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COMMITTEE: **JOINT HOUSING BOARD**

VENUE: **Council Chamber, Babergh District Council, Corks Lane, Hadleigh**

DATE: **Monday, 17 July 2017 at 2.15 pm**

Members

Babergh District Council:

Ms J Jenkins
Mr T Bavington
Ms J Osborne

Mid Suffolk District Council:

Mrs L M Mayes
Mr N Gowrley
Ms S Mansel

Tenants:

Mr M Berry
Mr R Chapman
Ms M Hilton
Mr S Phillips
Mr J Taylor
Mr K Wykes

A G E N D A

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PART I

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Agenda Item 3

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL AND MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of the **JOINT HOUSING BOARD** held at the Council Chamber, Mid Suffolk District Council Offices, 131 High Street, Needham Market, on Monday 19 June 2017 at 2.15pm.

PRESENT:

Councillors:

Mid Suffolk

Babergh

Nick Gowrley
Lesley Mayes
Sarah Mansel

Jenny Jenkins
Jan Osborne (Chairman)

Tenant Representatives

Keith Wykes
James Taylor

Michael Berry
Roger Chapman

In attendance:

Councillor Jill Wilshaw
Gavin Fisk – Corporate Manager - Income and Tenant Services
Kevin Jones – Interim Strategic Director
Sue Lister – Corporate Manager – Housing Options
Justin Wright-Newton – Corporate Manager – BMBS
Ian Winslet – Investment and Development Consultant
Ann Hunter – Improvement and Involvement Officer
Rob Carmichael – Governance Support Officer
Henriette Holloway – Governance Support Officer

19 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillor Tony Bavington and Tenant Representatives Maria Hilton and Steve Phillips.

20 **TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY OR NON PECUNIARY INTERESTS**

Councillors Nick Gowrley, Jenny Jenkins and Jan Osborne declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item JHB/17/5 on account of being Members of the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Districts Cabinets and agreed not to vote on this item.

21 **JHB/17/1 - TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 24 APRIL 2017**

Councillor Jan Osborne informed members that an email had been received from Councillor Tony Bavington regarding JHB/18/17, and he would like it noted that this Item was deferred so that the Rental Exchange could be discussed at the Tenant Forum.

RESOLUTION

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 April 2017 be confirmed as a correct record.

JHB/17/2 - COUNCIL HOUSING ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR POLICY

Gavin Fisk, Corporate Manager – Income and Tenant Services, introduced the Council Housing Anti - Social Behaviour Policy and outlined how the policy would come into effect for both Councils and would be replacing the previous out of date policies. There were three key principles to the policy:

- Self Service
- Transparency
- Focussed Resources

The new policies had taken into consideration the responses from the Tenant Consultation Events and feedback from the residents and were to be updated as work progressed. The Anti-Social Behaviour policy was intended to be a fluid document to be able to be innovative and supportive to tenants in relation to Anti-Social Behaviour.

Some Members were concerned about how communication was conducted with tenants, who had difficulties to communicate their complaint. The officer explained that the Councils as Landlords were interested in early intervention and would become involved as early as possible once a complaint had been received through any of the available communication channels.

Councillor Nick Gowrley asked clarification on Members' involvement in anti-social behaviour in the community. The Officer responded that the Members' roles would be to communicate the policy to tenants and to manage expectations. It was also important for Members to be involved in consultations and briefings. Similarly, Tenant Representative could provide friendly critical information and skills which could support the tenants.

The policy aimed to clarify areas in which the Councils would not become involved in Anti-social behaviour complaints, but it was recognised that some consideration had to be made with regards to safeguarding in the community. Communication was still considered the best form of prevention.

Some Members felt that it was difficult for the Board to agree to an implementation of a policy, which had areas that had yet to be developed.

Councillor Jan Osborne proposed that a change to the recommendation should be made.

By a unanimous vote

RESOLUTION

To agree implementation of the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy in principle and any associated procedures subject to an update from Report Authors to be provided at a

future meeting

23 **JHB/17/3 - UPDATE ON TENANT SCRUTINY REPORT ON VOID MANAGEMENT**

Sue Lister, Corporate Manager - Housing Options, provided an update on Tenant Scrutiny on VOID Management based on a review conducted by Officers, which had generated an action plan. Babergh and Mid Suffolk Building Services (BMBS) had changed the way VOIDS were managed and its effect on VOIDS would be reviewed regularly to assess the performance.

In response to questions from Members, it had not been possible to compare performance measures and management of VOIDS with other councils. Work was being undertaken with Suffolk County Council on how to improve and manage VOIDS and currently Officers were concentrating on improving performances in the Districts. One way forward was to develop a pre-VOID service to shorten the length of time of repair once the property was vacated.

Tennant Representative Roger Chapman asked if benchmarking from other councils could be used for comparison for Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council. Officers responded that the Councils no longer used HouseMark data but relied on local information to create realistic performance indicators. A Performance Indicator Report was due at the next Joint Housing Board Meeting in July.

By a unanimous vote.

RESOLUTION

That the updated action plan be noted.

24 **FIXED TERM (FLEXIBLE) TENANCIES - VERBAL REPORT**

Sue Lister, Corporate Manager – Housing Options, gave a verbal update on Fixed (flexible) Tenancies and Secure Tenancies, outlining to Members how they operated across the Councils.

It was pointed out to Members that The Secure Tenancy could only be terminated by the Council by a court order and only if the tenancy conditions had been broken or in circumstances such as redevelopment. The Fixed Tenancies were for a minimum period of two years and had the same tenancy rights as Secure Tenancies, the exception being that Fixed Tenancies also had the additional rights to improve, be compensated for improvements and to buy their properties.

The recent Housing and Planning Act 2016 had made provisions for preventing local authorities in England from offering secure tenancies in most circumstances, and it was expected that the Government would approve the necessary regulation later this year to confirm these provisions. This would have consequences for the current Flexible Tenancies and would require:

- A new tenancy agreement
- Amendment to IT Software
- Updated tenancy policy to take account of government regulations
- New processes for carrying out reviews during the fixed term and at the end of the tenancy.

RESOLUTION

That the verbal report be noted.

