

# **REVIEW OF TENANT INVOLVEMENT**

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**MEETING: OVERVIEW AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY FORUM**

**DATE: 10<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2014**

**REPORT BY: HOUSING SERVICE MANAGER - CUSTOMER DIVISION**

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## **1.0 BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 A report reviewing Tenant Involvement was approved by Cabinet in June 2012; this followed a review of arrangements in 2011/12 but essentially approved the setting up of the Tenants Challenge Panel, the Council's approach to RSLR (resident-led self-regulation – tenant scrutiny) which was required in accordance with new legislation to improve accountability and transparency to tenants.
- 1.2 A new Customer Involvement Agreement was also approved which set out how the Council will work with tenants and involve them in how the housing service is delivered, and setting out the range of options in operation in which they can become involved.
- 1.3 The report also approved the purchase of a mobile office staffed by tenant participation staff to take the service out to the tenants on the estates.
- 1.4 These actions have all taken place and the new arrangements are in operation.
- 1.5 In addition to this, a report was approved by Cabinet in October 2013 which restructured elements of the Housing Customer Division and moved the team delivering tenant involvement under the management of the Neighbourhoods Manager. This was to improve joint working between the Neighbourhoods staff delivering services out on the estates and those working with tenants in relation to tenant involvement and to facilitate more estate- based consultation events utilising the mobile office.

- 1.6 The report also approved additional resources to deliver tenant involvement which has provided an excellent opportunity to review some of the methods of engagement which have proven to be less effective than others, and to consider new ones.

## **2.0 CURRENT POSITION**

- 2.1 Our Tenant Involvement Strategy meets our strategic and statutory obligations with regard to tenant engagement, in ensuring that we deliver the type and level of housing services that tenants want.
- 2.2 The strategy aligns with the Council's Vision in putting our communities first, and our objectives to improve the quality of life for local people in improving the Housing Service, whilst pooling resources both within the housing service and corporately to gain the best possible value for money.
- 2.3 The essence of a good Tenant Involvement Strategy is to ensure that there are a range of opportunities for tenants to get involved at the level and frequency which suits them, with a clear recognition that our customers are all individuals with diverse needs and aspirations who want to participate in different ways.
- 2.4 We currently have the following means by which tenants can become involved, each with varying levels of success in terms of tenant engagement:

### **2.4.1 Tenant Executive**

Tenant Executive is a consultative group and is consulted on policies and plans and the wider aims and objectives of the Housing Service. It meets monthly and the meetings alternate between formal meetings with senior managers and informal TE Get Togethers, which enable members to prepare for the next Tenant Executive meeting. Tenant Executive members attend and feed back to, and from the Area Panel or TARA from which they were nominated thereby raising issues from their areas and disseminating information to the wider tenant body.

### **2.4.2 Area Panels**

Area Panels are public meetings open to all tenants and meet quarterly with officers to discuss issues that affect their specific neighbourhoods and estates. These meetings are the means of consulting the wider tenant body and two members from each Panel

attend Tenant Executive to feed back from and to the Area Panel.

A variety of venues are used in each Panel's area. Various methods have been used to promote meetings.

### **2.4.3 Estate Improvement Budget**

Following the Tenant Participation Review in 2011/12, the eight Area Panels covering the Borough were each given their own Estate Improvement Budget of £20,000. The aim of this was to enable tenants to influence how the Estate Improvement Budget was used to improve their area and to encourage more residents to get involved.

In 2013/4 the total budget had a small overspend, one Area Panel spent 49% of their budget, another spent 69% of their budget and four Area Panels spent more than their budget, using some of the other Area Panels' underspend.

There were a number of issues that were raised by tenants as areas for improvement in Area Panel meetings that could not be funded by the Estate Improvement Budget. Some of the potential projects would have cost in excess of £20,000.

### **2.4.4 Tenants Challenge Panel**

The Tenant Challenge Panel considers how well the Housing Service is performing and scrutinises service areas. The Panel makes service improvement recommendations.

