

# Communities Scrutiny Commission

## 17 November 2022



**Report of:** [Executive Director] Stephen Peacock

**Title:** Tenant Participation Review

**Ward:** City-wide

**Officers Presenting Report:** Sarah Spicer and Lesha Wilson

**Contact Telephone Number:** N/A

### Recommendation:

#### The significant issues in the report are:

- Improving resident engagement is priority for council tenants and leaseholders and a political priority for the cabinet member
- New legislation and increased expectations from the regulator of social housing aims to strengthen tenant voice and introduce greater regulation
- The tenant participation review delayed from original timescales
- There are resourcing challenges for the service in terms of completing the design phase of the tenant participation review, delivering local level engagement and delivering engagement strategy for building safety
- This report invites scrutiny to provide a steer on the scope for inclusive co-design of tenant participation and comment on the options for tackling resource challenges.



## 1. Summary and context

Tenant Participation in Bristol is a well-established function within housing and landlord services. The involvement of tenants and leaseholders in the governance, decision making, performance monitoring and scrutiny of their landlord is a regulatory requirement for all social housing landlords in England. Standards for how this should be achieved is set out by the [Regulator of Social Housing](#). A summary of the existing tenant participation activities, resources and tenant participation structure is included in appendix A.

As part of our Moving Forward Together programme, launched in 2020, housing and landlord services made a commitment to respond to [resident priorities](#) and review tenant participation. This review was in response to resident feedback and also to follow up on a commitment to review local housing forums (established in 2017) and to meet the requirements of the [social housing white paper](#).

In January 2022, we commissioned the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) to undertake an independent desktop review of tenant participation with Bristol City Council, in its capacity as a social housing landlord. The aim of the review was to identify short term performance improvements, areas where we need to work more sustainably, areas of risk and areas in need of strengthening to ensure compliance with new regulatory requirements. The review (known as a TPAS 'SMART' Review) assessed housing and landlord services against 7 national tenant engagement standards:

1. Governance and transparency
2. Scrutiny
3. Business and strategy
4. Complaints
5. Information and communication
6. Resources for engagement
7. Community and wider engagement

The format of the review involved submission of key documents followed by TPAS led workshops with key stakeholders (residents and colleagues) to gather further evidence. At the end of the review, TPAS provided an action plan report, with short term recommendations to help enhance engagement activities, see appendix B.

Alongside the SMART review, the engagement team gathered feedback about tenant participation from involved tenants, leaseholders and those not currently involved. Working with councillor Tom Renhard we ran a 'Big Housing Conversation' engagement survey. We also collected feedback from colleagues, existing tenant panels and resident feedback via our quarterly resident satisfaction survey. The engagement survey results are summarised in appendix C. Resident satisfaction survey results for 2021-22 are also provided in appendix D.

The research and information gathering part of the review concluded in June 2022. Due to limited capacity within the engagement team, the second phase of the review, co-design, has been delayed. This interim report to communities scrutiny seeks gain scrutiny members views on the options for the next phase of the review and on the level of involvement from council members.

## 2. Purpose

2.1 Our vision in Housing and Landlord Services is 'to improve housing services, meet the needs of residents and make Housing & Landlord Services a great place to work, with equality and diversity at its heart'. We aim to achieve equality and diversity through inclusion. Our vision for inclusion is:

- To have equal representation and engagement from all groups across Housing and Landlord Services where everyone feels valued, has a voice and equal opportunity to succeed and thrive
- To listen and understand the diverse needs of our residents, ensuring our services are accessible and inclusive, through the active participation and engagement of residents in decision making
- To act as beacon for equality, diversity and inclusion practice, and live our core values and principles

2.2 Our vision for resident engagement is to provide a great service and ensure that all residents are encouraged to:

- be involved in the development of thriving communities
- participate in discussions to drive resident-led improvements
- provide feedback that enables us to tailor services to the needs of residents

We want to:

- Provide all residents with an equal opportunity to contribute, removing barriers to effective participation to make sure we hear from a diverse range of residents
- Create a culture of mutual trust, respect, partnership and ownership between residents, elected members and officers at all levels, working together towards improving housing conditions and housing services
- Make resident engagement a live, continuous two-way activity
- Enable a joint process of agenda setting and information sharing
- Make sure decision-making processes are open, clear and accountable
- Develop good working relationships that are flexible and adapted to local circumstances
- Tailor resident engagement in areas to suit the particular needs of communities

