



NORTHAMPTON
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

25th July 2012

Briefing Note: Tenant Engagement Update

A new tenant engagement strategy is currently being developed and will be presented to cabinet for approval in September.

Why do we need a new Strategy?

Nationally tenant participation strategies and agreements are part of the Governments' agenda to improve service for local people and place tenants at the heart of decision-making and service delivery on issues that relate to the management of Housing; stock

What is Tenant Engagement

Tenant Engagement is about Northampton Borough Council Housing Directorate and its tenants working together in partnership to achieve an improved housing service.

Key to effective engagement is listening to our tenants and using their views to help us develop and improve the housing service provided.

Effective tenant Engagement is about understanding the needs, expectations, aspirations achievements and experiences of Northampton Borough Council tenants and continually improving the housing service as a result.

Tenant Engagement Benefits

- Ensuring high levels of tenant satisfaction with their homes and neighbourhoods
- Learning from our tenants' experiences as service users to inform the continuous improvement of housing services
- Increased number of tenants involved in participation activities
- Development of our services so that they become more appropriate to tenants' individual and collective needs

- Ensuring that services are delivered in a more efficient and cost-effective manner.
- Tenants are able to provide scrutiny and challenge to the way in which the Housing Service is delivered within Northampton.
- Ensuring that tenants are involved in making decisions that affect them and the community in which they live
- Enabling Housing Directorate staff and tenants to be more aware of each other's perspectives and organisational/financial limitations
- Breaking down misunderstanding between the Housing Directorate and tenants and building mutual respect and understanding
- Enhancing tenants' skills, knowledge, confidence and quality of life

What will be the Aims and Objectives of the new Agreement?

<p>Objective One Make tenant and leaseholder participation an integral part of our business by involving and consulting tenants to shape services to meet their needs</p>
<p>Objective Two Ensure that we are fully inclusive and provide opportunities to widen participation by offering a range of ways that tenants and leaseholders can get involved, at a level and pace that is accessible to all</p>
<p>Objective Three To provide and support training and development opportunities to enable all tenants to make a difference</p>
<p>Objective Four To maximise accountability and value for money to ensure that tenants have confidence in our services</p>

How will tenants be involved?

It is recognised that people want to give their views or be involved in different ways. As a result a number of ways in which tenants can get involved and participate are offered by the Housing Service

Below are listed a number of options available to tenants as to how they may get involved the list is not intended to be an exhaustive one , as new mechanisms will be developed to offer maximum choice and opportunities for people to participate.

Participation Working together. The Council and tenants decide together on what is best and work in partnership to carry out the work.	
Contract selection, monitoring and steering groups	<p>Useful for: Recommending the selection of contractors for specific capital work programmes to council homes and subsequent monitoring of performance and adherence to contract.</p> <p>Key features: Enables tenant involvement to be central to the process of contractor selection and performance. Assists to ensure that work contracts are managed effectively and deliver effective outcomes to those concerned.</p> <p>Commitment level: 2 – 3 hours, once a month</p>
Tenant Panels	<p>Useful for: Tenants and the council work together to improve specific area of the housing service.</p> <p>Key features: Tenants consider the strategies, policies procedures and performance relating to specific service areas and report findings to officers making recommendations re service improvement.</p> <p>Commitment level: 2 – 3 hours, once a month, plus additional reading team to enable familiarisation with service area</p>
Tenant Auditors	<p>Useful for: Longer term inspection of Housing. An opportunity to identify areas of good practice and areas where improvements can be made.</p> <p>Key features: More in-depth inspections on one specific of housing, finishing with a report that covers both written and oral/visual presentation options, to senior housing managers with recommendations for improvements. Each inspection takes approximately 4 months.</p> <p>Commitment level: 2 – 4 hours weekly for 3 - 4 months for each audit</p>

Involvement
Deciding together. The Council encourages additional options and ideas from tenants and provides opportunities for joint decision-making.

<p>Estate Walkabouts</p>	<p>Useful for: Meeting with your Housing Officer and representatives from other agencies who work in your area to point out problems and issues that could be improved.</p> <p>Key features: Getting to know the Housing Officers. Getting local environmental issues resolved/dealt with.</p> <p>Commitment level: 2 – 3 hours, once a year in each area</p>
<p>Mystery Shopping</p>	<p>Useful for: Inspecting housing to make sure that they meet published standards.</p> <p>Key features: Shoppers are anonymous. An opportunity to help identify improvements to services</p> <p>Commitment level: 2 – 3 hours, twice a year</p>

Consultation
The Council offers options and listens to feedback, and may change proposals.

