

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Neighbourhood & Communities Scrutiny Panel

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PART I **FOR COMMENT AND CONSIDERATION**

RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT

1. **Purpose of Report**

This report updates the Panel on resident involvement and engagement in Slough and follows the previous report to the Panel on 3rd November 2016.

2. **Recommendation**

The Panel is requested to note the report.

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

Engaging and involving residents to co-regulate and scrutinise the Council's landlord function links to the following JSNA priorities:

- Economy and Skills – engaging and empowering residents enables residents to gain new skills and confidence therefore increasing their employability.
- Regeneration and Environment – involving residents in establishing local priorities for maintenance and investment works helps to improve the environment and ensure that works programmes 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 neighbourhoods.
- Safer Communities – involving residents helps officers to understand the issues that impact on communities and ensures that resources are appropriately deployed to address any problems that arise.

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

Slough will be an attractive place where people choose to live, work and visit

The Neighbourhood & Communities Scrutiny Panel offers residents the opportunity to work with Enforcement and Housing Officers to tackle anti-social behaviour and enviro-crime when it occurs.

Our residents will have access to good quality homes

The Repairs & Maintenance Panel offers residents the opportunity to scrutinise repairs, maintenance and investment services to maintain and improve the Council's housing stock.

How we will make this happen:

- **We will listen to and work with our communities, customers and partners** – empowering residents to co-regulate and scrutinise services ensures that we listen to and work with our communities, customers and partners and respond to what they tell us.
- **We will work towards being self-sufficient through innovation, income generation and maximising the value and effective use of our resources** – co-regulation offers residents the opportunity to work with officers to maximise income generation and the value and effective use of resources. Residents were consulted on and involved in the development of the HRA Business Plan in 2017.
- **We will use digital technology to provide smarter services for people and businesses** – involved residents use digital technology as much as possible to limit the need for face to face meetings. In 2017 all involved residents were given access to iPads to facilitate this.

4. Other Implications

(a) Financial

There are no financial implications of proposed action

(b) Risk Management

Recommendation	Risk/Threat/Opportunity	Mitigation(s)
It is recommended that Neighbourhood Services continue to offer residents the opportunity to co-	The principles of co-regulation and resident led scrutiny underpin the delivery of the Regulatory Framework for Social	The Council's approach to co-regulation and resident led scrutiny was reviewed by an independent consultant

regulate and scrutinise services.	Housing in England. Failure to provide these opportunities will risk regulatory intervention and reputational damage to the Council.	in 2016 and the outcome of the review reported to the Scrutiny Committee. This report updates the Committee on progress against the action plan arising from the review to strengthen the approach.
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(c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

There are no Human Right 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 for face to face meetings. Whenever more in depth involvement activities are needed a full Equality Impact Assessment will be carried out to mitigate any risk of potential discrimination against any of the 9 protected characteristics.

5. **Resident Involvement**

Background

5.1 In November 2016 a report was presented to the Scrutiny Panel on the arrangements in place to engage residents to co-regulate and scrutinise Neighbourhood Services who are responsible for the delivery of the Council's landlord function. This report updates the Panel on co-regulation and resident led scrutiny activity over the course of the year so far. At the time of writing this report several activities have yet to take place, therefore a verbal update will be given at the Panel meeting.

Co-Regulation and Resident Led Scrutiny

5.2 The Council's landlord function is delivered by Neighbourhood Services who are currently regulated by the Homes & Communities Agency ('the HCA'). The HCA set out their specific expectations and required outcomes in the Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England. The framework contains four Consumer Standards that apply to local authority landlords the deliver of which is underpinned by the principles of co-regulation. The Consumer Standards include a specific Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard.

5.3 In Slough the Resident Board is the over-arching group responsible for co-regulation and scrutinising Neighbourhood Services. The Board delegates responsibility for scrutinising services to two Resident Scrutiny Panels:

- Repairs & Maintenance Scrutiny Panel ('R&M Panel')
- Neighbourhoods & Communities Scrutiny Panel ('N&C Panel')

5.4 The N&C Panel is registered with (and recognised by) the Ombudsman as the 'Designated Person' in Slough responsible for reviewing complaints that escalate to Stage 3 of the complaints process.

