



Report to Policy Committee:

Author/Lead Officer of Report: Vicky Kennedy,
Operational Team Manager (Author)

Tel: 0114 474 2736

Report of: *Ajman Ali (Executive Director, Neighbourhood Services)*

Report to: *Housing Policy Committee*

Date of Decision: *26th January 2024*

Subject: ***Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy***

Has an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) been undertaken?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
If YES, what EIA reference number has it been given? <i>(Insert reference number)</i> 2396				
Has appropriate consultation taken place?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has a Climate Impact Assessment (CIA) been undertaken?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Purpose of Report:

The current Housing and Neighbourhoods Engagement Strategy was launched in 2021. It was written in close consultation with tenants and leaseholders, and a commitment was made to review it after 3 years. That review has now happened, again in consultation with our tenants and leaseholders, and the Strategy has been updated based on their feedback.

The Action Plan which underpins the Strategy and describes how we intend to implement it has also been updated as part of this review.

Since the introduction of the new Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023, the importance of listening to, and acting on, tenant views has become ever more important. Our updated Tenant and Leaseholder Strategy will help us meet those new regulatory requirements.

Recommendations:

The Housing Policy Committee is recommended to:

- Note the outcomes of the consultation undertaken as part of the Engagement Strategy Review, as described in this report.
- Approves a) the updated Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy, and b) the updated Engagement Strategy Action Plan.

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Background Papers:

(Insert details of any background papers used in the compilation of the report.)

Appendix 1 – Current Housing and Neighbourhoods Customer Engagement Strategy

Appendix 2 – Proposed Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy

Appendix 3 – Engagement Strategy Action Plan

Lead Officer to complete:-		
1	I have consulted the relevant departments in respect of any relevant implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist, and comments have been incorporated / additional forms completed / EIA completed, where required.	Finance: <i>Helen Damon</i>
		Legal: <i>Tracy Beal</i>
		Equalities & Consultation: <i>Louise Nunn</i>
		Climate: <i>N/A – no climate-related implications of the proposals</i>
<p><i>Legal, financial/commercial and equalities implications must be included within the report and the name of the officer consulted must be included above.</i></p>		
2	EMT member who approved submission:	<i>Ajman Ali</i>
3	Committee Chair consulted:	Cllr Douglas Johnson
4	I confirm that all necessary approval has been obtained in respect of the implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist and that the report has been approved for submission to the Committee by the EMT member indicated at 2. In addition, any additional forms have been completed and signed off as required at 1.	
	Lead Officer Name: Janet Sharpe	Job Title: Director of Housing and Neighbourhoods
	Date: 16th January 2024	

1. PROPOSAL

- 1.1 The current Housing and Neighbourhood Customer Engagement Strategy was developed in 2020 and launched in 2021. It is based on a wide range of views and experience - tenants, leaseholders and Elected Members were closely involved in its development, and national tenant engagement experts TPAS (Tenant Participation Advisory Service) also provided input. A copy of the current Strategy is attached in Appendix One.
- 1.2 A commitment was made to review the Strategy after 3 years – that review has now been undertaken and the proposals in this report are a result of that review. This work has involved wide consultation with our tenants and leaseholders, as described in more detail in Section 3 below.
- 1.3 A lot has changed since the Strategy’s original development in 2020. There has been much in the news over the past few years which has had a huge impact on attitudes towards tenant involvement. This has brought into sharp focus the importance of tenant voices being heard, and as a result the new Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 was introduced.
- 1.4 In line with this new regulation, the Regulator of Social Housing is creating a set of four consumer standards. One of these will be focused on “Transparency, Influence and Accountability” - building on and replacing the existing Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard. Once approved (the Standards are currently being consulted on), this standard will mean that tenants should be able to (amongst other things):
- Influence their landlord’s decision-making
 - Understand how their landlord is performing
 - Hold their landlord to account.
- 1.5 Feedback from the consultation exercise and the new regulatory requirements have been the key drivers behind the proposed revised Engagement Strategy. Much of what was already in the Strategy has been reinforced by the review – the priorities and commitments within the Strategy are still relevant and important to our tenants and will help us meet the Regulator’s expectations.
- 1.6 However, the consultation provided some useful feedback in terms of areas of the Strategy where the commitment needs to be strengthened. There have therefore been some minor amendments and updates made to it, and a summary of these is given in section 3.9 below.
- 1.7 A full copy of the proposed revised Strategy is included in Appendix 2.
- 1.8 As part of the consultation, we also sought views on our plans for implementing the commitments made in the Strategy. The resulting Action Plan is included in Appendix 3. This describes the work which we are either already doing or have planned, to help us improve how we engage with our tenants. This Plan will be an ever-evolving document as more work is completed and more ideas put forward – by tenants, staff and Elected Members.
- 1.9 The proposed revised Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy and the accompanying Action Plan are the documents we are asking Housing Policy Committee to approve.

