

**Management Update (June 2014)****Re. Tenancy Engagement Internal Audit report (Jan 2014)**

This report sets out the progress and actions taken following the Tenancy Engagement Internal audit report completed in Jan 2014.

The key risk areas as identified by the Audit are highlighted below with the actions and progress update from housing officers following.

***1. Risk: Lack of clear Tenant Participation objectives and a strategy to deliver them.***

Progress update: A report proposing a new strategy for Tenant Participation was discussed at Housing Advisory Forum (HAF) in October 2013. The tenants on HAF did not agree to the proposals in the report and the recommendation from the Advisory Panel was for officers and tenants to establish a working party to come up with an agreed way forward.

A series of meetings were subsequently set up with the tenant representatives from the Housing Advisory Forum. From these meetings there was a general consensus that the key priority is to develop a more local approach which also fits in with the Council's strategic objectives and the Localities agenda.

The two tenant groups of Swindon Tenant Voice (STV) and Tenants Association for Sheltered Housing (TASH) were encouraged to develop a more local theme at their meetings and to encourage local people to attend, specifically at STV meetings. Tenants of STV expressed an interest in leaflet drops and attending other local community forums to encourage new members. To date this has not yet been progressed by STV.

Officers have encouraged local membership by moving the meeting venues to community facilities within the council estates.

***2. Risk – Current approaches to Tenant Engagement do not provide Value for Money***

Progress update: A number of projects are underway that will ensure improved value for money.

These include the Housing Sounding Board which has almost 900 members and this has provided a cost effective means of being able to engage with tenants. It is used to both inform tenants and to seek tenants views, for example, a recent survey resulted in well over 100 responses. This is a much improved response on previous surveys.

Also of note is the development of a new Tenant Website, "Voice Your Views" which will be developed and managed by tenants. This will offer a new opportunity for local conversations with local tenants across a more diverse household type.

Finally, we have recently acquired a Tenant Engagement IT software upgrade as an additional module to the Housing system. This will enable information sharing between the Tenant Participation activities and all the other tenancy information held on the IT system.

This will ensure improved profiling of tenants who are and who are not engaged, enabling officers to target groups who are not represented or geographical areas that are not represented. Overall, a much more local picture of views and service needs will be developed and evidenced.

Officers are confident that this will support new opportunities in being able to involve the right people at the right time.

A satisfaction survey of tenants was recently conducted and the report will be finalised shortly. The draft report was presented to Housing Advisory Forum on 11<sup>th</sup> June.

Of the tenants who responded:

- i) 63% said *they were satisfied with opportunities for their views being taken into account*. This is up from previous surveys, 54% in 2008 and 49% in 2006.
- ii) 83% said *they were being informed by the Council as landlord*. This also shows an increase in previous satisfaction surveys of 13%.

These results will provide the basis for conducting an industry recognised benchmark exercise where the cost of Swindon's tenant engagement service can be compared to other social housing landlords. This will be a more accurate test of whether Value for Money is being achieved in Swindon.

### ***3. Risk: Current approaches to Tenant Engagement do not reflect best/current practice and the Council's localities agenda***

Swindon's Tenant Scrutiny Panel (TSP) continues to grow and a number of reviews of the Housing Service have been completed by the Panel. The recommendations of these reviews have been implemented which shows that the best practices of the co-regulation agenda and the Localism agenda are being followed. Several other social housing landlords are using Swindon's TSP as the best model to follow.

A Tenants Complaint Panel has also been established, a new initiative for Swindon and another step towards best practice.

The development of the Street Representative model in Penhill and the close links established with Locality colleagues including working collaboratively across projects demonstrates the commitment to the Council's localities agenda.

Officers are also currently looking at an incentive/reward scheme to encourage tenants to volunteer. This draft scheme will be presented to tenants for their input over the next month before final decision is made. The language officers are now using also reflects the whole push on volunteers and volunteering opportunities, as per the wider Council priority.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion there has been a lot of activity focussed on the priority of local representation. The projects which are in progress show clear contributions and links to the Council's Corporate Plan, specifically:

- Work with residents to create well cared for neighbourhoods
- Work with people and families to help them fulfil their potential
- Make best use of Swindon's resources inside and outside the Council

It is agreed that a written strategy will assist, however to make this relevant for tenants we are exploring a number of local pilots to make it more. It is the approach which has been agreed with tenants which is the key as this will determine how they can have their say and as there is an increasing proportion of tenants who feel they have an opportunity for their views to be taken into account then it is this which will lead to improved service delivery, including improved outcomes around value for money.