- 5.5 To assist the Panels in their role, residents are able to commission scrutiny activities from the Service Improvement Team which consists of 200+ residents who have registered their e-mail addresses with the service to participate in scrutiny activities such as mystery shopping, quality audits and focus groups as one off activities and without having to commit to attending regular meetings.

Resident Board

- 5.6 The Resident Board consists of 6 resident representatives (3 tenants and 3 leaseholders) from the Scrutiny Panels. The Board meets quarterly to:
- Monitor the effectiveness of co-regulation and scrutiny activities
 - Receive performance reports and updates on scrutiny activities
 - Approve/sign off recommendations made by the Panels
 - Receive updates from the Neighbourhood Managers on activity in their patches
- 5.7 Details of the Board's activities are regularly published in the residents' newsletter, 'Streets Ahead'.
- 5.8 The Board was established in November 2014 following an independent review of co-regulation and scrutiny arrangements. Initially residents were reluctant to nominate a Chair, however this year Kevin Kopicki was elected as Chair of the Board and Aamer Pervez as Vice Chair. This is indicative of how residents have developed and grown in confidence since the Board's inception.
- 5.9 Over the course of the year the Board has approved a number of operational policies and commissioned the scrutiny of gas servicing and Introductory Tenancy management activities in response to performance information. The Board has also paid close attention to the re-commissioning of the repairs, maintenance and investment services ('RMI') and, ultimately, the appointment of Osborne Property Services Ltd ('OPSL') as the new RMI Service Partner.
- 5.10 At the Scrutiny Panel's meeting in November 2016 members expressed concern that the Resident Board did not reflect the diversity of the wider community. It is anticipated that the Board and Scrutiny Panels will merge when the service relocates to new offices in Langley. An Equality Impact Assessment will be carried out, however resident representatives broadly reflect the wider community in terms of ethnicity, religion, age and disability.

R&M Panel

- 5.10 The R&M Scrutiny Panel had a busy year, meeting monthly to monitor the progress of the re-commissioning of the repairs, maintenance and investment ('RMI') services. In January 2017 Panel members attended presentations by each of the three shortlisted bidders before submitting their comments to the Head of Neighbourhood Services. Once the contract was signed, Panel members met with OPSL to discuss how they would work with them throughout the mobilisation period. The Panel is now holding monthly meetings with OPSL ahead of the contract go-live on 1 December 2017.

- 5.11 Earlier in the year the Panel in conjunction with officers noticed a fall in performance on gas safety checks. Further scrutiny revealed that problems gaining access to some properties to carry out the annual gas safety check was the cause of the problem. Panel members worked with Officers to revise the process to gain an Injunction with the power of entry if there are problems gaining access. The change in process led to a marked improvement in performance in this area.
- 5.12 Over the coming year the Panel will continue to monitor the mobilisation and go-live of the OPSL contract and monitor the impact of re-charging tenants for repairs caused by wilful neglect or damage. The Panel will also be monitoring the impact of the new contract on service charges, working with officers in particular to understand the impact on leaseholders.

N & C Panel

- 5.13 The Complaints Panel reviewed two Stage 3 complaints during the year. Neither complaint was upheld and only one of the complainants went on to approach the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman did not uphold the complaint but was complimentary on the Panel's review and feedback.
- 5.14 The N & C Panel receive regular performance reports and are currently scrutinising the management of Introductory Tenancies. Panel members received training on the management of this type of tenancy to empower them to fully engage in this piece of work. Over the coming year the Panel will focus on scrutinising the management of Flexible (fixed term) tenancy reviews as the first Flexible Tenancies (2 year fixed term) are due to end. The Panel will also be scrutinising the customer service function delivered by Arvato and re-charged to the Housing Revenue Account as well as the implementation of the Garage Strategy.
- 5.15 At the Scrutiny Panel meeting in November 2016, members felt that the N & C Panel would benefit from including more members in its discussions and reporting to the Scrutiny Panel. Whilst residents have invited members to engage with them, they have received no response. However, it is hoped that residents can build on the relationships developed with members through the Options Appraisal and the Chair of the Resident Board will be contacting the Chair of the Scrutiny Panel to discuss how this could work moving forwards. Members also noted concerns that officers had too much influence over the Panel. This issue has since been discussed with members of the N & C Panel and the Board who do not share these concerns. Transparency is key to co-regulation and residents are satisfied that transparency underpins their work with officers.

