

Housing Scrutiny Board

29th September 2016

Update on Tenant Involvement

1 Purpose of Briefing Note

- 1.1 To update members on our tenant involvement framework, formal and informal structures.

2 Background

- 2.1 The tenant involvement framework was developed in consultation with tenant representatives through a workshop held in September 2015.
- 2.2 The framework has been developed in line with our statutory duties and legislative requirements in relation to tenant and customer involvement, as well as the requirements and expectations of the Localism Act 2011. i.e. Tenant Involvement and Empowerment standard.
- 2.3 There has been a change to the Community Development team and the four Community Involvement Officers who supported Housing Services have been deleted from the establishment. The monies saved by the deletion of the posts have been used to support local community development initiatives. Due to these changes we have introduced a tenant involvement framework that can be supported within current financial resources within the Neighbourhoods Directorate.
- 2.4 The support to Tenant and Resident Associations (TRAs), tenants and smaller community based groups is provided by Sandwell Community Information & Participation Services (SCIPS), a voluntary organisation. A Service Level Agreement is in place and funding of £150,000 per annum is provided. The key areas of the SLA are:
- To provide training for tenant led groups and organisations
 - To provide support for existing and new tenant led groups and organisations

- To provide development and capacity building to groups leading to local initiatives, especially provision of activities and services
- To support the independent contribution of tenant organisations and to enable effective consultation by SMBC and partners with tenant led groups and organisations
- To support tenant led groups and organisations to develop initiatives and to attract funding to deliver and sustain them

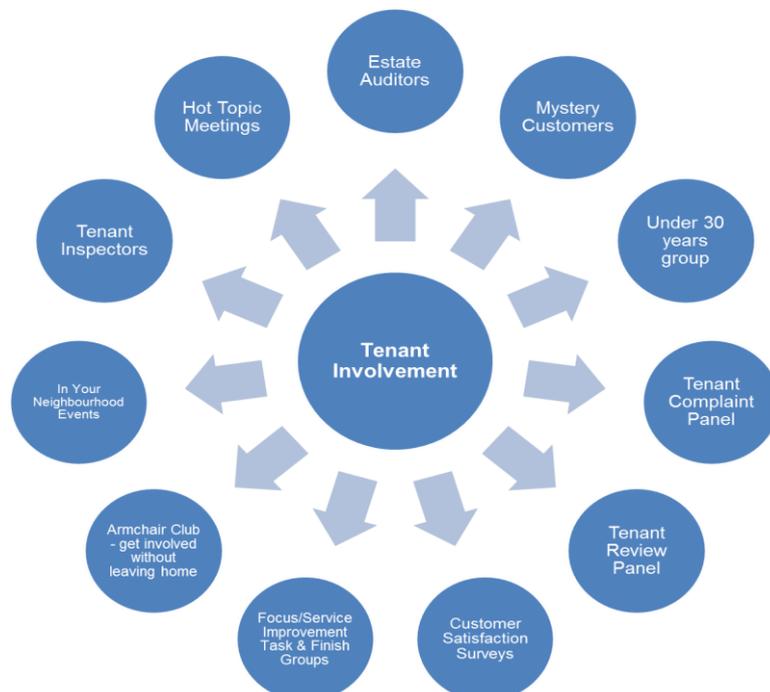
3. The Principles of good Tenant Involvement

3.1 Our customers are at the heart of everything that we do, and the tenant involvement framework that has been developed reflects this.

The principles of the framework are:

- To ensure customers are at the heart of the decision making process, able to influence and shape policy and services
- To meet statutory and regulatory requirements
- To provide a wide range of flexible involvement opportunities
- To help us understand the needs of our customers with diverse range of needs
- To increase efficiency and cost effectiveness
- To increase customer satisfaction
- To improve quality of service
- To provide resources to support and enable effective involvement
- To remove barriers to involvement to ensure all customers are involved –not just the “usual tenants”
- To be more accountable to our customers and stakeholders

4.0



Menu of Involvement

[ILO: UNCLASSIFIED]

4.1 **Formal Opportunities for Involvement**

Tenant Inspectors

Tenant Inspectors are volunteers who inspect our services by gaining an independent view and ensuring that there is a customer focus on monitoring services. Involvement may include face-to-face interviews with customers and staff, completing telephone surveys, desk top audits or mystery shopping. Inspections can take between 2 to 6 months depending on the nature of the service, with regular meetings during the process. The group have recently completed the repairs inspection in August 2016 and are starting two concurrent inspections of complaints and choice based lettings in September.

