

Tenancy Engagement

January 2014

(Final Report)

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Report Distribution – Final Report issued on 16th January 2014 to:

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Executive Summary

Background

Tenant participation is about tenants taking part in decision-making processes and influencing decisions about:

- *Housing policies*
- *Housing conditions*
- *Housing related services*

It is a two way process which involves the sharing of information, ideas and power. The aim is to improve the standard of housing conditions and standards (Source: Tenant Participation Advisory Service).

Government policy in recent years has continued to encourage greater resident involvement and participation in the delivery of housing services. Key to this is the regulatory framework standard for social housing introduced by the Tenant Services Authority (now the HCA) in 2010 that recognises the importance of tenants' views in shaping services to achieve organisational business objectives and delivering more responsive services. At the time this framework was introduced, an Audit Commission report, to compliment the changes, stated that Landlords must be clear about the costs and benefits of involving tenants, although acknowledging spending money more effectively was more important than how much money is spent.

Swindon currently is landlord to approximately 10,000 homes in the Swindon area. Following a recent restructure in the Housing Service, a Participation Team was established whose purpose is to increase the level of tenant participation, encouraging tenants and the Council as landlord to share information, ideas and power and improve the standard of housing conditions and services. The team comprises five posts with a net budget of £231k, including running costs.

Audit Opinion

The Council budget for Tenant Participation in 2013/14 is £231k including both staff and running costs. However, the 10,000 tenants are seen by Government and the Council as crucial in shaping and driving change in Housing Services with a total gross budget of £48m. The impact and materiality of the tenant engagement service is considered to be **high**. This combined with the Auditor's opinion **significant improvements are required** for system controls, gives an overall risk to the Council of '**of concern**'.

Key Messages

The audit found that there is no formal tenant engagement strategy setting out what the objectives of the service are and the targets they aim to achieve. Objectives set out in a participation strategy should be reflected in the Housing Strategy which in turn should be aligned with the Council's wider Corporate Strategy. Without clear and agreed objectives, evaluating value for money and the extent to which the current participation methods contribute to the corporate objectives is complex.

The Auditor was advised that objectives for tenant engagement would be agreed with the tenants as part of a consultation process to be held towards the end of 2013/14. However, it was clear from discussions with all staff involved in the service that the objectives set out in the HCA Regulatory Standard were fully understood and were being worked towards even in the absence of a formal strategy. Broad principles for participation have been discussed with tenants earlier in the year but these needed to be more clearly defined and captured in the final published document.

The review confirmed a wide spread belief that the current participation methods only capture the views of a minority of the current tenant population. As such, the majority of tenants were not involved in driving service improvement and protecting their consumer standards. However, work has already been instigated by the Participation Team to develop the existing participation methods and introduce new ones such as Street Reps and the Housing Sounding Board to encourage increased levels of participation. This is essential since the principles of co-regulation and greater service user involvement will form an important element of consumer protection for the foreseeable future and are key to ensuring that the Homes and Communities Agency's regulatory framework is complied with, particularly in relation to tenants being able to hold their landlords to account and drive up service standards.

As well as a need to target the wider tenant population, it was also established that data held on the make-up of the tenant population had not been used to focus engagement activities on under-represented groups, including young, disabled and BME tenants. Through research conducted during the audit, the Auditor identified that this is an area that has been addressed by other social landlords to increase their overall participation rates.

In addition, this research into approaches used by a variety of other social landlords (see Appendix D) determined that these organisations were not using methods significantly different to those in Swindon, although they were more established and embedded in these organisations. Consequently they achieved higher levels of tenant engagement with tenants having an enhanced role to support landlords to deliver the right services and develop a value for money approach.

In view of these findings in terms of the limited tenant involvement, lack of clarity on strategic objectives and the current cost of providing the participation service, further work is required to ensure participation standards are improved and deliver the value for money required in these financially challenging times.

The Tenant Participation service can be aligned with the Council's localities agenda however the Council is still exploring how it can work more closely with the community. As landlords, the Council needs to develop an approach to service delivery which positively engages with tenants and indeed the wider community, formally incorporates their views, is transparent and accountable to this population.

Context

This audit review was requested by the Head of Housing following a reorganisation in Housing that established a new Participation Team. The scope of the review was to evaluate:

- Whether current participation services met statutory objectives
- Whether the services provide value for money
- The extent to which the participation function met the Council's localities agenda.