25 **JHB/17/4 - UPDATE ON BMBS BUSINESS PLAN AND IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS**

Justin Wright-Newton, Corporate Manager - BMBS, introduced the report and the tabled paper. He updated Members on the development and status of BMBS, and said that in the beginning the focus had been on recruiting local people and apprentices, as well as looking for local vehicle suppliers. He continued by updating Members on:

- The development of diagnostic tools
- Providing additional support to call centre staff
- Improving mobile working technology, which would reduce the service's carbon footprint and increase efficiency.
- A training plan was being brought forward to all operational teams and team leaders to develop the service.
- A review was being carried out of the original business plan and an improved version was currently being drawn up.
- New scheduling software was to be introduced as well as a SMS Text Messaging service to remind tenants of appointments to reduce the numbers of inaccessible properties.
- The depot was to moving to Creeping Road, Stowmarket, later in the year.

Tenant Representative Roger Chapman raised concerns about the Customer Service number, as some tenants had found it difficult to get through to BMBS. He also pointed out that some residents were unable to use computers and could therefore not complete e-forms. Officers responded that the service had experienced some problems in April but staff was now fully trained to deal with the needs of the tenants contacting BMBS. An automated response email was also to be set up to acknowledge receipt of e-mails, so tenants knew that their requests had been received.

The Corporate Manager - BMBS enquired if a working group could be set up, consisting of Members and Tenants, to provide a steer for BMBS. Members felt that this could provide an opportunity to identify the areas most needed to be addressed.

Councillor Nick Gowrley proposed and Tenant Representative Michael Berry seconded the motion that a working group be set-up to provide a steer for BMBS.

By a unanimous vote

RESOLUTION

That the Update on the BMBS business plan and integration programme be noted

RESOLUTION

That a working group consisting of Members and Tenants be set-up to provide a steer for BMBS

26 **JHB/17/5 - JOINT HOUSING BOARD FORWARD WORK PLAN**

RESOLUTION

The Forward Plan be noted.

27 **MOS/17/4 AND BOS/17/4 - THE HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT 30 YEAR BUSINESS AND FINANCIAL PLAN UPDATE 2017**

Kevin Jones, Interim Strategic Director, presented the report and outlined the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan to the Board which explained the financial situation of the HRA and the possibility of the Debt Cap being breached in 8 to 9 years. The 30 Year Plan outlined the strategy for the efficiency savings to prevent this. The Plan was a living document and would be monitored annually to ensure it was still fit for purpose

In response to members questions the Interim Strategic Director, said that the dates outlined in the Appendix A were target completion dates and that the funds in both HRA Accounts were ring fenced and could not be shared with any other budgets.

As the Babergh District Members had agreed not to vote on this item the meeting was not in quorate and no vote was taken

The Report was noted and comments will be forwarded to Cabinet.

28 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS RELATING TO JOINT HOUSING BOARD**

Councillor Jan Osborne informed Members that she had received an email from Liz Perryman, Chairman of the Tenants' Forum referring to five complaints received in connection with the Rental Exchange scheme. The e-mail would be forwarded to

Members upon request.

Gavin Frisk – Corporate Manager Income and Tenant Services, informed Members that in the wake of the Grenfell Tower Fire he would like to assure Members that a Fire Risk Assessment of the housing stock was already underway, in line with the request received from the Government.

Gavin Fisk, also requested that a room be booked for the Tenants' Representatives to hold their pre-meeting before the Joint Housing Board. Ann Hunter – Improvement and Involvement Officer to book the rooms.

The Business of the meeting concluded at 15.40.

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Chairman

Agenda Item 4

BABERGH & MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCILS

From: Improvement & Involvement Officer	Report Number: JHB17/6
To: Joint Housing Board	Date of meeting: 17th July 2017

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS FOR SUPPORTED LIVING (2016/17)

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide the Joint Housing Board with a report on current performance in delivering the key outcomes in Supported Living

2. Recommendation

That the Supported Living performance report and the performance outcome information attached as Appendices A and B be noted

3. Key Information

- 3.1 The Supported Living performance information for this report evidences key achievements and the impacts they are having. Examples include:
 - Housing Delivery: Building **65 new council** homes by 2018, to date 12 at Babergh and 17 in Mid Suffolk. This is part of our aim to increase the number of new homes built of the right type and in the right place to meet the needs of our diverse communities.
 - Financial Inclusion: Our financial inclusion officers support some of our most vulnerable tenants with maintaining their tenancies and helping them to stay in their homes. Since April 2016 over 200 families and individuals have been supported and 13 evictions have been prevented saving the £91k to the councils.
 - Rent collection: We have collected 98.39% or £15.32m of council house rent in Babergh and 97.92% or £15.18m in Mid Suffolk.
 - We have brought 111 empty homes back into use which have been empty for more than two years.
- 3.2 Overall, good progress is being made across most areas. Ongoing, the Portfolio Holders and Assistant Director for Supported Living will continue to refine the indicators and performance information to ensure it gives improved real time insight into progress towards outcomes.

- 3.3 The Assistant Director will continue to develop targets and use additional trend information in future reports to provide an improving sense of progress. Our outcome performance culture will also continue to be embedded through ongoing performance conversations facilitating better decision making, service improvement and community involvement.
- 3.4 Appendices A and B provide quarterly performance information for 2016/17. As background information to this report, they contain populated tracking indicators with associated influencing indicators and, where available, a range of trends providing an 'at a glance' view.
- 3.5 Operational performance information, for each quarter of 2016/17, is available as 'Facts and Stats' on our website.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 There are no immediate financial impacts arising from this report.

5. Legal Implications

- 5.1 There are no immediate legal implications arising from this report.

6. Risk Management

- 6.1 Key risks are set out below:

Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation Measures
Without an effective performance framework, it is unlikely that the Council will deliver its priorities and outcomes and achieve value for money.	Unlikely (2)	Bad (3)	The new framework is intrinsically linked to our risk management strategy, creating an approach where it is clearly understood what is stopping us performing effectively and ensuring remedial actions are in place.

7. Consultations

- 7.1 Officers and Councillors have developed and refined the outcome performance framework through discussions at Portfolio Holder Briefings, and Administration Cabinet meetings and the Strategy committee.

8. Equality Analysis

- 8.1 There are no equality and diversity implications arising from this report.

9. Shared Service / Partnership Implications

9.1 Our performance approach is designed to measure the impact of our key collaborative activity in the wider Suffolk system and with our businesses and other partners.

10. Links to Joint Strategic Plan (JSP)

10.1 Effective performance management enables our Officers, Councillors and Communities to track progress against the delivery of Supported Living services to understand key risks, and to share in the celebration of our achievements and the contribution toward delivering on the JSP outcomes.