## 2.3 Proposed engagement approach – 4 types of engagement

Through moving forward together we developed an approach which acknowledges that engagement happens in different ways - From frontline services to individual and group feedback to community level engagement, to more formal involvement in decision making and scrutiny. The four types of engagement are described below:



### Level 1. Access to Services

Is an 'always on' level of service provision and communication where a range of communication channels can be used to complete certain actions related to resident's tenancies such as paying rent, reporting repairs or to request advice, support or assistance from services.

### Level 2. Engaging Residents

Is a deeper level of engagement with individual or groups of residents, to enable us to better understand their needs and deliver the outcomes residents have asked us to.

### Level 3. Engaging Communities

Means working with others and acting as a broker to bring together relevant stakeholders in activities which help to create thriving communities and make a positive impact on the lives of residents.

### Level 4. Resident Participation and Insight Management

Is about making sure residents have a say about their services and can hold us to account for how we are doing. We will make sure residents, service users and other stakeholders can influence decision-making and service improvements and use insight, alongside resident voice and other resident data, to meet our compliance requirements and improve resident satisfaction.

## 2.4 Aims

The key aims of this resident engagement approach are to:

- Meet equality and inclusion and regulatory requirements relating to customer involvement and empowerment
- Encourage customer involvement in our formal governance arrangements and decision-making processes
- Encourage more diverse resident involvement in our services
- Assist residents with social engagement, reducing isolation and loneliness, and increase tenancy sustainment
- Review and measure the impact, social value and inclusion of our engagement work, including through contracts with partners
- Provide clarity on roles, responsibilities and activities for residents and staff

Please note: The scope of this review addresses resident engagement with Bristol City Council as a landlord. Within the review we consider links to other council functions that support resident engagement, such as community development and external communications. However, the review does not include or seek to review the corporate offer. Instead it seeks to compliment corporate approaches, align with the council's corporate strategy and look for opportunities to collaborate with other BCC teams to improve our tenant participation offer.

## 2.5 Proposed delivery

Going forward we need to re-imagine resident engagement in a new world/environment, driven by a combination of the pandemic, new legislation/standards, technological change, climate emergency and the need to tackle cost of living and inequalities. We also need to proactively seek ways to deliver greater efficiencies and effectiveness. All these factors will inevitably shape what it is possible to achieve. The big question with limited resources is where to focus our attention for the most effective results for residents and the service.

We are proposing delivery of resident engagement in housing as follows:

**2.5.1 Access to services** achieved primarily through the Moving Forward Together IT transformation programme. This is a long-term IT programme which will improve access to services through improved and better use of technology. In the short term, we will use an approach of continuous improvement. This involves service teams improving services by regularly and iteratively responding to ongoing resident feedback and refining/monitoring these improvements with residents via service user groups.

**2.5.2 Deeper engagement** achieved through specific activities and campaigns working with individual residents and individual blocks. These activities may be service or resident led with the aim of sustaining tenancies, improving quality of life, homes and estates, providing better information and engagement about safety and through partnership working with community development, local agencies and contractors in order to meet resident's needs. Typical activities may include action groups, building safety groups, consultation on planned maintenance works, good and consistent information for residents about safety, communal issues and cost of living support.

**2.5.3 Community engagement** achieved through proactive partnership working in communities to empower residents to come together (for example, via resident groups), to take action on the things that matter to them and to take part in local decision making. In line with the asset-based approach, we would seek to identify service/community improvement opportunities including, where relevant, co-production at local level (for example communal spaces) and create/promote clear pathways for residents to raise community ideas or concerns.

**2.5.4 Tenant participation and insight** achieved through insight management and a formal structure. We will focus on how we use listening and insight to develop our engagement and service improvements. Starting with the recommendations from TPAS SMART review, we'll develop an operational involvement structure that takes into account all forms of resident experience, feedback and complaints. Roles within the involvement structure will have a clear purpose and outcomes that align to resident priorities, the HRA business plan and the council's

corporate strategy. Key success factors will be a) the successful connection of local level engagement and insight to the formal structure to ensure all voices are heard and b) compliance with consumer regulations.