Swindon has a significant landlord responsibility with approximately 10,000 council homes. Its tenants placed a vote of confidence in the Council at the end of 2011 when they voted to retain the housing function in the Council. This vote was probably the best demonstration of tenant engagement witnessed by the Council. It highlighted the need for tenant engagement to be improved further to ensure tenants were at the heart of driving service improvement and supporting the Council as landlord to deliver the right services and develop a value for money approach.

Tenant Engagement (also known as empowerment or participation) has been a focus for social landlords for over 20 years, with the Homes and Communities Agency in recent years having responsibility for implementing a regulatory framework that delivers the wider government objectives. Swindon has supported and encouraged a number of participation methods, including Tenants' Associations and groups, publication of Housing Matters magazine and E-Housing, the provision of a Tenant Scrutiny Panel and support for a number of other ad-hoc groups including tenant representation. However, in common with many other social landlords, these older participation models were designed around formal meeting structures to capture the tenants' voices and are not representative of the wider tenant population.

Tenant engagement has been put back under the spotlight by the present government which wants to develop co-regulation of social housing with tenants adopting a governance role and scrutinizing the performance of their social housing landlord to drive service improvement and value-for-money. This view was recently reiterated in a report by the Local Government Information Unit (LgiU) that recognized that the Government's welfare reform agenda will necessitate more enabling interventions on the part of social landlords. The LgiU determined that, combined with increasing demand and reducing resources, the challenges facing social landlords can only be met by better citizenship, with landlords taking a proactive stance on developing relationships that invest in community resilience.

These issues fit neatly with the Council's priorities of ensuring '*more people are proud of their neighbourhood*' and '*increased community involvement so that everyone is able to make a positive contribution*'.

Risk Areas Examined and Findings

In accordance with best practice, a risk-based approach was adopted that identified the key risks to the business objectives and those mitigating actions/controls that should be in place. The Auditor then assessed the effectiveness of the mitigating controls through examination of relevant documents, procedures and testing.

The key risks to the achievement of the business objectives were discussed and agreed with the Head of Housing and the Housing Business Development Manager before the commencement of the audit. The table below summarises the Risk Areas examined during the review and provides an assessment of the adequacy of controls in place for each area of risk examined:

Risk Area Examined and Findings	Audit Conclusion
<p>Risk: Lack of clear Tenant Participation objectives and a strategy to deliver them</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no Tenant Participation Strategy. Tenants have agreed broad participation principles but have not yet been consulted to determine their objectives for a participation strategy and the extent they will be involved in decision making AP1.1. As such, the Council has not set out its vision, how it will get there, or the targets by which it will measure its success. The strategy when prepared will need to incorporate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The five key requirements of the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) regulatory framework. AP1.2 ○ Details of how and where tenants will be involved in decision making and the extent of their involvement AP1.3 ○ How tenants views will be balanced against that of Officers/Members. AP1.3 ○ How the Council will be held to account by tenants. AP1.3 ○ Detail of how the Participation Strategy links to strategic aims in the short term and an action plan explaining how the aims will be delivered, with clear prioritised actions attributed to specific officers. AP1.4 	<p style="text-align: center;">Significant Improvements Required</p>

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<p>Risk: Current approaches to Tenant Engagement do not provide Value for Money</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work has already started on evaluating the VFM provided by the current range of participation services. This work will be used to determining how these services should be improved, ceased or complimented with other alternatives to increase the impact of tenant participation. • However, the following observations were made during the review: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The current VFM approach does not fully apportion the participation teams' costs to their activities to provide the full cost of their provision. AP2.1 ○ E-media is not yet being used to its full potential. AP2.2 ○ Data on the make-up of the tenant population has not yet been used to target participation work at groups that may be under-represented. AP2.3 ○ A significant proportion of the current participation budget is allocated to groups that do not represent the wider tenant population. Resources are not allocated on the basis of the size of the group and extent of its representation. AP2.4 ○ Beyond the ability to reclaim travel expenses, tenants are currently offered no incentives to become involved in the participation process. This approach of incentivising tenants has been effective in other social housing providers. AP2.5 	<p>Significant Improvements Required</p>
<p>Risk: Current approaches to Tenant Engagement do not reflect best / current practice and the Council's localities agenda.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A review of the current approaches to tenancy engagement compared to that of a number of other social housing providers identified that Swindon were already using or preparing to use methods similar to those organisations (see Appendix D). However, it would appear that other organisations have achieved a higher rate of participation where these practices have been in place for longer and have become more embedded. • Whilst there is currently a focus on getting more tenants to participate in decision making around their housing, there needs to be a clear demonstration by the Council of how these tenants views are being used to develop the service. AP3.1 • In terms of linking the work of Housing with the Council's wider localities agenda, there are a number of governance structures used in organisations like City West Homes and Hull City Council that have successfully devolved much of their decision making to area Housing Boards to ensure services are more responsive to the needs of tenants in their areas. However, these functions rely on a level of participation that Swindon does not yet have, to operate effectively. Therefore, Tenant Engagement needs to become more embedded and effective to enable new and more responsive structure's to be put in place. AP3.2 	<p>Significant Improvements Required</p>

