

**TENANTS' AND LEASEHOLDERS' PANEL**  
**24 July 2012**

**Lead Officer:** Executive director of adult services, health and housing

**Wards:** All

**Agenda Item:** 7

**Subject: -** Review of the Resident Involvement Framework

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**1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1.1 The Panel is asked to support a revised framework for the involvement of residents in the management and scrutiny of housing services

**2. SUMMARY**

- 2.1 This report details changes to the council's resident involvement framework which are being proposed to ensure that we are meeting regulatory requirements and that arrangements are effective and represent value for money.

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The revised regulatory framework for social housing introduced by the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) in April 2010 requires all housing providers to develop arrangements for co-regulation. There will be significantly less inspections and these will only be triggered in the event of poor performance or high levels of complaints
- 3.2 Co-regulation requires a relationship between the regulator, landlord and the tenant to carry out an assessment of the landlord's performance and develop plans for service improvements. In response to this Croydon agreed with its residents a framework for tenant scrutiny.
- 3.3 In April 2012 responsibility for social housing regulation passed to the Homes and Communities Agency. They have published revisions to the TSA regulatory standards. These included revisions to the Tenant Involvement & Empowerment standard. There is now a greater emphasis on local mechanisms to involve tenants, scrutinise landlord performance and resolve problems with housing services.
- 3.4 It can be shown that increased engagement by tenants in the scrutiny of housing services can result in improved customer focused services, build landlord/tenant relationships, build the capacity of the landlord and build the individual capacity of those engaged in the process.

## 4. THE CURRENT POSITION

4.1 Croydon has an excellent track record in involving its tenants in monitoring and reviewing its housing services. We have a number of tenant audit, performance monitoring, service review and inspection mechanisms in place. These include the following:

- **Housing Service Inspectors** – Residents are trained to carry out a detailed audit of a particular service area and present a report on their findings together with recommendations for improvements to DMT.
- **Mystery Shoppers** – Residents are trained to test or inspect services and report their findings to service managers and the performance monitoring panel
- **Neighbourhood Voices** – Residents monitor local estate services and reports are provided to neighbourhood services managers and performance monitoring panel
- **Estate Inspections** – Joint inspections with service managers and tenants. Actions plans produced. This is also an inspection programme organised by the deputy cabinet member for housing to which tenants are invited.
- **Surveys** – A range of surveys conducted to gauge tenants' views, satisfaction, priorities and aspirations.
- **Service Review Groups** – Residents reviewing or prioritising housing services with service managers. Recommendations to Tenant & Leaseholder Panel. (e.g. Stock Investment, Resident Involvement)
- **Tenant & Leaseholder Panel** – Make decisions on proposed changes to housing strategies or policies.

4.2 These activities have all independently proved to be effective in engaging tenants in service improvement and monitoring but currently they all operate independently of each other and, in the main, are council led. The current implementation of the Housing Scrutiny Panel will ensure that these activities are co-ordinated and overseen by tenants.

4.3 The council also services specialist panels to focus on issues that are specific to particular sections of the community. These include leaseholders, sheltered housing tenants and disabled residents.

4.4 Locally the council has been servicing Community Housing Panels (CHPs) which focus on local service delivery. The council also organises local surgeries for tenancy & repairs issues and supports residents' associations.

## 5. WHAT DO WE WANT TO ACHIEVE?

- To develop an effective involvement framework which enables & encourages all sections of the community to become involved in a way that is most convenient to them.
- To work in partnership with residents to drive up performance.
- To give residents the opportunity to raise complaints/complements about their housing services
- To give residents the opportunity to be involved in the management of their homes & estates, including the ability to influence strategic priorities, the formation of housing policies and the delivery of housing services.

- To consult residents on local standards (offers) and the opportunity to agree & monitor these.
- To develop mechanisms to ensure robust and effective tenant scrutiny of i) decision making ii) performance iii) customer service.
- To ensure robust resident self assessment and production of an annual report to tenants.
- Provide support to residents to build their capacity to be more effectively involved.
- To demonstrate that we understand the different needs of our residents, including in relation to the equality strands and residents with additional support needs

## **6. WHAT ARE THE DRIVERS FOR CHANGE?**

- The number of those who are currently actively involved is decreasing, particularly at community housing panel meetings. Currently only a small group of residents are regularly participating. These residents are spread thinly across a range of groups or events.
- Need to co-ordinate effective tenant scrutiny in line with new regulatory requirements
- Ensure resources are more focused towards scrutiny activities and in ensuring high quality services and excellent value for money.
- Tackle high cost, low impact in some areas of the existing involvement framework
- Ensure residents have the knowledge, skills and information to be effectively involved
- Need to embrace opportunities to use electronic means and new technologies to improve/increase options for involvement
- The introduction of the service provider/client relationship
- Making best use of limited officer and financial resources

## **7. WHAT ARE CROYDON'S TENANTS SAYING?**

7.1 The Resident Involvement Group agreed to consult both involved and non involved residents. A focus group of involved tenants was organised followed by a survey of non involved residents.

