

Meeting of:	Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	Wednesday, 18 September 2019
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Homes and Safe Communities
Report Title:	Tenant Engagement Strategy - Monitoring Report
Purpose of Report:	To update the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee on progress implementing the Tenant Engagement Strategy.
Report Owner:	Nick Jones - Housing and Strategic Projects Team Leader
Responsible Officer:	Miles Punter - Director of Environment and Housing
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	This report will affect all Council tenants and therefore no individual ward member consultation has been undertaken. The report has been reviewed by Officers from the Legal and Finance teams.
Policy Framework:	This report is a matter for information and noting.
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Tenant Engagement Strategy sets out a framework for giving tenants a greater say in how services are delivered. The Strategy includes four key priority areas, namely: making tenant engagement an integral part of the business; providing opportunities for all tenants to be engaged (and broadening current levels of engagement); building capacity of tenants to make a difference via support, training and development opportunities; and lastly, using customer feedback to drive service improvements. Monitoring reports are reviewed by the Scrutiny Committee to check progress against the key actions within the Strategy. 	

Recommendation

1. That the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee note the monitoring report in relation to the Operational Delivery Plan for the Tenant Engagement Strategy

Reason for Recommendation

1. To ensure that the actions in the Tenant Engagement Strategy are progressed and they drive improvements in the quality of the housing service.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Tenant Engagement Strategy was approved by Cabinet in June 2018 and incorporated feedback from the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee. One of the recommendations was to provide monitoring reports to the Homes and Safe Communities Committee. This report therefore updates members of progress against the actions identified.
- 1.2 Appendix 1 to this report includes some more detailed information regarding progress against each of the actions within the Strategy. Many of the actions are 'ongoing'; progress for these is shown in grey. Completed actions or things on target are shown as green; whilst tasks which are incomplete are identified in red.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1 The Strategy highlighted the need to make tenant engagement an integral part of the Housing service, influencing how services are provided, how decisions are made and how money is spent. This is driven by two key strategic groups of tenants namely, the Quality Design Forum (QDF) and the Tenants Working Group. Both groups meet regularly with senior Officers and have an input on important decisions, for example: the specifications for major work, the choice of external contractors, approval of new policies/ strategies and prioritising investment options. Membership of both groups is stable and includes tenants from across the Vale. There is however a reliance on a small number of individuals meaning it would be beneficial to expand the number of tenants on the groups. So far, attempts to recruit additional tenant members to either group has been challenging, however a further recruitment exercise is due to take place to try and attract new tenants.
- 2.2 There is also a need to ensure that front line staff understand fully the principles of Tenant Engagement. In order to progress this, there have been discussions at team meetings and TPAS Cymru have been invited in to facilitate some staff

workshops about the principles and benefits of tenant engagement. In addition, questions about tenant engagement are included in the recruitment of new housing staff- to ensure that future employees share the commitment to making tenants an integral part of the Housing service.

- 2.3** Significant progress has been made at involving more tenants. Over the last year 2,577 tenants took part in 19 separate community events organised by the Housing team. However the need to broaden levels of tenant engagement and provide varied opportunities for tenants to get involved remains a key part of the Strategy and a number of actions have already been completed to achieve this. These include, the promotion of tenant involvement opportunities via the tenant newsletter, social media and word of mouth. In addition a tenant 'taster day' was organised to try and inspire more tenants to take part. Sadly this event had to be postponed when a number of apologies were received at the last minute. Alternative ways of getting the message across are now being considered, including more informal, local events to try and encourage people living in specific areas to come along.
- 2.4** There are now a wide range of ways that tenants can get involved. These range from being a member on the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee, the QDF or the Tenant Working Group to being a member of a local Residents Board or a more informal social club. In addition, there are opportunities for tenants to get involved in volunteering opportunities, including litter picks, community clean ups, gardening, befriending, etc. Lastly tenants can get involved by completing surveys, taking part in focus groups, attending the Summer Fete, becoming a block champion or joining in Estate Walkabouts. This flexible range of opportunities mean that tenants are able to make different commitments, by either attending regularly or dropping in and out.
- 2.5** A significant amount of work has taken place to help give tenants skills and the confidence to take part. Over the last year, over 100 tenants have attended training sessions on a wide range of things including: confidence building, personal effectiveness, health and safety and first aid. In addition, tenants have taken advantage of work experience and volunteering opportunities and several have been able to secure employment as a result.
- 2.6** One of the actions in the Strategy has been to establish a tenant scrutiny group which could undertake service testing and reviews. A number of tenants have been identified and they have agreed to take part in this project. The next steps will be to run some training events to equip the tenants with the knowledge and skills required to start this work and to produce a terms of reference for the group in order to clarify their remit and responsibility. The Group will have a nominated staff contact that will be on hand to offer support and advice and to agree a forward work programme of reviews.
- 2.7** Progress has also been made in respect of the objective to gather feedback from a wide range of tenants and to use this to drive further improvements in the