Overall Opinion

Materiality and impact: The Council budget for Tenant Participation in 2013/14 is £231k including both staff and running costs. However, the 10,000 tenants are seen by Government and the Council as crucial in shaping and driving change in Housing Services with a total gross budget of £48m. Materiality is therefore **high**.

Changes since last audit: The last audit of tenant participation was undertaken in 2003/4 at which time the challenges facing the service were considerably different from those faced by the service today. This is particularly due to the demand for value for money and also the way the service can be linked into the Council's wider localities agenda under Stronger Together. Additionally, with the introduction of self-financing for Housing in 2012/13, the Council was given responsibility for shaping its own future for Housing services with more financial autonomy.

Opinion on system controls: **Significant improvements required** (see Appendix A) i.e. the Auditor completing the review concluded that existing procedures needed to be improved to ensure that they are fully reliable. A number of significant recommendations have been made to improve missing or failing controls.

Overall assessment of risk: the combination of the high impact of the system, along with the opinion on the system controls gives an overall risk assessment to the Council as being **of concern**:

		MATERIALITY AND IMPACT		
SYSTEM CONTROL		High	Medium	Low
1	High standard	Moderate	Minimal	Minimal
2	Satisfactory	Moderate	Moderate	Minimal
3	Significant Improvements required	Of Concern	Moderate	Moderate
4	Fundamental weaknesses identified	Significant	Of Concern	Moderate

Action Plan

The purpose of this action plan is to provide a summary of the matters arising during the audit of Tenancy Engagement, together with the recommendations to mitigate risks, the manager's response to the recommendations, along with the officer responsible and timescale for implementation. In order for you to identify the most significant matters arising, which affect the reliance that can be placed on the controls reviewed, the recommendations have been prioritised.

Ref.	Finding	Recommendations Priority (High/Medium/Low)	Responsible Officer and Timescale	Management Response
1	<i>Risk: Lack of clear Tenant Participation objectives and a strategy to deliver them.</i>			
1.1	<p>In order to determine how effective the current provision is for Tenant Participation, it is necessary to measure the activities provided against the participation objectives of the organisation to determine how much they contribute.</p> <p>Some broad participation principles have been agreed with tenants, but these have not been formally incorporated into a dedicated participation strategy. As such, there is nothing to set out the role of tenant involvement in helping to deliver the departmental and corporate objectives and how increasing awareness of the importance and value of using tenants' views will shape and improve services to make them more efficient.</p> <p>There is a risk that without having clear objectives to work towards, changes may be made to the current approaches used to encourage participation that may not actually contribute towards increased participation. This could have both resource and reputational impact for the Council.</p>	<p>Clear objectives for Tenant Participation must be agreed in consultation with tenants prior to any significant changes being made to the way tenants are involved in the delivery of housing services' objectives.</p> <p>These objectives should be linked to both the Housing Strategy and the wider Corporate Strategy.</p> <p>See examples 2 - 3 in Appendix C.</p> <p>Priority: High</p>	<p>Housing Business Development Manager</p> <p>July 2014</p>	<p>Agreed.</p> <p>Consult with tenants to establish outcomes for Tenant Participation</p> <p>Set up monitoring of outcomes</p> <p>Link to Housing Strategy and Corporate Strategy</p> <p>Establish new model of Tenant Participation</p>

