

<b>HOUSING COMMITTEE</b>	<b>Agenda Item 145</b>
	Brighton & Hove City Council

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement</b>		
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>March 17<sup>th</sup> 2021</b>		
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Rachel Sharpe</b>		
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<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	<b>All</b>		

## FOR GENERAL RELEASE

### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT

- 1.1 The Community Engagement Team is a cross tenure team that supports resident engagement with council services including the council as a landlord. The team supports a collaborative relationship between residents and services.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is update and seek members' approval on proposals to develop and widen the opportunities for tenants and leaseholders to be engaged with the council as their landlord. These will increase and diversify residents' involvement, develop participatory approaches, maximise the impact of the Estates Development Budget and change the culture between council and residents.
- 1.3 The proposals will build on and augment the council's current approaches to consultation with tenants and leaseholders on landlord/tenant matters.

### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Housing Committee notes and approves:

- 2.1 The delivery of more 'pro-active' styles of engagement with tenants and leaseholders to consult and engage with a wider and more diverse group of residents.
- 2.2 The proposed changes to the current engagement's structures for tenants and leaseholders as set out in Appendix One.
- 2.3 The maximisation of Estate Development Budget by agreeing a change of scope to include tenant and leaseholder led community projects as well as physical items and works. This will sit alongside the funds from the environmental improvements budget to give tenants a greater say over funding.
- 2.4 To develop a policy for extending participatory budgeting, co-designed with tenants and leaseholders for approval by Housing Committee Winter 2021

- 2.5 The development of a co-produced Implementation Plan to support the delivery of the Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy

## CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 **Policy Context-** In Brighton and Hove engagement with communities is a core priority. Our Corporate Plan 'A Stronger City' states we

- Work alongside communities on what matters to them
- Increase participation by using Neighbourhood Action Plans and Ward Budgets
- Preserve and develop the civic spaces to ensure people have space to meet and get online, preventing digital exclusion
- Ensure that the city continues to be a place where people feel safe, supported and valued.

- 3.2 **The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard and section 105 of the 1985 Housing Act** set out clear standards and duties for consultation on matters of housing management. Under section 105 of the Housing Act 1985 the council has a legal obligation to consult its secure tenants on matters of housing management, such as changes to the management, maintenance, improvement or demolition of houses led by them or changes to the provision of amenities.

- 3.3 Housing Committee Work Plan - the proposals in this paper will contribute to meeting many of the key priorities such as:

- Working in partnership with the existing forums and expanding the involvement of residents in temporary and emergency accommodation
- Improving transparency and accountability in the housing department
- Ensuring housing tenants have more coproduction opportunities in decision-making around housing policy and service delivery – to work with the council not just be consulted
- Extending participatory budgeting in environmental improvements to estates
- Reviewing community involvement in housing
- Meeting the regulator's Involvement and Empowerment standard
- Developing and implementing a decent environment standard for council estates to go alongside the Decent Homes standard
- Involving residents in fire safety
- Ensuring greater transparency and early involvement with leaseholders over proposed capital works
- Continuing to ensure that leaseholders voices are heard, and financial support is offered where necessary

## **Current Picture**

- 3.4 In May 2019 Brighton and Hove City Council created a cross tenure Community Engagement Team. The aim of the team was also to support strong, active and inclusive communities that can influence and shape the city in which they live and work with the outcome being.

*“Local people are effectively informed, engaged, involved and empowered by the council. They actively help define and design local priorities and policies, deliver and evaluate services and inform council decision making in areas that impact on their lives.”*

- 3.5 The Community Engagement Team are key to providing the support to tenant and leaseholder engagement and ensuring the statutory duties are met. However, having one engagement team has enabled tenants and leaseholders to be engaged with a broad range of council services, supporting involvement in local priorities that include housing issues but are not limited to these.