services provided. A significant consultation exercise was carried out with Residents Boards and individual tenants over the last three months which has informed the draft Neighbourhood Plans. This provided valuable feedback about the experiences of tenants and their future priorities for their area. The Neighbourhood Plans are currently being finalised and will be shared with tenants, Councillors and other stakeholders shortly.

- 2.8** Another consultation exercise has recently been completed in respect of the Home swapper service. This is a service used to enable existing tenants to swap homes. A large number of tenants responded to the survey and whilst some issues were identified, there was strong support for the scheme which has meant the subscription for Home swapper has been extended.
- 2.9** A budget has also been set aside to run a large scale tenants survey (STAR) and a specification produced in order to advertise the opportunity for experienced market research companies to submit expressions of interest via the Sell2Wales web site. Quotations will be requested before the end of September 2019, with a view to the survey work starting in October and the final report being published in December 2019. The results of this survey will provide valuable intelligence regarding what tenants think of the services provided by their landlord as well as highlight priorities

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

Long term

- 3.1** The Strategy ensures that a planned approach is taken towards the long term, to ensure that services continue to improve and customers are able to access the services they need when they need them.

Prevention

- 3.2** The approach to tenant engagement helps ensure that services provided remain tenant focussed and relevant to tenants needs. Tenants have the best knowledge of their local areas and which services are required, therefore involving them in service design and key decisions will ensure that services are fit for purpose and neighbourhoods continue to thrive.

Integration

- 3.3** The Strategy supports a holistic approach to customer service which is focussed on outcomes and problem resolution, ensuring that different Officers and teams work together to bring about solutions to complex problems.

Collaboration

- 3.4** The Strategy recognises that a number of factors contribute towards an effective housing service and sets out a framework for several Council teams i.e. Rents, Neighbourhood Management, Assets and Repairs- to work together with residents to deliver high quality services.

Involvement

- 3.5** Better tenant engagement and increasing the tenants' voice is the driving force behind this Strategy. Taking account of tenants' needs and views is vital to support the aim of providing high quality, responsive services. There is also an acknowledgement there needs to be a wide range of flexible ways for tenants to take part. As well as the traditional tenants' association structures, it is important to open up opportunities for tenants from different backgrounds. This might be light touch, informal ways like completing surveys, attending estate walkabouts or taking part in volunteering as well as more formal roles like joining the editorial panel for the tenant newsletter or joining the tenant scrutiny group.

4. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 4.1** The Strategy is being delivered within existing departmental resources. Financial investments are being made from training or ICT budgets.

Employment

- 4.2** There are no direct employment implications arising from this report.

Legal (Including Equalities)

- 4.3** There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. The Strategy is however designed to ensure that all tenants have an opportunity to get involved and influence the way services are delivered. This includes people who may not have taken part previously and also vulnerable people who may require more assistance. The Strategy also takes account of the need to make communications available in English and Welsh.

Public Sector Equality Duty

- 4.4** The public sector equality duty came into force in April 2011. Public authorities like the Council are required, in carrying out their functions, to have due regard to the equality needs set out under s.149 of the Equality Act 2010 to:
- eliminate discrimination (both direct and indirect), harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
 - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 4.5** The Council must also comply with the specific equality duties imposed by the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties)(Wales) Regulations 2011, SI 2011/1064 (“the Regulations”), particularly regulation 8 (imposing specific duties to make

arrangements for assessing the impact of its policies/practice and monitoring of the same).

