

Meeting of:	Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	Monday, 15 March 2021
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Homes and Safe Communities
Report Title:	Interim report on the development of the new Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy
Purpose of Report:	To examine progress to date and emerging themes from the review of Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement
Report Owner:	Director of Environment and Housing
Responsible Officer:	Farida Aslam, Senior Neighbourhoods Manager
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 within the Policy Framework and Budget.
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The report updates members on the development of a new Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy. It highlights the research and background work undertaken to inform the draft Strategy; flags up some emerging themes and sets out the next steps in terms of future consultations which will be taking place. 	

Recommendation

1. That Scrutiny examine the report highlighting the emerging themes from the review of Tenant and Leaseholder engagement and notes the consultation timetable for delivery of the new Tenant and Leaseholder Strategy.

Reason for Recommendation

1. To ensure that the review of current mechanisms and engagement work is robust, and the new Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy provides an effective means for all Council tenants and leaseholders to have an opportunity to take part and have the opportunity to shape the services they receive.

1. Background

- 1.1 The previous Tenant Engagement Strategy was approved by Cabinet in June 2018 (Cabinet Minute C97 refers) and incorporated feedback from the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee. Subsequently the Scrutiny Committee has received regular updates regarding progress made.
- 1.2 The 2018 Strategy had four priority themes, firstly: integrating the tenants voice into the Housing section's decision-making process; secondly, creating a more inclusive approach to 'engagement'. Specifically, expanding opportunities for all tenants to take part and broadening the range of tenants taking part, so tenant engagement was representative of the broader tenant population. Thirdly, building capacity, i.e. ensuring that tenants and tenants groups have access to training and support and also the skills and confidence needed to take part. The fourth and final theme concerned 'listening and learning' which was about seeking feedback and using this to drive improvements to key services.
- 1.3 Significant progress has been made over the last three years and some of the highlights include:
 - 1.3.1 The work carried out by the Quality Design Forum (QDF) and Working Group. These groups are made up of tenants from various tenants' groups and meet regularly to provide feedback to Council Officers and to inform important decisions about services. Group members have provided a 'positive challenge' as well as ensuring any proposed service changes are evaluated from a tenant's perspective.
 - 1.3.2 Sustaining and strengthening formal tenants' associations and groups. There are an extensive range of groups representing different areas of the Vale which meet regularly, and these form the bedrock of the tenant involvement structure. It is estimated that together, volunteers on these groups give up 100 hours of their own time each year in order to make a positive difference to where they live.
 - 1.3.3 The expansion of outreach work, including estate action days, roadshows, consultation events, community clean ups etc. In the year prior to lockdown, 2,577

tenants participated in over 19 community events. This is over 60% of the whole tenant population and shows the great reach that has been achieved by taking events and consultations out into the community

- 1.3.4 Creation of community groups e.g. Gibby Greenfingers, Llantwit Major Gardening Group, Cwtch Cymru. The new groups have grown up around a specific theme and are different to the existing tenants' associations. These groups have been extremely effective and brought residents together which has generated community spirit but also helped promote better health and well-being for individuals. There have been some incredibly powerful accounts given by residents of the impact that being part of these community groups has had on them personally.
- 1.3.5 Scaling up of tenant volunteering. The Timebanking project has been instrumental in driving progress in volunteering and has helped tenants who would not have previously given up their own time or taken part in more traditional volunteering. To date over 527 tenants have given up 5,387 hours of their own time to volunteer and this has had a significant positive effect on them and on their community
- 1.3.6 Employability projects have proved to make a difference to tenants furthest away from the job market. As a result, 110 people have been supported into employment and 961 accredited qualifications have been obtained".
- 1.3.7 Two large scale tenants' satisfaction surveys have been completed since the Strategy was adopted and were completed by over 1,300 tenants. This high response rate has provided vital feedback about key issues, such as the homes, the rent, neighbourhoods, getting in touch with the Council etc. The feedback has then been used to drive service improvements, inform Strategies, Policies etc, ensuring that key services are tenant focussed.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1 Work on the new Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy has been ongoing for over 9 months by a working group. The working group has undertaken a series of SWOT analyses with staff and tenants to identify key issues and opportunities, to highlight what works well and could be built on and also any gaps or weaknesses which need to be addressed. The working group has also looked externally to review best practise and take account of things other landlords are doing. Crucially, a tenant consultation exercise has also been carried out to gather views from all tenants including 'active' tenants and those who are part of more formal groups or tenants' associations
- 2.2 The STAR satisfaction data has also provided valuable insight into what tenants think. In terms of highlights, 23% of respondents said that 'keeping tenants informed' should be a priority and in addition, 21% said it was important to 'listen and act' on residents' views. This was broadly the same across different

parts of the Vale but there were significant variations between younger and older tenants. Younger people indicated that they had higher expectations of their landlord and were less satisfied with existing arrangements for engagement.