2. HOW DOES THIS DECISION CONTRIBUTE ?

2.1 As described above, adopting this updated Engagement Strategy and the Action Plan will be a significant step in us meeting the new regulatory requirements around tenant involvement and influence. It will strengthen the voices of tenants and leaseholders, give them more direct influence over the decisions that affect them and support them to work with us to improve our housing services.

2.2 The proposed new regulatory requirements relating to tenant engagement are shown below, alongside a short description of how effective implementation of the updated Engagement Strategy will support us in meeting each one:

Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard: Tenant Engagement	
Proposed requirement	How our Engagement Strategy will support this
To give tenants a wide range of meaningful opportunities to influence and scrutinise their landlord's strategies, policies and services. This includes in relation to the neighbourhood where applicable.	Priority One emphasises the need to offer a wide range of different engagement activities to help ensure that we meet the diverse needs of our tenants. The range of activities we have planned as listed in the Action Plan demonstrates how we intend to achieve this. Priority Three focuses on engagement at a local community level.
To assist tenants who wish to implement tenant-led activities to influence and scrutinise their landlord's strategies, policies and services. This includes in relation to the neighbourhood where applicable.	Priority Five is focused on the support we will provide to tenants to help them challenge us and to have influence. Section five of the Action Plan describes in more detail how we will do this – including support to get online and training opportunities to increase skills and confidence in engaging with us. The Action Plan also lists all the different engagement activities we are providing for tenants who want to be involved.
To provide accessible support that meets the diverse needs of tenants so they can engage with the opportunities.	As per above, both the Strategy and the Action Plan refer to the support we will provide to help empower tenants to effectively engage with us. The Action Plan explains that support will be in a range of formats, and that tenants will be given extra support if needed to access these opportunities.
Working with tenants, to regularly consider ways to improve and tailor their approach to delivering landlord services including tenant engagement. They must implement changes as appropriate to ensure services deliver the intended aims.	The overarching aim of both the Strategy and the Action Plan is to strengthen the ways in which we work with tenants to improve services. There is also a clear commitment in the introductory section of the Strategy to make sure that tenant views are not only heard but also acted upon.

2.3 In turn, this will also help support two key priorities set out in the new Sheffield City Council Plan 2024 – 2028:

- **”Work with communities to improve the places and spaces that make neighbourhoods great places to live and be active”** - An effective engagement strategy will help ensure that we work in partnership with our tenants and leaseholders to support successful neighbourhoods where people want to live.
- **“A new approach to community empowerment and engagement, working with our VCFSE partners and through LACs”** – The updated Strategy and Action Plan include commitments to working with the LACs, and community organisations, to improve engagement at a community level.

3. HAS THERE BEEN ANY CONSULTATION?

- 3.1 Consultation with tenants and leaseholders has been a key element of the Engagement Strategy review. To ensure as many people as possible could participate, surveys were carried out both online and over the telephone.
- 3.2 The telephone surveys were focused on the tenants whose views are traditionally under-represented and used to address the gaps we had identified in the demographics of those responding to the online survey. The telephone surveys were therefore targeted towards younger tenants and those from a BAME background.
- 3.3 The survey questions – online and telephone versions – focused on the 5 key commitments given in the current Engagement Strategy. We asked if these commitments are still important and relevant to tenants, and if there is anything else they feel should be included as a priority.
- 3.4 As part of the online consultation, we also shared a draft Action Plan, outlining the work we are doing or intend to do to help us deliver on the commitments in the Strategy. We sought ideas from tenants and leaseholders about what more we could do to improve our engagement work and to give tenants a stronger voice.
- 3.5 In total, 274 people have completed the surveys and a summary of the outcomes is as follows:

	Online survey	Telephone survey
Demographics data		
No. of respondents	124	150
Age profile	18-24: 2% 25-49: 26% 50-64: 39% 65+: 32%	18-24: 1% 25-49: 62% 50-64: 17% 65+: 19%
% with a disability	51%	21%
% BAME background	Not measured	56%
% with English NOT 1 st language	11%	Not measured
Feedback on existing Engagement Strategy priorities		
% rating Priority One as ‘very important’ or ‘important’	93%	87%
% rating Priority Two as ‘very important’ or ‘important’	98%	90%

% rating Priority Three as 'very important' or 'important'	98%	86%
% rating Priority Four as 'very important' or 'important'	98%	93%
% rating Priority Five as 'very important' or 'important'	98%	94%

