARCH 2018

**10**

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>The Changing Future of Tenant Involvement</b>
<b>Purpose of Report</b>	To consider the way we consult, support and seek positive outcomes from tenant engagement.
<b>Decision(s)</b>	<p><b>The Committee RESOLVES to:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Continue to support existing tenant groups with the commitment that funding will have defined outcomes evidencing the benefit to the community and the council.</li> <li>2. Implement a programme of digital access consultation through social media to achieve a varying consultative audience.</li> <li>3. The re-development of Tenant Inspectors to scrutinise the service as part of an agreed work programme with defined outcomes and recommendations to be reported to Housing Committee.</li> <li>4. Development of Tenant Reps to Neighbourhood Ambassadors.</li> <li>5. Utilise £10K from the environment fund to be dedicated to training Tenant Inspectors and Neighbourhood Ambassadors to ensure levels of professionalism are enhanced.</li> <li>6. Review the tenant grants process to ensure the values are fit for purpose and funding is proportionate (see 6.2).</li> </ol>
<b>Consultation and Feedback</b>	Chair and Vice Chair of Housing Committee Representatives of established tenant groups (19 Feb 2018) Tenant Reps: Ian Allen and Sadie Tazewell

<p><b>Financial Implications and Risk Assessment</b></p>	<p>There are no direct financial implications as all funding is within existing budgets.</p> <p>Lucy Clothier – Principal Accountant Tel: 01453 754313 Email: lucy.clothier@stroud.gov.uk</p> <p><b>Report author to comment on the Risk Assessment</b> Compliance with the regulators requirements must be met and these are fairly broad in their direction. Consultation may take many forms including moving towards more online engagement where appropriate and the raising of professional standards and capabilities of those directly involved in improvements to the housing function.</p>
<p><b>Legal Implications</b></p>	<p>The key points (on which the legal implications are drafted) of this report appear to be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve communication with our tenants, through in part the development and training of tenant representatives; and,</li> <li>• Improve consultation through the use of Social Media.</li> </ul> <p>Heads of Service may exercise virement on budgets under their control for amounts up to £20,000. However, the committee will recognise that this reallocation of funding will mean there is £10,000 less in the Environment Fund.</p> <p>If training involves financial assistance for any formal qualifications unless the person is subject to the Learning &amp; Development Policy or another formal agreement, then SDC may not be able to recoup any financial assistance for said qualification (as part of any training programme), should the Neighbourhood Ambassadors leave their role significantly sooner than expected.</p> <p>Where funding is provided by way of a grant it may be appropriate to be secured by a grant agreement, which ensures it is used for the purposes intended by SDC and allows appropriate provisions for clawback/termination if it is not.</p> <p>Craig Hallett, Solicitor &amp; Deputy Monitoring Officer Tel: 01453 754364 Email: craig.hallett@stroud.gov.uk (Ref: r5.3c12.3d13.3)</p>

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<b>Performance Management Follow Up</b>	Updates to be added to the 2018/19 work programme as Housing Committee agrees
<b>Background Papers/ Appendices</b>	

## 1. Background

- 1.1. Tenant involvement at Stroud District Council has been key to some of the innovative transformations (Tenant scrutiny inspectors, repairs inspectors, development of service standards) we have seen in the delivery of our housing service. A range of forums have operated over a number of years with varying degrees of success.
- 1.2. Tenant involvement has experienced a slow evolution over the last few years as the housing sector has come to recognise that traditional forms of involvement have a tendency to be inaccessible to the majority of tenants, unrepresentative of all but a limited few and expensive to develop and maintain. This realisation and greater flexibility by the regulator to develop local approaches to involvement, have given landlords the ability to embrace the more commercial principle - that tenants are individual consumers of services and interaction and influence should be focused at an individual rather than a collective level.

## 2.0. Introduction

- 2.1. Henry Ford is attributed with the statement “If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses”
- 2.2. It’s an interesting point and particularly pertinent when we consider how we define and refine tenant involvement. Mr Ford’s customers might have asked for faster horses, but they were delighted to be offered something else in the form of a Ford Model T.
- 2.3. To fully understand what tenants want, and how that will impact and shape operational improvements, we need to take a far more bottom-up, holistic and all-encompassing approach.
- 2.4. However, like everything in life, it’s all about balance; and relying too heavily on what non proportionately representative tenant groups tell us – and shaping services around a relatively small number of them – has the potential to lead us down an unintended path.

- 2.5. Critics could legitimately argue that current tenant groups are artificial compared to the lived experiences of the majority of tenants in their day-to-day lives.
- 2.6. In a post-Grenfell world we must have the right kind of relationship – one that comes from a place of trust –The question is: how do we best achieve that?
- 2.7. Our approach must move towards seeking to engage with all of our tenants, and learn from the feedback we collect each year, as well as themes picked up by our complaints service and, of course, through social media.
- 2.8. Though we have a long way to go, we are increasingly trying to involve our tenants in helping us shape practical solutions through tests and pilots.
- 2.9. An example being our repairs inspector programmes seeking to coach new and existing tenants in how to challenge what we do and why we do it. Also the handyman service which additionally completes some basic repairs and maintenance around the home and showing tenants how they can take ownership for themselves– things like bleeding radiators and fixing cupboard hinges.
- 2.10. This stemmed from tenants telling us they were open to taking on more responsibility for simple DIY fixes, but lacked the tools and the confidence to be able to.
- 2.11. We want tenants to tell us how the proposed solution to a problem was working, rather than to simply tell us there was a problem.

