

Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy (Housing, Maggie Ward)

Synopsis of report:

The proposed Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy sets out the Council's commitment to meaningful engagement. With an action plan and examples of engagement methods to be adopted, it will provide an additional mechanism for continuous service improvements, with the aim of increasing tenant and leaseholder satisfaction.

Recommendation:

That Members approve the Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy for tenants and leaseholders (Appendix A) for immediate adoption.

1. Context and background of report

- 1.1 At its meeting on 10th November 2021, this Committee approved the request for Officers to consult on a Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy. The consultation took place between 12th November 2021 and 14th January 2022. This report presents the findings of this consultation and recommends that Members approve the Strategy for adoption.

2. The Purpose of the Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy

- 2.1 The proposed Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy sets out the Council's commitment to listening to tenants and leaseholders and to take account of their views. Registered social landlords are required to demonstrate they have sought out and considered ways to improve tenant engagement and tailored their engagement for their local circumstances. One of the new Tenant Satisfaction Measures (detailed in the performance report at item 15 on this agenda) is that the landlord listens to tenant views and acts upon them. In addition to the new regulatory requirement, there is a strong business case for meaningful engagement with customers as the information obtained leads to targeted investment, more effective processes, efficiency savings, better services, increased satisfaction and motivated staff, all part of a cycle of continuous improvement.

2.2 Consultation on the Draft Strategy

- 2.2.1 Consultation on the draft Strategy took place between 12th November 2021 and 14th January 2022. A new 'Have Your Say' page on the Council's website was developed, with the purpose and a summary of the Strategy presented to encourage feedback. The web page also contained the full draft strategy and a new dedicated email address for engagement called 'Listening@Runnymede.gov.uk'

- 2.2.2 The other consultation methods were:

Email to 1,841 tenants signposting to the website. 1,138 tenants opened this email, 182 clicked to read more.

203 letters posted to IRL residents (arrangements for workshops cancelled due to Covid restrictions)
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Letters sent with confirmation of repairs raised and rent statements, with a QR code to the website
RCRA Facebook post
All housing staff email 'signature' highlighting the strategy consultation
Forum of Engagement Officers with other Registered Provider landlords
Survey emailed to all Housing Committee Members

2.2.3 The full results of the consultation are presented at Appendix B, but can be summarised as:

	Satisfied or very satisfied
1. How satisfied are you that the draft Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy will improve the way the Housing services at Runnymede Borough Council listens to your views?	51.62%
2. How satisfied are you that the draft Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy will improve the way the Housing service at Runnymede Borough Council will keep you informed about things that might affect you as a resident?	64.52%
3. How satisfied are you with the opportunities of involvement available to tenants and leaseholders, to participate in the housing services decision-making process?	64.52%
4. Overall, how satisfied are you with the draft Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy?	61.29%

2.2.4 A number of comments highlighted a perception that the Council needs to not only involve and listen to residents, but also communicate and demonstrate that we are doing so. This approach will be adopted as the Strategy, if approved, is rolled out.

2.3 The initial draft Strategy was presented to Housing Committee in November 2021. The new Engagement and Inclusion Officer has launched a number of new initiatives and learning from this and from the consultation informed a review of the draft strategy. The following amendments have been made:

- Added new actions to the Action Plan to help meet specific objectives, e.g. Involvement in reviewing policies and input on transactional survey questions.
- To demonstrate the action taken in response to engagement, the website will have pages dedicated to project and consultation results so residents can view feedback and next action steps.
- Tenants using the 'Listening@runnymede.gov.uk' address will receive both an initial response and an update on how to view the results of consultation they contributed to.
- As focus groups have proved difficult to recruit to so far, opportunities for one-to-one discussions and qualitative interviews will also be available.
- As some tenants indicated they would like more information before getting involved, we will provide more specific information on the menu of opportunities, e.g. terms of reference, responsibilities and likely commitment required.
- More convenient engagement opportunities that require less time commitment e.g. RCRA Facebook group, 'Be Heard from Home' surveys, Digital Champions, Resident Reader etc.
- Proposals for digital skills training and promotion of Housing Online.

2.4 The draft strategy is at appendix A.

2.5 Members are invited to approve the Strategy for immediate adoption.

3. Monitoring of Delivery and Next Steps

3.1 If approved, the Strategy will be adopted immediately. A Steering Group has already met and will continue to drive the implementation of the Strategy's action plan. The Strategy will be launched on the website, the new Housing Online portal, social media and upcoming consultation events. It will be featured in the tenants' annual report in September and in newsletters. It will also be launched to leaseholders, with the new and enhanced Northgate modules expected to make engagement with this group more effective.

3.2 Performance against the targets in the strategy will be reported to the Council's Housing Committee as part of the annual review of the implementation of the strategy. The strategy will be reviewed within the next three years.

4. Policy framework implications

4.1 The Corporate Plan commits the Council to empowering communities to enable them to make decisions which impact on their future. This strategy supports and facilitates tenants and leaseholders in shaping the Council's services to meet their needs. Implementation of the Strategy is included as a project in the Business Centre Plan 2022 – 23.

5. Resource implications/Value for Money

5.1 When approving the HRA budgets for 2022/23 at the January meeting, this Committee approved an increased provision in the Tenant Participation budget to include additional engagement costs including a STAR survey. The appointment of the Engagement and Inclusion Officer was approved by this Committee in March 2021, and the annual budgets already include an ongoing annual provision for sending out newsletters and the annual report to tenants.

6. Legal implications

6.1 This Strategy arises from the 'Tenancy Involvement and Empowerment Standard', as one of the 'Consumer Standards' against which the Regulator of Social Housing assesses Registered Providers, including this local housing authority.

6.2 The Public Sector Equality Duty, under the Equalities Act 2010, requires public authorities in exercise of their functions to:

- Eliminate discrimination.
- Foster good relations
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons protected under the Act and those not.

The Strategy can be seen as implementing, in particular, the last of these by aiming to extend meaningful engagement opportunities to groups who have been underrepresented.

7. Equality implications

7.1 The Equality Impact Assessment screening of this Strategy found that it aims to remove the barriers of engagement for groups who have been underrepresented -

including young people and people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds - and create meaningful engagement opportunities for them to raise concerns and issues that impact them. It is expected to have a positive impact on all tenants and leaseholders.

8. Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications

8.1 There are no identified environmental, sustainability or biodiversity implications associated with this strategy.

9. Other implications

9.1 The Strategy will promote social inclusion. Data Protection issues will be addressed in line with legislation and best practice. Communications plans for the launch of the strategy and for specific events and initiatives will be agreed in consultation with the Head of Public Relations and Marketing.

10. Timetable for Implementation

10.1 If approved, it is proposed that the strategy will be adopted immediately.

11. Conclusions

11.1 Following a period of consultation, the new draft Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy sets out an Action Plan to improve meaningful engagement. Implementation of the strategy is expected to lead to service improvements that deliver increased customer satisfaction and better value for money.

(To resolve)

Background papers

None