Tenant scrutiny is a key driver in social housing and the reviews that have taken place have been in depth and have challenged the service appropriately. Following a review an officer group works to action the recommendations made.

The Tenant Challenge Panel meets the Housing Regulators' requirements with regard to tenant scrutiny of services.

### **2.4.5 Tenants and Residents Associations (TARAs)**

TARAs operate at a local estate based level. They usually meet monthly and one representative attends Tenant Executive to feed back from and to the TARA.

There are two remaining TARAs in the Borough, and both receive an

annual grant of £600 to pay for room hire. Both TARAs fundraise and manage their own accounts.

#### **2.4.6 ChAT**

ChAT is Chesterfield Active Tenants' database which tenants can elect to be included on. It enables tenants to tell us what their interests are, what they would like to be involved in, and how they would like to be involved.

#### **2.4.7 Tenant Inspectors**

Tenant Inspectors have been recently recruited and following training will commence regular mystery shopping exercises to test the service.

A key task will be to take over inspection of void properties and test them against Chesterfield's Lettable Standard.

Tenant Inspectors will not be involved in other tenant engagement activities to ensure that they remain objective and independent.

#### **2.4.8 Annual Tenant Participation Event**

Following the 2011/12 review, the annual tenant participation event was focussed on consulting tenants about Local Offers. This event has proven to be popular with tenants who have attended the 'speed dating' style of consultation for the whole service.

It is a requirement of the Regulatory Standards that tenants are consulted on Local Offers annually. Using the annual event fulfils this requirement.

#### **2.4.9 Tenant Resource Centre**

The Tenant Resource Centre is available for tenants to do research, receive support from the Tenant Participation Officers, or to use as a meeting room. There is access to broadband, a PC and a laptop. To assist with research, the Inside Housing publication is available in the Centre and tenants can also access HouseMark.

The Centre is used by active tenant representatives.

#### **2.4.10 Social Media**

Following the 2011/12 review a presence on Facebook was established. The site has attracted 80 'friends' and posts have been viewed, shared and liked to up to 130 users. An account has also been set up on Twitter.

Social media allows us to receive instant feedback and to provide information to tenants about events as they happen. More work is required to increase the number of tenants who already use social media to promote Housing's pages.

#### **2.4.11 Tenant Engagement Events**

In March 2014, the Tenant Participation Team was integrated into the Neighbourhoods Team. This was done to encourage greater integration of tenant participation and engagement with tenancy and estates management.

One immediate benefit of this was the development of a programme of events aimed at encouraging and facilitating the engagement of tenants and the promotion of local community involvement more generally. As these events develop, it is envisaged that they will link with and become a focus for other community initiatives, for instance, for those instigated or promoted by the Council's Community Development Worker.

These events form part of the Local Offers to Tenants and the mobile office will be used to promote them.

### **3.0 THE REVIEW**

3.1 In carrying out the review of current arrangements the following actions took place:

- Guidance on tenant participation was researched. Housemark was used to benchmark against other organisations and to research good practice.
- Current tenant participation arrangements were evaluated, including Area Panels, Tenant Executive, Tenant Challenge Panel, Tenant and Resident Associations, Forums and ChAT.
- Tenant engagement activities in neighbouring authorities were researched.

The following consultation was carried out:

- Tenants who are currently actively involved in tenant participation activities were consulted in a focus group and surveyed individually by post. Completed surveys were returned by 15 tenants.
- 446 tenants, which represent 4.66% of tenants, were surveyed face-to-face in their homes, at Council venues and in their local area using the mobile office.
- Tenants who have registered on ChAT were surveyed by post. Completed surveys were returned by 46 tenants.
- A focus group was held with staff and managers.

Overall, 5.29% of tenants were surveyed.

3.2 When reviewing good practice it was confirmed that Chesterfield is already involved in tenant engagement activities that are recognised as good practice, have used these methods in the past or are proposing to do so in the near future. This was also the case when looking at neighbouring authorities tenant engagement activities. A précis of the TP activities carried out in other Derbyshire Districts is attached at **Appendix B**.

