

Subject:	DOVER DISTRICT COUNCIL DRAFT TENANT ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY 2022–2027
Meeting and Date:	Cabinet – 3 October 2022
Report of:	Louise Taylor, Head of Housing
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Derek Murphy, Portfolio Holder for Social Housing, Port Health, Skills and Education
Decision Type:	Key Decision
Classification:	Unrestricted
Purpose of the report:	To seek Cabinet approval of the draft Tenant Engagement Strategy attached at Appendix 1 for consultation purposes and agreement for wider formal consultation with stakeholders and service users.
Recommendation:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That Cabinet approves the draft Tenant Engagement Strategy and Action Plan at Appendix 1 for consultation purposes. 2. That Cabinet notes and approves the draft consultation plan for the Tenant Engagement Strategy for formal consultation with tenants and leaseholders for a 4-week period. 3. That Cabinet delegates to the Strategic Director (Corporate Resources), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Social Housing, Port Health, Skills and Education, authority to consider the consultation responses and to make any minor amendments arising therefrom and thereafter, and to adopt this document on behalf of the Council with effect from 7 November 2022. Should more significant amendments be considered desirable, the matter shall be the subject of a further report to Cabinet. 4. That Cabinet delegates to the Strategic Director (Corporate Resources), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Social Housing, Port Health, Skills and Education, authority to make future minor amendments to the strategy as required.

1. Summary

- 1.1 The way in which landlords engage with their tenants and leaseholders is changing and both nationally and locally there is a significant push to ensure tenants have a genuine say in how their homes and services are managed.
- 1.2 This strategy has been developed against a backdrop of demands for greater transparency and accountability in the social housing sector following the Grenfell Tower tragedy. The publication, in the wake of Grenfell, of the Government’s Social Housing White Paper ‘The Charter for Social Housing Residents’ will result in a more robust regulatory regime overseen by the Regulator of Social Housing, more emphasis upon tenant satisfaction as a performance measure and greater intervention by both the Regulator and Housing Ombudsman if required.
- 1.3 The draft Tenant Engagement Strategy 2022-2027 (appendix 1) sets out how the housing service will strengthen relationships, give an effective voice to our tenants and leaseholders

and increase the opportunities they have to work with us. It has been developed in collaboration with tenant and leaseholder representatives and is intended to help Dover District Council develop stronger, more inclusive tenant engagement activities in the future.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 As a registered provider of social housing, Dover District Council must comply with the regulatory framework developed by the Regulator for Social Housing. This framework has three economic standards (applicable to housing associations only) and four consumer standards. The standard set for resident involvement is the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment (Consumer) Standard and covers:

- (i) Customer Service, Choice and Complaints.
- (ii) Involvement and Empowerment.
- (iii) Understanding and Responding to Diverse Needs of Tenants.

2.2 Underpinning the Regulators approach is the concept of co regulation. This means that boards and Councillors who govern providers' service delivery are responsible for ensuring their organisation is meeting the Regulator's standards and are open and accountable in their approach. Co-regulation also requires providers to encourage and support their tenants to engage with the shaping and scrutinising of service delivery.

2.3 The Regulator of Social Housing is currently reviewing its Consumer Standards and consulting with social landlords regarding the introduction of a fifth standard requiring all social landlords to use and report upon a suite of national tenant satisfaction measures. It is expected these will be introduced from April 2023.

3. The Social Housing White Paper – 'The Charter for Social Housing Residents'

3.1 In the wake of the Grenfell Tower tragedy the Government published its Social Housing White Paper, The Charter for Social Housing Residents. This paper was heavily informed by lessons learnt from the disaster and focuses upon tenant health and safety, landlord accountability and transparency and greater tenant empowerment. At its heart is a desire to see a cultural shift in the way in which housing providers interact with their tenants and leaseholders. In terms of effective tenant engagement landlords are expected to:

- (i) Seek out best practice and consider how they can continually improve the way they engage with their tenants.
- (ii) Support more effective engagement with tenants by giving them the tools to influence their landlord's and hold them to account.
- (iii) Review the professional training and development of their officers to improve the service delivery arrangements for service users.
- (iv) Be more transparent with the publication of their service and performance standards.

3.2 The recently published Social Housing (Regulation) Bill will move significantly beyond the current arrangements for sector regulation and introduce proactive consumer regulation by the Regulator for Social Housing. It also strengthens the role of the Housing Ombudsman Service.

