

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

TO: Babergh District Council	REPORT NUMBER: BCa/22/29
FROM: Cllr Jan Osbourne - Cabinet Member for Housing	DATE OF MEETING: 7 November 2022
OFFICER: David White, Housing Transformation Manager & Chris Stratford, Interim Director of Housing	DECISION REF NO. CAB345

TENANT ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To share with Members for their approval Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council's Tenant Engagement Strategy 2022.

2. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 OPTION 1 – To approve the strategy in its current form and acknowledge the changing landscape of social housing regulation in terms of the significance of good tenant engagement.
- 2.2 Option 2 – To do nothing.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Option 1 - To approve the strategy in its current form and acknowledge the changing landscape of social housing regulation in terms of the significance of good tenant engagement.

REASON FOR DECISION

The strategy has been co-designed with tenants through a consultation exercise with the Tenant Board, the wider tenant population, portfolio holding members and some key staff.

It is important for the councils to have a Tenant Engagement Strategy to set out how we, as a landlord, ensure that tenants are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in the formation of their landlord's housing-related strategic priorities. This includes decision making about how services are delivered, performance scrutiny and the management of their homes as required in the Regulator's Tenancy Involvement and Empowerment consumer standard.

4. KEY INFORMATION

- 4.1 The Government publication of the Social Housing White Paper, Charter for Social Housing Residents, and the proposed Tenant Satisfaction Measures are all set to become statute law during 2022/23. This impending legislation has rightly brought a

renewed focus on the importance of empowering and listening to social housing residents.

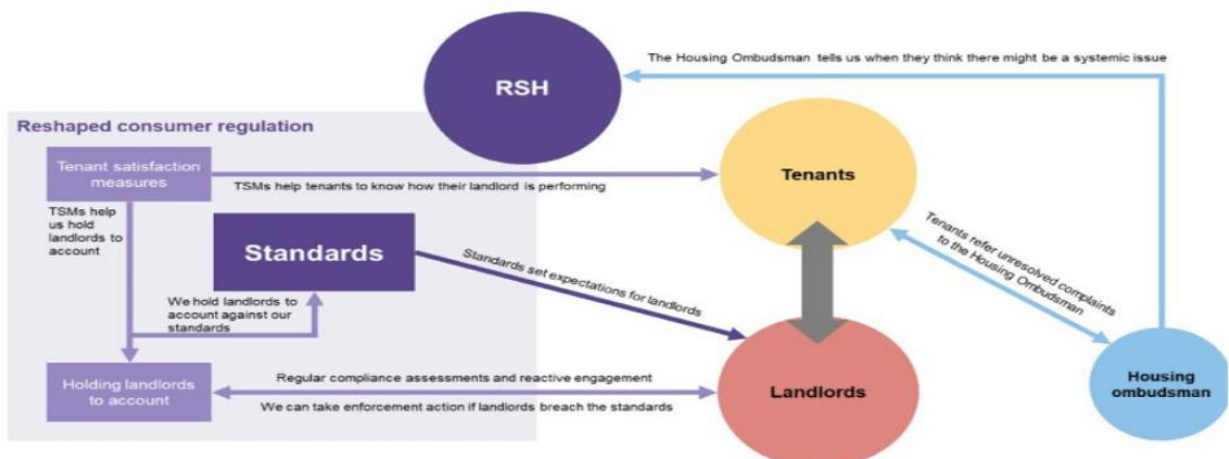
4.2 The emerging legislation brings a change to the level and type of regulation for Local Authority landlords with an emphasis on proactive engagement with its tenants. As part of the introduction of the legislation, both the Regulator for Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman have been given enhanced powers. Central Government has been clear that they want the Regulator to create a strong, proactive consumer regulatory regime, strengthening the formal standards against which landlords are regulated and require them to:

- be transparent about their performance and decision-making – so that tenants and the regulator can hold them to account
- put things right when they go wrong
- listen to tenants through effective engagement

4.3 Both bodies will now work closer together to identify failings and areas of concern. They also have the power to issue and enforce improvement notices. The Regulator can also impose unlimited fines on landlords that are not performing against the Regulations and Consumer Standards and are introducing routine inspections for all landlords with over 1000 homes at least once every four years, this will be twice in four years as we are two sovereign councils. The diagram below demonstrates how this is brought together.