11. Outcome Performance Reporting

11.1 Appendices A and B present our position using tracking (lagging) and influencing (leading) indicators. They set a baseline upon which future reports will track our progress and trends. This is a new approach to data collection and consequently in some cases gaps still need to be filled and targets identified.

11.2 As a reminder, a tracking indicator helps us to monitor progress towards our desired outcomes. Through selecting what is important to us, they provide us with a data snapshot that we can track. A number of activities are identified and measured that will influence this tracking indicator and these are called the influencing indicators. If we identify these correctly they will help us to achieve better results and ultimately deliver our outcomes.

11.3 Work is underway to review the targets and to further expand the suite of measures.

12. Appendices

Title	Location
HD Performance 16/17	Appendix A
Draft HD within A&I Performance 16/17	Appendix B

Author: Ann Hunter, Improvement & Involvement Officer
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Make best use of our existing Housing Assets - (Supporting Housing)

Work with tenants to agree the best way to deliver property services across our own housing, to make sure we are efficient and cost effective in our delivery and commercial in our approach

Ensure the ways we manage the Councils' assets helps to free-up finances to reinvest in new affordable homes

Tracking Indicator	Linked to	2016/17				Target	Trend	Council	Comment / How does this compare to the Suffolk-wide/National picture?	Why is this indicator important?	
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4						
T1. No. of unlicensed Houses in Multiple Occupation identified within the districts				0	0	Decrease number	N/A	BDC		We work hard to identify HMOs to ensure they meet standards in fire safety and amenities and are adequately managed.	
				0	0	Decrease number	N/A	MSDC			
T2. No. of properties empty, in excess of two years, brought back into use				52	64	Increase number		BDC		By increasing the number of homes available in our Districts, we are contributing to a flourishing housing market offering a good range of quality housing.	
				38	47	Increase number		MSDC			
T3. No. of households placed in Bed and Breakfast				20	24	Reduce number		BDC		We want to reduce homelessness in our Districts. Tackling homelessness is not just about getting people off the streets. It's also about finding lasting solutions to stop people from becoming homeless in the first place.	
				5	12			10			17
T4. Expenditure on Bed and Breakfast				£20,288	£34,210	£30,073	*Avail' May/Jun17	Decrease		BDC	Tracking expenditure will enable us to see the resources spent on B&B accommodation. *Invoices received from B&Bs typically fall one quarter behind.

		£3,290	£10,379	£9,720	*Avail' May/Jun1 7	expenditure		MSDC		
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Influencing Indicator	Linked to	2016/17				Target	Trend	Council	Comment / How does this compare to the Suffolk-wide/National picture?	Why is this indicator important?
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4					
I1. No. of inspections of flats above businesses				87	Awaiting data	Increase number	N/A	BDC		This project identifies fire hazards and HMO's.
				97	Awaiting data		N/A			
I2. No. of notices served on hazardous premises				0	0	Increase number	N/A	BDC		We want to improve the health and wellbeing of private sector tenants by ensuring they live in the right conditions.
				0	0					
I3. No. of disabled adaptations in council stock				13	9			BDC		We aim to enable customers to continue to live independently in their own homes. This is done by providing equipment and making modifications in our customers' homes that meet their needs.
				7	12					
I4. No. of disabled facilities grants				37	44	Increase number		BDC		We aim to enable customers to continue to live independently in their own homes. This is done by providing equipment and making modifications in our customers' homes that meet their needs.
				31	46					
I5. No. of empty home owners contacted				50		Increase number	annual figure	BDC		By increasing the number of homes available in our Districts, we are contributing to a flourishing housing market offering a good range of quality housing.
				50						

16. No. of Compulsory Purchase Orders					0	Increase number	N/A	BDC		By increasing the number of homes available in our Districts, we are contributing to a flourishing housing market offering a good range of quality housing.
					0					
17. No. of temporary accommodation units at our disposal (exc. Bed and Breakfast)		27	27	32	32	Increase number		BDC		By monitoring the number of units, we are able to seek alternative temporary accommodation solutions when necessary.
		10	10	10	14			MSDC		
18. No. of households for whom homelessness was prevented via the private rented sector		11	6	8	2	Increase		BDC		We want to make greater use of the private sector to provide housing for homeless households rather than see temporary accommodation used. This offers a long-term solution to households.
		0	1	2	3			MSDC		
19. Average time to turn around an empty council property (VOID)		24	25	26	36	28 days		BDC		By tracking our performance on the days to turn around a VOID property, we can ensure the most cost effective and efficient processes are used.
		35	36	35	35	28 days		MSDC		

I10. Amount of energy generated by Solar PV panels installed on council property roofs					Housing Stock - 3,707,349kW ----- Sheltered Stock - 312,186kW	N/A	BDC	* Amounts shown measured February 2017	The Solar PV project helps us to work with our communities to tackle fuel poverty and raise revenue for our local authorities.
					Housing Stock - 3,173,864kW ----- Sheltered Stock - 195,418kW	N/A	MSDC		

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JSP Homes for ageing population

We will review our own sheltered housing stock to understand how current provision needs to change to meet future needs
Understand the needs for different types of accommodation - care homes, supported housing, lifetime homes, special needs accommodation - and support their delivery

Tracking Indicator	Linked to	2016/17				Target	Trend	Council	Comment / How does this compare to the Suffolk-wide/National picture?	Why is this indicator important?
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4					
T1. The 2017 Strategic Housing Market Assessment (awaiting publication date) contains evidence of housing need for an ageing population. A suitable tracking indicator will be derived asap in collaboration with HRA and Housing Enabling teams.							BDC		With a large predicted rise in older aged households, many of whom will live alone, understanding the <u>housing and health needs</u> of this group will enable the wider Suffolk system (ACS /Public Health / NHS / Housing Authorities) to create solutions together by making best use of combined assets and resources, placing less strain on care and health budgets – and significantly enhancing the quality of life in older age.	
						MSDC				

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Assets & Investments Theme (Housing Delivery)

JSP: Manage our housing assets effectively

We will need to transform our approach to our tenants and housing stock to manage within reducing resources
 We are investigating and will implement short-term improvements in efficiency and effectiveness of the current housing management arrangements
 We will explore longer-term options for making best use of our housing assets
 We will seek to reduce our carbon footprint and make our housing sustainable