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Ref.	Finding	Recommendations Priority (High/Medium/Low)	Responsible Officer and Timescale	Management Response
1	<i>Risk: Lack of clear Tenant Participation objectives and a strategy to deliver them.</i>			
1.2	<p>The objectives of the HCA National Framework were compared to the broad participation principles agreed with SBC tenants. The Auditor found that some of the detail of the Framework had been omitted, including reference to equality and diversity and the provision and publication of performance data to encourage challenge by tenants on landlord performance.</p> <p>Should the national guideline not be followed, there is a risk that national objectives in terms of participation may not be achieved, with opportunities to improve service standards and increase value for money diminished.</p>	<p>The five expectations for tenant participation, detailed in the HCA National Framework, should be included in the participation principles agreed with SBC tenants.</p> <p>Priority: High</p>	<p>Housing Business Development Manager</p> <p>March 2014</p>	<p>Agreed</p> <p>Can incorporate into new draft model</p>

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Ref.	Finding	Recommendations Priority (High/Medium/Low)	Responsible Officer and Timescale	Management Response
1	<i>Risk: Lack of clear Tenant Participation objectives and a strategy to deliver them.</i>			
1.3	<p>Although some principles for participation have been discussed with tenants, the focus appears to be very much geared towards increasing the number of tenants' voices that are heard and increasing or rationalising the number of approaches used to capture these voices.</p> <p>However, increasing the number of tenants becoming involved is not an end in itself if services do not change as a result of what the tenants are saying. In the absence of a formal tenant participation strategy, there are no clear objectives or targets to determine how the tenants voices will be used to influence decision making in shaping service delivery and driving improvement e.g. what forums will be tenant influenced, and which will be tenant led.</p> <p>There is a risk that if participation is increased, but tenants cannot clearly see the value of their involvement, they could revert to being disengaged and opportunities to improve services may be lost.</p>	<p>The Tenant Participation Strategy should include clear objectives in terms of how tenants will actually be involved in decision making and shaping the way services are provided.</p> <p>The Strategy should answer the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How and where will tenant' views influence our Housing Strategy objectives? • How are tenants' views balanced with those of Officers and Members in terms of business planning and budget setting? • Are we clear which parts of the service should be tenants-led and which are tenant influenced. • How are we held to account by tenants. <p>Priority: Medium</p>	<p>Housing Business Development Manager</p> <p>March 2014</p>	<p>Agreed</p> <p>Auditor needs to recognise the role of Tenant Scrutiny Panel (TSP) here.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TSP has clear Terms of Reference and has developed a work plan with standard templates that meets best practice guidance. • Through the TSP, changes to services have been made following the outcomes of the service reviews e.g. repairs satisfaction and Neighbourhood Wardens reviews. • TSP also attend Performance meetings every 3 months with officers and have challenged performance areas to improve the service delivery. • Annual Report also highlights areas where tenants have asked for service changes and these have been implemented. • Local Offers (Service standards) – full consultation done with tenants to establish what service delivery is important to them, it is these service standards which are measured, monitored and then reported back to all tenants in the Annual Report.

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Ref.	Finding	Recommendations Priority (High/Medium/Low)	Responsible Officer and Timescale	Management Response
1	<i>Risk: Lack of clear Tenant Participation objectives and a strategy to deliver them.</i>			
1.4	The Auditor compared and contrasted Tenant Participation Strategies from three other housing providers to identify the key aspects that could be adopted in a strategy for Swindon as well as using guidance from the Tenant Participation Advisory Service. The Auditor found the Bristol City Council Landlord Services Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Strategy 2012 - 2015 to be a good example that contained all the key information required to set out that City's vision for the future and explained how they were going to achieve it.	<p>Following the appropriate consultation with tenants to determine the joint objectives, consideration should be given to incorporating some of the elements identified as part of this review from the other councils, including Bristol City Council. Examples are included at Appendix C to this report.</p> <p>The full Bristol City report can be found on the link below</p> <p>Bristol City Tenant Involvement and empowerment strategy 2012-15</p> <p>Priority: High</p>	<p>Housing Business Development Manager</p> <p>July 2014</p>	<p>Agreed</p> <p>Response as at 1.1</p> <p>Officers will use the Bristol City model as applicable.</p>