7.2 The survey results (see appendix 1) can be summarised as follows:

- Nearly all residents feel that it is important that they are given a say in their housing services
- The vast majority are happy to complete questionnaires or surveys
- Just over half of residents say they are likely to attend a meeting but many say that they are not aware of when they are taking place
- A significant number of residents are able and willing to communicate their views online or via a mobile phone
- Housing surgeries are popular but the timing and publicity could be an issue

7.3 The outcomes from the focus groups (see appendix 2) can be summarised as follows:

- Residents are ok with time they give and maybe willing to give more so long as it made a difference
- Biggest motivation to get involved was making a difference and getting information
- Biggest issues were poor outcomes – nothing gets done or not real consultation
- Feedback poor – don't always hear how their involvement has made a difference
- Best way to encourage involvement is to deliver on action plans/promises

## 8. PROPOSED CHANGES

8.1 In developing these proposals the following principles have been applied:

- a) retain things that work well (good outputs and cost effective)
- b) adapt or replace things that don't work well
- c) introduce new ways of working to meet new objectives
- d) introduce new ways to get involved to encourage those who traditionally fail to do so

8.2 We need to provide a range of options for resident engagement. It is essential that we continue to provide opportunities for residents to engage with us at a local level. It is proposed that this is achieved through the following:

- Continued support for **residents' associations & resident forums**
- Review the operation of the **community housing panels**. Continue to support these where there is a demand from residents but the responsibility for servicing of these would move gradually from the resident involvement team over to residents. Where regular attendance falls below 10 residents the panel will be disbanded. Where this happens we will encourage the continued engagement of active residents in other local activities.
- The introduction of **questiontime road shows** (similar to the successful council wide model) attended by senior managers, service providers and councillors
- Regular **surgeries** covering repairs, income, tenancy, estate services to be held in community centres & sheltered schemes
- **Themed open events** where requested by local tenants to focus on a specific service issue
- A programme of regular **estate inspections** attended by local residents

8.3 We also need to involve residents in service delivery and improvement. It is proposed that we do this through the following:

- Continue to service **specialist panels** for sheltered housing tenants, disabled residents\* and leaseholders. In addition we will review the forums for BME residents and younger residents.

- Continue to support **service review groups** (stock investment group, resident involvement group etc) and set these up when services are undergoing major reviews.
- Develop a **housing on-line forum** to enable residents to communicate with each other and seek information from officers on generic housing service issues. This would also operate as a hub for the council to seek tenants' views & priorities for housing services.

\* The role of the Housing Disability Panel may be changed to become a user panel for all those in receipt of adult services (subject to service user consultation).

- 8.4 Finally, we need to ensure that residents are able to scrutinise and monitor housing services. The **Housing Scrutiny Panel** will co-ordinate all scrutiny activities and present reports to senior management recommending service improvements. Scrutiny mechanisms will include Neighbourhood Voices, Mystery Shoppers, Housing Service Inspectors and surveys and benchmarking reports.
- 8.5 It is proposed that regular performance will continue to be presented to the **Performance Monitoring Panel** who can refer any performance concerns to scrutiny.
- 8.6 Membership of all of these groups & activities (except the scrutiny panel) will be recruited from the **Housing Sounding Board**. Any tenant wishing to participate would be required to join the HSB if they were not already members. We will look to maintain a representative membership of around 500 residents.
- 8.7 It is proposed that the membership of the **Tenant & Leaseholder Panel** be opened up to all residents subject to a self assessment (see 9.1 below). It is also proposed that the chairing of this panel be rotated on a more regular basis to further empower a greater number of panel members. It is proposed that these changes take place after the changes to other elements of the framework have bedded in.
- 8.8 Feedback from residents indicates that the vast majority will not attend any form of meeting or event regarding their housing services due to their other commitments, lack of interest or a belief that their involvement will not make any difference.
- 8.9 One alternative to meetings which may be more convenient for residents is an **on line forum**. This can take many forms but this should enable residents to post questions, seek advice from other residents or agencies, promote & celebrate their achievements. It will provide the council with a cost effective way of communicating information, promoting events/meetings, seeking customer feedback/views and identifying issues with service delivery. It is hoped that this will greatly increase the number and range of residents regularly engaging with the council. Together with tenants, the council will explore options for establishing an on line forum for council tenants & leaseholders to communicate with each other & the council.
- 8.10 The council will look to recruit new residents from those who have had reason

to complain about their housing services, even if they only engage on a specific service area or for short periods. We will also explore new ways of recruiting new residents including adverts in newsletters and on line.

- 8.11 The council will build on the success of the 'all ages' project and explore ways of working with **young people** to enable them to feed into the involvement framework.
- 8.12 The survey suggests that more residents maybe persuaded to attend meetings if they were aware of when they were taking place. A **communication strategy** will be developed together with residents. It has already been proposed that a regular **e-newsletter** be produced summarising all past and future involvement activities together with their outcomes.
- 8.13 A diagram of the proposed framework is attached as appendix 1.

## **9. TRAINING AND COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS**

- 9.1 Currently, with the exception of the newly formed Tenant Scrutiny Panel (interview) and the Tenant & Leaseholder Panel (elections), any tenant can join a panel or working group. We need to maintain an 'open door' to our range of involvement activities but it has become evident that some of the scrutiny activities and some of the service review panels require a higher level of commitment, skills & knowledge if they are to be effective.
- 9.2 Therefore it is proposed that some activities will require tenants to demonstrate that they have the required competencies to participate in the activity or on the group. This would normally be via a simple self assessment and/or a requirement to attend compulsory training/induction sessions.

## **10. IMPLEMENTATION TIMETABLE**

- 10.1 A proposed implementation timetable is attached as appendix 4.

## **11. FINANCIAL AND STAFFING IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 Initially there is likely to be an increase in the number of meetings or activities taking place. Longer term it is proposed that the servicing of some of these activities will be transferred to residents. There will be significant staff resources involved in establishing the new activities but these should reduce after the first year. There will be costs incurred for tenant training and if the numbers of residents involved increases there will be additional claims for expenses and refreshments. However it is felt that all costs can be contained within existing budgets and staffing within existing resources.

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