

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Neighbourhood & Community Services Scrutiny Panel

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PART I

FOR COMMENT & CONSIDERATION

RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT

1. Purpose of Report

This report has been written in response to a request from the Panel and sets out Neighbourhood Services' approach to engaging with the wider resident community in Slough.

2. Recommendation

That the Panel recommend to Cabinet that the Commissioner for Housing and Urban Renewal lead a Consultative Commissioning Group. This will consist of Councillors, Council tenants and leaseholders and will review the Housing Revenue Business Plan, the Housing Strategy and act as lead consultative group on the Options Appraisal for the Council's housing stock.

3a. The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA and the Five Year Plan

Engaging and involving residents to influence decisions, set priorities and monitor performance against those priorities links to the following JSNA priorities:

- Economy and Skills – engaging and empowering residents enables residents to gain new skills and confidence, increasing their employability
- Regeneration and Environment – involving residents in establishing local priorities for maintenance and investment helps to improve the environment and ensures that improvement works meet residents' needs and expectations
- Housing – offering residents the opportunity to influence decisions about their homes and communities ensures that the service is meeting residents' needs and expectations and improves the quality of their homes and environment
- Safer Communities – involving residents helps officers to understand issues that impact on communities and ensures that resources are directed appropriately and effectively to address any problems that occur

Cross-Cutting themes:

Engaging and empowering residents encourages people to be responsible and accountable for their homes and environment and to understand the role they can play in creating and maintaining their neighbourhood and community.

3b. **Five Year Plan Outcomes**

- *There will more homes in the borough, with quality improving across all tenures to support our ambition for Slough*

Resident engagement has been built into the governance structure for the new repairs, maintenance and investment contract to ensure that residents have the opportunity to influence and monitor the performance of the new Service Partner. This will allow them to contribute to improving the quality of homes in the borough and influence investment programmes to improve their local environment.

- *Slough will be one of the safest places in the Thames Valley*

Engaging with residents will increase officers' understanding of local concerns and issues that impact on residents' safety and ensure the effective and appropriate deployment of resources to address residents' concerns.

- *The Council will be a leading digital transformation organisation*

Using digital media to engage with residents is a cost effective and simple way to engage with a broad range of residents whilst minimising the need for face to face meetings which do not appeal to the majority of residents.

4. **Other Implications**

(a) Financial

A budget of £72,000 was allocated to resident involvement in 2016/17 (excluding salary costs). Within this, £25,000 was assigned to tenant participation and a further £39,500 to project work which included the cost of the annual resident satisfaction survey. This equates to approximately £8.00 per household, 14% of which (£3,660) was re-charged to leaseholders as part of their annual service charges.

(b) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

There are no Human Rights Act implications in relation to this report.

(d) Equalities Impact Assessment

Using digital media to engage with residents as far as possible will increase accessibility to involvement opportunities by avoiding the need to attend face to face meetings. Wherever more in depth involvement opportunities are needed, a full Equalities Impact Assessment will be carried out to mitigate any risk of potential discrimination against any of the 9 protected characteristics.

5. **Supporting Information**

- 5.1 Neighbourhood Services are responsible for the delivery of the Council's landlord function. As a registered provider of social housing, the service is regulated by the Regulatory Committee of the Homes & Communities Agency. The regulator sets out the standards that registered providers must meet in the Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England, which includes the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard (attached at Appendix 1).
- 5.2 Whilst co-regulation and resident led scrutiny groups are well established in Slough, the service has recently struggled to engage with the wider community. This is not uncommon amongst registered providers as research has shown¹:
- L&Q Housing Association manage 71,000 homes, only 68 (0.09%) residents were actively involved in 2014/15
 - Catalyst Housing Association manages 21,000 homes however they have just 125 (0.59%) were involved
 - Thames Valley Housing Association manage 15,000 homes however only 235 (1.56%) residents were involved
 - Moat Housing Association manage 20,000 homes however they have just 11 (0.05%) Scrutiny Panel members and just 51 (0.2%) residents attended their annual resident conference
- 5.3 Neighbourhood Services believe in involving and engaging tenants and leaseholders, offering them opportunities to influence services, agree local priorities and monitor performance against those priorities. In order to understand residents' views on getting involved, the 2013, 2014 and 2015 annual satisfaction surveys were used to get residents' feedback.
- 5.4 In 2013, residents told us that:
- Whilst 46% of residents would complete a survey, 46% of residents indicated that they were not interested in completing surveys
 - Just 22% of residents said that they would attend a meeting organised by the Council and just 17% would attend a Tenants & Residents' Association meeting
 - 38% of residents said that they were not interested in getting involved in any way
- 5.5 This feedback was explored further in the 2014 satisfaction survey which revealed that:
- 60% of tenants and 64% of leaseholders were too busy to get involved, however just 9% of tenants and 3% of leaseholders indicated that they were not interested in taking part
 - 31% of tenants and 44% of leaseholders said that knowing more about activities would encourage them to get involved whilst 47% of tenants and 33% of leaseholders said that nothing would encourage them to get involved