### **Operational context - Engagement Structures**

- 3.6 There is a long-established operating model within tenant and leaseholder engagement which has been reviewed many times over the last 10 years, alongside smaller reviews and explorations of how to involve and engage more people in Tenant and Resident Associations (TRA) with the recognition of both formal and informal groups.
- 3.7 The last significant review was in 2016, whilst there were wider ranging recommendations only small changes have been achieved.
- 3.8 Changing engagement culture, practice and structures is difficult and there is not a widely accepted benchmark across local authorities. There is also a level of understandable resistance to change, particularly from the residents who have invested time and energy in the current structures for fear change will reduce influence and voice and dilute tenant involvement.
- 3.9 A small number of valued & dedicated tenants and leaseholders are actively involved in working with the council on improving housing stock and services. However, whilst these tenants and leaseholders continue to work hard and give huge amounts of their time to being involved, they are only a very small percentage of the wider tenant and leaseholder population - approximately 0.4% of the total tenant/leaseholder population.
- 3.10 There is some disparity in representation in relation to the people who are housing in our council stock
- 90% of engaged residents are over 50 and yet 37% of BHCC tenants are under 50.

- 10% of our tenants identify within a minority ethnic group but we only have a tiny proportion involved
- We have no young people involved in housing management
- We have a large section of people with disabilities and older people actively involved

- 3.11 5% of the tenant population participated in 2016 review. A series of core recommendations were made including providing more on-line opportunities for involvement and reducing the four Area Panels to one core Panel meeting. The latter was not implemented due to concerns about losing space and time for discussing specific localised issues. Many of the 2016 recommendations are outstanding
- 3.12 The review found that from 16 Area Panels 15 had the same agenda, with just the East Area Panel having an additional agenda item. In 2019 this had improved slightly with some additional area-based agenda items, but the core agenda remains the same in each area. This not only results in the officers reporting the same information at four different meetings, but the lack of a City-Wide Panel doesn't allow residents to share and explore the similarities across areas. This can result in piecemeal changes rather than looking strategically at a problem.
- 3.13 As a result of COVID 19 Area Panels have been held online and we have explored having one larger meeting with four breakout meetings to still retain the important area focus. Feedback from the first of these meetings has been extensive and mixed. Overall, the online format made it difficult to have a larger and longer meeting and residents preferred a small area-based meeting where more people were able to speak. The postponement of meetings due to Covid has created a backlog of 3-star items that means, for the moment, there is a preference among residents and members to keep to area-based meetings. Once social distancing measures are lifted the format of Area Panel will need to be reviewed to ensure we are addressing both local and strategic residents priorities.
- 3.14 Feedback from the 2019 Star survey showed that 67% of tenants and leaseholders remained satisfied with their involvement with the council. Whilst this is down three points compared to 2016, it still demonstrates the same improvement in the proportion of 'very satisfied' responses. Indeed, whilst making allowances for the change in methodology this year, it remains true that council's performance in this respect continues to generally trend upwards. However, when replying to the question respondents were just as likely to consider day to day transactions such as telephone queries and the repairs process, as they are to think about wider resident involvement and consultation. As such, the strong score is most likely linked to the generally high standard of customer service that tenants experienced.
- 3.15 The main demographic difference was age, with older tenants (aged 65+) significantly more satisfied (78%), whereas the opposite was true for the under 35's and those aged 35 - 49 (58% and 60% respectively). This is reflected in the make up of our most engaged residents, with very limited engagement from within these age groups.

- 3.16 Currently it is very difficult to evaluate any change that is created through the tenant and leaseholder engagement structures and there is no formal process to do this.
- 3.17 In early 2020 each Area Panel had a workshop on increasing resident involvement and a number of residents have voluntarily written papers with proposals for change, we have used much of this to influence the Tenant and Leaseholder Strategy. Summary of feedback was as follows:

The burden of meetings is considerable
Information isn't joined up across meetings, creating duplication
The structures limit representation from tenants and leaseholders
Ways to get involved need to be expanded to interest more people
We need to do more online
Engagement/Involvement needs to be fun
Residents want to do things in their communities and on estates, they need support and resources to do this
Tenant Associations need support to achieve their aims and increase involvement
Residents want their input to create real change – they often feel the council is tokenistic about its engagement
Reports need to use less jargon
The council and officers need to be more open to input, constructive criticism and change
Outcomes for involvement should be clear and measured so we can see what has been achieved
Trust and confidence is a concern of residents in officer and the decision making process
Decisions are already made prior to their involvement, officers talk 'at them' with information and there is little time for real debate and opportunity to influence – 'it's a done deal'
Community Engagement should be advocates for residents to get more achieved