Tenant Complaint Panel

This is a small number of tenants that are invited to meet with officers on an ad-hoc basis to consider complaints and responses to them. Full training is provided. The panel meet when is required.

Tenant Review Panel

The Tenant Review Panel is made up of tenants and looks at issues relating to the Council's role as a landlord and provider of social housing. The Tenant Review Panel meet on a quarterly basis. This group last met in August and will next meet in November 2016. Some of the issues discussed: Channel Shift and the Council's approach, Star survey results, Tenant Assistance Scheme, Welfare Reform and Housing Act.

4.2 **Informal Opportunities for Involvement**

Mystery Customers

Mystery Customers are volunteers who monitor services provided by Neighbourhoods; they assess services wholly from the point of view of the customer and provide feedback about how they think services can be improved. Two sets of mystery shopping have been undertaken in July and August; the first in the local centres and the second is presently taking place with the Contact Centre.

Focus / Service Improvement Task and Finish Groups

Focus / Service Improvement Groups will meet to discuss one specific issue at a time; for example complaints, grounds maintenance or customer service. Customers who have expressed an interest of 'getting involved' will be invited to attend these meetings.

These groups have met three times to assess two of the three local standards and the tenant assistance scheme. One local standard (Home) is now live on the website. The second (Neighbourhood & Community) is in draft form and the third local standard (Tenant Involvement & Engagement) will be presented to the group later this month.

Under 30years group

Under 30years group members will work with Neighbourhoods to improve life skills and opportunities for employment, training and apprenticeships for young people. Officers who work closely with the house to home and motiv8 projects are prepared to share relevant consultation with the Facebook group where a topic requires consultation with this target group.

Estate Auditors

Estate Auditors are invited to walk around neighbourhoods with neighbourhood officers, colleagues and representatives from partner agencies. They will identify areas of concern, gather evidence and discuss options to resolve them. This may include quality of maintenance, cleansing and caretaking, grounds maintenance, fly tipping, litter, graffiti and vandalism. These groups are co-ordinated by each ward officer and all members of estate auditing groups are involved with an on-going cycle of visits to estate areas.

Armchair Club - get involved without leaving home

Customers who have expressed an interest of 'getting involved' will be invited to take part in completing customer satisfaction surveys by telephone, post, email, online or text message on a range of services that they are interested in. We will provide feedback on what improvements have been made as a result in our Homelife section of the Sandwell Herald. The armchair club have reviewed the first local standard (Home) and will be receiving the updated draft second local standard (Neighbourhood & Community) in September.

In Your Neighbourhood Events

In Your neighbourhood Events are a method of consultation with residents in each of the 24 Neighbourhood Wards. Residents are invited to complete a survey on priority issues; the feedback will be used by the Neighbourhood Services Managers and Local Councillors to develop Ward Pledges. These events were undertaken throughout the borough in 2015 and the list of members has been sent to local centres, to invite to the next cycle of events. These are currently under review.

Hot Topic Meetings

Hot Topic Meetings will be arranged with a group of customers who have expressed an interest to give their thoughts and opinions on things that might affect or do affect them. This could be rent arrears recovery, repairs, anti-social behaviour etc or service reviews. The group have met twice to discuss the tenant's assistance scheme and floorwalkers. The next session is due to take place in September and will focus on channel shift.

Customer Satisfaction Surveys

Neighbourhood services will contact customers to monitor customer satisfaction on a range of services we provide; the feedback will be used to help us to improve our services. This will include the annual housing survey. Customers who have expressed an interest of 'getting involved' will be invited to take part either by telephone, online, email, text message and post.

5.0 Future Proposals

The framework will be kept under review and developed to meet changing requirements. A key objective of the framework is to create opportunities for more customers to get involved in a way that suits their circumstances.

To do so we will:

- Increase options for customers to become informally involved in a way that suits them. This will be achieved through innovative, appealing and meaningful opportunities for customers of all ages, backgrounds and abilities.
- Create new options for consultation through social media.
- Communicate effectively and efficiently using the method preferred by each customer.
- It is important that engaged customers accurately reflect the diverse population in their local area. We will seek to actively engage more young customers and other under-represented groups.

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