

Slough Borough Council

Report To:	Cabinet
Date:	18 December 2023
Subject:	Housing Resident Involvement Strategy
Lead Member:	Cllr Paul Kelly, Lead Member for Highways, Housing and Transport
Chief Officer:	Pat Hayes, Executive Director - Property & Housing
Contact Officer:	Chris Stratford, Associate Director - Housing
Ward(s):	All
Key Decision:	YES
Exempt:	NO
Decision Subject To Call In:	YES
Appendices:	1. Housing Resident Involvement Strategy 2. Equality Impact Assessment

1. Summary and Recommendations

- 1.1 This report sets out the purpose and expected impact of the newly developed Housing Resident involvement Strategy to ensure meaningful opportunities for more residents (tenants and leaseholders) to influence housing services, policies and strategy that impacts them. It is also required to be compliant with the new Consumer standards from 2024.
- 1.2 The strategy has been developed in partnership with the Resident Board and shaped by feedback from other residents through survey responses and in person drop-in sessions. The strategy highlights the importance of a culture that embeds resident involvement, with implementation as everyone's responsibility.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is recommended to:

- (a) Approve the Housing Resident Involvement Strategy at Appendix 1.
- (b) Agree to receive an annual report on the implementation of the strategy.

Reason:

Resident involvement within the housing directorate has been provided on a very limited basis with engagement process solely reliant on the established resident board for some time. The strategy with its proposed new resident involvement structure will ensure we improve our communication with residents and adopt a culture of ***nothing about***

residents without residents. This will also support compliance with the Regulator's requirements to engage and involve tenants and leaseholders in respect of influencing and shaping housing services.

Commissioner Review

This report has been reviewed by Commissioners who have no specific comments to make.

(c) Report

Introductory paragraph

2.1 The strategy provides a framework for resident involvement with the following five strategic themes:

1. Create a resident involvement culture.
2. Strengthen the Resident Board and resident influence.
3. Range of options for resident involvement.
4. Appropriate resources and support to enable effective involvement.
5. Inclusive and accessible engagement.

2.2 Delivering safe and healthy homes plays an important part in achieving the Council's priority of a town where residents can live healthier, safer and more independent lives. The Housing Resident Involvement Strategy aligns well with the Council's approach to be resident focussed, enabling residents, strengthening partnership and building trust. The disruption from the Covid-19 pandemic and our financial situation has had a deep and far-reaching impact on service delivery and our residents. This refreshed approach will ensure we better serve the residents of Slough, responding to their concerns, ensuring their views are heard and delivering on the issues that matter most to residents.

2.3 The use of residents in this report refers to both tenants and leaseholders.

Options considered

Option 1: Accept the Housing Resident Involvement Strategy in full. This is the **recommended option** particularly following contribution and support received from the Resident Board made up of tenants and leaseholders and independent chair.

Option 2: Agree specific aspects of the Housing Resident Strategy. Cabinet may choose to accept only certain aspects of the strategy and identify areas for amendment. In this circumstance, Cabinet should provide a commentary to support decision which can be shared with for the Resident Board. **This is not recommended.**

Option 3: Do not approve a new Housing Resident Involvement Strategy. The Regulator of Social Housing sets out expectations for the standards which apply to social landlords. This includes a requirement to ensure tenants are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in policies, priorities, decision-making and scrutiny. If there is no strategy, it is difficult for tenants to understand how the Council is meeting this standard. **This is not recommended.**

Background

2.3 The Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 established the framework for regulation of social housing. This has been subject to revision in terms of the national agency responsible for enforcement of the regulatory framework. The Regulator of Social

Housing's remit has most recently been strengthened by the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023, which facilitates a new, proactive approach to regulating social housing landlords. Social landlords are obligated to comply with economic and consumer standards. The consumer standards include home, tenancy, neighbourhood and community, tenant involvement and empowerment and tenant satisfaction standards. The guidance from the Regulator of Social Housing on Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard sets out specific expectations in relation to accessibility of information and involvement and empowerment. The approach detailed in the draft strategy is required to strengthen resident involvement and ensure the Council is compliant with the standard. The feedback from the consultation with residents, relevant teams and Osborne have been used to develop our approach in this strategy.

2.4 During the month of July and August 2023, we consulted residents and other key stakeholders in a variety of ways to shape our approach in this strategy. The following summarises the consultation methods used with residents:

- Interviews with six Resident Board members and the independent chair
- Four drop-in sessions at Langley, Chalvey, The Curve and Britwell
- Online focus group
- Online survey 4-31 August with 52 participants

2.5 Interviews with the Resident Board members identified the following priorities:

- Strengthen Board's influence in key housing services decisions, with clear structure that involves working more closely with senior officers and councillors.
- Transparency and follow-through with improvement plans and regular update on progress.
- Incentive scheme and skills development for current and future resident members.
- Recruitment of more residents onto the Board.

2.6 The findings from the online survey indicated that priorities for residents included:

- Improvement to repairs service and communication of improvement plans with regular updates to residents.
- Meaningful engagement where residents' views are heard and acted upon.
- Transparency about why we may not be able to do some things that residents are telling us.
- Providing neighbourhood level involvement such as joint estate inspections with residents and residents led activities.
- Provide opportunities for resident scrutiny projects to enable service improvements influenced by recommendations from the residents' examination.
- Variety of ways for involvement to suit the diverse needs of residents.

