

	<b>Overview &amp; Scrutiny</b> <b>13<sup>th</sup> January 2015</b>	<b>Agenda Item No. 5</b>
<b>Title</b>	Update on Tenant Involvement Strategy	
<b>For further information about this report please contact</b>	Abigail Hay Housing Strategy & Development Manager 01926 456044 <a href="mailto:Abigail.hay@warwickdc.gov.uk">Abigail.hay@warwickdc.gov.uk</a>	
<b>Wards of the District directly affected</b>	All	
<b>Is the report private and confidential and not for publication by virtue of a paragraph of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006?</b>	No	
<b>Date and meeting when issue was last considered and relevant minute number</b>	N/A	
<b>Background Papers</b>	N/A	

<b>Contrary to the policy framework:</b>	No																
<b>Contrary to the budgetary framework:</b>	No																
<b>Key Decision?</b>	No																
<b>Included within the Forward Plan? (If yes include reference number)</b>	Yes																
<b>Equality Impact Assessment Undertaken</b>	No																
Update report only – a full equality impact assessment will take place when the new tenant involvement strategy is developed.																	
<b>Officer/Councillor Approval</b>																	
<b>Officer Approval</b>	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="616 1261 858 1294">Date</th> <th data-bbox="866 1261 1437 1294">Name</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="616 1294 858 1373">Chief Executive/Deputy Chief Executive</td> <td data-bbox="866 1294 1437 1373"></td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="616 1373 858 1406">Head of Service</td> <td data-bbox="866 1373 1437 1406">30.12.14 Andy Thompson</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="616 1406 858 1440">CMT</td> <td data-bbox="866 1406 1437 1440"></td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="616 1440 858 1473">Section 151 Officer</td> <td data-bbox="866 1440 1437 1473"></td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="616 1473 858 1507">Monitoring Officer</td> <td data-bbox="866 1473 1437 1507"></td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="616 1507 858 1541">Finance</td> <td data-bbox="866 1507 1437 1541"></td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="616 1541 858 1597">Portfolio Holder(s)</td> <td data-bbox="866 1541 1437 1597">30.12.14 Councillor Norman Vincett</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Date	Name	Chief Executive/Deputy Chief Executive		Head of Service	30.12.14 Andy Thompson	CMT		Section 151 Officer		Monitoring Officer		Finance		Portfolio Holder(s)	30.12.14 Councillor Norman Vincett
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<b>Consultation &amp; Community Engagement</b>																	
None – update report only																	
<b>Final Decision?</b>	No																
<b>Suggested next steps (if not final decision please set out below):</b>																	
Further work will be carried out, informed by the current Tenant’s Action Plan and the development of the Housing Advisory Group, to develop practical and responsive ways for tenants to contribute to the Council’s landlord services. A further report will be presented in 2015 to Executive if necessary to approve any significant changes to current policy that may be needed to improve the way the Council works with tenants to improve housing services.																	

## **1. Summary**

- 1.1.** This report sets out the tenant involvement structures that Housing & Property Services currently have in place and the plans being developing for a new approach to encouraging tenants to be better able to contribute to the Council's landlord services.

## **2. Recommendation**

- 2.1.** That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the current position in relation to tenant involvement and the plan informed by the current Tenant's Action Plan and the development of the Housing Advisory Group, to develop practical and responsive ways for tenants to contribute to the Council's landlord services.