3.3 However, it has become clear from the survey results, the focus groups, Officer experience, and from participation and thus representation levels, that the areas to concentrate on in terms of their effectiveness are the Tenants Executive, Area Panels and TARAs.

### 3.4 Area Panels

3.4.1 Between June 2012 and March 2014 each Area Panel met six times, and had variable attendance. There were 48 meetings in total. Of these:

- 77% of meetings (37 meetings) were attended by 5 or more tenants.
- 46% of meetings (22 meetings) were attended by between 6 and 10 tenants
- 29% of meetings (14 meetings) were attended by 10 or more tenants
- 23% of meetings (11 meetings) were attended by less than 5 tenants
- The average number of tenants attending each meeting was 8

- The highest number of tenants attending an Area Panel meeting was 20

3.4.2 The majority of the tenants attending the Panels are the same tenants each time.

3.4.3 The Area Panel meetings are publicised as open public meetings. Some tenants come to raise an issue that is affecting them at a particular time or to suggest a project for funding. Once the issue is resolved or the project was completed they did not return to future meetings.

3.4.4 Feedback received by officers was that some meetings were dominated by more experienced community representatives and this could have deterred tenants from attending further meetings.

3.4.5 From the face-to-face surveys, completed by 446 tenants, 35% of tenants said that they were aware of Area Panels, but only 5.4% said they had attended an Area Panel meeting. 7.6% said that they felt the Area Panel represented them as a tenant.

3.4.6 Results were higher from postal surveys completed by 46 tenants of the tenants who are registered on the ChAT. 73.9% tenants said that they were aware of Area Panels. 54.3% said they had attended an Area Panel meeting. 41.3% said that they felt the Area Panel represented them as a tenant. This is perhaps unsurprising as these tenants are already actively engaged with the service.

3.4.7 From postal surveys completed by 15 active tenant representatives, 100% of tenants said that they were aware of Area Panels. 100% said they had attended an Area Panel meeting. 66.7% said that they felt the Area Panel represented them as a tenant.

3.4.8 When tenants were asked about how they would like to give their views about the Housing Service, the face-to-face surveys, which were completed by 446 tenants, told us that only 4.9% wanted to attend public meetings. The figure was higher from postal surveys completed by 46 tenants of the tenants who are registered on the ChAT of which 26.1% wanted to attend public meetings. The highest result was received from the postal surveys completed by 15 active tenant representatives with 66.7% who wanted to attend public meetings.

3.4.9 When we asked tenants why they did not attend meetings and what could be done to encourage them to attend meetings, there was no strong indication from their answers. This tells us that the majority of tenants simply do not want to attend public meetings.

### 3.5 **Tenants Executive**

3.5.1 The Tenant Executive has approximately 17 active members. The representatives are all of retirement age and are mostly white British ethnicity.

3.5.2 We have tried without success to ensure a broader representation of the wider tenant body but are unable to attract and keep a more representative group, for example a younger representative that was recruited has gone on to full time education with a view to gaining employment.

3.5.3 Low attendance at Area Panels limits the number of tenants who benefit from the system of the feedback to and from Tenant Executive.

3.5.4 Tenant Executive receives a lot of information, often at a high level, about the whole service. People volunteer to become a tenant representative for a variety of reasons, often it is because they have a particular interest in a specific aspect of the service e.g. repairs or how anti-social behaviour is dealt with. However, as a Tenant Executive member we ask them to attend meetings that discuss a very broad service including areas that they do not have any interest in, and that they may feel are not relevant to them.

3.5.5 The tenant representatives have received extensive training to broaden their skills, knowledge and experience and to assist them in their roles. The training has included tenant involvement, tenant scrutiny, finance, performance management, team work, representing others and IT skills. The representatives also have the opportunity to attend events and seminars organised by the East Midlands Tenant Participation Forum and courses at Trafford Hall.