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Ref.	Finding	Recommendations Priority (High/Medium/Low)	Responsible Officer and Timescale	Management Response
2	<i>Risk: Current approaches to Tenant Engagement do not provide Value for Money</i>			
2.1	<p>Housing provided a VFM review to the Housing Advisory Forum (HAF) in October 2013 that was based on a model developed by HouseMark.</p> <p>However, the audit review identified that not all costs had been attributed to the activities reviewed in the VFM model and without clear objectives it is difficult to measure the impact of the services being provided.</p> <p>Costs were determined using an estimate of the time spent directly by officers on each activity, with the actual costs based on their salary rather than the full cost of the participation function. This approach does not take into account on-costs and time spent by staff on more generic participation functions.</p> <p>Because the full cost of the service has not been considered when estimating the cost of each activity and there are no agreed objectives against which to measure the effectiveness of current participation services, it is not possible to accurately assess the value for money gained from each activity. There is a risk that decisions to alter the way participation activities are provided may not bring the added value that is intended.</p>	<p>In determining the level of value for money achieved from current participation services, support should be sought from the Finance Team to ensure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All the participation services provided are included in the cost calculations • The full cost of providing each service is fully understood • The basis for apportioning costs are not made overly complex • The contribution of each activity toward the agreed objectives is fully understood. <p>This work is critical to ensuring that the value of the various services currently provided can be maximised.</p> <p>A survey recently conducted by the LGiU identified that 60% of councils had increased their budgets for participation (<i>source: Strong Foundations: Building better dialogue between tenants and landlords</i>)</p> <p>Priority: High</p>	<p>Housing Business Development Manager</p> <p>March 2014</p>	<p>Agreed</p> <p>There seems little value in spending more time looking a VFM in the current model which we know does not meet the standard we wish to attain.</p> <p>It would seem a better idea to review VFM as part of the development of a new model and after the new model has been established.</p> <p>Officers will use the evidence from a Tenant Satisfaction survey (STAR) to assist with the VFM principles.</p> <p>VFM is a principle that is well embedded in the team. E.g. looking at best ways to offer refreshments, expenses policy, venue hire etc.</p> <p><i>Audit Comment: Agreed that this approach should be applied to any new models and approaches to Tenant Participation, but also to existing approaches where they continue to be used.</i></p>

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Ref.	Finding	Recommendations Priority (High/Medium/Low)	Responsible Officer and Timescale	Management Response
2	<i>Risk: Current approaches to Tenant Engagement do not provide Value for Money</i>			
2.2	<p>Housing provides an electronic information service to over 2,500 tenants. E-Housing appears to be relatively low cost and is primarily used as a tool to provide information to tenants rather than encouraging proactive feedback from tenants.</p> <p>The E-Housing is also sent to tenants who would additionally receive the Housing Matters magazine.</p> <p>All tenants currently receive three copies of Housing Matters magazine each year which due to its publication and delivery costs is a relatively expensive form of communication. It does not lend itself to two way communication.</p> <p>As more and more tenants begin to use IT technology on a regular basis, there will be more opportunity to communicate with a larger proportion of tenants using this approach. Without developing this side of the participation programme, there is a risk that less and less tenants will become involved in housing through the traditional methods.</p>	<p>Consideration should be given to using E-Housing as a means of allowing tenants to voice their opinion on key housing issues.</p> <p>The apparent low cost of using such technology to provide and receive information to and from tenants compared to traditional paper based services should be exploited and E-Housing should be promoted to ensure a wider take-up by tenants.</p> <p>Consideration should be given to providing a link on E-Housing to the latest Housing Matters publications, thereby reducing the need for expensive hard copy publications.</p> <p>The effectiveness of the Housing Matters magazine should be reviewed with a view to measuring and improving its impact on participation and reducing its overall cost.</p> <p>Tenants should be given the option to 'Opt-in' or 'Opt-out' of Housing Matters given the substantial cost involved.</p> <p>Priority: Medium</p>	<p>Housing Business Development Manager</p> <p>March 2014</p>	<p>Agreed</p> <p>Projects are underway that will deliver improved VFM, these include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of tenants website • Facebook page and use of other social media, encourages tenants to have their say • Changes to Housing Matters • Housing Sounding Board sustainment and growth – e.g. surveys on HSB offer VFM • STAR survey (tenant satisfaction survey) undertaken in house and over 1000 responses. Results are due to be collated in next few weeks.

