

## Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement, Annual Report

<b>Corporate Priority:</b>	<b>Providing high quality council homes and landlord services</b>
<b>Relevant Ward Member(s):</b>	All
<b>Date of consultation with Ward Member(s):</b>	N/A
<b>Exempt Information:</b>	No
<b>Key Decision:</b>	No
<b>Subject to call-in:</b>	No Not key decision

### 1 Summary

- 1.1 Cabinet approved a revised Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Framework in 2022, which marked a change in the way the Council engages with and listens to its tenants and leaseholders.
- 1.2 This report provides an update on engagement activity, outcomes and associated improvements and service changes over the last 12 months.
- 1.3 Meaningful engagement with tenants and ensuring tenants voices are heard is an important responsibility for a landlord. This report seeks to provide assurance that the council takes this seriously and puts it into practice, and in doing so, that the council can meet its regulatory requirements and corporate commitment to providing high quality council homes and landlord services.

### 2 Recommendation(s)

**That Cabinet:**

- 2.1 **Notes the progress to date and endorses the approach taken to engage with Melton Borough Council tenants and leaseholders**

### **3 Background**

- 3.1 In November 2020, the Government released its White Paper; 'The Charter for Social Housing Residents'.
- 3.2 The White Paper aims to rebalance the relationship between social housing landlords and their tenants, and it sets out principles to underpin safe and decent housing, ensures that residents (tenants & leaseholders) are treated with dignity and respect and that social housing that is required, is provided for the future.
- 3.3 Though there is a clear section within the white paper which addresses the issue of engaging residents directly, there is a thread running through the whole document on the need to meaningfully engage with residents and leaseholders across housing services.
- 3.4 Specific national emphasis to strengthen the residents voice includes:
- An expectation that the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) will require landlords to demonstrate how they are looking at best practice and continuously improving their engagement with residents
  - Delivery of a new opportunities and empowerment programme for residents, giving them tools to influence their landlords, hold them to account and make engagement more effective
  - A review of professional training and development to ensure that residents receive a high-quality customer service
  - A commitment to ongoing ministerial engagement with social housing residents to listen to their concerns (although light on specific details of how this will be taken forward)
- 3.5 Tenant engagement is not new, but it is an area that requires continued focus and continuous improvement, and increased emphasis has been placed on this by the Government and Regulator of Social Housing. It is important that it is embedded, and that it is taken seriously and as such, is not seen solely as a standalone function.
- 3.6 In January 2022, Melton Borough Council implemented a [new framework](#) for tenant and leaseholder engagement. The framework recognised that the Council was at the start of a new phase of engagement, and one that required the council to respond proactively and confidently to the requirements of the Charter for Social Housing Residents.
- 3.7 This report provides an update on engagement activity, outcomes and associated improvements and service changes over the last 12 months and seeks to provide assurance that the council takes this seriously and puts it into practice.

### **4 Main Considerations**

- 4.1 The tenant and leaseholder engagement framework (approved in January 2022) initially set a series of actions. The actions were intended to broaden and improve meaningful engagement, whilst also creating solid foundations to make service changes and improvements in response to feedback, and to improve the Council's ability to demonstrate to the RSH that it takes this seriously.

4.2 The initial actions and progress against these are shown below:

Action	Rag Rating	Commentary
Publish details of the commitment to engage in a meaningful and proactive way with tenants and leaseholders	Complete	Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Framework completed and published. Included in tenant newsletters.
Publish annual tenant satisfaction survey results and recommendations	On Track	<p>The government consultation on Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) has concluded and the council is on track to collect the information required in 2023. Housemark has been commissioned to undertake the annual tenant survey for the next three years. The survey will commence in summer 2023.</p> <p>The feedback received will be shared with the RSH and with tenants and leaseholders. This will become an annual survey, enabling the tracking of progress. In addition to 12 standard questions, the council is exploring the focus for 3 additional questions.</p>
Arrange training for staff and stakeholders around the White Paper core values and the Tenant & Leaseholder Engagement Framework	On Track	<p>Staff have had internal briefing sessions on engagement and their role within delivering this.</p> <p>The staff away day in 2022 also focused on how roles and responsibilities will change as consultation and engagement forms part of every post within the Housing Department. The engagement activity tracker shows increased engagement activity across a range of housing service functions.</p> <p>Further detail on the requirement for senior officers to hold professional qualifications is awaited. A diagnostic of staff qualifications has been completed and future training and professional qualification requirements will be progressed via individual performance development reviews.</p>
Implement a programme of service improvement groups from February 2022	Complete (with ongoing review and development)	<p>The Council established the 'Your Choice' group in 2022. As part of this group, residents and council officers meet every 6 weeks. Work has included reviewing processes (such as the rent arrears management process) and provides an opportunity for residents to provide feedback and suggestions. Feedback is also provided. To increase reach, 'Your Choice' meetings are just one of the ways in which residents can get involved. Tenants and leaseholders can also comment / provide feedback via email or post (example: HRA business plan consultation).</p> <p>More bespoke engagement is carried out for specific projects and a consultation toolkit has been developed (shaped by resident feedback) to assist with this. It is currently being piloted.</p>
Engage with tenants to shape the development of the HRA business plan	Complete	A survey questionnaire was sent to all tenants, seeking feedback on priorities for investment. Over 350 responses were received. This feedback directly informed the development of both the HRA Business Plan and HRA Asset Management Plan. Positive feedback was received through an external review of the Council's Business Plan by Savills, who noted that tenant engagement in developing the plan was positive and meaningful.