Tracking Indicator	Linked to	2016/17				Target	Trend	Council	Comment / How does this compare to the Suffolk-wide/National picture?	Why is this indicator important?
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4					
T1. Headroom within Housing Revenue Accounts	11				£13.1m	On track	N/A	BDC		We want to have robust Housing Revenue Account Business Plans, that are reviewed annually. This offers Members and Tenants peace of mind that we are compliant with HRA regulation in relation to accounting, rents and treasury management.
					£4.1m	Increase headroom	N/A	MSDC		
T2. Acquisitions - houses/s acquired for the HRA					13 (£2,349,669)	On track	N/A	BDC		We need to demonstrate that we are using the RTB Receipts wisely and for the benefit of the community on an annual basis and in total to prevent having to return the unspent funds to the Government.
					19 (£3,200,379)	On track	N/A	MSDC		
T3. New build - houses built for HRA					12	65 across the two districts (by 2018)	N/A	BDC		Affordable Homes Programme Remaining units to be completed 2017-18.
					17		N/A	MSDC		
T4. Surplus generated by in house trades team (BMBS) Babergh Midsuffolk Building Service					new wef 2017		N/A	BDC	Track from April 2017	This measure will monitor inputs, outputs, expenditure and potential income generation to inform future business decisions (JSP tile 'Managing our Housing Assets Effectively').
					new wef 2017		N/A	MSDC	Track from April 2017	

Influencing Indicator	Linked to	2016/17				Target	Trend	Council	Comment / How does this compare to the Suffolk-wide/National picture?	12. Why is this indicator important?
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4					
I1. Capital generated by sale of non-viable housing stock	T1				£624,500	Increase number	N/A	BDC		By disposing of our non-viable housing stock, we can reinvest capital into building homes in the right places for the right needs.
					£781,000					
I2. No. of people assisted by Financial Inclusion team	T2	72	47	43	67	Increase number annually		BDC	229 cumulative.	Increasing financial inclusion benefits our wider communities and impacts positively on our districts' economies. We have decreased debt and its effects by helping tenants claim £33k more in benefit entitlement and averted 13 evictions; helped people gain skills and confidence to manage household budgets via 1:2:1 income / outgoings planning; and improved employability skills by signposting tenants to relevant agencies /on-line support.
		19	21	18	21					
I3. % of calls passed on to housing team by contact centre					2% (784)		N/A	*Both		Supports 'no wrong door' policy by demonstrating the majority of customers are being dealt with at first point of contact i.e. the contact centre. * System does not allow for individual reporting.
I4. Housing Revenue Account Capital programme expenditure (£,000's)		£379k	£563k	£971k	available May/Jun 17			BDC		Robust stock condition data enables the Councils to plan and to budget for the capital work required to maintain the housing stock in a reasonable and lettable condition. Accurate data provides confidence that HRA funds are spent on the right work and in the right places.
		£488k	£245k	£448k	available May/Jun 17					
I5. Productivity: average jobs per day completed	T4				new wef 2017		N/A	BDC	Tracking from April 2017	Target; to improve levels of output and performance and increase income generation. This measure will enable BMBS to investigate and implement improvements in efficiency and effectiveness of housing management arrangements.

16. Attendance at toolbox talks Babergh Midsuffolk Building Service (BMBS)	T4				new wef 2017		N/A	BDC	Tracking from April 2017	‘Toolbox’ is a staff / operative forum to keep staff informed on a timely basis. Measuring staff involvement and engagement will identify further development needs for the service and will enable BMBS to effectively and efficiently contribute toward transforming our approach to our tenants and housing stock, whilst managing within reducing resources.
					new wef 2017		N/A	MSDC		

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FINAL REPORT Review of resident involvement structures Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils

JULY 2017

Strictly private and confidential



The Housing Quality Network
Fast practical guidance on everything to do with housing.



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For everyone working in neighbourhood, tenancy and estate management.



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Asset management, repairs and maintenance, and environmental issues.



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Promoting and supporting excellence in health and safety in the housing sector.



The Housing Finance Excellence Network
Supports excellence in financial and business management arrangements.



The Leasehold Excellence Network
Helps drive up service quality, performance and leaseholder satisfaction.



The Rent and Income Excellence Network
Help housing providers maximise



The Residents' Network
The best place to keep up to date with co-regulation.



The Strategic Excellence Network
A resource for everyone with an interest in policy and strategy.

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1. Introduction

HQN was commissioned by Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils in October 2016 to review the Councils' resident involvement structures, assess their effectiveness and advise on any changes that might be necessary.

HQN is a well-established company with a focus on helping providers to understand the needs and aspirations of their customers and communities, to assess their performance in meeting these and to improve their services in cost effective ways. Residents have always been at the centre of our work and we have ready access to a wealth of good practice – over 600 organisations – through our Housing Quality Network membership as well as our specialist networks. Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils are members of The Residents' Network, which has been set up especially for residents and staff involved in co-regulation and which has a bank of best practice to draw on. HQN has developed an accreditation specifically for resident involvement which gives us access to the best in class. Our directors and associate consultants have between them unrivalled experience and understanding of social housing and effective resident engagement and this expertise has informed the review.

The work was conducted by Sue Farrant in February and March 2017 and consisted of a desk-top review of documents and a series of interviews with involved residents, Council officers and key councillors. The information collected has been used to inform this report. Sue is a long-standing HQN associate, specialising in resident involvement, scrutiny and meeting regulatory requirements. She has worked previously with Babergh and Mid Suffolk.

2. Background

Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils began a programme of integration and transformation with the appointment of a joint Chief Executive in 2012. Landlord services are delivered across both Councils by a single Supported Living service, although the two Housing Revenue Accounts have remained separate and each Council has its own governance structures.

The Councils together have some 7,000 homes of which nearly all are tenanted; there are just 150 leaseholders. Babergh and Mid Suffolk Districts cover 540 square miles and their stock is spread across a wide, mainly rural, area.

The transformation plan is still being rolled out and the Councils have voted to move to an Executive and Cabinet governance model in May 2017. There is also to be a relocation of offices to a single headquarters in Endeavour House, Ipswich, probably in the autumn of 2017 and this will mean a change in customer access arrangements. The Joint Strategic Plan 2016-20 refers to the Councils seeking better ways to deliver services, more efficient public access arrangements and better use of digital technology. This includes installing a Customer Response Management System which will enable the Contact Centre to resolve enquiries at the first point of contact and co-ordinate information about tenants and leaseholders so service provision can be better targeted.

It is against this background of change and development that the Councils decided to review the ways in which they engage with their tenants and leaseholders. There was concern that structures had not necessarily kept pace with the needs and preferences of residents and that the relatively small number of involved tenants (there are currently no involved leaseholders) was not representative of the wider customer base.