2.7 Poor communication and lack of transparency were common themes from concerns raised by residents in addition to the above findings. This helped shape the five strategic themes listed in the introductory section of this report. Further detail about findings from consultation can be found in the strategy (Appendix 1).

(d) Implications of the Recommendation

Financial implications

3.1.1 There are currently budgeted two full time posts delivering resident engagement but only one is in post. This is insufficient to deliver effective implementation of the resident involvement strategy and additional staff will be recruited within existing budget. This team will be leading on embedding resident engagement into the housing service, supporting the Residents Board; coordinating Scrutiny projects looking at the housing services being provided; Building Safety Champions; Neighbourhood and Resident Led Groups working with front line staff and Leaseholder Forums.

3.1.2 As the Council aims to involve more residents, and in accordance with best practice, the strategy acknowledges the need for training, support, equipment and incentives to reduce the barriers to participation. This has financial implications.

3.1.3 The proposed strategy requires additional estimated staffing costs of £150,000 for the service to meet the requirements of the consumer standards and the Housing Regulator. The additional requirement will be reflected in the HRA (Housing Revenue Account) budgets 2024/25 to be considered by Cabinet in February. The full detailed financial implications will need to be identified, considered and included in the 2024/25 HRA budget details of which will be presented as the budget setting process which will be considered by Cabinet and subsequently full Council in February and March 2024. If the new budget needs are not adopted and approved by members at that time, then the staffing establishment outlined above will not be established and the overall involvement strategy would be undermined and would require significant review.

3.2 *Legal implications*

3.2.1 The Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 established a framework for regulation of social housing. The legislative framework and the regulatory body have been amended by subsequent legislation and the new Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 has made further amendments. The most recent changes include a reform of the consumer regulatory regime, including making safety and transparency explicit parts of the Regulator of Social Housing's objectives.

3.2.2 The existing tenant involvement and empowerment standard is supplemented by guidance from the Regulator of Social Housing. This sets out the required outcomes and specific expectations. Under involvement and empowerment, this includes supporting the formation and activities of tenant panels or equivalent groups, the provision of timely and relevant performance information to support effective scrutiny by tenants, including the publication of an annual report including information on repair and maintenance budgets and providing support to tenants to build their capacity to be more effectively involved.

3.2.2 The guidance refers to a need to consult tenants at least once every three years on the best way of involving tenants in the governance and scrutiny of the housing management service. It also refers to the need to respond to a range of diverse needs in the way services are provided and tenants are communicated with.

3.3 *Risk management implications*

3.3.1 The following key risks have been assessed.

Risk	Assessment of risk	Mitigation	Residual Risk
Reputational			
Further damage to trust of the Council from lack of resident involvement and influence in housing decisions that impact tenants and leaseholders.	Med	Strategy is resident focussed and will ensure that everyone accessing housing services from the Council will be empowered and encouraged to get involved and influence service improvements.	Low
Regulatory			
Non-compliance with the regulatory framework with no current Resident Engagement Strategy in place.	High	Implementation of the strategy will ensure that the Council is compliant with the regulatory requirement and future proof for the upcoming changes to the consumer standards by the Regulator for Social Housing.	Low
Operational			
Lack of resources including staff and skills to lead the delivery of effective resident engagement.	High	Recruitment of additional staff with the right skills and behaviours to drive culture change and lead the delivery of the strategy. Becoming members of Tenant Participation and Advisory Service (TPAS) will provide staff with training and best practice in resident engagement.	Low
Lack of engagement from some staff and repairs contractor where implementation is viewed as additional workload and not beneficial.	Med	Involvement of staff in development of an action plan to ensure shared ownership, and awareness workshops will help mitigate these risks. Including resident involvement as one of the key appraisal objectives for all housing staff will also help embed a positive culture. Providing support for staff to help corporate ownership will be important.	Low
Financial			
Budget pressure	Med	The increased costs to deliver this strategy can be covered by the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).	Low

3.4 Environmental implications

3.4.1 None identified.

3.5 *Equality implications*

3.5.1 The Council has a duty contained in section 149 of the Equality Act to have due regard to the need to:

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it and
- c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

3.5.2 The protected characteristics are: Age; Disability; Gender reassignment; Marriage and civil partnership; Pregnancy and maternity; Race; Religion or belief; Sex; and Sexual orientation.

3.5.3 Inclusive and accessible engagement is one of the five themes of the Housing Resident Engagement Strategy which seeks to reduce barriers to involvement for our diverse residents improve involvement of under-represented groups within Slough.

3.5.4 Equality Impact assessment in the Appendix 2 demonstrates positive impact on groups with protected characteristics.

3.6 *Corporate Parenting implications*

3.6.1 The Council provides housing for young people leaving care and therefore as tenants they will have opportunities to link into the strategy including becoming board members, participating in focus groups and other engagement activities.

3.7 *Workforce implications*

3.7.1 Implications for the workforce are considered positive through coordinated approach to resident and community engagement across the Council and implementation of strategy that includes all housing staff, repairs contractor, internal service providers and councillors.

3.7.2 A culture where genuine consideration of residents' views is at the heart of all decision-making by staff in the delivery of housing services will help rebuild trust with residents and improve satisfaction.

3.7.3 Awareness training and engagement toolkit will be developed to support all staff to embed resident involvement in their roles.

3.8 *Property implications*

3.8.1 None identified.

4. Background Papers

4.1 Relevant background paper.

[Regulatory standards](#)