4. Strategy Aims

4.1 Since the return of the housing service to the Council in October 2020 officers have worked hard to consult with tenants and leaseholders about the services we are delivering and to listen to what they are telling us and act upon their feedback.

4.2 The draft Tenant Engagement Strategy 2022-2027 (appendix 1) sets out how the housing service intends to strengthen relationships and the voice of tenants and leaseholders taking into account:

- (i) Feedback from residents.
- (ii) Feedback from housing staff.

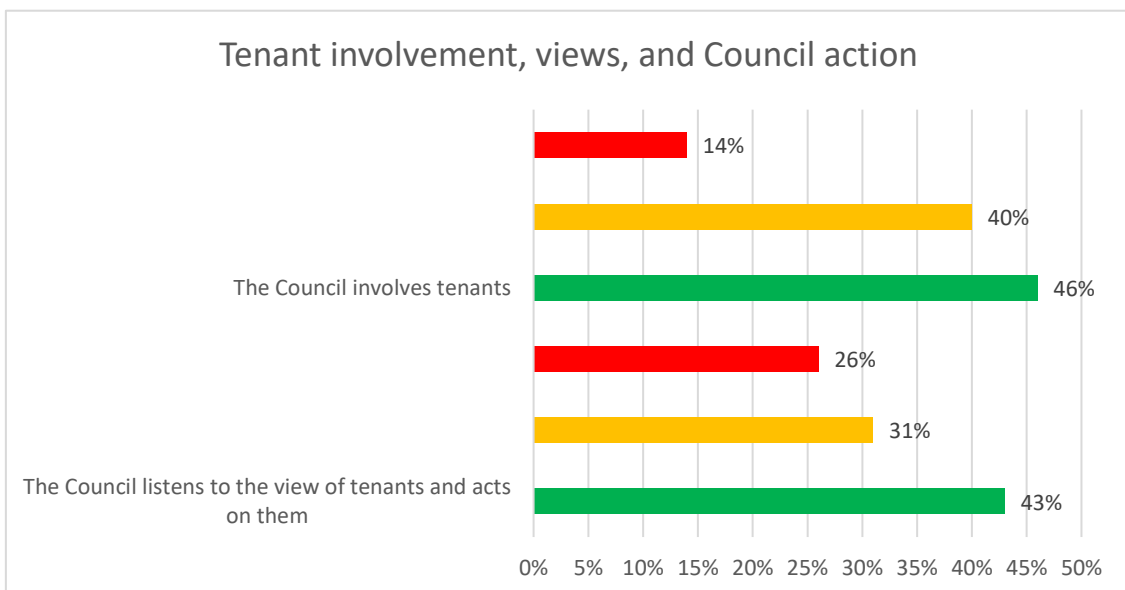
- (iii) Current best practice in involvement from social housing.
- (iv) Current and future legal and regulatory requirements.

4.3 The strategy recognises the hard work and commitment of existing involved residents and highlights the need to strengthen the voice of underrepresented groups and extend our reach through a programme of accessible and flexible involvement opportunities that are tied together through the new framework.

5. Strategy Development

5.1 The Strategy has been developed over the course of the last 12 months and has been informed by feedback and material from a range of sources. Last summer the housing service organised a full scale tenant satisfaction survey (STAR). Over 550 council tenants and leaseholders responded to this and analysis of the results has helped us focus on service delivery areas we need to improve.

Key:



Green = Satisfied or very Satisfied. Red = Dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Amber = neither satisfied or dissatisfied