- 3.18 There are currently four Service Improvement Groups (SIG) that residents are able to take part in to work with the council on strategic issues. These are:

- Involvement and Empowerment
- Home Group

- Business and Value for Money
- Tenancy and Neighbourhoods

- 3.19 The last two of these groups have not met frequently over the last two years.
- 3.20 The proposal is to merge the four Service improvement groups to create two with a focus on People and Buildings. This will mean Home Group merges to create the Buildings SIG and Involvement and Empowerment will merge into the People SIG. This supports the residents' suggestions for more joined up working and less meetings. Task and finish groups will be set up for specific timebound issues to be looked at.
- 3.21 There will be no other changes to the main formal housing structures please see Appendix Two

#### **Leaseholder Engagement:**

- 3.22 There is a Leaseholder Engagement Strategy that was agreed at Housing Committee in June 2020. The actions within this will be including in the Implementation Plan for the wider Tenant and Leaseholder Strategy to ensure we are taking a joint approach to engagement.
- 3.23 Leaseholder Engagement is currently supported through the Leaseholder Action Group and a dedicated Senior Leaseholder Liaison officer. The leaseholders are involved in Area Panels, service improvement groups and task and finish groups

#### **Participatory Budgeting - Estate Development Budget, Environmental Improvement Budget and Housing Revenue Account**

- 3.24 Participatory budgeting allows residents to identify, discuss, and prioritise public spending projects, and gives them the power to make real decisions about how money is spent. PB often benefits people who are not generally engaged in decision making such as low-income residents, and young people. Evidence shows PB can result in fairer public spending, greater transparency and accountability.
- 3.25 The Current Estate Development Budget (EDB) is a unique and valuable annual fund it engages and empowers residents who can bid for local project with the main outcome of improving the quality of life for tenants and leaseholders. It is bid for by local groups and has a resident decision-making panel that evaluate and decide on the bids so to some extent uses participatory methods for all its decisions.
- 3.26 Traditionally, residents have bid for funding to undertake small physical improvements to their estates. However, only a small number of tenants and leaseholder groups are bidding for works/equipment and an even smaller number of tenants and leaseholders comprise the decision-making panel.

- 3.27 An internal audit of the EDB process in 2018 found partial assurance in the process; 'weaknesses in the system of control and/or the level of non-compliance is such as to put the achievement of the system or service objectives at risk'.
- 3.28 A resident led EDB review group consisting of residents drawn from the EDB Panel, Area Panels, Service Improvement Groups met seven times between July 2018 and January 2019 to:
- Make EDB easier to understand and use
  - Find ways to shorten the main bid process from application to the point of delivery
  - Introduce new processes to encourage more and varied bids
  - Ensure the processes are fair and equitable. Strengthen the understanding and guidelines for the bidding especially defining the difference between an improvement and maintenance
- 3.29 The group made a series of recommendations (see appendix Two) many of which have been implemented. For example, clear bidding and evaluation criteria have been introduced and the application form simplified.
- 3.30 One recommendation was to provide a 'community chest' which could fund revenue projects, for example, community fitness classes, arts and crafts groups, homework clubs, ICT classes within community rooms and/or on open space. It was felt that enabling tenants and leaseholder to bid to develop resident led community projects would increase the ability to 'improve the quality of life' for tenants and leaseholders living on council estates.
- 3.31 The EDB budget sits in the revenue funds and the majority of bids/works are of a revenue nature, based on historic analysis of spend. The scope of what can be funded from EDB will be expanded to promote tenant and leaseholder led community projects as well as physical items and works.
- 3.32 The Environmental Improvement Budget (EIB) is an additional fund that was made available in 2019 to support environmental improvements on estates, both on open spaces and within buildings. The EIB is split £220k revenue; £280k capital. The aim is to be able to identify and respond quickly to local issues, improving the quality and pleasantness of the environment for residents.
- 3.33 Projects funded through the Environmental Improvement Budget are complementary to the use of EDB funds. Residents currently feed in views and priorities for EIB through the Community Engagement Team or other housing officers.
- 3.34 In addition to EDB and EIB the tenants and leaseholders have been keen to have a deeper understanding and involvement in the setting of the HRA budget. This is a complex process that needs to be both timely to sit within the timeframes for budget setting and offer residents enough information to work with the council on any decision making.