2.3 The survey of 'active' tenants, namely those who are members of a tenants' association or recognised community group, also flagged up some important themes, including:

- Tenants who are on Tenants Associations (TAs) give up a significant amount of their time (on average over 6 hours per month) to contribute to their local group;
- Active tenants have been involved for a long time, with many tenants being on board for over three years;
- Active tenants are older;
- A significant proportion of active tenants have access to the internet and have the ICT skills required to continue working digitally;
- Tenants feel they would benefit from training and support.

2.4 Emerging themes

2.4.1 Existing tenant groups play an important part with over 13 groups representing tenants in most areas of the Vale and providing an important voice to drive change in different geographical areas. The existing groups need to be supported and developed so the burden of responsibility can be shared by a greater number of tenants.

2.4.2 The overarching tenant groups i.e. the Working Group and the QDF are made up of committed tenants who meet frequently to provide feedback on more general matters including policies, work specifications, choice of contractors engaged by the Council etc. This group may benefit from new members and also from targeted training and support to enable them to carry out their roles more effectively.

2.4.3 Several new community groups have been developed and are being supported by staff i.e. Gibby Green fingers. These groups tend to be themed around things which are local priorities or important to members. For example, environmental matters, providing peer support for people with poor mental health, music etc. These 'themed' groups have made a significant impact and are a great example of tenants being empowered to drive positive changes.

2.4.4 The membership of more formal groups is not representative of the broader tenant and leaseholder population. They tend to be older residents and many groups are

based at sheltered housing schemes. There is shortage of younger tenants and leaseholders taking part and scope for more work to be completed to understand the reasons for this and to design a more appropriate vehicle for younger tenants and leaseholders to get involved.

- 2.4.5 There may still be some barriers for people to get involved, anecdotally this can be around financial issues, related to confidence of individuals or about the perceived bureaucracy. Further exploration of this needs to be carried out with a view to developing a more flexible means of 'getting involved' which enables tenants and leaseholders to dip in and out when they choose or when other things in their lives enable them to do so.
- 2.4.6 A small tenant assessor group has already been formed and has attended several networking events with tenants of other social landlords. The group has also started to review services undertaken by Housing and Building services. This is a young group and needs to be supported to grow and develop so they can carry out rigorous reviews of things like the way neighbour issues are dealt with, the conditions on estates, day to day repairs, gas servicing etc
- 2.4.7 The pandemic has highlighted a gap in digital inclusion and the means for tenants and leaseholders to engage digitally. This includes day to day transactions like paying rent, reporting a repair or bidding for a home via Homes4U and also for residents' groups to continue to meet virtually. Work has started to address this issue, but it is likely that as restrictions on people mixing continue, digital tenant and leaseholder engagement will be more relevant.
- 2.4.8 Currently, for leaseholders, there are formal consultation processes in place regarding major works. However, there are potential benefits to them and the Council by putting in additional structures to support engagement. This may include a specialist Leaseholder forum, more local groups or the expansion of existing tenants' associations to include leaseholders and leasehold matters.

2.5 Next steps

- 2.5.1 A new draft Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy will be developed and submitted to Scrutiny Committee for consideration and comment in August 2021.
- 2.5.2 The draft Strategy will then undergo further consultation via the Council's website and Gov delivery platform to give tenants and leaseholders the opportunity to comment have input before the Strategy is finalised.

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

Long term

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

Prevention

- 3.2** The approach to tenant and leaseholder engagement ensures that services provided remain focussed and relevant and meet the needs of tenants and leaseholders. Tenants and leaseholders 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 will support 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 will recognise that several factors contribute towards an effective Housing service and will set 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 and leaseholder engagement and increasing their voice is the driving force behind the new Strategy. Taking account of their' 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 and leaseholders to take part. As well as the traditional tenants' association structures, it is important to open opportunities for tenants and leaseholders 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 new Tenant and Engagement 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 and leaseholders have an opportunity to get involved and influence the way services are delivered. This includes people who may not have taken part previously and 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 (see section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) 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.

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.