3.5.6 The majority of Tenant Executive agenda items are officer-generated. Where tenants raise an issue it is usually from their own personal experience of the service. Whilst Tenant Executive raises some valid issues, it does not challenge services in a way that compares to the Tenant Challenge Panel.



- 3.5.7 Tenant Executive is a very traditional method of consulting tenants. It relies on tenants being nominated through public meetings (Area Panels) and has quite formal meetings with senior officers and whilst it could be argued that this vehicle is meeting our requirements to consult, there is a question regarding if it truly represents the views of the wider tenant body and if there are better ways of achieving this.
- 3.5.8 From the face-to-face surveys, completed by 446 tenants, 9.6% of tenants said that they were aware of Tenant Executive. 0.9% said they were aware of who their Tenant Representative is. 2.7% said that they felt the Tenant Executive represented them as a tenant. 1.3% said that they would consider getting involved in Tenant Executive.
- 3.5.9 Results were higher from postal surveys completed by 46 tenants, 52.2% of the tenants who are registered on the ChAT database said that they were aware of Tenant Executive. 17.4% said they were aware of who their Tenant Representative is. 37% said that they felt the Tenant Executive represented them as a tenant.
- 3.5.10 From postal surveys completed by 15 active tenant representatives, 93.3% of tenants said that they were aware of Tenant Executive. 66.7% said they were aware of who their Tenant Representative is. 80% said that they felt the Tenant Executive represented them as a tenant.

## 3.6 **TARAs**

- 3.6.1 There are two remaining TARAs in the Borough, at Mastin Moor and Newbold. Mastin Moor TARA has between 11 and 15 attendees and Newbold Moor has between 6 and 9 attendees. The main focus of the groups appears to be social activities and trips, however there is some evidence of local community issues being raised and discussed.
- 3.6.2 There is limited evidence of feedback from Area Panels and Tenant Executive and whilst there are obvious benefits of social activities, the validity of the Housing Service funding these groups must now be considered.
- 3.6.3 From the face to face surveys, completed by 446 tenants, 22.9% of tenants said that they were aware of a TARA in their area. 2% said they had attended a TARA meeting. 4% said that they felt the TARA represented them as a tenant.

- 3.6.4 Results were higher from postal surveys completed by 46 tenants of the tenants who are registered on the ChAT database. 32.6% tenants said that they were aware of a TARA in their area. 26.1% said they had attended a TARA meeting. 28.3% said that they felt the TARA represented them as a tenant.
- 3.6.5 From postal surveys completed by 15 active tenant representatives, 46.7% of tenants said that they were aware of a TARA in their area. 60% said they had attended a TARA meeting. 60% said that they felt the TARA represented them as a tenant.

## 4.0 **PROPOSALS**

- 4.1 **Area Panels** - It is proposed that Area Panels are discontinued and are replaced by the estate based Tenant Engagement events. These will be delivered in the main by utilising the mobile office, and will take the service out to tenants rather than expecting them to attend meetings. An emphasis will be on being inclusive and reaching out to all aspects of the community.
- 4.2 As part of this, a reward scheme for young people who get involved in community activities such as estate clean-ups, litter picking, graffiti removal, planting etc will be explored. The young people receive points for each engagement event attended, which can then be redeemed for leisure activities, trips etc.
- 4.3 **Tenant Executive** - It is proposed that Tenant Executive is dissolved and is replaced instead by Service Review Groups, which would be less formal workshop style, focus group meetings to look at particular parts of the service. We have found that service specific Focus Groups set up to look at repairs and ASB, have proven very effective, well attended and popular with the tenants who attended them.
- 4.3.1 Building on the success of the Focus Groups should improve the way that tenants are consulted about the Housing Service. This would also give tenants the opportunity to get involved in the parts of the service that are of specific interest to them.
- 4.3.2 From the surveys undertaken as part of this review, it is clear that tenants' interest varies enormously across the service areas. Below are the results when asking tenants which areas of the service they would be most likely to get involved in (tenants could choose more than one option).

