

Report to: **Housing Review Board**

Date of Meeting: 19 September 2019

Public Document: Yes

Exemption: None

Review date for release None



Subject: **Resident Involvement Strategy**

Purpose of report: To consider the contents of the refreshed Resident Involvement Strategy and adopt it as fit for purpose for the period 2019/22

Recommendation: **To adopt the Resident Involvement Strategy 2019/22**

Reason for recommendation: To ensure our Resident Involvement Strategy is agreed at the highest level and recorded for all to see.

Officer:

Sue Bewes Landlord Services Manager

sbewes@eastdevon.gov.uk

01404 515616

Financial implications: There are no specific financial implications

Legal implications: There are no legal implications which require comment.

Equalities impact: Low Impact

If choosing High or Medium level outline the equality considerations here, which should include any particular adverse impact on people with protected characteristics and actions to mitigate these. Link to an equalities impact assessment form using the [equalities form template](#).

Climate change: Low Impact

Risk: Comments

Low Risk

[Click here to enter text on risk considerations relating to your report.](#)

Links to background information: ➤ [Click here to enter links to background information; appendices online; and previous reports. These must link to an electronic document. Do not include any confidential or exempt information.](#)

Link to Council Plan: Encouraging communities to be outstanding

1 Introduction

1.1 The Government's Regulator of Social Housing publishes regulatory standards that registered providers of social housing must meet. The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard 2017 requires us to:

- Provide choices, information and communication that is appropriate to the diverse needs of tenants in the delivery of all standards

- Have an approach to complaints that is clear, simple and accessible that ensures that complaints are resolved promptly, politely and fairly
- Ensure tenants are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in:
 - The formulation of our housing related policies and strategic priorities
 - Making decisions about how housing related services are delivered, including setting service standards
 - Scrutiny of our performance and making recommendations about how performance might be improved
 - Management of their homes, where applicable
 - 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
 - Agreeing local offers for service delivery

1.2 So, with this in mind, the Resident Involvement Strategy 2013 has been updated to reflect our present position and aspirations. The term 'resident' has been maintained at the request of tenants who prefer to reflect our work with leaseholders and to show our intention to offer access to our involvement opportunities to all users of our services.

1.3 Effective customer involvement is seen as good practice in the housing sector and essential to the effective planning and operation of the service. Our recommended approach is to build on the improvements in resident involvement over recent years and consolidate what works well.

1.4 To this end it is important to formally agree as tenants, councillors and officers together how we will involve residents in the service at all levels so that they can influence its direction and delivery in a meaningful way. Failure to do so would give a negative impression to stakeholders that customer views were not important to us and had little value. This would be incorrect, and a risk to the authority's reputation as well as, importantly, the quality of the service delivered.

2 Background

2.1 We have a history of positive commitment to customer involvement, of striving to improve and raising this element of the Housing Service to greater heights. Our work in this area has achieved recognition over the years: we won a national award for our tenant magazine in the 1990s; we were the first local authority in the South West to produce a tenant compact in 2000; we were one of the first local authorities to invite tenant and community representatives onto our Housing Review Board in 2006; our work on tenant scrutiny and involving tenants in our formal complaints process won us praise from Government Office in its turn, and we are now recognised by Involvement Devon as one of the few remaining social landlords that continues to offer a comprehensive menu of involvement opportunities.

2.2 We have been keen to involve customers to improve service delivery and have seen positive benefits by doing so which include:

- Delivery of services that tenants want so that they reflect local priorities
- This has contributed to a service that produces less waste and that represents good value for money
- This approach has also helped bring high levels of customer satisfaction and performance when measured against our peers.

- 2.3 Our collective approach has been in line with recognised good practise which requires that residents should have a clear voice and the genuine opportunity to be involved in setting priorities, determining outcomes and developing relevant performance measures to assess whether these outcomes are being met.