5. Background Papers

None.

Operational Delivery Plan

Objective 1: INTEGRATE- make tenant engagement an integral part of our business, influencing how services are provided, how decisions are made and how money is spent.

Action	Target date	Progress	Status
Chief Officer (Head of Service) appointed to act as a champion for tenant engagement and take overall responsibility for implementation of the Tenant Engagement Strategy	On-going	The Head of Housing and Building Services acts as champion for tenant engagement and actively challenges Officers to ensure that tenants have opportunities to be involved and influence service delivery.	
Work closely with the tenant working group and the Quality Design Forum (QDF) to increase membership and develop capacity	Ongoing	The Tenant Working Group and the QDF continue to meet regularly and play an active an important role in the decision making process. Despite efforts to engage new members there continues to be a reliance on a small number of hard working tenants.	
Tenant Working Group to be routinely consulted on services and have meaningful input to key strategies and policies which effect tenants. Evidence of tenant consultation to form part of reports to Scrutiny Committee	On-going	<p>The Tenant Working Group have regular discussions with Senior Managers about key issues and have been able to challenge performance, raise concerns, review new policies and new initiatives.</p> <p>Reports to Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny set out specific tenant consultation and engagement carried out in respect of each issue.</p>	
Establish tenant scrutiny team who are able to undertake quality checking and service reviews	June 19	<p>Staff have made contact with a number of tenants to try and raise interest in a tenant assessor project and a 'taster' day was organised to provide more information and get people on board. To date there has been limited interest and the 'taster' day had to be cancelled at short notice when a number of apologies were received. Anecdotal feedback has indicated that tenants have been put off by the time commitment required and also lack of confidence about their own ability to undertake this work.</p> <p>A number of other options are now being explored to establish a tenant scrutiny team.</p>	

Tenant Engagement to become a fixed agenda item at team meetings and for monthly staff 1-1 sessions	On-going	Discussions about tenant engagement take place regularly on team meeting agenda and front line staff are challenged to develop ways of actively engaging tenants when carrying out their day to day roles.	
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Objective 2: INCLUSIVE- ensure that opportunities are provided for all tenants to get involved and broaden the current levels of engagement

Action	Target date	Progress	Status
Develop a flexible menu of tenant involvement which enables a broader cross section of tenants to take part	Dec 18	There are now a wide range of flexible ways for tenants to take part, including more formal groups like residents boards, working groups and focus groups to a wide range of more informal local opportunities including attending estate walkabouts, completing surveys, undertaking litter picks, taking part in training, volunteering or health and well-being initiatives. Over the last 12 months the Housing team has engaged with over 2,500 tenants from a wide variety of backgrounds and in a number of different areas across the whole of the Vale.	
Promotion of tenant involvement opportunities via tenant newsletter, web site, social media, leaflets etc.	On-going	<p>There has been an increased emphasis on social media with regular updates and information shared via Twitter and Facebook. There are currently over 670 followers on Twitter and around 450 'likes' on Facebook, however the nature of these communication channels, mean the information reaches a very wide audience with several thousand 'interactions' with many of the posts.</p> <p>As well as Social Media, use has been made of email with surveys and information shared with Council tenants via the Gov Delivery email subscription service.</p> <p>The value and benefits of paper based communication is being reviewed in light of the costs, time involved in getting information out and the fact that it becomes out of date quite quickly.</p>	
Target groups who are currently under represented e.g. young people, single mums, BME backgrounds	On-going	There has been an increase in the range of tenants involved in more informal tenant engagement activities. Over the last year, over 2,500 people have	

etc. and put in place different means of getting them involved		<p>engaged with various projects and initiatives. Younger people taking part in employment and training opportunities, families and children getting involved in healthy living and sporting initiatives and also tenants in rural areas joining in local events within their communities.</p> <p>The more formal tenant groups continue to be made up of older people with many living in sheltered housing.</p>	
Meet with existing Tenants and Residents Associations and explore opportunities for further involvement, additional projects etc.	On-going	Staff regularly attend Residents Boards meetings and have discussions about potential projects and initiatives in their area.	
Engage local people in development of local actions e.g. local action plans, estate walkabouts, spending estate budgets	On-going	There has been significant consultation with tenants to inform the Neighbourhood Plans. As well as the estate level information from the large scale tenants' survey; emails, roadshows and door knocking in different estates took place to help identify key issues and priorities for action in each neighbourhood.	
Establish tenant consultation panel/ sounding board which can be used to provide feedback on specific themes	April 19	It has not yet been possible to establish a consultation panel. This work will be a priority for the next six months.	