- 3.35 For Estate Development Budget, Environmental Improvement Budget and Housing Revenue Account the aim is to engage more residents in setting priorities, bidding for funds and making decisions about how the funding is spent. This will take many forms to share information and promoting the funds, in addition we will be exploring the options of participatory budgeting with online voting elements to engage a much wider group of tenants and residents
- 3.36 It is proposed that the new 'People' Service Improvement Group and the EDB panel members continue to work on options that form part of wider consultation, through local surveys, work with small groups, Homing-In and the Council's online consultation portal, to move towards a wider 'participatory budgeting' process. This would inform and engage more residents in both bidding and the decision-making process.

### **Future of Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Proposal**

- 3.37 To widen and deepen engagement with tenants and leaseholders it will need us to expand the ways residents are able to be involved. Whilst there are already some good practices this paper proposes to develop and build on these, recognising communities play an important role in;

- Supporting the council to improve and measure performance
- Responding to challenges
- Improving the delivery of local services
- Providing community led independent activities and services
- Providing residents with the skills and methods to make a significant difference to the way services are shaped and delivered
- Developing different working practice that build a culture of collaboration and coproduction

- 3.38 Currently most of the engagement with tenants and leaseholders is carried out through meetings. This type of engagement is only of interest to a small proportion of the community and often excludes those who are not able, keen or confident to attend. However, many people want to voice their view or do something about their estate, community or living conditions but are not sure how to do this.
- 3.39 The 2016 review acknowledged that the format of council led meetings does not always deliver the improvements and changes the residents want to see
- 3.40 The Community Engagement Team are working with many groups but to widen this engagement and meet the council's priorities and statutory duties we propose to develop these three core styles of engagement
- 3.41 **Proactive Engagement** – developing relationship with tenants by offering or joining everyday activities, consultations and events.

- Door knocking
- Questionnaires and surveys
- Social media and online groups
- Support tenant and residents' groups to provide and deliver local activities and events
- Supporting and developing arts, cultural and fun days/events
- Networking and workshops
- Supporting residents to develop ideas and bid for EDB/EIB
- Developing Neighbourhood Action Plans
- Use of community rooms

3.42 This approach enables people to get involved or express their views on a wide range of council services, policies or practices in a more informal way

3.43 **Responsive Engagement** - supports and enables services in the council to speak to residents through outward communication and feedback.

- Supporting council departments and teams to engage with tenants and leaseholders
- Provide specific consultation and engagement workshops and facilitate events to engage communities in council/housing priorities
- Provide some financial support to tenant and leaseholder groups
- Providing area-based teams of community engagement officers and community development workers to support to neighbourhood groups residents, tenants and leaseholders and to work with the council and build their capacity to self-manage.
- Support tenants and leaseholders to develop their skills and knowledge through training and learning
- Commission other organisations to offer independent support to tenant and leaseholder groups
- Support ward councillors in their work with communities
- Facilitate the development of self-sustaining independent community groups

3.44 **Structural Engagement** – this is the most formal engagement. It is often meeting based and is used to look at, council policy and practice.

- Providing support to TRAs, and offering information, guidance and practical support to tenant, leaseholder and community representatives.
- Support to area based representative groups including Local Action Teams, Neighbourhood Forums
- Support to the Tenant and Leaseholder structures such as Area Panels, Service Improvement groups and specialist groups
- Commissioning training and learning for/with tenant and leaseholder representatives
- Supporting tenants and leaseholders to be representative and engage their communities
- Explore further engagement with people in temporary and emergency accommodation

3.45 These approaches are further set out with the Tenant and Leaseholder Strategy Appendix One

### 3.46 **Conclusion**

3.47 The new Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy and Implementation Plan aims to move the council to a more collaborative and broader engagement approach with tenants and leaseholders. This approach will acknowledge the skills and experience of the residents and work with council departments and officers to support them to hear and respond to tenant and leaseholder priorities

3.48 This work will be developed with a three-year Implementation Plan. The development of the Implementation plan will engage staff from different departments, tenants, and leaseholders to consider the priority areas and identify the key priorities to develop over the 3 years.