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Ref.	Finding	Recommendations Priority (High/Medium/Low)	Responsible Officer and Timescale	Management Response
2	<i>Risk: Current approaches to Tenant Engagement do not provide Value for Money</i>			
2.3	<p>The audit review confirmed that current approaches to improve tenant participation focussed around regular meetings and generally involved only a very small proportion of the tenant population.</p> <p>Although Open Housing contains data on the tenant population mix, it is understood that this may not be complete / up-to-date and it does not appear to have been used to target previous participation work.</p> <p>The LGiU have promoted this in one of four recommendations in a recent report entitled '<i>Strong Foundations: Building better dialogue between tenants and landlords</i>'. In it, they state landlords should be encouraged to use data segmentation to target communications to avoid inefficient communication strategies and the use of resources.</p> <p>There is a general belief in the Council as supported by Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS), that the formal meeting structures used currently, discourage or limit the ability of some minority groups to engage in active participation.</p> <p>Without understanding the make-up of the tenant population in terms of ethnicity, age, disability etc, there is a risk that further work to increase the numbers of tenants participating may exacerbate this situation and therefore not capture the views of minority groups.</p>	<p>The data contained on the Open Housing System in terms of tenant ethnicity, age profile and disability etc., should be utilised to ensure that those tenants involved in participation activities represent the wider tenant population.</p> <p>Positive action to reduce the barriers to involvement should be considered for minority groups identified above e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introducing a tenant disability network like that used in Brighton and Hove City Council where disabled tenants from areas of the city have elected representatives. The creation of a Young Advisors Group like that used in Green Square HA to capture the voices of young people; Development of a strategy and plan to address the needs of minorities e.g. Ealing Council with a statistically higher proportion of young people introduced a separate strategy for involving young tenants. <p>Priority: High</p>	<p>Housing Business Development Manager</p> <p>July 2014</p>	<p>Agreed</p> <p>New resident involvement software module to be purchased which will provide improved customer profiling info.</p> <p>Recent customer profiling of Housing Sounding Board shows good diversity of tenants against base data.</p> <p>Young tenants will be targeted as part of new project - Green Spaces</p>

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Ref.	Finding	Recommendations Priority (High/Medium/Low)	Responsible Officer and Timescale	Management Response
2	<i>Risk: Current approaches to Tenant Engagement do not provide Value for Money</i>			
2.4	<p>Whilst contributions from all the existing participation groups are useful, some such as Swindon Tenants Voice (STV) use considerable resource (housing estimate £4k) but represent a very small percentage of the tenant population (19 tenants).</p> <p>The support for such groups should be proportionate to the tenants they represent in a similar way to that used in other local authorities. For example, Hull City Council award grants each year to tenant groups to cover their running costs, based on the number of tenants the group serves. See Appendix C example 5</p> <p>There is a danger that groups that are effectively not offering value for money could limit resources available for new and possible more effective initiatives.</p>	<p>Consider funding tenants groups on the proportion of the number of tenants they represent. This will act as a driver for such groups to engage with more tenants and therefore become more representative of the wider tenant population.</p> <p>If such changes are not possible or prove to be unacceptable to such groups, their influence on Council decisions should be considered in relation to the number of tenants that they represent and possible wider opinion.</p> <p>Priority: Medium</p>	<p>Housing Business Development Manager</p> <p>July 2014</p>	<p>Agreed</p> <p>Idea welcomed and will be considered in new TP model.</p>

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Ref.	Finding	Recommendations Priority (High/Medium/Low)	Responsible Officer and Timescale	Management Response
2	<i>Risk: Current approaches to Tenant Engagement do not provide Value for Money</i>			
2.5	<p>The Participation Team have already started introducing a number of improvements to the current methods in order to capture the voices of more tenants.</p> <p>One recent example included the use of prepaid envelopes sent out with questionnaires to tenants on the Housing Sounding Board which quadrupled the rate of return to 10%.</p> <p>However, whilst this demonstrates significant improvement in response, it only represents a small percentage of total tenant population.</p> <p>There remains a risk that without higher levels of involvement, tenants will not engage in wider and longer term aspects of housing delivery, leaving the Council to drive change and continue to second guess the wishes of tenants.</p>	<p>The Participation Team should evaluate the benefits of offering incentives to tenants to become more engaged in the participation process and particularly those where the take-up by tenants is already low i.e.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Winchester City Council – Tenants can select an amount of time they can offer to participation i.e. 4 hours per month, and then choose which participation approach best suits them. Bracknell Forest Homes offer a £5 shopping voucher for every telephone or postal survey completed. They have 1,200 tenants (17%) on their Sounding Board from a total tenant base of 7,100 rented properties. Whilst this represents a significant cost, by targeting specific groups of tenants for each survey, the sample size can be significantly reduced. <p>Priority: Medium</p>	<p>Housing Business Development Manager</p> <p>June 2014</p>	<p>Agreed</p> <p>Officers are currently looking at a tenant reward/incentive scheme.</p> <p>Looking to implement scheme from June.</p> <p>Incentives will include training through the Tenant Academy, financial incentives and rewards in kind (e.g. Timebank)</p>