### **3.0. Opportunities and potential**

- 3.1. Perhaps our greatest opportunities could include development of tenant reps into neighbourhood ambassadors (Decision 4) without the use of a formal group This would afford the opportunity to use their smaller patches to pick up feedback, opinions and suggestions on a daily or weekly basis while out in their communities which could offer more to both residents and the Council. If agreed it, would be expected that ambassadors will have sound interpersonal skills and effective methods of communication to ensure that respective communities are kept informed and feedback is concise, relevant and timely. This will also hopefully develop more proportional representation with the opportunity to engage at a much more local level.
- 3.2. We would also be looking to encourage ambassadors who have never engaged before, the ability to opt in and out if there were specific issues they may have as a community interest.
- 3.3. Training and development needs to be approached professionally and as such there will be a role description and defined objectives as a requirement

to deliver the tenant inspectors role and candidates must demonstrate the skills required for logical analysis of strategies, policies and procedures and the application into service delivery.

- 3.4. Future tenants should also have the opportunity to engage regarding the type of service they would like when they are afforded the opportunity to become a tenant, this to a degree future proofs the direction that we may take.
- 3.5. Consultations also take place with tenants on kitchen open days as part of the cyclical programme where tenants are invited to an open day (at a local venue to where the works take place) so that they can choose their own door front, work tops, tiles, flooring and paint. The open days have been going for a number of years now and it enables the tenants so see the ranges available to them on a larger scale.

#### **4.0. Regulator compliance**

- 4.1. The flexibility of the current regulatory framework allows organisations to move away from traditional involvement practice which has the potential to offer greater levels of influence to a larger number and more diverse range of tenants, increasing the objectivity of tenant led influence.

#### **5.0. Current make up**

- 5.1. We have two tenant representatives involved directly with the service and communities and who have a role on Housing Committee. There is an opportunity to further develop this role into a conduit for feedback to Housing Committee of common themes and resolutions being expressed to them in the form of a report either written or verbal.
- 5.2. Seven established tenant groups spread across Cam, Dursley, Nailsworth and Stroud and five rural village voices and street reps covering Bisley, North Nibley, Frithwood, Slimbridge and Stroud.
- 5.3. Feedback has been positive towards the proposed changes including statements such as “things must change” “I’m pleased things are moving on and looking forwards” Really pleased that training is given priority”. “100% support for training for ambassadors” There were different views on the use of social media, some did not like the idea and others embrace it seeing it as an area where greater numbers of younger tenants could be reached. Tenant groups who have been part of the discussion have agreed with the 6 proposals and have asked for the following to be considered:
  - Established groups would like to be renamed Community Groups
  - Would like hard copies of committee papers in advance to discuss and contribute
  - Would like a forward plan of Housing Committee meetings
  - ID cards to be updated

- Would like to be involved in estate walkabouts with Neighbourhood Wardens
- Would like their public liability insurance increased to £2 million

Other views expressed included a request that more have your say type events are programmed, more engagement is needed with general needs tenants and development of good neighbour approaches. A really positive quote was that “the council are not just a remote provider, they are great at community building” it would be good to see local businesses getting involved with local events to support and share their expertise.

## **6.0. Funding**

6.1. The recognised tenant groups currently have access to the following funds:

- Environment fund £19,700
- Grants - £150 for each new group to set up (commonly called start up grants)

6.2 Established groups receive an annual grant which is based on a formula of how many people they work with starting from £200 (up to 50 tenants) up to £400 (200+ tenants). This grant is paid out after they have held their AGM and submitted their accounts. All groups have now been paid for 2017/18, however, no further payments will be paid for 2018/19 until after a decision has been made by Housing Committee (see decision 6).

## **7.0. Social Media**

7.1. Tenant Services has a Facebook page (SDC Tenants), that was re-launched in January 2018 and is proving very successful in promoting our services/council messages and community services:

- announcing the publication of Keynotes
- Sheltered Modernisation News
- advertising for tenant repairs inspectors
- ending of Mears contract etc.
- vacancies
- recycling
- reposting education
- volunteering from partners such as GL1, Learn Direct

7.3. Increasing success is being made in tenant involvement - by writing a post then sharing it to community groups such as:

- Dursley Matters - 6,176 members\*
- Stonehouse, GL10 community discussion – 2,644 members
- Nailsworth Chat & Information – 4,444 members

- Nailsworth Town – 3,518 followers\*
- Wotton Noticeboard – 946 members
- I love Wotton – 2,972 members
- Berkeley Town Council – 223 followers

*(\*note – the difference between members and followers is - closed groups must approve members; anyone can follow an open group)*

- 7.4. By sharing to community groups our messages reach a huge number of readers, not all of which will be tenants of course, but many are.
- 7.5. The post to advertise the publication of the last Sheltered Modernisation News reached over 3,000 people within one week
- 7.6. Every share to a community group page drives tenants to follow our own Facebook page. This form of engaging with tenants is becoming increasingly popular. It is informal, quick, people can engage in their own time, take as long as they like, can have conversations, receive often immediate responses, and get through to someone who can act on their feedback.
- 7.7. It's important that apart from promoting ourselves on Facebook we highlight issues that provoke engagement and we shouldn't shy away from controversy. There are always two sides to every story and ours is sometimes not always shared leading to misconceptions of Tenant Services and the Council generally being in the wrong.
- 7.8. A post that was added to our Facebook page, within 24 hours had reached 356 people, and attracted comment and debate on the subject of tenancy inspections – without the time, effort and money a formal tenant meeting would take.

## **8.0. Summary**

- 8.1. We should always be mindful of improving our service and how tenants both current and future can, through mutual trust and professionalism develop and enhance the service we provide from strategic direction, development of policies to delivery of services. The report sets out a number of recommendations on this basis.
- 8.2. Tenant engagement is not about settling for things as they are, or always have been, it's about continually looking to the future and having aspirations that are achievable both from the landlord's perspective but crucially the satisfaction of its tenants.