¹ Taken from organisations' annual reports as published online

- 5.6 With this feedback in mind, a series of articles have been published in the residents' newsletter, Streets Ahead, aimed at raising awareness of opportunities to get involved and describing what various activities (ie Mystery Shopping) involved. This resulted in over 200 registering their e-mail addresses with Neighbourhood Services indicating their interest in learning more about involvement opportunities. These residents receive regular newsletters promoting involvement opportunities as well as giving feedback on what their involvement has achieved.
- 5.7 Neighbourhood Services developed the Resident Involvement Strategy with resident groups which was implemented in 2014. The approach to engaging with the wider resident community is based on the use of digital media wherever possible and in order to test residents' capacity to engage using online tools, residents' internet access and use was tested in the 2014 satisfaction survey. The results of the survey revealed that:
- 62% of tenants and 82% of leaseholders had access to the internet at home
 - 22% of tenants and 29% of leaseholders accessed the internet through friends and families
 - The main reasons given for not access the internet were:
 - No wish to (48% of tenants and 49% of leaseholders)
 - Too old to learn (36% of tenants and 26% of leaseholders)
 - Don't know how to (26% of tenants and 21% of leaseholders)
- 5.8 Whilst there is clearly some work to do to encourage residents to access the internet, the approach to engaging with residents using digital media supports the Council's 5 Year Plan objective of becoming a digital transformation organisation. As such, the service has been working with the Digital Transformation Manager to explore online tools for engagement.
- 5.9 In June 2016, the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) published a report² which concluded that the range of opportunities to get involved has become increasingly unattractive to all but a minority of tenants. The report concluded that the use of customer insight (intelligence captured from tenants on a routine basis) should be seen as the primary source of experiential evidence on which service decisions could be based. The report recommended that evidence informed decision making should be underpinned by reliable and corroborated evidence.
- 5.10 In July 2016, the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) published their national tenant engagement standards³ recommending that information and insight data combined with new technologies should form the foundation of effective engagement.
- 5.11 In September 2016, Neighbourhood Services commissioned Phil Morgan (cv attached at Appendix 2) to carry out an independent review of resident participation in Slough. The review included a desk top review of documented

² "Working together to challenge the future of tenant involvement, CIH, June 2016

³ National Tenant Engagement Standards, TPAS, July 2016

evidence together with interviews with members, officers and Resident Board/Panel members.

- 5.12 The recommendations arising from the independent review are attached at Appendix 1 of this report.
- 5.13 The contract with the new repairs, maintenance and investment Service Provider contains requirements for resident involvement with resident involvement clearly set out in the governance arrangements for this contract. Neighbourhood Forums will be established to facilitate local engagement opportunities, based on using digital technology as far as possible.
- 5.14 The proposal for resident engagement will act as the catalyst for engaging at every level. Three Resident Forums will be created, one for each of the management areas and will act as a conduit for resident consultation. The Options Appraisal will act as the catalyst for engagement and meaningful dialogue with residents as to the future management arrangements for the Council's housing stock.

6. **Conclusion**

The recommendations made following the independent review of participation in Slough will be used to drive forward improvements to ensure that the service complies with the Regulatory Framework and to strengthen the links between resident groups and the Council. The creation of a Consultative Commissioning Group led by Phil Morgan, as an independent agent, together with the Commissioner for Housing and Urban Renewal and residents to review the HRA Business Plan and the Housing Strategy and to act as the key consultative group for the Options Appraisal.

Neighbourhood Services accept the recommendations of the independent review, as follows:

1. That SBC restate its commitment to co-regulation and involvement with the objectives of a customer focussed culture, improving services and meeting regulatory requirements.
2. That to fulfil the requirements of co-regulation and the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard that a conduit is set up between the Council and the Resident Board.
3. The Terms of Reference for the Resident Board and Panels need updating including the conduit between the Council and the Resident Board, the new roles within the RMI, Options Appraisal and accountability to residents.
4. The 2016/18 Involvement Strategy cover the new areas of Options Appraisal, Neighbourhood Forums, Independent Agent for the RMI contract and Digital Inclusion.
5. That there be an Annual Review of the Involvement Strategy including the Resident Board with a clear emphasis on outcomes.
6. That the Gap Analysis be reviewed annually and reported to the Resident Board and Neighbourhood and Communities Scrutiny Panel. This will form the basis of the Council demonstrating regulatory compliance. An Action Plan should be put in place for any outstanding issues and monitored by the Council and Resident Board.

7. That the RMI Independent Agent is appointed and by and accountable to a group including Councillors and Resident Board members.
8. That work begin immediately on a Project Plan for the Options Appraisal.
9. That members of the Resident Board and the Steering Group be given laptops and internet access to support their role. Support should be given to ensure that disabled resident members are able to operate on an equal footing to able bodies resident members.

7. **Appendices Attached**

- 'A' - Review of Co-Regulation, Resident Involvement and Scrutiny, Phil Morgan BSc CMCIH
- 'B' - Phil Morgan's Curriculum Vitae
- 'C' - Regulatory Framework Gap Analysis

8. **Background Papers**

- '1' - The Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England
- '2' - "Working together to challenge the future of tenant involvement", CIH, June 2016
- '3' - National Tenant Engagement Standards, TPAS, July 2016
- '4' - "Changing Places: how can we make resident involvement More relevant?", Family Mosaic, June 2016