

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

LANDLORD SERVICES ADVISORY BOARD

30 JUNE 2022

Title:

INTRODUCTION TO TENANT INVOLVEMENT

Portfolio Holder: Co-Portfolio Holder for Housing Paul Rivers

Head of Service: Hugh Wagstaff, Head of Housing Operations

Key decision: No

Access: Public

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1. Purpose and summary

To review and consider current performance and proposed actions for Tenant Involvement in line with the regulatory Tenant Involvement and Empowerment standard.

2. Recommendation

It is recommended that the Landlord Services Advisory Board:

- makes comments on the report
- advises the Portfolio Holder for Housing on methodology for future recruitment and selection of the Landlord Services Advisory Board members.

3. Reason for the recommendation

To gain an understanding of the Tenant Involvement service and to support and assess ongoing developments and improvements.

4. Background

4.1 Tenant Involvement continues to successfully develop through our valued volunteers, officers and elected members working together to co-regulate the service to meet regulatory standards.

4.2 In 2021 the [Tenant Involvement Strategy](#) was launched. It celebrated successes and shared aims for the next three years (please refer to Annexe One).

4.3 The strategy states that tenants are the experts of living in council homes. Therefore, engaging with our tenants means the service can develop by listening and working with that customer experience.

Tenant Involvement Standard

4.4 We recently conducted a review of the Government's tenancy involvement regulations against the information available on Waverley's website to assess how well the service complies across a variety of standards, from accessibility to the quality of information provided.

4.5 The website met the standard in terms of providing advice to solve issues before they need to be escalated to the council. The website also provides repair responsibilities and escalation process for complaints. Furthermore, it provided ample opportunity to provide feedback and how to get involved with the Tenants Panel, although it was less clear on direct ways of reporting complaints or scrutiny opportunities.

4.6 There were a couple of ease of access issues for sections such as home improvements. These were sections included under headings that didn't effectively point users to the correct section of the website. So, while available, were not particularly easy to find.

4.7 There is room to improve information on holding the council publicly accountable against the regulations via the website, and more generally on signposting to the standards that tenants can expect from their landlord.

4.8 Overall, the website adequately met the standard of 10 of the 21 relevant regulations, with some level of ambiguity or need for minor improvement on eight of the standards, and three in need of improvement.

4.9 Those in need of improvement are easily rectified and we will be working with the relevant internal teams and tenant volunteers to do so by 30 September 2022.

Tenants Panel

4.10 Established in 1995 the Panel remain robust and actively engaged with officers, elected members, and tenants.

4.11 In 2021 the members celebrated their 25th (plus one) anniversary. The occasion drew together all those involved with the group including previous Panel Chairs and members of the public. The event offered the opportunity to reflect on past achievements, look to the future and most importantly to thank those who have been part of the Panel's success.

4.12 There have been challenges for the Tenants Panel, not least working together during the pandemic. The Panel have welcomed the changes by developing their use of platforms such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams. Throughout this period, they managed to work together, meet virtually with officers, and recruit new members.

4.13 In 2022 the group continue to meet quarterly with the Head of Housing Operations and Portfolio Holder for Housing, sharing, and discussing Panel and Housing work.

Customer Experience Group

4.15 Newly launched in May 2022 the Customer Experience Group will be replacing the Designated Persons Panel when the role ceases to be recognised by the Housing Ombudsman.

4.16 Group members will scrutinise performance data and complaints to ensure quality and parity of the housing service. Members will report their findings quarterly to senior officers and present a report to the Landlord Services Advisory Board six monthly.

Local groups

4.17 Waverley housing formally recognise two tenant community groups.

4.18 The Meads, Haslemere. In 2013 resident's mere established an association with the support of officers. The purpose of the group is to encourage residents to take part in both community and social activities. The aim is to make a positive difference to the lives of residents.

Nine years later the group remain strong and inclusive to all. Their events have helped to improve the community and residents' wellbeing.

4.19 Lucas Fields, Haslemere. Established in March 2022 the residents have already made a difference to their local area. In April 2022 they secured funding from Haslemere Town Council to purchase seating and tables for their shared communal space which brings the community together. Working with Waverley officers and members the group have established a working action plan for issues in the area.

4.20 Both groups are supported by Waverley through officer assistance, training (if required) and start-up funding.

Landlord Services Advisory Board

4.21 In 2022 the Landlord Services Advisory Board was created. Part of the democratic process the board focuses on the housing service and reports directly to the Co-Portfolio Holder of Housing and Executive. The Tenants Panel currently hold three places on the board with one member acting as joint chair with the portfolio holder. Meetings are open to the public and provide an open forum for discussion on housing issues within the agenda.

4.22 As the board progresses there will be a requirement to recruit new members. Both officers and Tenant Panel members would recommend that the selection is made through existing engaged tenants and leaseholders. They can be from a wide range of activities for example Tenants Panel, Local groups, Customer Experience or Leaseholder groups. Engaged tenants can put themselves forward, on an annual basis, or as vacancies arise, for the Board and meet with the Tenants Panel Chair and Co-Portfolio Holder for Housing Operations. If there are more volunteers than positions the Chair and Vice chair of the board will select.

Conclusion

4.23 The Tenant Involvement Officer, wider housing team and members recognise the value of tenant involvement and engagement.

4.24 The Tenant Involvement Strategy was launched in 2021. It shares previous tenant involvement successful outcomes and an action plan for the next three years. The strategy also welcomes tenants to get involved in any way they can, support and training is available for all.

4.25 Self-assessment demonstrates Waverley housing meet the majority of the Tenant Involvement regulatory standard and that there are plans to update and ensure clarity of information.

4.26 The Landlord Service Advisory Board is developing into a strong group focusing on the ongoing management and improvements of the housing service and gaining assurance that the Housing Service meets regulatory requirements.

4.27 Waverley housing officers would like to thank all tenants who volunteer or engage in the service. Their contribution is valued and welcomed.

5. Relationship to the Corporate Strategy and Service Plan

The report supports the Council's Corporate commitment to promote "*Good quality housing for all income levels and age groups*" and aim to "*be the best council landlord in the Southeast and to be acknowledged so by our tenants.*"

6. Governance journey

Information only for board

Annexes:

Annexe 1 – Tenant Involvement Strategy

Background Papers

There are no background papers, as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972).

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