As registered providers, Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils are subject to regulation and required to comply with the four consumer standards of the current Regulatory Framework. The review took into consideration the required outcomes and specific expectations of the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard.

3. Summary of key findings

The key findings of the review of resident involvement are summarised in this section.

3.1. There is a lack of strategic influence with defined objectives for resident involvement

All the individual councillors and officers¹ who contributed to this review were strongly committed to the principle of involving tenants and leaseholders in decisions being made about the housing service. Nonetheless, interviewees were not able to articulate a consistent vision of the Councils' objectives and intended outcomes and HQN was told that other officers and councillors failed to see the point of resident involvement.

There are no formal links between involvement and the Joint Strategic Plan 2016-20 or the HRA Business plans. Without resident involvement being embedded into housing service design and delivery, officers working in the service area are likely to feel marginalised, residents are likely to feel their contribution is not valued and the Councils are missing the opportunity to match services to residents' needs and preferences.

One consequence of the lack of strategic direction is that the development of engagement activities in Babergh and Mid Suffolk has been ad hoc. There is a reliance on formal structures and meetings with limited routes for customers to engage with their landlord in less formal ways, even if only to express an opinion on a service received. There is no systematic capturing of customer insight; customer satisfaction surveys were carried out by Feedback Services in 2014 and the Councils have recently introduced a survey to assess customers' satisfaction at the end of the complaints process but there are no other mechanisms in place.

HQN's experience suggests that a strategic approach which is understood and shared by councillors, officers and residents is fundamental to providing housing services shaped by tenants' and leaseholders' priorities. At a time when local authority budgets are being squeezed ever harder and the HRA is expected to deliver maximum value for money, working with residents to understand their aspirations, share information and take account of different opinions has never been more important. In Babergh and Mid Suffolk, the

¹ The term officers is used throughout this report to mean Council staff at all levels.

integration of service delivery and the disparity between the two HRAs, adds further complexity and the Councillors and officers need to be able to make decisions with as much information as possible.

3.2. The service cannot demonstrate that its involvement activities are delivering value for money

Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils employ an Improvement and Involvement Officer (Housing) whose role includes supporting resident involvement groups and events. That Officer reports to a Corporate Manager (Housing) whose responsibilities include Resident Involvement. The involvement budget was £64,300 in 2016-17 but was underspent. It was reduced to £25,575 in 2017-18 (excluding officer salaries) as the Councils sought savings and efficiencies. This is approximately £3.58 per tenant.

To assess value for money, the budget and staff resource need to be measured against achieving defined outcomes. The time given by volunteers is also a very important resource and they need to know that they are making a difference just as much as tenants and leaseholders and Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils need to know if resident involvement is delivering value for money. There is no impact assessment in place at present and so it is not possible to know if scarce resources are being used effectively.

The numbers of actively involved residents are low. Despite energetic attempts at recruitment backed up with imaginatively designed materials, Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils have struggled to get tenants interested in joining involvement groups. It has been even more difficult to engage with the very small number of leaseholders and none are currently on any of the groups. Participants in this project were asked what they thought was the reason and in summary, officers and Members thought it was because people were generally satisfied with their Council landlord. The involved tenants, on the other hand, talked about apathy, unwillingness to volunteer, reluctance to attend meetings and reluctance to travel.

The 2014 Feedback survey results should have caused some concern on two important engagement indicators. Only just over half (57%) of Babergh tenants said they were satisfied with involvement opportunities whilst 37% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Although satisfaction with involvement opportunities amongst Mid Suffolk tenants was higher, it was still only 65%, with just under one in three people (30%) saying they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

The 2014 survey found that approximately 80% of Babergh and Mid Suffolk and tenants were satisfied with the way their landlord kept them informed but compared with the 2008 responses, satisfaction with the way their landlord listened to their views and acted upon them had fallen, especially in Mid Suffolk. The figures were:

- In 2014, 58% of Babergh tenants were satisfied with the way their landlord listened to views and acted upon them; in 2008, the figure was 76%
- In 2014, 58% of Mid Suffolk tenants were satisfied with the way their landlord listened to views and acted upon them; in 2008, the figure was 69%

- This put both Councils 11% below the 2014 HouseMark average and into the bottom quartile on this measure. There does not appear to have been any attempt to explore the reasons behind the fall in satisfaction and the opportunity to find out more about tenants' expectations and engagement preferences was missed.

Participants in the HQN project expressed concern not only about the small number of involved residents but also about the limited range of people who were currently engaged. There is no formal profiling of involved residents as compared with the total tenant and leaseholder population but tenants, officers and councillors agreed that they were not representative; in particular, younger tenants are largely absent and there are no involved leaseholders.

The exception to this picture is the team of seven mystery shoppers recruited in 2016, all of whom were new to involvement with Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils. Although the incentive payable for each 'shop' might be a factor, the Joint Housing Board members also get a payment for attending meetings and that has not encouraged many people to stand for election. Perhaps the difference is that mystery shopping can be done in their own time and from their own homes. Further insight into the reasons these residents chose to become actively involved may assist in informing future engagement routes.

3.3. The resident involvement service is marginalised

Resident involvement is not mainstreamed within the Councils. There is, for example, no apparent involvement of officers from other customer-facing teams in identifying residents who might be encouraged to get involved. Housing Officers, the Tenancy Support Team, Surveyors and contact centre staff all have frequent, one-to-one interactions with the Councils' residents and would be well placed to 'talent spot'.

Conversely, there is scope for the Involvement and Improvement Officer to contribute to the work of other teams and help deliver an excellent service. For example, where the Officer has developed a relationship with an individual resident and has knowledge of their circumstances, they might be able to assist another team or another officer to manage issues involving that person.

Having a dedicated officer risks resident involvement being seen as something that is marginal to the 'real' business of housing management and outside the responsibility of other officers. Equally, there is a risk that the skills and knowledge of the involvement specialist are not integrated into the delivery of other services.

3.4. Involvement structures are not serving the Councils or their residents

Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils offer a range of involvement opportunities with very limited take-up. The two principal involvement bodies at present are the Joint Housing Board and The Babergh and Mid Suffolk Tenants' Forum. Both have formal structures and rely on residents attending meetings. The tenants who attend are undoubtedly dedicated and give up much of their time but there is little evidence of impact and there is genuine concern about the Councils having access to the views of only a very small number of people.

