

DRAFT BRIEFING NOTE

FOR THE ATTENTION OF:

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday 21st July 2021

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Subject / Title:

**Resident Involvement Strategy
in Council Housing –
Response to Call In Reasons**

Date: 13/07/21

Background

The Resident Involvement Strategy and Involvement Framework seeks to set out a path to build on the positive role our residents play in shaping housing services and reaffirms our commitment to involving residents in the design and improvement of services and support our wider commitment to the empowerment of residents and communities in Enfield.

This three-year Resident Involvement Strategy has been developed to fulfil the current and future regulatory requirements of social housing providers reflecting the requirements of the existing Tenant Empowerment and Involvement Standard, whilst also looking forward to future requirements from the Social Housing White Paper 'The charter for social housing residents'.

Whilst it reflects and seeks to ensure compliance with the regulatory standards the primary purpose is to recognise the powerful and critical role that the voice of 'lived experience' in delivering on our vision for transforming our customer relationships, homes and communities.

The strategy sets out how the Council will strengthen relationships and the voice of tenants and leaseholders over the next 3 years, responding to:

- Feedback from residents and community groups
- Feedback from Council Housing officers
- Review of existing involvement mechanisms in Enfield
- Current best practice in involvement from social housing
- Lessons learnt from the Grenfell Disaster and to respond to the changing legal framework arising from the Building Safety Bill
- Current and future regulatory requirements as they effect Council Housing

Responses to Call In Reasons

1. ***In preparing this strategy, the report states that the Council has obtained extensive feedback and support from its tenants and leaseholders. But no specific information is provided about residents' views on the current involvement arrangements, or about their recommendations on how to improve resident engagement.***

Response:

During the initial consultation process, residents were invited to attend a programme of focus groups initiated to inform and influence the development of the Strategy document.

Residents stated that the main areas of focus for improving our current resident involvement offer are as follows:

- Do what we say we will do in order to build trust and confidence
- Provide feedback on all involvement activities including highlighting where involvement has made a difference and sharing this more widely to encourage other to get involved
- All staff in housing services need to have resident involvement as a priority not just those who work in the resident involvement team
- There needs to be flexible and easy ways for residents to have their say through a channel that suits them at a time that is convenient
- Spreadsheets and performance reports alone cannot give a clear picture of service and needs to be supplemented with 'reality checks' to see if the reports reflect the customer experience
- Reach out to underrepresented groups through outreach and partnerships with local community and voluntary sector groups

We will be embarking on a wider, six week consultation process with all residents to seek their views on the proposed Strategy document where we hope to gather further insight on the current involvement arrangements and recommendations for how to improve resident engagement in the future. The Strategy document will be updated to reflect the feedback during this consultation period.

2. ***Under the latest terms of reference of the Housing Advisory Group (the top tier of the proposed new consultative committees), the Committee no longer has statutory status, and no role is provided for the Opposition Lead on Housing, or the two independent advisers as was the case hitherto. This change downgrades the status of the Committee and reduces its ability to provide independent advice to the Cabinet on housing matters. No explanation or justification for this change is provided in the report.***

Response:

For clarification, the Housing Advisory Group operates as an advisory group, not a statutory Committee and meetings have been held in private since the Group was formally established. The Housing Advisory Group supersedes the

Housing Board which also held their meetings in private since May 2019. The membership of this Group is open to review as part of the consultation process.

- 3. The report proposes a three-tier structure for resident engagement comprising 11 new committees, including the new HAG. There is no reference in the report to the possible difficulties in recruiting residents of the appropriate calibre to fill the large number of roles in the new structure, nor to the risks involved if the requirements of the Social Housing Regulator regarding resident involvement are not met.***

Response:

The proposed framework for involvement provides a flexible range of options for residents to get involved at all levels based on their interests and preferred communication channel. A number of new involvement options listed under tier 3 of the Involvement Framework will be operated on an ad hoc basis, enabling residents to influence service area reviews (Task & Finish Groups) or local improvement projects (Community Partnerships), whilst offering minimal commitment with a clear improvement output.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, all resident involvement committees and groups have been meeting on line, enabling a wider, more diverse resident base to get involved. The intention is to maintain this flexibility in order to attract a wider number of residents to drive improvements and influence a positive change to the housing service.

The proposed Involvement Framework will be reviewed in consultation with residents. Clarity over the commitment required for each element of the framework will also be added to the current diagram.

The proposed actions required in the Resident Involvement strategy have been closely aligned with requirements of the Social Housing White Paper (see page 5 of the Strategy document). The recommendations within the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard have also been incorporated into the proposals to ensure residents are able to influence improvements to customer service, customer choice and the complaints procedure.

The proposed Involvement framework diagram could benefit from identifying the routes for residents to hold Enfield Council to account. The framework and Strategy document will therefore be amended to provide clarity to residents. Further details will also be included with regards to transparency of performance information and how this will be shared more effectively with residents, providing effective opportunities for challenge. The steps that will be taken to understand our residents' needs will also be reflected in the Strategy document, with details on how this information will be used to drive service improvement.

4. ***It is not stated in the report whether recruitment to the new committees will be by appointment or by election. The future role of existing and new tenants' associations in relation to the new structure is not set out clearly.***

Response:

Currently, recruitment to committees and groups are undertaken on an application and appointment basis. Residents views will be sought on the future recruitment processes for new committees and groups during the consultation period. All residents' comments will be considered, and future recruitment processes will be detailed in the final strategy.

The future role of existing and new tenant's associations will continue to provide a pivotal link to the 'customer voice' and the Housing Teams will work closely with all Tenants Associations to assist and support on a local level. We will actively seek to maintain a strong dialogue with the Tenants Associations and ensure local issues are captured and utilised to inform wider service improvement projects.

5. ***A. Various members of the Customer Voice have expressed misgivings about the practicality of including six representatives with experience of homelessness as well as tenants and leaseholders on the HAG because their interests are different in many ways. Various members were also concerned that the decision to refer significant issues to the Housing Scrutiny Panel would be solely at the behest of the Chair of the HAG (the Cabinet Member for Social Housing) which was not a transparent process. These important concerns are not addressed under the proposed new arrangements.***

Response:

The Resident Involvement Strategy states: "The Group [HAG] can provide feedback on the development of strategy, policy and service delivery issues and can make recommendations as appropriate to Cabinet and Cabinet Members. It will ensure that residents have a role in advising on housing policy and performance issues".

For clarification, the views of the Housing Advisory Group (HAG) can be agreed collectively by members of the HAG and reported to the Scrutiny Panel Chair via a formal, transparent process as appropriate. Individual members of HAG, or indeed any resident, can write to the Chair of the Housing Scrutiny Panel with views on matters under discussion. This can be made clear in the HAG's Terms of Reference and in the Strategy.

There are a range of issues that affect all residents in housing need which would come under the remit of the HAG. For example the forthcoming review of the Council's Tenancy Strategy. Tenants and Leaseholders continue to run

a council housing specific forum which officers will continue to work with on a collaborative basis.