4.4 Chapter 5 of the Charter for Social Housing Residents focuses on 'To have your voice heard by your landlord' and the regulator is expecting all landlords to:

- seek out best practice and consider how they can continually improve the way they engage with social housing tenants.
- deliver a new opportunities and empowerment programme for social housing residents, to support more effective engagement between landlords and residents, and to give residents tools to influence their landlords and hold them to account.
- review professional training and development to ensure residents receive a high standard of customer service.



- 4.5 Meaningful tenant engagement drives better service delivery, increases tenant satisfaction, and ensures that tenants are involved in decisions that affect their housing. The strategy sets out the various ways our tenants and leaseholders can choose to be involved with and influence us. As well as how we are going to support our tenants by providing them with the knowledge and information required to be able to hold us to account on our performance.
- 4.6 The strategy and wider tenant engagement function of the councils will ensure that we are being as inclusive as possible to residents from all communities and demographics by offering both digital and non-digital methods for engagement where required and is an area of compliance within the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Consumer Standard which states registered providers must: “provide choices, information and communication that is appropriate to the diverse needs of their tenants in the delivery of all standards, demonstrate that they understand the different needs of their tenants, including in relation to the equality strands and tenants with additional support needs and provide support to tenants to build their capacity to be more effectively involved.
- 4.7 We want our tenants and leaseholders to be at the heart of decision making and for our tenant engagement structure to enable as many people as possible to engage with us, capturing the non-engaged tenant voice and removing the barriers to engagement where practicable.
- 4.8 We first consulted with the existing Tenant Board to gain their insight on what currently works well and not so well within their roles, more widely across the tenant engagement function of the council and what they believed the function of the Tenant Board to be. We also created a survey that was sent out through the digital tenant’s newsletter, My Home Bulletin and by post to those who do not subscribe to the newsletter. The questions asked during the consultation can be found at **Appendix B**.
- 4.9 We had 1092 responses which is a 16% return rate. The responses have helped to inform the strategy and its 5 priorities and promises and are based around common themes as our tenants told us what they valued the most about their landlord relationship with the council. The results of the survey can be found at **Appendix C** and are split by response type where practicable.
- 4.10 The strategy outlines our proposed engagement structure and is accompanied by a delivery plan which outlines what actions we will take and what success will look like throughout the life of the strategy. This structure has been based around the TPAS Smart Review’s recommendations (carried out in June 2021), which can be found as a background paper to this report.
- 4.11 The TPAS review assessed our engagement structure and offer against their seven national engagement standards. Below is a table of the themes and our assessment rating against each:

Overall assessment against the seven National Engagement standards:

THEME	ASSESSMENT
Theme One: Governance and Transparency	Partial
Theme Two: Scrutiny	Partial
Theme Three: Business and Strategy	Not Met
Theme Four: Complaints	Partial
Theme Five: Information and Communication	Partial
Theme Six: Resources for Engagement	Not Met
Theme Seven: Community and Wider Engagement	Not Met

- 4.12 As you can see from the extract above, we either partially met or did not meet the national engagement standards as part of the assessment and we have made sure we have used their recommendations to ensure that the strategy will enable us to meet or exceed their standards through the delivery of the action plan. Work has already taken place since the original assessment in June 2021 particularly around the complaints theme and we continue to work closely with colleagues outside of housing to ensure we are providing excellent services to all our residents.
- 4.13 The strategy and its progress against the delivery plan will be monitored by the Portfolio Holders for Housing and our Tenant Board group quarterly. We will also report our progress to tenants through our annual tenant report and quarterly through our websites.
- 4.14 We will be developing a communications plan for resident engagement across the councils, sharing the strategy through our websites and will provide a physical copy on request. The strategy's vision and 5 priorities will also be sent to every tenant household using a postcard, along with a QR code, which when scanned will show a video we are going to produce with tenants. There will also be a phone number included to request a physical copy for those that are not digitally included.