An assessment of the current structures is in section 3 of this report.

There is no use of social media and other digital options by the Councils and most of the involved tenants who participated in this project were unenthusiastic about using IT for engagement.

The 2014 Feedback survey found that 50% of Babergh tenants and 47% of Mid Suffolk tenants had internet access at home or outside their home. Of Babergh leaseholders, 68% had internet access in or outside their home. (There does not appear to be data for Mid Suffolk leaseholders). Nationally, 80% of all households report having internet access at home so the survey suggests that connectivity is well below the national average. HQN considers, however, that there is probably under-accounting because of the way the question was framed and that it is likely that many more tenants and leaseholders have smart phones and use them routinely to access a variety of applications without thinking that this constitutes internet access.

Finding methods to engage more tenants and leaseholders in total and to broaden the engagement base was seen as essential by all participants in the HQN study.

3.5. Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils are not fully compliant with the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment standard

There is no tenant scrutiny of the housing service and no rigorous customer-led challenge, both of which are integral to the current regulatory framework.

The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment standard requires providers to give their tenants a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in:

- Formulating policy and strategic priorities
- Decision-making about service delivery and service standards, including local offers
- Scrutiny of performance and making recommendations for improvement.

Providers should also provide support to tenants to build their capacity to be more effectively involved.

The standard specifies information that landlords should provide to tenants, including:

- The landlord's performance against the standards
- Timely and relevant performance information to support effective scrutiny by tenants, in a form agreed with tenants
- An annual report, including information on repair and maintenance budgets
- How complaints are used to improve services and the number, nature and outcome of complaints (to be published annually)

- Arrangements for tenant involvement and scrutiny.

In 2015, Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils put a great deal of effort and resource into recruiting, selecting and training a Tenant Scrutiny Panel. Three tenants completed the training and their first scrutiny, of voids, was well-received with all their recommendations being accepted. Unfortunately, two of the members have since stepped down for personal reasons and the Panel is in abeyance.

Communication and information to tenants and leaseholders is largely through 'News and Views', a newsletter for which is posted out twice a year; until 2016-17, it was a quarterly publication. The first inside page carries articles by the Chair of the Forum and the Chair of the Joint Housing Board about the work of those groups. Contact names and details of tenant representatives are at the end of the newsletter. There is no performance information reported regularly to customers within the newsletter.

The Councils have ceased producing an annual report to tenants.

Although there are Corporate reports giving data on complaints and compliments on the website and the reports include some examples of learning, there does appear to be anything more detailed provided to tenants specifically on housing complaints.

Involving residents in the complaints process is considered best practice in the sector but does not happen in Babergh and Mid-Suffolk Councils. There is a two-stage process that begins with a Corporate Manager (Housing) dealing with the complaint and if the complainant is not satisfied, it passes to the Council's Corporate Complaints Officer at stage two. The next stage is the Ombudsman. There is no opportunity for residents to be part of a housing complaints review process so they can give the customer perspective on the issues that are driving satisfaction. This is a missed opportunity for the Councils, as involvement in the complaints process plays a significant part in setting the tone of relationships with residents.

Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils do provide support for capacity building. There is a training budget for residents, in 2017-18 it is set at £3,000, and the Councils pay membership subscriptions to The Residents' Network and Chartered Institute of Housing. Training has been commissioned from HQN, Havebury Housing and a digital training provider. Although training is available, in general take-up is low.

Involvement opportunities are promoted on the website, in News and Views and in a Welcome pack. The latter is imaginatively designed and provides user-friendly information, including the amount of time needed for each type of involvement. The pack is sent to new tenants four to six weeks after they move in, with a Freepost response card and a covering letter from the Improvement and Involvement Officer.

4. Assessment of current involvement opportunities

This section of the report assesses each of the involvement activities offered to Babergh and Mid Suffolk tenants and leaseholders.

Involvement opportunity	Role	Assessment
Joint Housing board (JHB)	<p>Approved by councillors in 2012, the first tenant/leaseholder elections to the JHB were in 2013.</p> <p>The JHB's purpose is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To review policy on any aspect of the landlord function ▪ To be consulted on and then advise and make recommendations to Strategy and Executive Committees on financial matters relating to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) ▪ Support the active involvement of tenants and leaseholders in the process of decision 	<p>The JHB has comprehensive Terms of Reference and Constitution agreed in December 2014 (and in need of updating to remove references to the Tenant Services Authority).</p> <p>The interviews demonstrated a lack of understanding amongst board members of the role and functions of the JHB as set out in the terms of reference.</p> <p>There is no leaseholder on the JHB. Of the six tenant members, only two have been elected following a contest and the rest were elected unopposed in the absence of any other nominations. The apparent difficulty in finding residents willing to stand for election to the board is perhaps related to the fact that there is no mechanism for the members to report back to their electorate or for the tenants/leaseholders in the electoral areas to contribute their views or ideas. The Forum Chair writes a short article in 'News and Views', the newsletter sent to all tenants and leaseholders, but there is no other feedback and no use of informal methods of communication with tenants/leaseholders, eg, via Facebook.</p> <p>The JHB meetings are supported by the Councils' Committee Services team. There is a monthly work plan which determines the agenda but board members commented that items were often withdrawn from the plan, reports to JHB were insubstantial and there was usually little or no discussion. Councillors and officers felt that tenant members made little contribution despite encouragement. The single exception cited was a recent discussion</p>

Involvement opportunity	Role	Assessment
	<p>making on housing (HRA) related matters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a means of improving delivery of the housing service. <p>Each Council nominates three Councillors to the board and the six tenant/leaseholder members are elected for a four-year term on the same cycle as District Council elections. There are six 'electoral areas' for the tenant/leaseholder members, with one candidate being elected from each area by postal ballot of other tenants/leaseholders in the area.</p> <p>The Chair is decided annually by the board and the position alternates between a Councillor and a tenant/leaseholder.</p>	<p>about a rent policy matter in which tenant members engaged actively, presenting a different perspective which resulted in the proposal being sent back for further consideration.</p> <p>Meetings are scheduled to be held monthly, except in August, but in 2016 four meetings were cancelled.</p> <p>The JHB budget for 2016-2017 is £6,500. That figure covers the allowances given to tenant members (a payment of just under £50 is made for each meeting attended up to a maximum of £500 a year), membership of CIH and election costs. Officer time, travel expenses and training costs are not included in that budget.</p> <p>There was little evidence of the tenant members being fully and constructively engaged in the work of the board. The views expressed by the tenant members included complaints that information was withheld from them, they had no input into the agenda, no training had been provided and that the tenants were not considered of equal value and status on the board.</p> <p>On the other hand, Officers and councillors expressed concern about the lack of input from the tenant members to discussions, commenting that some rarely, if ever, spoke at meetings. There was concern that very few tenants or leaseholders put themselves forward for board membership and as a result the members elected were not necessarily those best suited to the job.</p> <p>There is no monitoring of the impact of the JHB. When asked about its achievements most people (JHB members and others) struggled to find an answer, with the single exception of the policy proposal referred to above. There was a widespread perception (within and beyond the JHB membership) that the board was not achieving what had been hoped.</p>