Service Improvement Team

- 5.15 The Scrutiny Panels asked Service Improvement Team members to carry out the following scrutiny activities over the course of the year:
- Mystery Shopping to test the Arvato call centre response
 - Mystery Shopping to test how easy it is to contact their Housing Officer
 - 2 Audits to test the quality of the service's response to complaints

A copy of the report presented to the Neighbourhood & Complaints Panel is attached at Appendix 1. The Board will continue to monitor customer services and the function played by Arvato over the coming year.

- 5.16 The audit of complaints responses was carried out by sending anonymised complaints and responses to residents and asking them:
- If they would be satisfied with the response to the complaint
 - How the response could be improved

Residents' feedback has been used to inform Personal Development Plans and training is being sourced to address residents' concerns.

Co-Regulation and Scrutiny Activity

- 5.17 Following the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower, the Board called a meeting with the Strategic Director, Regeneration, Housing & Resources and the Head of Neighbourhood Services to understand Neighbourhood Services' response and management of the Council's four tower blocks. Members of the Board and Scrutiny Panels were invited to the meeting which was well attended and indicative of the level of residents' concerns. Follow-up meetings have since been arranged to ensure that residents are kept informed.
- 5.18 In December 2016 Cabinet commissioned an Options Appraisal to determine how the Stock Condition Survey data and HRA Business Plan assumptions might impact on the management of the Council's housing stock. To support this work a Commissioner's Consultative Group ('CCG') was created with three Resident Board members working with elected members to oversee this project. Service Improvement Team members were invited to form a Resident Consultative Group ('RCG') and, following interviews, five (previously uninvolved) residents were appointed to the group. The RCG elected Jayde Cripps as their chair and have worked with the Independent Tenant Advisor, as mentor, to be involved in this work.
- 5.19 On 28 October 2017 a Tenant and Leaseholder Conference is being held at the Copthorne Tara Hotel to consult the wider resident community on the Options Appraisal. The conference will also be an opportunity to introduce OPSL and ask residents how they want to be engaged in monitoring RMI services following the contract go-live on 1 December. A verbal update will be given at the Committee's meeting.
- 5.20 In 2016/17 residents were consulted on the Housing Strategy and the HRA Business Plan with feedback being incorporated into the final versions of these documents.
- 5.21 In July members attended a meeting with Resident Board members and OPSL to present residents with iPads. This will significantly improve residents' ability to engage with Neighbourhood Services using digital media and reduce the need for face to face meetings. Residents have enjoyed being able to review and discuss information by e-mail which has significantly reduced time spent at meetings.

Senior Tenants' Action Group (STAG)

- 5.22 Officers have continued to engage with STAG at a local level however, it is understood that the Chair of STAG has informed its members that the group will cease to meet following their Christmas lunch in December 2017.

Resident Newsletter

- 5.23 At the Scrutiny Panel's meeting in November 2016 members expressed the view that the resident newsletter, Streets Ahead, did not include an update on the work of the Board in each issue. Some members also wished for the frequency of updates to increase. Streets Ahead routinely includes updates on the work of the Board and Scrutiny Panels and, more recently, excerpts from the Neighbourhood Managers' updates to the Board. As part of residents' discussion with the Chair of the Scrutiny Panel, arrangements will be agreed for more frequent updates and information sharing with members.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 The response to the independent review of co-regulation, resident involvement and scrutiny was undertaken in 2016. An update on the response to the recommendations made following the review is attached to this report at Appendix A. In 2017, 7 new residents were recruited to participate in various activities, including the Options Appraisal. Work on the Options Appraisal will conclude in December 2017 when all residents will be invited to discuss future arrangements for co-regulating and scrutinising Neighbourhood Services.
- 6.2 It will be important to discuss how residents can best use the knowledge and skills they have gained through their work with the Independent Tenant Advisor which will add value to the Board and Panels moving forward.

8. Appendices Attached

- 'A' - Response to recommendations made following the independent review of co-regulation, resident involvement and scrutiny review
- 'B' - Mystery Shopping Report

9. Background Papers

- '1' - Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England
- '2' - Review of Co-Regulation, Resident Involvement and Scrutiny, Phil Morgan BSc CMCIH, July 2016