5. LINKS TO CORPORATE PLAN

- 5.1 This strategy vision aligns with our Homes and Housing Strategy aim of Babergh and Mid Suffolk being an effective social landlord, known for delivering quality services, and the aim for both councils to have a strong relationship with their residents.
- 5.2 Involving tenants in the running of the service is one of the seven aims of the Housing Revenue Account Business Plans.
- 5.3 This strategy's vision is also the same as the Housing Programme Board's vision of "Housing services are delivered through multiple channels that convey clear, streamlined communication with our residents. Meaningful tenant engagement puts tenants at the heart of everything we do".
- 5.4 We will also work with the rest of the Councils teams who have a stake in Resident and Tenant Involvement, including how we can work closely together in the development of the Councils Resident Engagement Strategy and will ensure we are avoiding duplication, sharing learning and best practice and where necessary sharing resources to deliver on the strategy's delivery plan.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are possible financial implications in the delivery of the strategy's vision and its delivery plan, individual project budgets or extra resources may need to be considered funded through the existing Housing Revenue Account budgets.

6.2 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.3 There are no legal implications arising from the strategy and action plan however, failure to comply with the Regulator for Social Housing could result in fines and cause damage to our reputation and the relationship between tenants and their landlord.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 Key risks are set out below:

Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation Measures
Non-Compliance with the Regulator for Social Housing	3 – Probable – may occur	3 – Bad/Serious – Adverse effect on local and national reputation	Complete a set of actions plans and gather evidence to demonstrate we are compliant with the regulatory standards
Failure to deliver the Tenant Engagement Strategy work	2 – unlikely	2 – Noticeable – reputation and trust between landlord and tenant could be affected	Ensure we are working alongside other teams within the council to deliver on the wider Resident Engagement Strategy and Commitment from corporate function to provide assistance, resources and work together to achieve the aims and deliverables of the strategy.

8. CONSULTATIONS

- 8.1 Tenant Engagement Strategy Survey to tenants and results – **Appendix B & C.**
- 8.2 Draft Strategy approved by members of the Tenant Board at a meeting held on 25th August 2022.
- 8.3 We also carried out a review of our Tenant Engagement offer with TPAS, experts in Tenant Engagement, and there were areas of improvement or weaknesses highlighted that we have tried to address through the strategy, our proposed structure, and the delivery plan using the current resources we have available. This can be found as a background paper to this report.
- 8.4 We have also consulted with the portfolio holders for Housing, Political Leadership Group, Senior Leadership Team and other colleagues working across teams who will be key in delivering the council's wider Engagement Strategy, ensuring we are working together to deliver good resident engagement across all council services, share resources and reduce duplication.

9. EQUALITY ANALYSIS

- 10.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for the strategy and one of the priorities of the strategy is all about Valuing Diversity and Inclusion. There are specific actions and targets relating to this priority within the strategy and its delivery plan. We have also identified through the EQIA that there are some gaps in our tenant demographic data and therefore work is being planned to improve our data in this area so that in the future we can use this insight to deliver more targeted services and more meaningful engagement.
- 10.2 We have also been mindful of the responses from tenants through the consultation about ensuring that there are various opportunities and methods that tenants can influence our housing service by using both traditional and digital channels. We also aim to make engagement more relevant to place and therefore relevant to peoples own local identity, specifically through the creation of Neighbourhood Champion roles alongside offering residents support for more local residents' groups and representation. We hope that the impact of this will lead to increased levels of engagement amongst currently underrepresented people.

10. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no environmental implications associated with the Tenant Engagement Strategy or its action plan.

11. APPENDICES

Title	Location
(a) Tenant Engagement Strategy	Attached as Appendix A
(b) Tenant Engagement Survey	Attached as Appendix B
(c) Tenant Engagement Survey Results	Attached as Appendix C
(d) Tenant Engagement Strategy Delivery Plan	Attached as Appendix D

12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- 12.1 TPAS Smart Review carried out in June 2021.
- 12.2 [Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard – Regulator for Social Housing.](#)

13. REPORT AUTHORS

- 13.1 David White – Housing Transformation Manager and Chris Stratford – Interim Director of Housing.