## **3. Reasons for the Recommendation**

- 3.1.** The councils existing Tenant's Panel was formed in 2010. The panel is open to all tenants of Warwick District Council and has a committee made up of a chair, vice chair and secretary who are voted in annually by members of the Tenant's Panel.
- 3.2.** When the Tenant's Panel was initially formed, its main focus was on monitoring the delivery of the department's Service Improvement Plan. The Tenants Panel has been evolving and since its formation, and has shown a desire to be involved in the shaping of the service and in holding the landlord service to account.
- 3.3.** A number of sub-groups from the Tenant's Panel were set up to focus upon specific elements of the service including: Repairs, Tenancy Management and Complaints. The purpose of these groups were to have an in depth look at the service, what was working well and what needed to be improved and to report findings back to the Tenants Panel.
- 3.4.** In July 2013, following the Tier 1 redesign, Housing & Property Services arranged a facilitated away day with all senior managers in the department with a number of tenant panel members. From this, a three year Action Plan was devised which was designed to allow the managers and tenants to work together to develop a pathway to develop future tenant involvement.
- 3.5.** Over the past 18 months, the department has been working with tenants in a number of ways to involve them in the service, examples include:
- We hosted a successful open day at the pump rooms in September 2013 which attracted a record number of tenants.
  - We have carried out a planned estate walkabout programme involving tenants, councillors, Neighbourhood Services and Housing & Property Services staff which has been able to improve the way issues of importance to local communities are understood and managed.
  - We have expanded our social media presence including opening Facebook and Twitter accounts as a way to reach out to more and different tenants.
  - We have promoted the Environmental Improvement Project in which Tenant Panel members have been involved in the decision making for allocating budgets to community projects and improvements.

- We have developed actions plans for each of the sheltered schemes in relation to improving participation, especially in light of the changes that have been implemented as part of the Tier II redesign.
- 3.6.** In October 2014, the Housing & Property Services and members of the Tenant's Panel Committee reviewed the current state of tenant engagement. The results of this review suggested that the current arrangements are not working effectively, with a particular concern over the lack of involvement by a representative range of tenants, unrealistic expectations and inconsistent communication and engagement by the Housing & Property Service.
- 3.7.** As a result of the review, Housing & Property Services are now looking at how we can involve more tenants in shaping the service that we deliver and create a two way communication between officers and their clients. We need to have constant and wide ranging feedback on how our services are experienced if we are to be able to improve the way the Council manages its housing. To do this, we believe that we need to develop practical and responsive ways for tenants to contribute to the Council's landlord services that account for the different forms of contribution people may wish to make. This could include:
- Being enabled to make an instant response to the quality of repairs and maintenance works
  - Forming time and task limited project groups to explore specific areas of interest
  - Taking a long term formal commitment by becoming a formal member of the Tenant's Panel
  - Practical ways in which both tenants and officers can use contributions to improve services, for example evidencing feedback to contractors on their performance
  - Attending drop-in and fun-day events
- 3.8.** We are already trialling new ways in which we can target and direct our communications more specifically to tenants so that we can engage more effectively on matters that are important to them. In early 2015 we will be trialling localised newsletters which move us away from one big publication three times a year for all tenants and leaseholders. Instead, we will send shorter, more regular housing focused newsletters to target audiences. The newsletters will be localised to where people live, for example a slightly adapted newsletter for each town, one for rural locations and one for tenants living in sheltered schemes. We recognise that it's not always the case that one size fits all.
- 3.9.** The Service Improvement Team is responsible for facilitating and supporting the contribution and involvement structures. The Service Improvement Manger who joins the service in January 2015 will lead on developing practical and responsive ways for tenants to contribute to the Council's landlord services by:
- Reference to the Tenant's Action Plan
  - Consulting with tenants
  - Working with the Housing Advisory Group
  - Exploring and exploiting best practice
  - Learning from past successes and failures
- 3.10.** This will include developing and implementing a project plan that by March 2017 means the Council will have the culture and processes embedded so that tenants are:

- Involved in ways that are most appropriate to and convenient for individuals
- Experience an environment where people are confident and able to provide honest, constructive feedback which is fed into the systems and processes which will ultimately improve services for all tenants

#### **4. Policy Framework and Fit for the Future**

**4.1. Policy Framework** – This report does not make any recommendations to change policy.

**4.2. Fit for the Future** – The Council’s approach to tenant involvement can make a positive contribution to the Sustainable Communities Strategy in a number of ways. Through effective involvement of tenants and listening to their views, the Council will be more able to meet the needs and aspirations of its tenants which also supports the cross cutting theme of engaging and strengthening communities.