Involvement opportunity	Role	Assessment
<p>The Babergh and Mid Suffolk Tenants' Forum</p>	<p>Each Council had its own Tenants' Forum until a meeting of involved tenants in July 2014 decided unanimously to merge. The single Forum met for the first time in January 2015 and agreed a Constitution which set out the Aims and Objectives as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To represent interests and views of all tenants and leaseholders on all matters relating to the housing service (including management, maintenance, development, community investment and related activities) provided by the District Councils. The Forum and individual members are expected to consider and represent 	<p>Attendance at the monthly Forum meetings averages 12 tenants, roughly half of whom are from Babergh and half from Mid Suffolk. The regular attendees are long-standing and despite recruitment efforts, the Forum has been unable to attract any new participants. Leaseholders, younger people and people from ethnic minorities are not represented in the core group.</p> <p>The Forum recognises that it is not representative of the wider tenant and leaseholder community but feels that people, especially young people, are unwilling to give their time without payment and are not prepared to travel to attend meetings.</p> <p>The Forum Chair writes an article in 'News and Views', the newsletter sent to tenants and leaseholders and the Spring 2017 article was a direct appeal for more people to attend meetings or give their views in other ways.</p> <p>There is no other route by which the Forum can inform other residents of its activities. A Facebook page has been discussed but not yet actioned.</p> <p>There has been an uneasy relationship with the board since the JHB's creation, although the current Forum Chair and board Vice Chair are working to improve communication and mutual understanding.</p> <p>Training is offered to Forum members but take up is minimal; one participant reported having done a computer course.</p> <p>In April 2016, the Forum worked with officers to address concerns about its effectiveness and value for money. A new approach was agreed in which the Forum would have a quarterly meeting with officers to discuss a particular area of service and would use the other two meetings in the quarter to prepare and review without officer support. This is still bedding down but the</p>

Involvement opportunity	Role	Assessment
	<p>the views of all tenants and leaseholders where practical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To review, consider and provide feedback to the District Councils on plans policies and procedures regarding housing and related services, including ideas and methods for improving existing service ▪ To promote the interests of tenants and leaseholders in the consideration of local and national housing policy ▪ To actively promote tenant involvement through liaison with the Tenant Involvement Officer. <p>Membership is open to all tenants and leaseholders</p>	<p>Forum and officers feels it has started well.</p> <p>There is no method in place to evaluate the Forum's impact and when asked Forum members found it hard to give examples of things they had achieved or changed on behalf of other residents since 2015. The Chair was able to say that the Councils had changed the timing of a rent letter and the website now made tenant repair responsibility clearer as a result of the Forum's work. Other participants seemed to understand their role as taking up issues on behalf of individual tenants in their neighbourhoods. There was also some focus on matters of personal concern.</p> <p>A budget of £300 has been allocated for 2017-18 to cover costs of room hire (should council premises not be available) and catering for the Forum. Travel and training come from other budgets.</p>

Involvement opportunity	Role	Assessment
	<p>of both Councils and members elect a Forum Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary and seven committee members at the AGM.</p> <p>The Forum meets monthly during the day in the Council offices in either Hadleigh or Needham Market and participants can claim travel expenses.</p>	
Scrutiny Panel	<p>A Tenant Scrutiny Panel was established in 2015 with the aims of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Acting as a driver for continuous improvement in performance and excellence through the process of customer-led scrutiny ▪ Ensuring that tenants' views, aspirations and priorities are central to the performance 	<p>Recruitment to the Scrutiny Panel was very difficult and only three tenants completed the training and undertook part in the voids review. Since then, two members have had to drop out for personal reasons and the Scrutiny Panel is in abeyance.</p> <p>The voids scrutiny report was well received and all ten recommendations were accepted by the Councils. An update on progress with implementation was presented to the JHB by the Improvement and Involvement Officer in April 2017.</p> <p>Expenditure on the Scrutiny Panel in 2016-17 was £3,900. No specific budget is allocated for 2017-18, although resources will be made available from the RI budgets if required.</p>

Involvement opportunity	Role	Assessment
	<p>framework for housing services at Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils.</p> <p>External support was commissioned for recruitment, selection and training of Panel members. An Independent Chair was appointed on a voluntary basis but resigned before completing the training.</p> <p>The Panel completed a scrutiny review of the voids service early in 2016.</p>	
<p>Mystery Shoppers</p>	<p>There is a team of seven mystery shoppers in place. They carry out three 'shops' of housing services a year, earning up to £25 worth of shopping vouchers for each. They have a code of conduct and training was provided by an external trainer.</p>	<p>Their first shop of Customer Services in June/July 2015 was a training exercise and they have since completed shops of Repairs Reporting in November/December 2015 and Tenancy Services in May-July 2016.</p> <p>The shoppers meet the Improvement and Involvement Officer (Housing) after each shop to compile a report and action plan which then go to JHB. The Improvement and Involvement Officer (Housing) is responsible for ensuring that the action plan is implemented.</p> <p>There has not yet been an evaluation of the impact of the mystery shoppers. The team is to carry out their third independent shop, of the restructured repairs service, later in 2017 and an evaluation session will be held after that.</p>

Involvement opportunity	Role	Assessment
		<p>The mystery shoppers are all new to involvement with Babergh and Mid Suffolk.</p> <p>There is a budget of £585 for 2017-18, that figure includes the incentive payments and room hire for the debriefing sessions.</p>
Estate Inspectors	<p>The Inspectors' role is to monitor the condition of communal areas on the estates and report any issues to the Improvement and Involvement Officer. The officer passes reports on to the relevant services for action.</p> <p>Inspectors are thanked with a £5 shopping voucher each month they send in a report.</p>	<p>There are currently three active Tenant Inspectors who send in a report form on an ad hoc basis when they spot a problem. There has been little activity for some time.</p>
Tenant Inspectors	<p>To survey tenants and leaseholders who have recently received a service. Shopping vouchers are offered as a 'thank you' for each inspection, up to a value of £30 a year.</p>	<p>There have been no volunteers.</p>

Involvement opportunity	Role	Assessment
Reading Group	To review and contribute ideas for the newsletter and to comment on the website and written material.	There have been no volunteers.

5. Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

The following table summarises HQN's view of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats associated with resident involvement in Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils.

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<p>A strong commitment to involvement from the Councils' political leaders.</p> <p>A core of tenants who have been involved for a long time and who are knowledgeable and committed.</p> <p>Good quality information about involvement opportunities is offered to residents.</p> <p>Tenants and leaseholders</p>	<p>No strategy for resident involvement and no formal link with the Joint Strategic Plan or the HRA Business Plans.</p> <p>No systematic impact assessment and therefore no evidence of value for money.</p> <p>The number of involved residents is very small and they are not representative of the tenant and leaseholder customer</p>	<p>Scope for developing the use of social media and other digital channels.</p> <p>The new in-house maintenance service, BMBS, gives a reason to engage with residents to get feedback.</p> <p>The continuing transformation project, particularly changes to customer access and data collection, offer opportunities to do things differently.</p>	<p>Continuing pressure on local authority budgets.</p> <p>Disparity in HRAs of Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils could lead to tenant dissatisfaction and make it difficult to sustain joint tenant involvement structures.</p> <p>Resistance amongst involved residents to adopting new ways of working, and especially digital technology.</p>

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<p>appear to be broadly satisfied with housing services.</p>	<p>base of the Councils.</p> <p>Tenants and leaseholders are unwilling to engage with existing involvement structures; strenuous recruitment efforts have not succeeded in increasing numbers or broadening the base of the involvement.</p> <p>There is no digital engagement with residents.</p> <p>Tenants and leaseholders appear to be broadly satisfied with the services they receive, meaning there is no stimulus to involvement.</p> <p>On some key engagement measures, satisfaction fell between 2008 and 2014 (both Councils) and the reasons are not known.</p> <p>The Councils are not fully compliant with the Regulatory Framework.</p>		

6. Moving forward

The existing involvement structures operating within Babergh and Mid Suffolk are not working effectively for either the organisation or its residents.

In considering an alternative model, HQN has particularly taken into account:

- The largely rural nature of the Districts and the distribution of tenanted and leasehold homes across a wide area
- The continuing transformation programme and the move into a single office building in Ipswich which will not be readily accessible in person for many tenants and leaseholders
- The low number of engaged residents and the apparent lack of enthusiasm for formal structures and meetings
- The lack of information available to the Councils about their residents' involvement (and other) preferences
- The absence of digital engagement.

HQN consequently recommends a phased approach to developing an alternative model.

Phase one: Disband all existing engagement structures, with the possible exception of mystery shopping. Carry out a major consultation exercise with tenants and leaseholders, using a variety of methods, to gain an understanding of what information they want, which engagement methods they would prefer and what would motivate them to or deter them from getting involved. At the same time, work with councillors and officers to define the Councils' objectives and preferred outcomes for resident involvement.

Phase two: Once that information is available, analyse the findings and, in discussion with residents, develop appropriate approaches to involvement. Make an explicit link to the Councils' strategic objectives and develop impact assessment methods. Set budgets. Plan a recruitment strategy with targets for demographic representation. Develop a volunteer training and development programme, to include incentives and annual meetings with individual volunteers to assess achievements and training needs and to address any issues. Put mechanisms in place to ensure the wider tenant/leaseholder community is kept informed and is able to feed information into the engagement structures. Put in place mechanisms for collecting customer insight data on service delivery, eg, use of SMS to get real time repair satisfaction data.

Phase three: Implement the new engagement structures. Monitor impact, adjusting as necessary. Report regularly to tenants, leaseholders and members. Use customer insight data to inform the work of the new structures as well as corporate decision-making. Keep the new model under review to check that it is meeting residents' needs and expectations and can demonstrate value for money.

6.1. Possible structures

In accordance with best practice and in order to meet the requirements of the Regulator, HQN suggests that the following are considered in some form as part of the new resident involvement model in Babergh and Mid Suffolk.

- **A strategic group** of residents selected against agreed criteria which provides a constructive, evidence-based challenge to Cabinet. (It might be preferable for each Council to have its own group.) The group(s) would be independent of the governance structure and would be accountable to the wider tenant and leaseholder community, receiving information from formal and informal engagement activities and reporting back on a regular basis. The group would receive and analyse performance data, including complaints analysis, and might commission topic-based scrutinies using task and finish groups
- **A complaints panel** for resolving housing complaints which includes specially selected and trained tenants/leaseholders
- **Sounding board(s)** of tenants/leaseholders who will give their views on, eg, proposed policy or service changes on an 'as needed' basis. The pool of residents to call on should be as large and comprehensive as possible with information about their particular interests and preferred contact methods kept up to date. Consultation should be via a range of methods, including telephone, email, SMS, Skype, online surveys or Facebook as well as face to face when necessary.

6.2. Impact assessment

Involving residents is not an end in itself but must have objectives and measurable outcomes so that its value for money can be demonstrated to the Council(s) and residents. Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils are strongly advised to design and put in place appropriate assessment mechanisms as new involvement structures are established.

Most approaches to impact assessment are based on the number of changes that have been made as a direct result of resident involvement. The easiest way is to track how many recommendations made by, for example, a scrutiny panel, are accepted and implemented by the housing service. One model assesses the level of tenant input on a scale of one to ten against the outcomes achieved for tenants, also assessed on a scale of one to ten. Others attempt to quantify savings made as a result of tenant suggestions.

7. Conclusion

HQN recognises the efforts that have been made by Babergh and Mid Suffolk District councillors, officers and residents over many years to make resident involvement work. Although there have been some successes and the Joint Housing Board in particular was an innovative approach to meaningful engagement at a strategic level, it is clear that the current model is no longer fit for purpose. The Councils are to be commended for making

the decision to commission this review and we hope that the report will help to move things forward successfully.

HQN would like to thank the councillors, officers and tenants who contributed to this review.

HQN provides high-quality advice, tailored support and training to housing associations, councils, ALMOs and other housing providers.

Find out more about our network memberships and our services by visiting www.hqnetwork.co.uk

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