## 2.6 Next phase of the tenant participation review

For the next part of the review, we are proposing to identify and take forward the recommendations made by TPAS. We have identified several areas where we can collaborate with colleagues, resident and members to co-design our activities. Possible themes and key questions for co-design are:

- Establish a cross service group to develop the new approach to tenant engagement and involvement, involve tenants and work together to review plans and take ownership of progress.
- How can residents be involved in governance and influence decision making at the highest level?
- Review the vision for resident engagement, promises and principles. How do we work together and create an environment of mutual respect?
- Does engagement exist as a “golden thread” through the organisation? How do we ensure member’s and every member of staff is involved in that process and is aware of their responsibilities against it?
- How will we evidence our commitment to equality and diversity in how we involve and consult with our tenant base – specifically BME residents, disabled tenants, those of working age and those in under-represented areas of the city
- How do we make performance information available to all residents on a consistent basis? What information sharing protocol or agreement is needed to set out how formal groups and individuals can request additional information. How do we highlight and connect insight to engagement in a meaningful way?
- Develop an operational policy around tenant participation taking into account learning from Covid, technology, future travel policies for Bristol, climate action and relevant regulatory requirements
- How can we create a clear and robust pathway for referrals and joint working between housing community development? What mechanisms should there be for 'community' issues/complaints to be raised, heard and responded to? What scope is there to commission local engagement projects?

Other areas identified for co-design are based on what residents told us in the Big Housing Conversation and tenant satisfaction surveys:

- When we bring together resident priorities, business priorities and regulatory requirements including fire and building safety, what are the key priority areas for engagement and where/how do we focus our efforts?
- Communication – What methods can we use to keep residents informed?
- What training and support can be provided to build residents capacity and confidence to get involved?
- How, when and where can we demonstrate that residents/resident voices have made a difference?
- How can we reduce the barriers to engagement?

- How can we build residents capacity and knowledge to create their own agenda for resident engagement?
- How can we work together in local areas? What local issues do residents want to have a say about/influence? (with some specific focus on South Bristol)

## 2.7 Key Challenges

There are 4 key challenges to delivering co-design and engagement:

- 2.7.1 **Building safety** – there is an urgent need to undertake further engagement with residents on fire safety. This is a top priority for housing and landlord services in light changes to national guidance and recent fires in two of our tower blocks. We are currently reviewing our work around fire safety and speaking with Avon Fire Service about the approach we need to take. Resources to take forward the tenant participation review will be redirected in the short term to help facilitate communication and engagement with residents living in tower blocks about fire safety. In the longer term we have made budget provision for a new building safety function to assume responsibility for our long-term engagement plans around fire safety. This posts/s (currently vacant) needs to be built into a new structure and recruitment undertaken.
- 2.7.2 **Service capacity to undertake engagement at local level** – There is an expectation that resident engagement is a key part of everyone’s job and specifically intrinsic to the housing officer role, this means frontline housing colleagues delivering resident engagement within their day-to-day work. From resident and colleague feedback, we know residents want the housing service to engage better and to be more visible in responding to local issues. The impact of increased case work for housing officers and priorities around fire safety, means there is limited capacity within estates services to undertake pro-active resident engagement work in local areas. We need a broader range of colleagues engaging with residents in communities. At a time when the council is actively becoming a smaller organisation, we will need to find better ways of collaborating and partnership working to achieve this aim.
- 2.7.3 **Capacity of the dedicated engagement team** - There are currently resource pressures within the housing engagement team (currently down to two officers from four). This means we have limited capacity in the short term to begin co-design work with stakeholders. Once at full establishment, we will remain limited in terms of our capacity to run co-design workshops on a broad scale. We need a co-design plan that is manageable and either makes use of wider resources to get the job done or we need to create a plan that delivers co-design over a longer period of time.
- 2.7.4 **Business readiness for change** – To deliver effective resident engagement there needs to be a whole council approach. There are some big service challenges ahead and in the wider context of efficiency savings, increased workloads, greater service demand and impending regulation, we are concerned about the organisation’s readiness for change. The regulator expects the governing body, senior leaders, corporate and frontline colleagues to be ready and geared up for changes ahead. A named person for consumer regulation needs to be identified as a matter of urgency. The regulator states - **it should be clear to tenants who, in the leadership**