- 3.6 We know that around 24% of our tenants are of a BAME background but are often underrepresented in our consultations, and so by using ViewPoint to target this group we are confident that their views are well represented in this consultation.
- 3.7 We also know that around 46% of our tenants are under 50, but of the online respondents only 28% were of this age group. So we also used ViewPoint to target these tenants which resulted in a more representative age-profile.
- 3.8 It is clear from these results that the existing priorities are still relevant and important to the vast majority of tenants and leaseholders, and so they need to continue to be the focus of our engagement activity.
- 3.9 The consultation also asked if there was anything else which respondents believed should be included in the Engagement Strategy or the Action Plan. Some feedback from this question was unfortunately less relevant to this review. As with many consultation exercises, a number of respondents took the opportunity to air their frustration with issues outside the scope of the consultation. These issues included:
- ASB
 - Housing repairs
 - Ability to contact the housing service
 - Complaints handling
- 3.10 Whilst not relevant to the Engagement Strategy, these are areas of our service which we know attract a significant level of customer dissatisfaction. They are all areas which are being worked on and developed by other projects and initiatives.
- 3.11 However, there were several common themes emerging from the feedback which are relevant to this review and so have been acted upon and reflected in the updated Strategy and Action Plan. These are:

Feedback / common theme	How this is reflected in the final Strategy and / or Action Plan
The Council needs to properly listen to tenants and do what it says it will in the Strategy – a strategy is meaningless if it isn't implemented effectively.	<p>By sharing the Action Plan which underpins the Strategy, we are providing clear examples of <i>how</i> the Strategy will be implemented. For every Priority in the Strategy, there are several actions listed to which we are committed to delivering.</p> <p>Going forward, we need to ensure that we regularly monitor and update tenants on our progress against this Plan – this will be done through our tenant bulletins and other communications. A commitment to do this has been added to the Strategy.</p> <p>This commitment to listening to and acting on tenants' views is included as part of the introduction to the Strategy.</p>

<p>We need to offer a wide range of ways to be involved, so that we are meeting the diverse needs and preferences of our tenants. This needs to include those without online access.</p>	<p>This was already covered in the existing Strategy under Priority One. However, that priority has now been re-worded slightly to strengthen our commitment to accommodating and supporting a diverse tenant group in being involved in our engagement work. Also, to reflect that we won't solely rely on digital engagement methods.</p> <p>The Action Plan lists different ways in which tenants can participate – these include both digital and non-digital methods, and a range of activities in which people can engage at a time which suits them. More engagement channels will be added to the list as our engagement work develops over the coming months.</p>
<p>Tenants need to be more involved in the decision-making in relation to their housing.</p>	<p>Priority Two includes a commitment to ensure tenant voices are heard by those making decisions. To support this, the Action Plan references our new 'Tenant Voices Matter' panel – a new tenant and leaseholder group who will work directly with the Housing Policy Committee to help inform housing-related decisions.</p>
<p>Communications and information needs to be in plain language and easily understandable.</p>	<p>Priority One has been amended to refer specifically to the use of plain language, and a specific action to address this has been added into the Action Plan.</p>
<p>The Council needs to work with a range of community groups, not just TARAs.</p>	<p>Priority Three focuses on community engagement and has been updated to reinforce that this encompasses work with a range of different community organisations.</p> <p>This has also been addressed in the Action Plan, with a stronger emphasis on working with a whole range of groups including but not limited to TARAs.</p>
<p>Tenants need to be supported and empowered to engage effectively and confidently</p>	<p>Priority 5 of the Strategy is focused on tenant empowerment and the Action Plan includes specific actions aimed at achieving this – through a training programme and other support.</p>

4. RISK ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

Equality Implications

- 4.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out and no negative impacts on any group of people were identified. The Strategy supports a fully inclusive approach to engagement and should have a positive impact in terms of equalities.

Financial and Commercial Implications

- 4.2 There are no financial or commercial implications arising from this report.

Legal Implications

- 4.3 The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 received royal assent on 20th July 2023. Its aim is to strengthen legislative powers to tackle failing social landlords and to provide better support for tenants living in unsafe homes.
- 4.3.1 The terms of reference of this Committee, as set out within Part 3 of the Council's Constitution provides that it has the express power to monitor data "... for monitoring the performance of services" relating to the functions of the Council as Local Housing Authority, including public sector, [and] private sector..." Further, that this Committee has the discretion to "...refer matters within its own remit to Full Council only in exceptional circumstances." Given there are no apparent exceptional circumstances, this Committee has the reserved power to determine and approve all the matters set out within the report recommendations.
- 4.3.2 Pursuant to s.149 of the Equality Act 2010, ["the Act"] the Council must in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act,
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not,
 - Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic those who do not.
- 4.3.3 Giving effect to matters relating to the proposed Action Plan, may inevitably engage relevant equalities implications.

Climate Implications

- 4.4 There are no climate implications arising from this report.

Other Implications

- 4.5 There are no other implications arising from this report.

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 5.1 The alternative to updating the strategy as proposed in this paper would be to continue with the current Engagement Strategy that has been in place since 2020. However, this would be contrary to our commitment to reviewing and updating the Strategy after 3 years.

6. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 Adopting the updated Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy will enable the Council to further improve how it engages with its tenants and leaseholders.
- 6.2 It will also support the Council in meeting the requirements of the new social housing regulatory framework.

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