**4.3.** The Council’s approach to tenant involvement will also contribute towards the Council’s Fit for the Future (FFF) agenda. This is through the improvement of services to customers which can only be led by engaging with and understanding our customers. There is also opportunity to deliver efficiencies which may be identified by ensuring that we are delivering what our customers want. Also, through being held to account by our tenant’s we will be able to focus our efforts on the things that matter most to our customers.

**4.4. Equality Impact Assessments** – Equalities Impact Assessments will be carried out where necessary as part of the project plan to improve the way the Council’s engages with and responds to the contributions of its tenants.

#### **5. Budgetary Framework**

**5.1.** This report does not make any proposals or recommendations and there are no budgetary implications. There is already provision within the Housing Revenue Account to fund the involvement and empowerment functions. Any changes to budgets that might be required as a result of the new strategy will be considered as part of the review.

#### **6. Risks**

**6.1.** Although this report does not make any recommendations or proposals, there is a residual risk that the Council is not acting in accordance with the principles of co-regulation and that it does not meet the tenant involvement and empowerment standards (please refer for section 8 for further information).

**6.2.** The Council has been providing some opportunity for those tenants who wish to be involved in the service and are taking considerable steps to make improvements to this. The service redesign has appropriately resourced the support required to enable this to happen and a new strategy is being developed which will ensure that all obligations placed upon the council are met.

**6.3.** The regulator will not be proactively monitoring the achievement of consumer standards by social housing landlords (now referred to as Registered Providers) unless there are cases where breach or potential breach of a consumer standard leads to risk of serious detriment to tenants. It is highly unlikely that

failing to meet the tenant involvement and empowerment standard will lead to serious detriment to tenants and therefore the risk of any sanctions from the regulator is incredibly low.

- 6.4.** It is recognised that some tenants might be dissatisfied with the opportunities which the Council are providing for them to be involved in the service and indeed some of the current tenant panel members have expressed this view. We are working with those tenants that are already involved and also seeking to gain the views of the wider tenant population to ensure that the new strategy supports the ambitions and desires of our tenants to be involved in the service.

## **7. Alternative Option(s) considered**

- 7.1.** There are no recommendations for this report, therefore no alternative options have been considered.

## **8. Background**

- 8.1.** On 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012 the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) became the housing regulator in England and at the same time, the Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England was published which set directions for specific standards which must be met by Registered Providers, including Local Authority landlords.
- 8.2.** In line with the spirit of the Localism Act 2011, the principles of the regulatory framework for Registered Providers were focused on devolving power locally with little intervention from Central Government unless there is, or is likely to be, a case of serious detriment. The regulators role is limited to setting the required standards and it is the responsibility, the case of local authority landlords, of councillors for ensuring that the required standards are met.
- 8.3.** The HCA has set out four Consumer standards which apply to all Registered Providers, including Local Authority Landlords which are:
- Tenant Involvement and Empowerment
  - Home
  - Tenancy
  - Neighbourhood and Community
- 8.4.** One of the key principles of co-regulation as set out by the HCA is that tenants should have opportunities to shape service delivery and to hold the responsible councillors to account.
- 8.5.** Providers are expected to engage meaningfully with their tenants and offer them opportunities to shape the tailoring of services to reflect local priorities. Tenants should have the ability to scrutinise their provider's performance, identify areas for improvement and influence future delivery. Landlords will also need to continue to support tenants in developing their skills and capacity so that engagement and scrutiny are effective.
- 8.6.** Of particular importance to the council's current and future approach to Tenant Engagement and Involvement, is the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment standard which expects tenants to be 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

**8.7.** Landlords are expected to support their tenants to develop and implement opportunities for involvement and empowerment, including by:

- Supporting the formation and activities of tenant panels
- Publishing an annual report which should include information on repair and maintenance budgets, and
- Providing support to tenants to build their capacity to be more effectively involved