Objective 3: BUILD CAPACITY- provide support, training and development opportunities to enable tenants to make a difference

Action	Target date	Progress	Status
Carry out skills audits of existing tenants groups to identify gaps and opportunities for further development	Oct 18	Broad discussions have taken place with tenants groups and for the most part, they feel they have the skills and knowledge to undertake their work. There are some groups who have identified further training needs and this has been delivered.	
Develop training/ development plans for existing tenants groups	Nov 18	Tenants groups are asked to think about any training development needs and there is funding available from the Council to support groups who feel they need development or new skills.	

Promote training opportunities for individual tenants to improve employability	On-going	<p>The work undertaken to improve employability has been very effective with over 20 training courses run, over 100 people taking part and a number of tenants have secured employment as a direct result of the support they have received.</p> <p>There continues to be a focus on training and employment and joint work with Communities for Work, Job Centre Plus and local Housing Associations is taking place to provide comprehensive support for job seekers but also to improve access to work experience and employment for tenants. A good example is the construction opportunities being created on the Council house building programme, where local people will be able to get paid site based work experience in a number of different trades at the new Brecon Court and Holm View developments.</p>	
Produce toolkit for new tenants groups to start up	Sept 18	There is a variety of information and support available from TPAS which tenants groups are able to access as part of the Council's membership. Specific advice, information and support is provided to any new group looking to set up.	
Work with Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) and/or Welsh Tenants Federation (WTF) to provide training and/or support to existing tenants groups	March 19	TPAS training has been provided to existing Tenants Groups and further sessions are scheduled to take place with other tenants and staff. The Council continues to be a TPAS member so that tenants groups have access to a wide range of support and assistance specifically around tenant involvement.	

Objective 4: LISTENS AND LEARNS- feedback is sought from a wide range of tenants and this drives improvements in the services provided

Action	Target date	Progress	Status
Run large scale tenant satisfaction survey every two years in order to drive improvements in standards	Jan 19	A specification has been developed for a large scale tenants' survey and suitably qualified contractors have been invited to submit quotations via the Sell2Wales procurement website. Subject to appointment of a contractor, it is planned to post out a survey to every tenant in the late Summer/ early Autumn. This survey will provide valuable insight from tenants about a range	

		<p>of services provided and will also allow tenant satisfaction to be benchmarked with a range of other housing providers.</p> <p>A tenant focus group will be consulted about the survey design and choice of questions and when the exercise is completed, the final report will be presented to the Tenants Working Group.</p>	
Undertake monthly tenant surveys on specific issues e.g. ASB, new lettings etc.	On-going	<p>Monthly telephone surveys are undertaken of new lettings and neighbour nuisance which enables staff to monitor trends and identify any concerns.</p> <p>The satisfaction with property condition (at letting) is very high and positive feedback has been received regarding the paint voucher scheme and the welcome bowls (which contain some basic items for new tenants).</p>	
Put in place action plan to address issues identified in tenants survey	June 18	<p>An action plan was developed from the 2017 tenants' survey and several key issues were addressed. In addition, the main issues for each estate has been incorporated into the Neighbourhood Action Plans, which are deigned to drive improvements in different areas.</p> <p>A new action plan will be drafted later this year when the latest survey is complete and the results have been received.</p>	
Performance information to be made available to tenants via the tenants newsletter, including comparative information showing how the Vale performs relative to other social landlords	Oct 18	Some performance information has been shared via social media and the Councils web site, however an article on performance, including comparative information with other landlords will feature in the next tenants' newsletter.	
Publish a 'you said, we did' section within the tenants newsletter, highlighting examples of how tenant feedback has led to positive change	Oct 18	There has not been a tenants' newsletter for some time but the next edition will feature some feedback information highlighting examples of changes made arising from tenant feedback.	