Percentage of tenants who selected each option:

	Face to Face surveys	ChAT postal surveys	Tenant Representative postal surveys
Repairs - day to day	32.7	17.4	66.7
Rents	30.0	13.0	33.3
ASB	14.3	37.0	26.7
Estate Services	7.2	41.3	53.3
Adaptations	7.2	23.9	46.7
Allocations	6.5	10.9	33.3
Repairs – programme/budgets	4.3	23.9	53.3
Finance	2.0	8.7	20.0
Response and Support Service	1.8	19.6	40.0

4.3.3 Service Review Groups would meet the requirements of the Regulator, three or four groups with a wide remit would meet our consultation requirements and ensure that tenants have the opportunity to get involved in the areas of the service that are of interest to them. The Service Review Groups would focus on issues related to a particular part of the service, for example:

Finance:

- How the Estate Improvement Budget is used.
- Capital Programme.
- Budgets.

Communications:

- Annual Report.
- Our Homes newsletter.
- Communicating with tenants – leaflets, websites etc.

Service Standards:

- Performance information including benchmarking, mystery shopping etc.
- Service improvements and any recommendations from Tenant Challenge Panel.
- Current/emerging issues – legislation, guidance etc.
- Cabinet Reports.

- Information, communication, opportunities for tenants to influence.
- Complaints and lessons learned from customer feedback.
- Equalities.
- Value for money.

4.3.4 Tenants would be able to attend the groups depending on their interests and would not be required to attend every meeting of the group, as they are likely to be based on a task and finish type model.

4.3.5 As part of this review a focus group was held with Tenant Executive members to discuss how tenant engagement could be improved. The current tenant engagement opportunities were discussed along with ideas on how they could be improved. There was agreement that the focus groups had been a success and that they were popular with tenants. Based on the good practice research that had been undertaken, the idea of Service Review Groups was discussed and welcomed.

4.3.6 In consideration of the proposal of Service Review Groups the role of Tenant Executive was considered. Discussion took place around decision making if Service Review Groups were introduced. It seemed logical for decisions to be made by tenants who were involved in the Service Review Groups, working with officers responsible for delivering the service, with access to detailed information about the relevant service area, rather than the responsibility being passed to a different group of tenants. To do so would lengthen the process and lead to duplication.

4.3.7 The skills and knowledge of tenant representatives have, as a result of their experience and training, been acknowledged, along with the importance of putting this to its best use to ensure that we provide the best possible service to tenants. The current tenant representatives would be a valuable asset to the Service Review Groups or to the Tenant Challenge Panel and will be strongly encouraged to participate in these areas of engagement.

4.3.8 A focus group was also held with staff and managers from across the Housing Service. Current tenant engagement arrangements, the requirements of the Regulatory Standards and the idea of Service Review Groups, were discussed.

- 4.3.9 Staff and managers felt that having flexibility regarding the format of Service Review Groups would be more beneficial than the current arrangements. Staff and managers were keen that they could plan ahead for a Service Review Group and attract tenants to participate who had a real interest in their part of the service. They felt it would be useful to hold an initial event to find out what tenants would like to be consulted on in the groups in future, and felt the Service Review Groups could enable more consultation to take place on the Local Offers.
- 4.4 **TARAs** - It is proposed that the funding of TARAs ends with effect from 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015, with work taking place with the two TARAs during the remainder of this financial year to assist them in securing alternative funding and in ensuring that they are financially secure going forward. Active TARA members will be encouraged to participate in the Service Review Groups and it is proposed that the funding from April 2015 is used to support other tenant and community engagement events for example the young peoples reward scheme.
- 4.5 **ESTATE IMPROVEMENT BUDGET** – it is proposed that the Estate Improvement Budget is pooled, thus enabling larger projects to be considered. Work will take place with Community Assemblies to look at joint projects which where appropriate could be jointly funded, to ensure greater value for money.

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