**of their landlord, is responsible for ensuring good quality customer service.** Guidance is clear that the responsible person will ensure that the organisation is complying with consumer standards, ensure delivery of good quality customer service and should be sufficiently senior to drive culture change where it is needed. We have considered Options for addressing these capacity issues:

#### **2.7.6 Options for resourcing tenant participation co-design**

**1:** The housing engagement team facilitates a single task and finish group, made up of residents and housing colleagues, to co-produce resident engagement purpose, principles and approach using the evidence from consultation. An action plan is agreed which is delivered over 2 years.

**2:** Housing commissions an external organisation to co-produce, with residents, a revised involvement structure with improved engagement activities. The structure is agreed and adopted – a delivery plan in place over 2 years.

**3:** Housing commission an external organisation to co-produce a local involvement model / offer. The formal structure remains in place with recommended changes made. The local model feeds into the existing structure with clear pathways for voice and influence.

#### **2.7.7 Options for resourcing local engagement**

**1:** Increasing the size of the tenant participation team is not an option at this time, due to budget pressures that will be explored as part of the 2023/24 budget setting process. However, we can re-evaluate the team priorities whilst being mindful of regulatory requirements.

**2:** Strengthen partnership working between housing and community development via a new SLA, setting clear priorities for housing engagement within existing funding arrangements.

**3:** Commission local involvement projects to third sector grass roots organisations. Each commission would need clear purpose and outcomes as well as clear and transparent methods for how tenant voice will influence decisions, policy making and/or service change.

All options would need to be resourced within existing budgets.

### **2.8 Recommendation**

Scrutiny is asked to:

1. Offer views on resident engagement priorities
2. Provide a steer in response to the options submitted for tenant participation co-design and proposals to begin the first phase of co-design workshops in the new year (by March 2023)
3. Comment on the options for the co-design and make clear how they would like members to be involved with co-design activities
4. Comment on the proposed joint working with community development and where relevant commission engagement to local groups
5. Comment on the need to identify a named person for consumer standards (this person will be a champion of housing consumer standards at a senior level and raise the profile of the standards and the roles/responsibilities of members, senior leadership and colleagues).

### **3. Policy**

Recommendation best aligns with the future requirements of the regulator for social housing and will form a new policy/approach for resident engagement with Bristol City Council as a landlord.

#### 4. Consultation

##### a) Internal

- Community Development Team
- Housing and landlord services divisional management team (HSLT)
- Policy and public affairs team

##### b) External

Not applicable, however as part of evidence gathering and feedback for the review; council tenants and leaseholders have been consulted for their views about resident engagement through telephone surveys, online surveys and meetings. This report includes a compilation of the findings from the consultation and feedback. The proposals for co-design is a response to resident feedback.

#### 5. Public Sector Equality Duties

- 5a) Before making a decision, section 149 Equality Act 2010 requires that each decision-maker considers the need to promote equality for persons with the following “protected characteristics”: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. Each decision-maker must, therefore, have due regard to the need to:
- i) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Equality Act 2010.
  - ii) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to --
    - remove or minimise disadvantage suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic;
    - take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of people who do not share it (in relation to disabled people, this includes, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities);
    - encourage persons who share a protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.
  - iii) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to –

- tackle prejudice; and
- promote understanding.

5b)

To date the tenant participation review has been a research project to gain feedback from residents about how they want to be involved. An equality impact assessment has not been completed for this part of the review; however we have analysed equalities profiling information as part of this work. Listening to the views and involving residents who are under-represented is a key priority within the strategy. The forward proposal for co-design has potential to design in the involvement of communities that are currently under-represented in tenant participation. Namely these are residents from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, young people and those of working age.

**Appendices:**

- A. Tenant participation in summary - current structure and activities
- B. Findings and recommendations from the TPAS Smart review
- C. Big Housing Conversation engagement survey results
- D. Tenant satisfaction survey results and survey questions

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**

**Background Papers:**

**None**