

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

CABINET: 6TH NOVEMBER, 2017

REFERENCE FROM HOMES AND SAFE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE: 11TH OCTOBER, 2017

“ TENANT ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY (REF) -

At its meeting on 9th October, 2017, Cabinet had been provided with a draft Tenant Engagement Strategy for Public Housing. The purpose of the Strategy was to ensure that tenant engagement was at the heart of the decision-making processes and a broad range of tenants had the opportunity to take part in a variety of different ways. This would allow the wider tenant population an opportunity to comment and suggest changes to the draft Strategy.

Cabinet had subsequently referred the matter to the Scrutiny Committee for consultation purposes.

In 2007 the Welsh Government set out a requirement for all social landlords to develop their own local Tenant Participation Strategies. The first Vale Strategy was published in 2008 and led to an improvement in tenant participation; albeit from a fairly low base. Two years later, the Vale published a further Strategy with more ambitious objectives designed to drive further improvements and that included outcome focussed objectives for the first time.

It had been seven years since the last Strategy was published and the current version aimed to pick up any gaps which had come to light and also incorporated feedback from more recent tenant consultation. A number of priority areas were identified included:

- a need to involve a broader cross-section of tenants;
- the need to develop the range of methods used to engage tenants (beyond the traditional tenants association type approach);
- the need to develop the capacity of tenants groups to play a bigger role;
- ensuring tenant views fed into the strategic decision making process, for example shaping new services, developing new policies and deciding spending priorities.

The above priorities informed the new Strategy and the outcomes focus was retained in order to maximise the impact of the actions and initiatives which had been formulated.

The Head of Housing and Building Services, in presenting the report, advised that the draft Strategy attached at Appendix 1 to the report was a working document and could be amended following Member comments. The Strategy was one of the most important Strategy's for the Council as it allowed officers to manage and recognise customer expectations. The Council had made significant progress in terms of engaging with its tenants over the last three years and the officer advised that this was largely due to the growing awareness of Housing Officers on their responsibility for promoting tenant engagement.

The officer highlighted the recurring themes, following consultation with tenants, which informed the four objectives and their subsequent outcomes within the Strategy.

- **Communication/keeping people informed:** the results from the STAR survey showed that only 70% of tenants felt the Council was good at keeping them informed. General needs tenants were less impressed (69%) compared to tenants in sheltered accommodation (78%).
- **Listening to views and acting on them:** 69% of tenants agreed that the Council took views of tenants on board and acted on them, this was just below the medium point for social landlords (70%) and gave scope for improvement. A significant number of tenants were indifferent to this question (16%).
- **Creating opportunities for more tenants to get involved:** Membership of the existing tenants groups could include a significant portion of older people; in addition, the groups tended to be established groups located on some of the larger estates. This highlighted the potential for involving tenants from different demographic groups and for new groups in areas where there may currently be less representation.
- There was interest from tenants in **contributing in a number of ways**, including reviewing policies and procedures, mystery shopping, sounding boards/consultation panels, and decisions about budget etc.
- **Tenants being aware of opportunities for them to participate with suggestions:** including expanding use of social media and community notice boards being seen as positive ways to share information.
- Some tenants may **lack the confidence** or perceive they have a **lack of skills** to take part.

A Member asked officers how the Council would be tackling the distinct high level of apathy amongst young people evidenced amongst the young people in her own local area.

The Head of Housing and Building Services advised that the Council currently operated a Community Investment Strategy which had been brought to the Committee previously; which included various training activities which had been provided for young people. For example, driving lessons which would in turn help the young person's employability and skill set. The officer also advised that the particular area that the Member referred to was under the control of the Newydd Housing Association and suggested that it might be of benefit to the Committee if the

Association were invited to present on their current work. The Committee agreed that this would be a useful presentation to receive and requested that the recommendation be made.

A Member highlighted the fact that young people have a very different set of needs and interests and the Council therefore needed to be aware of these to have effective engagement with them. With this in mind, the Member asked officers whether they had been in contact with the Youth Forum and how the Council intended to start engaging with young people generally.

The Head of Housing and Building Services advised that Digital Inclusion courses had already been offered to young people and that the Housing and Building Services Department were getting involved with community investment events as part of the Community Investment Strategy. However, there needed to be further emphasis put on the use of social media to build an extra communications platform to engage with young people.

A Tenant Working Group representative provided the Committee with an example of engagement work currently undertaken with young people in her local area. A leaflet was distributed to homes by the Tenant Group which requested young people to feedback on the information that they wished to know and/or activities they wished to get involved in within their local area. From this, a “ground force” project was created and an information only Facebook page was set up for local area residents to subscribe to. The representative then advised the Committee that the young people involved wished to continue the project independently into the future and had thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

Officers and Members congratulated the Tenant Working Group representative on her work and the success of the “ground force” project and their hopes that other resident groups will take the success as a positive example for the future.

Having considered the Strategy and all the outcomes and objectives contained therein the Committee summarised their comments for consideration.

RECOMMENDED -

(1) T H A T the draft Tenant Engagement Strategy be endorsed as a working document with further consideration given to the following Member comments:

- That Members be encouraged to attend their local Tenant Working Groups to enhance communication between tenants and local councillors and to provide feedback to the Tenant Working Groups on matters that have been considered by the Council.
- That innovative technology/software such as Hwb and Office 365 (on the Cloud) be considered by officers to engage with young people at a much younger age which will ease engagement opportunities and increase results in the long term future.

- That partnership working is established with the Youth Forum, the new apprentice within the Housing Services Department and individual school councils to create stronger links with young people and to combat apathy amongst young people.
- That greater consideration is given to communication methods between tenants, Members and officers so more effective lines of communication can be established and that any staff changes are brought to Member attention so a more accurate source of support is established.

(2) T H A T the Newydd Housing Association be invited to a future Committee meeting to share their engagement practices for young people.

Reasons for recommendations

(1) Scrutiny Member comments are considered by Cabinet as part of the draft Tenant Engagement Strategy consultation period.

(2) Members are informed of the works undertaken by the Newydd Housing Association within the Vale of Glamorgan area.”