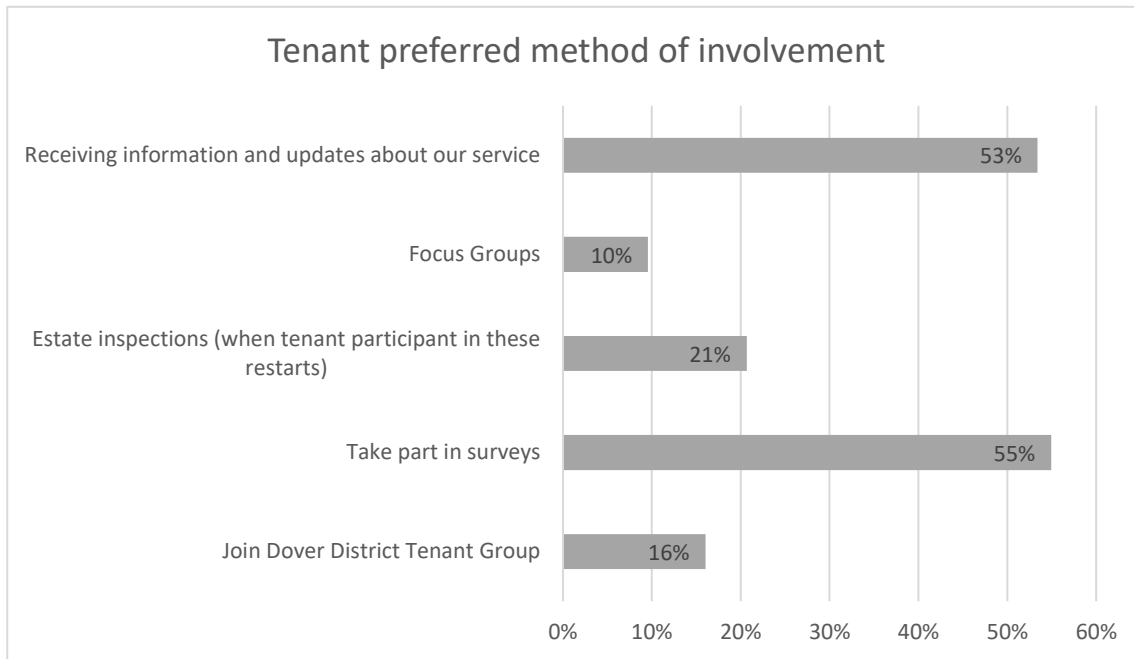
5.2 When questioned about their satisfaction with the way in which the Council involves tenants and listens and acts upon their views, the results show that although there were many tenants satisfied with this there were also a higher number of respondents who were indifferent compared to other questions asked.

This suggests that possibly:

- (i) Our tenants are content with the way they are being included and informed by the Council; or
- (ii) There is a lower level of interest in involvement.

It is clear however that more can be done to encourage tenants to be actively involved at some level and to understand the benefits that this can bring.

5.3 The survey also asked tenants what their preferred method of involvement would be. The results show that there was a strong preference by tenants to get involved by either taking part in surveys, or by receiving information and updates about services. The Tenant Involvement Strategy has taken into account the information gleaned from the full-scale tenant satisfaction survey and in particular the types of activity that tenants and leaseholders have indicated they would be most interested in.



5.4 Between February 2022 and April 2022 a series of workshops took place with a focus group recruited to help develop the engagement framework. This included tenants (some of who had previously been engaged with the housing services and others who had not), leaseholders and staff. A number of consistent themes emerged from the workshops and these have been used to inform the strategic priorities and the 'menu' of opportunities that underpins the engagement framework.

5.5 Between May and August the draft priorities and engagement opportunities were consulted upon more widely through:

- (i) Discussion with the Dover District Tenant Group.
- (ii) A full online survey for all tenants and leaseholders with covering information and links to it featured in the tenant newsletter sent by post to all households in July 2022.
- (iii) A staff survey.
- (iv) Semi structured interviews and meetings with the Councils sheltered housing tenants.
- (v) Survey reminders sent to all 437 members of the housing specific Keep Me Posted Forum.

5.6 The feedback received from tenants, leaseholders and staff has been both helpful and consistent, with a clear aspiration to work in partnership to help improve services. In all approximately 120 service users and staff have contributed to the development of this strategy.

5.7 Those who contributed frequently cited the following as essential ingredients for successful resident involvement:

- (i) Honesty and Trust.
- (ii) Transparency and accountability.
- (iii) More and different opportunities to meet diverse needs.
- (iv) Support for tenants to make a difference.

6. Strategic Priorities

6.1 Building upon the work undertaken in the last 12 months four key strategic priorities have been identified. These are:

- (i) Priority one – Breaking down the barriers to being involved. Tenants and leaseholders want us to make it easier for their voices to be heard and to try to ensure that all tenants can feel there are opportunities for them regardless of their circumstances, abilities, and characteristics.
- (ii) Priority two – Rebuilding the trust that tenants have in Dover District Council. There has been a recurring theme in the comments given by tenants and leaseholders that Dover District Council has the opportunity to build a better relationship with its tenants after years of management by East Kent Housing.
- (iii) Priority three - Increased offering and a wider variety of opportunities to encourage more people to be involved in ways that suit them. Tenants are keen that there be a range of ways in which they can share their views with their landlord. This needs to take into account that individuals wish to be involved in different ways and to varying degrees.
- (iv) Priority 4 - Supporting tenants to be involved. The respondents to our survey all felt that it was important that the Council support tenant and leaseholder involvement with guidance, encouragement and training where needed.