## 4. **ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

### 4.1 **Do nothing**

This option would lead to continued frustrations from residents who have worked for years on changes to the structures. We would continue to support a small group of active residents to be involved but not widen this group or the demographic within the group to represent more tenant and leaseholder views. No change may also result in an increase in mistrust and a sense that 'nothing ever changes' and further impede the relationship between the tenants, leaseholder and council.

No changes to the EDB fund would result in a sustained focus on capital projects that are providing funding to a few groups and not engaging the wider tenant and leaseholder population. Users of the service, and residents on the EDB panel not be able to flexibly use the funds, it would be more difficult to evaluate the improvement in the 'quality of life' which is the key outcome for the fund. This would leave the EDB team and the wider community engagement team without answers to residents' concerns and dissatisfaction with the way that the current scheme is managed. Consequently, this may lead to lower participation rates and fewer council tenants and leaseholders actively represented in, and participating with, Housing and wider council services (one of the purposes of EDB).

## 5. **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION**

5.1 EDB Review Panel, Involvement and Empowerment Service Improvement Group and Area Panels have all been involved in the content of this paper. In addition, the information from the area panel review 2016 and EDB review in 2018 have been included.

## 6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 Proposals outlined in this report support the corporate priorities, and the section 105 of the Housing Act. The intention increasing engagement with tenants and leaseholders is long standing aspiration and needs to be considered within the context of how the community wish to be engaged rather than the focus on structures of meetings. To develop a wider 'Proactive Engagement' approach of working with tenants and leaseholder which aims to 'meet people where they are' and build trusting relationships that enable them to engage with the council in a wide range of ways. Developing the EDB funds to support Tenant and Leaseholder projects, linking some of these to the EIB fund to support the capital improvements to engage people that have not been involved before and better achieve the outcome of 'improving the quality of life'. Developing a participatory budgeting process will engage a more diverse group of people in decision making and will result in a fairer and more democratic process.

## 7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

### Financial Implications:

- 7.1 Examination of expenditure over a number of years indicated that the majority of expenditure has been of a revenue nature

The revenue budget for 2021/22 includes £0.247m for EDB and the current budget strategy uses EDB reserves of £0.240m to augment this to a total of £0.487m for 2021/22 if necessary.

The EIB for 2021/22 is £0.500m, of which £0.280m is included in the capital programme and £0.220m in the revenue budget, given the nature of spend to date.

*Finance Officer Consulted: Michael Bentley*

*Date: 25/02/21*

### Legal Implications:

- 7.2 As the council Committee with delegated responsibility for the discharge of the council's functions as a housing landlord, the recommendations in the report are within the committee's powers. Legal input will be provided as necessary in the future as the proposals are developed.

*Lawyer Consulted:*

*Name Liz Woodley*

*Date: 02/03/21*

### Equalities Implications:

- 7.3 By having a broader engagement approach with a wider and more diverse group of tenants and leaseholders, the council will be able to hear and amplify voices of those who may not have been heard previously. This will also allow us to understand the communities we work with better and address their needs in a more proactive way.

This strategy aligns with the corporate aims of the Fair and Inclusive Action Plan, specifically under the communities workstream.

An EIA will be developed in the next stages, to inform the focus and direction of the Implementation Plan.

*Equalities Manager Consulted: Anna Spragg      Date: 25/02/21*

Homelessness Implications:

7.4 None

Sustainability Implications:

7.5 None

Brexit Implications:

7.6 None

Any Other Significant Implications:

Crime & Disorder Implications:

7.5 None

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

7.6 None

Public Health Implications:

7.7 The Tenant and Leaseholder Strategy aims to reach a wider and more diverse group of people which will enable the council to have better understanding of the needs and opportunities to work with communities. Having the reach into the community is so important for public health outcomes and messaging. Covid has been an example of this when the community engagement team have been able to reach into the community to share public health messaging. This will be extending with the different types of working practice in the new strategy.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

7.8 None

**SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

**Appendices:**

1. Appendix One - Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy
2. Appendix Two – Housing engagement structures
3. Appendix three – EDB tables

