

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to the Executive for Decision 03 September 2024

Portfolio:	Housing
Subject:	Tenant Engagement Strategy - Adoption
Report of:	Director of Housing
Corporate Priorities:	Providing Housing Choices

Purpose:
To seek Executive approval for the adoption of the Tenant Engagement Strategy.

Executive summary:

This is a new Strategy produced in response to the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 and the new Consumer Standards set by the Regulator of Social Housing. The Tenant Engagement Strategy sets out our approach to improving how we listen to and work with our tenants.

Following agreement at the Executive on 2 July 2024, the draft Tenant Engagement Strategy was circulated for public consultation from 16 July to 20 August. This report summarises the outcome of the consultation and any necessary changes as a result.

Recommendation/Recommended Option:

It is recommended that the Executive:

- (a) agrees the Tenant Engagement Strategy, as provided in Appendix A to this report, be adopted;
- (b) notes that the Continuous Improvement Action Plan element of the Strategy will be a live document that will be kept up to date by the Principal Tenant Engagement Officer; and
- (c) agrees that authority is delegated to the Director of Housing, following consultation with the Executive Member for Housing, to make any minor changes to the Strategy providing they do not alter the approach and objectives of the Strategy.

Reason:

The Council currently does not have a Tenant Engagement Strategy. The adoption of the new Strategy will support the Council to deliver on the new regulatory requirements.

Cost of proposals:

The costs of utilising the strategy are met within existing operational budgets.

Appendices:

A: Tenant Engagement Strategy 2024-2029

B: Equality Impact Assessment

C: Analysis of consultation responses

D: Menu of involvement opportunities

Background papers: None

Reference papers: Report to the Executive 1 July 2024 – Draft Tenant Engagement Strategy 2024-2029

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Executive Briefing Paper

Date:	03 September 2024
Subject:	Tenant Engagement Strategy - Adoption
Briefing by:	Director of Housing
Portfolio:	Housing

INTRODUCTION

1. The Tenant Engagement Strategy sets out the Council's commitment to improving how we listen to and consider the views of tenants in the services we deliver.
2. The Council currently does not have a Tenant Engagement Strategy in place. Work has been undertaken to prepare a Strategy in response to the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 and the new Consumer Standards set by the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH). The Strategy outlines the national and local context, provides three objectives to help begin the work with tenants and sets out how we will achieve and measure these aims.
3. Public consultation on the draft Tenant Engagement Strategy took place between 16 July and 20 August 2024; responses were predominately positive. Following the consultation, a few amendments have been made. The amended version is included as Appendix A.

BACKGROUND

4. This Strategy takes into account our responsibility as a social landlord under the Housing Act 1985, Housing Act 1996, Equality Act 2010, and the Human Rights Act 1998.
5. Through the introduction of the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard, registered social landlords are required to demonstrate how they have taken tenants views into account in their decision making about how their services are delivered.
6. This Tenant Engagement Strategy is aimed at consolidating our legislative duties and incorporating all aspects of the standard into the delivery of our housing services.
7. We recognise that since Covid-19, the Fareham Housing service has not returned to its previous levels of engagement. While a dedicated Tenant Involvement Officer previously carried out tenant engagement work, until recently it fell to our Neighbourhood Officers to incorporate engagement within their existing work.

8. The recent appointment of the Principal Tenant Engagement Officer in April 2024 provides the opportunity to rebuild tenant engagement, beginning with the creation of a Tenant Engagement Strategy, followed by the implementation of the Action Plan.

THE TENANT ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

9. The Tenant Engagement Strategy is attached as Appendix A to this report. It incorporates four main sections: -
 - The National and Local Context
 - The Objectives
 - Monitoring the Tenant Engagement Strategy
 - Continuous Improvement Action Plan

The National and Local Context

10. This Strategy focuses on the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 and the enhanced roles for both the RSH and the Housing Ombudsman. Following the Grenfell Tower Fire, the death of two-year-old Awaab Ishak and Building Safety concerns, greater emphasis has been placed on resident engagement which is reinforced by the introduction of the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard in April 2024.
11. The Tenant Engagement Strategy seeks to support the Council's corporate approach and priorities. It takes into consideration the Council's Corporate Strategy 2023-2029 and Fareham Housing's Affordable Housing Strategy.