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Ref.	Finding	Recommendations Priority (High/Medium/Low)	Responsible Officer and Timescale	Management Response
3	<i>Risk: Current approaches to Tenant Engagement do not reflect best / current practice and the Council's localities agenda</i>			
3.1	<p>A review of the approaches used by other social housing providers determined that Swindon was using many of those widely used by its comparators, and implementing some including the Housing Sounding Board and Street Reps.</p> <p>Street Reps have the potential to deliver community champions, as promoted by the LGiU as an effective resource in signposting sources of support and reaching groups of tenants furthest from engagement.</p> <p>In the absence of a participation strategy, Swindon has focussed on providing many types of approach to capture tenants' voices, rather than a concentration on how tenants' views will be used to drive service improvement and delivery more effectively.</p> <p>There is a risk that should tenants express their views on the service delivery without seeing any change in its delivery as a result, they may become disillusioned with the whole process and consequently withdraw from the engagement process.</p>	<p>The process of engaging with tenants to capture their views should be rationalised to ensure that they are captured in such a way as to maximise the impact of any suggested changes to the way services are delivered.</p> <p>Street Reps should be championed to promote other sources of support to tenants and reach under-represented tenant groups throughout the community</p> <p>How this information has been used must be clearly communicated to tenants through the various housing publications to ensure they can see the influence they have had.</p> <p>Priority: Medium</p>	<p>Housing Business Development Manager</p> <p>March 2014</p>	<p>Agreed</p> <p>Annual report informs tenants where their views have changed service delivery – acknowledged in this report.</p> <p>Local offers (service standards) as agreed by tenants are monitored and measured by officers and tenants.</p> <p>Housing Sounding Board provides feedback to tenants on the result of surveys etc.</p>

APPENDIX A

Standard Audit Opinions

The audit opinion is based on two different criteria the first is the materiality of the system and its impact on the Council if there was a system failure. This has been spilt into High, Medium or Low.

The second criteria, is the standard of control found within the system audited. This has been categorised into 4 different levels i.e. high; satisfactory; significant improvements required and, fundamental weakness. Each of these categories has a standard opinion (see below).

The combination of these two factors gives an overall risk assessment to the Council of one of four scores i.e. significant, of concern, moderate or minimal (see Overall Opinion section in the main report).

The auditor completing the review concluded that existing procedures needed to be improved to ensure that they are fully reliable. A number of significant recommendations have been made to improve missing or failing controls.

Standard Audit Opinions on System Control

Audit Opinion 1. *High standard*

The auditor completing the review concluded the significant system controls are in place and operating effectively and only minor recommendations have been made.

Audit Opinion 2. *Satisfactory standard*

The auditor completing the review concluded that most of the significant controls are in place and operating satisfactorily although some non-compliance was identified and therefore there is scope for improvement

Audit Opinion 3. *Significant improvements required*

The auditor completing the review concluded that existing procedures needed to be improved to ensure that they are fully reliable. A number of significant recommendations have been made to improve missing or failing controls.

Audit Opinion 4. *Fundamental weaknesses identified*

The auditor completing the review concluded that the matters arising from the review are sufficiently significant to place doubt on the reliability of the procedures reviewed. Implementation of the recommendations made is a priority to ensure that reliance can be placed on the system.

Acknowledgements**APPENDIX B**

Internal Audit would like to acknowledge and thank the following Officers who contributed to the review:

Name	Job title
Mike Ash	Head of Housing Services
Arlene Griffin	Housing Business Development Manager
Stuart Hook	Lead Housing Participation Officer
Shelley Slater	Housing Participation Officer