3 The Resident Involvement Strategy

- 3.1 Over the past 18 months we have been reviewing our customer involvement offer by a variety of means, including:
- Formal impact assessment of all areas of the structure including Service Review Groups, the Tenant Involvement Forum, the Tenant Scrutiny Panel, the Designated Tenant Complaint Panel, the Conference Committee, the Editorial Group.
 - A series of focus groups to gain the views of tenants who are not routinely involved in a regular way.
 - Questionnaires to tenants attending training sessions.
 - Sessions with Residents Associations.
 - Survey of Housing Staff.
- 3.2 What the consultation and review has shown us is that our determination and strong partnership working over the years has stood us in good stead, and we have a structure in place that is tried and tested and has worked well for us in many areas. Some areas though have not worked as well and have benefited from the review to challenge their usefulness, and how we can redefine the shape of our involvement structure to make sure it is truly inclusive for the future and able to deliver real improvements for the service.
- 3.3 For the most part the feedback gained showed that most areas of the structure have worked well and made a positive impact on the service. Looking closely and challenging ourselves in this way has led to some changes, for example amalgamation of work with residents across sheltered and general needs estates, as the sheltered group, in particular, had been struggling to achieve any meaningful results and become an information giving meeting that was not helping residents shape their service or influence it in any way. Another change is the re-emergence of the Tenant Involvement Forum (TIF) in a focus group format that will be convened as and when required. This was because the forum was not representative of the larger tenant body, being composed largely of residents over retirement age living in sheltered housing who could not comment on behalf of younger families living in general needs accommodation. It did not achieve its goal of reporting to the Board on its thinking, or play a great part in shaping or influencing services. It did serve the purpose of bringing the service review groups together and listening to what they had achieved, but did not offer advice or act upon the information that it received. It was recognised that the TIF's practice of meeting just after Board agendas were produced meant that they were unable to influence the content of papers, as the meaningful consultation had already been undertaken with the service review or focus groups at an earlier stage in the process.
- 3.4 The TIF has operated successfully as a focus group over the past three months to help me look at the material gathered during the review and to draw up the new strategy for the next phase of our future. The aims and objectives are little changed, but we have tried to be less structured, but concentrate on ensuring we respond to residents and offer opportunities for involvement wherever they tell us they would like to be involved.
- 3.5 The consultation has shown the demographic of our involvement structure does not match our actual demographic, and the fact that our structure has been heavily weighted towards physical meetings during the daytime hours when many of our younger families will be at work, does not help us to engage these residents in our activities. The new structure is

more innovative and accommodates our requirement to pay more attention to communicating with younger people in the way they communicate with each other, oftentimes this will mean offering a digital option where possible. At the same time we do not want to lose our loyal tenants who have been offering their time for many months and years, and without whose expertise and knowledge we would be seriously debilitated. In recognition of this we have kept the majority of the present structure, where it is recognised that this has been working well and achieving great results.

3.6 Earlier this year a paper was brought to the Board's March meeting which drew your attention to the **National Housing Federation (NHF) publication and consultation – Together with Tenants**. This document had been produced in response to the Housing Green Paper and the aftermath of the Grenfell tragedy. Whilst the document is intended for housing associations, there is much of value to our tenant involvement and Housing Review Board agenda. It asks some basic questions:

- Are residents listened to when things go wrong with their home or the service they receive?
- Do they have a chance to influence decisions made about their home or service they receive?
- What can they do if they don't think their landlord is taking their concerns seriously?

3.7 They have been working hard to protect and strengthen the rights and interests of tenants living in social housing, and to this end have produced a set of 8 commitments they are asking 40 housing associations to sign up to and test in a move to pilot the draft plan. They have been kept deliberately simple and straightforward, making it easy for people to relate them to their own experience. These are:

1. Every tenant and resident has the right to be treated with respect.
2. Every tenant and resident has the right to a decent safe home and quality of service.
3. Every tenant and resident has the right to be listened to and have their voice heard on decisions that affect their community, home and services they receive.
4. Every tenant and resident has the right to know how the organisation is run, how decisions are made and how they can get involved.
5. Collectively tenants and residents have the right to influence decisions that affect their community, home and the services they receive.
6. Every tenant and resident will have simple, clear and accessible routes for raising issues, making complaints and seeking redress.
7. Every tenant and resident will receive support and advice when things go wrong or their expectations aren't met.
8. Every tenant and resident will have access to the information they need to make informed decisions and hold their landlord to account.

3.8 The Board recommended at that meeting that we should follow the progress of the NHF project and weave its findings into our strategy of involvement for the future.

4. Conclusions

4.1 We believe that what the new strategy offers is sustainable for both residents and officers alike but, like its predecessors, this strategy continues to shift the emphasis and responsibility of resident involvement from the Tenant Participation team towards all Housing staff, as is expected by accepted good practise, and required for effective involvement to result. We believe it has the right structure to deliver the expectations of the NHF Together with Tenants draft plan, and that the requirements of the plan are catered for within the strategy.

- 4.2 We have some great examples of tenants having meaningful involvement such as the procurement of our new integrated asset management contract where we have made a real effort to integrate by having tenant involvement from the very start. We work with a skilled team of editors to produce a high quality tenant magazine, have a Tenant Scrutiny Group that is recognised by neighbouring authorities for the excellent reviews and reports it has undertaken and made to the Board as well as a strong history of making sure we achieve every single recommendation that it has made (so far!). Our Designated Tenant Complaint Panel has helped shape the corporate complaints process for the better as well as much of the staff training we received last year from the Government Ombudsman and mental health and legal experts, and who again report directly to the Board in their own right. These examples and others have been kept within the structure.
- 4.3 It is time now to look at and provide more digital options, and also to make best use of the 'tenant portal' element of our housing system when it is brought on line.
- 4.4 What matters most to tenants is not just the strategy, but that we deliver on our promises contained within it. Monitoring is essential and therefore built in to the structure going forward, but it will require more than just this to make the strategy a success.
- 4.5 To this end the commitment of the Board, and strong leadership across Housing teams, as well as an improved focus on digital inclusion and involvement opportunities, will enable us to build on our firm foundations and improve our offer to younger families and residents, in particular.