<p>Area Tenant Panels</p>	<p>Useful for: Enabling tenants and leaseholders to be consulted on an area basis of housing issues that may affect them. To inform the Housing Directorate of their views and opinions on the quality and nature of the service provision and delivered. Residents from across the Borough discussing issues, recommendations and improvements with housing representatives.</p> <p>Key features (or time involvement): Quarterly meetings held in 4 x housing management areas. Attended by Housing Directorate officers. Residents from across the Borough are able to influence what is important for all residents of Northampton Borough Council</p> <p>Commitment level: 2 – 3 hours, quarterly in each area</p>
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<p>Complaints/Compliments</p>	<p>Useful for: Helps Housing to identify areas for improvement and also how we are performing.</p> <p>Key features: Open and available to any resident at any time.</p> <p>Commitment level: Will vary</p>
<p>Conferences/Seminars</p>	<p>Useful for: Gaining information on national initiatives. Learning how other geographical areas provide services. Learning how Housing provides services.</p> <p>Key features: Allows a wider audience from the total tenant population, and any tenant can find out more information about housing in Northampton and the rest of the country.</p> <p>Commitment level: Will vary, up to one day</p>
<p>Focus Groups</p>	<p>Useful for: Gives tenants the opportunity to give their views on one specific topic.</p> <p>Key features: No additional work involved. Meetings should not be any longer than approximately 2 hours.</p> <p>Commitment level: Take part as and when held, 2 - 3 hours duration</p>
<p>Open Meetings on “stand-alone” issues</p>	<p>Useful for: Tenants to forward their views and opinions to council officers on “stand-alone” issues e.g. spending priorities, choice of kitchen units, bathroom suites etc. Local communities discussing issues, recommendations and improvements with housing representatives</p> <p>Key features: Enables tenants to have choice and influence to determine priorities for their home/communities. Depending on the project, it may mean attendance at more than one meeting.</p> <p>Commitment level: Take part as and when held, 2 - 3 hours duration</p>

<p>Specialist Forums</p>	<p>Useful for: Gives tenants from hard to reach groups a collective voice.</p> <p>Key features: Similar to focus groups but focus on engaging with tenants who are hard to reach or seldom heard from. For example tenants aged 16 to 25 years, black and minority ethnic tenants, leaseholders and sheltered housing residents.</p> <p>Commitment level: 2 - 3 hours, quarterly</p>
<p>Surveys/Questionnaires</p>	<p>Useful for: Providing us with feedback in writing on particular subjects. The information is helpful in planning revised or new services.</p> <p>Key features: An opportunity for you to give your views on our services and performance, and to influence future planning.</p> <p>Commitment level: Will vary</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Information The Council tells tenants what they are going to do.</p>	
<p>Information, Handbooks and Leaflets</p>	<p>Useful for: Keeping tenants up to date. Easy access to information about services.</p> <p>Key features: Tenancy/repairs handbooks are provided to all tenants when they move in. These provide advice on rights, responsibilities and how to report faults. Other leaflets are available from the One Stop Shop or on-line</p> <p>Commitment level: Will vary</p>
<p>Local Information Notices</p>	<p>Useful for: Finding out what is happening in your area. Sometimes these are directly delivered to tenants' homes or more often notices will be posted in the One Stop Shop (Guildhall) and other community outlets (local shops, Community Centres etc).</p> <p>Key features: Information provided could include invitations to events where you can discuss plans for your area</p>

	Commitment level: Will vary
Newsletters	<p>Useful for: Keeping you up to date on what is happening both in Housing and your area and providing information on our performance.</p> <p>Key features: Produced quarterly and sent to all tenants. Tenants can be involved as part of the Editorial Panel, or they can send articles etc to the tenant representatives</p> <p>Commitment level: 2 - 3 hours, quarterly</p>
Tenant Sounding Board	<p>Useful for: Letting us know which ways tenants want to be involved and when they are available to work with us to improve the service</p> <p>Key features: Tenants are able to choose how they become involved and with which part of the service</p> <p>Commitment level: Will vary dependent on which activities you get involved in</p>

To enable tenants to fully engage in the above activities and to raise confidence levels an extensive programme of free training sessions has been held for the past 2 years and this will continue to be built on.

Will This Agreement be Different from Previous Ones?

The new agreement builds on previous good work delivered by tenants and officers in the past but will also fully embrace the new government agenda of co regulation. The publication of this regulatory framework for social housing places a clear expectation on NBC that we have a system of robust tenant scrutiny in place which provides a system of customer challenge and genuine tenant input in the development and improvement of Housing Services at Northampton and the new agreement is designed to ensure that the agenda of co regulation is fully developed

In order to deliver the agenda the new agreement will propose to Cabinet that a system of tenant scrutiny is developed and operated at NBC.

Once fully established effective Tenant Scrutiny will result in internal processes at NBC that not only support challenges of performance but also

give our tenants the power to not only challenge service delivery but also drive change, done effectively this will in turn result in improved processes and better quality housing services being delivered to NBC customers.

In order to ensure effective tenant scrutiny at Northampton the agreement proposes we establish arrangements that not only build on the good work produced in previous years by tenant engagement but also deliver a structure that best suits our local situation and needs.

To achieve this we will take account of good practice models available nationally but the freshness of the Scrutiny panel initiative means that at present it is still in an emerging stage and there are no hard and fast rules re its introduction and as a result we will be able to develop a structure that fits the requirements of NBC rather than making our service delivery model meet a national framework. The result of this will be that the final model is most effective for Northampton and best meets and serves the needs of its tenants

The final model of tenant scrutiny at NBC will be fully developed in the autumn and will include all those tenants that express an interest it is intended to develop an inclusive model that offers involvement for all who wish to be involved rather than restricting the numbers who can be involved

The Completed Tenant Engagement strategy will be presented to September Cabinet and will include a full action plan detailing how effective efficient engagement will be delivered during the lifetime of the strategy

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