The Objectives

12. To begin this engagement journey with our tenants, the Strategy includes three objectives.
13. Objective 1 seeks to 'create a culture that recognises and values tenant engagement'. This objective focuses on promoting the importance of tenant input in the design and development of services and establishing internal buy in. Through this, we can build trust and transparency with our tenants as they begin to see the results and benefits of their involvement.
14. Objective 2 is to 'offer a range of opportunities for meaningful collaboration to ensure all tenants are able to get involved, scrutinise and influence'. Attached in Appendix B is the menu of opportunities for tenant involvement. Included are different options with varying levels of commitments to suit the tenant. This menu of opportunities will be promoted in the next edition of the Tenants Newsletter and all tenants will be encouraged to sign up and get involved.
15. Objective 3 looks to 'improve communication methods ensuring tenants have convenient access to information and news'. This objective will ensure that we are using appropriate methods of communication that suits the needs of our tenants. This objective will also ensure we produce timely and up to date information, this is fundamental for critical issues such as building regulations and fire safety.

Monitoring the Tenant Engagement Strategy

16. The Tenant Engagement Strategy will cover a period of five years, to coincide with the Council's Corporate Strategy, but will be reviewed annually. The Strategy will be reviewed by the Tenant Engagement team, alongside Housing Management and Tenants to ensure it reflects the views and needs of our tenants.
17. This Strategy is subject to regulation through the Consumer Standards as set out by the Regulator of Social Housing.

Continuous Improvement Action Plan

18. The Tenant Engagement Strategy contains a live Continuous Improvement Action Plan.
19. This is the beginning of our engagement journey with tenants; therefore, this live document ensures we can update the Action Plan when appropriate as we continue to engage with tenants, leaseholders, and partners in creating and developing actions.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON THE DRAFT STRATEGY

20. Public consultation on the draft Tenant Engagement Strategy took place between 16 July and 20 August 2024. An online survey was produced to gather feedback from residents, to ascertain whether they agreed with the proposed objectives and how easy it was to understand the information.
 21. A £50 gift voucher was offered as an incentive for participation. We recognise this is the beginning of our engagement journey with tenants; we hope to further build engagement throughout the next year and increase participation.
 22. A total of 42 responses were received, out of these, 23 stated they were a Fareham Housing tenant. Overall, 69% of respondents stated that the information in the Strategy was easy to read with 28% of respondents remaining neutral. The comments did not indicate that there was anything particularly unclear or difficult to understand but it was suggested more imagery could be included to make the document more reader friendly.
 23. When asked about the proposed objectives; 86% of respondents agreed with Objective 1, 73% agreed with Objective 2 with 18% of respondents remaining neutral, and 83% agreed with Objective 3. Objective 2 should become clearer to tenants with the launch involvement opportunities menu which can now be found on our tenant engagement webpages.
 24. Overall, 90% of respondents agreed that this was the right approach to restart our engagement journey. No significant themes emerged from the comments. The few comments received questioned how the strategy will be implemented to meet a wide and varied community.
 25. Further details on the feedback from the public consultation is contained in Appendix C to this report.

AMENDMENTS TO THE STRATEGY

26. No significant issues of concern or note have been raised following the public consultation.
27. Minor changes have been made to the document to ensure clarity and consistency:

- a) On page 7, 'traffic light system' has been added underneath the table heading 'RAG' to ensure tenants understand what this means.
- b) The images on pages 5 and 6 of the Strategy have been changed to relate to engagement activities.
- c) Throughout the document a few grammar and punctuation amendments have been made.

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

28. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) of the strategy has been produced, which raises no issues of concern.
29. The EIA, attached as Appendix B to this report, found that the Strategy is expected to have a positive impact on all tenants. It aims to remove the barriers of engagement for groups who have been underrepresented and create meaningful engagement opportunities for them to raise concerns and issues that impact them.
30. The full EIA will be made available alongside any subsequent recommendation to adopt the strategy.

CONCLUSION

31. The Tenant Engagement Strategy will support the Council to deliver on the regulatory requirements and new consumer standards from the Social Housing Regulation Act. This will place the tenant, their needs, and their voice at the centre of Fareham's Housing Service.
32. The draft Tenant Engagement Strategy was considered by the Housing Scrutiny Panel at their meeting on 27 June 2024. Public consultation subsequently took place which has raised no significant issues of concern or note that require significant amendments to be made.
33. Minor changes to the draft Tenant Engagement Strategy have been made. The Tenant Engagement Strategy will be reviewed annually to ensure that the document continues to reflect the views of our tenants.
34. An EIA has also been produced raising no issues. The Tenant Engagement Strategy, as attached in Appendix A, is therefore recommended for adoption.

RISK ASSESSMENT

35. There are no significant risk considerations in relation to this report.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS/CARBON IMPACT ASSESSMENT

36. The subject matter of this report is not anticipated to have an impact on the Council's carbon footprint, nor is it expected to have a detrimental or beneficial impact to the wider environment.

Enquiries:

For further information on this report please contact Eden Singh, 01329 824360.