7. The ‘Menu’ of Engagement and Action Plan

- 7.1 The engagement framework includes a variety of ways in which service users can be involved. These form a ‘Menu of Opportunities’ and include ways to be involved at a more formal level where the time commitment required is higher, through to simply picking up and reading the newsletter.
- 7.2 The need for so many households to communicate with each other through online platforms during the pandemic has transformed the way in which large sections of the population communicate with each other still. Wherever possible we will be promoting opportunities for engagement through digital channels and enabling tenants and leaseholders to engage with the housing service in ways that suit their lifestyle.
- 7.3 The strategy reflects our hope that offering digital and online channels of communication will increase the diversity of the customers that we engage with especially if they are able to do so from their own homes and at times that suit them. It should result in less reliance on (but not a complete move away from) face-to-face meetings and make engagement more easily accessible and appealing to a wider group of tenants with different backgrounds.
- 7.4 We recognise however that this isn’t suitable for everyone and that there are tenants who are digitally excluded or choose not to interact in this way. For those we will continue to provide more traditional methods of engagement ie by telephone and with face to face meetings.
- 7.5 The action plan sets out the actions we propose to take to help us meet the four priorities and demonstrate to tenants and leaseholders our commitment to work in partnership with them to help shape and improve the services we offer. All actions listed in the Action Plan are aimed at achieving one or more of the above priorities.

8. Wider Consultation

- 8.1 A significant amount of feedback has already been received from tenants and taken into account in the development of this strategy. To reflect this, it is proposed that a shorter online consultation take place with tenants, leaseholders and stakeholder of 4 weeks. This will be through the Council’s website, targeted awareness raising among tenants and leaseholders through social media posts and reminders sent to those who are already signed up to our keep me posted service.

9. Identification of Options

- 9.1 Option 1: Approve for consultation the draft Tenant Engagement Strategy and delegate to the Strategic Director (Corporate Services) in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Social Housing, Port Health, Skills and Education authority consider the consultation responses and to to make minor revisions to the strategy following the outcome of the consultation exercise

and thereafter adopt formally the Strategy. In the event that consultation responses are received which make more significant revisions to the Strategy desirable, a revised versions will be brought back to Cabinet for approval.

9.2 Option 2: Not approve the Tenant Engagement Strategy

10. Evaluation of Options

10.1 Option 1 - is the recommended option because the proposed structure has been designed to maximise the ways in which tenants and leaseholders can get involved with the housing service.

10.2 Option 2 - is not the recommended option as it is a requirement for local authorities (under the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard of the Regulatory Framework for Social Housing) to involve and engage their tenants and therefore to do nothing would place the authority at risk of challenge.

11. Resource Implications

11.1 The Tenant Engagement Strategy will be delivered within existing resources in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). A range of opportunities to be involved with the service are already in place and the strategic ambition is to build upon these.

12. Climate Change and Environmental Implications

12.1 The strategy seeks to increase the level of engagement and communication with residents via digital channels to improve access for residents whilst minimising the impact on the environment. Increased engagement and communication should bring about improvements for tenants in their home environment.

Corporate Implications

13.1 Comment from the Director of Finance (linked to the MTFP): Accountancy have been consulted in the writing of this report and have no further comment to add (AC)'

13.2 Comment from the Solicitor to the Council: The Solicitor to the Council has been consulted in the preparation of this report and has no further comments to make.

13.3 Comment from the Equalities Officer: An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed which highlights potential positive impacts for several protected characteristic groups. Members are required to comply with the public sector equality duty as set out in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/149>

13.4 Other Officers (as appropriate): None received.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Dover District Council Draft Tenant Engagement Strategy 2022 - 2027

Appendix 2 - Proposed consultation plan

Appendix 3 - Equality Impact Assessment

Background Papers

Regulator of Social Housing Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tenant-involvement-and-empowerment-standard/tenant-involvement-and-empowerment-standard-2017>

The Social Housing White Paper: A Charter for Social Housing Residents https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/936098/The_charter_for_social_housing_residents_-_social_housing_white_paper.pdf

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