Launch of a Tenant & Leaseholder Facebook Group	On Hold	A Tenant and Leaseholder Facebook Page has been developed. This action has been placed on hold for operational reasons and will be reconsidered in 2023.
Create a specific Tenant & Leaseholder Engagement webpage	Complete and ongoing (continuous improvement)	Created and available at <a href="#">Tenant and leaseholder engagement – Melton Borough Council</a> Further to resident feedback, a more bespoke housing / landlord services microsite is in development. This is a key action for 2023.
Develop and issue the next Homes for Melton newsletter end January 2022	Complete and ongoing	Two newsletters have been produced to date, with an aim to produce two per year plus an annual report (performance focussed) each summer.
Refine the proposed 'tenant offer' to guide communication between the Councils and tenant representatives	Complete and ongoing	Informed by tenant feedback, a tenant and leaseholder policy has been created which sets out the ways in which residents can get involved. This has been published to the council's website at <a href="#">Tenant Leaseholder Engagement Policy – Melton Borough Council</a> .
Understand requirements to achieve TPAS accreditation	On Track	The Council remains a TPAS member, enabling access to training, learning and best practice. Accreditation to be reconsidered in 2023. Priority has been given to Housemark and development of Tenant Satisfaction Survey at the current time.
Develop a communications plan	Ongoing	Communication with residents has improved.  Examples include improved communication through tenants newsletters, attendance at events / coffee mornings, implementation of tenant consultation toolkit, estate walkabouts and public facing messaging around commitments made within the HRA business plan.  The ways in which tenants can get involved are set out in the <a href="#">Tenant Leaseholder Engagement Policy – Melton Borough Council</a> .
Ensure that tenant engagement is embedded as a core strand of the remit of a new strategic housing officers' group (internal)	Ongoing	The Housing Leadership Team was established in 2022. This forms a key part of the considerations by the HLT at their meetings. Examples include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Signing off consultation toolkit</li> <li>- Review of regulatory changes</li> <li>- Review of complaints, trends and learning</li> <li>- Development of new performance dashboard</li> <li>- Regulatory readiness diagnostic (underway)</li> <li>- Decision to commission Housemark to deliver tenant satisfaction survey</li> </ul>

4.3 Tenant engagement is becoming more readily embedded into the work of the whole housing team. An engagement tracker is maintained by the Housing Team to ensure activity is logged and that actions and improvements are clearly recorded.

4.4 Some notable achievements and improvements are listed below:

4.4.1 Signing up to **Housemark** benchmarking services. This will support the council's continued improvement by providing comprehensive cost and performance comparative information, with housing providers across the social housing sector.

This will also provide access to best practice forums and learning, in order to improve services.

4.4.2 The **Your Choice** platform has started to change in focus, momentum, and impact. As this mechanism has evolved, it has started to create a space in which tenants are genuinely shaping processes and approaches, and tenant feedback is shaping and improving services. Some key examples include:

- Development of a **Tenant Hardship Fund** – Tenant suggestions around criteria, level of support, and type of support shaped the offer that has been created. This fund will be launched further to due diligence on the proposed funding allocation and record keeping processes.
- Further to tenant feedback, a **housing microsite** (website) is in development. This will enable tenants and leaseholders to access relevant information more easily, without being embedded within the council's main website. Tenant feedback will continue to shape this piece of work.
- Through the Your Choice group, tenant representatives reviewed the Council's suite of **rent arrears** letters and have provided comments and feedback which are leading to changes in the way letters are written.
- A **Housing Asset Consultation Toolkit** was developed, to embed this into the Council's planned improvements programme for homes and communal areas. This includes providing choice (where possible and appropriate). Some examples of consultation in action include seeking tenants views on future options for outbuildings/ sheds and providing choice to residents on kitchen cupboards as part of a kitchen upgrade programme.
- **Estate Walkabouts** have proven to be beneficial, and a more structured programme is in development. Key to these visits is tracking actions taken to follow up on commitments made.
- The **Housing Asset Management Plan** was discussed with the Your Choice group, and key feedback was the need to make the plans 'real' to residents. Information on key commitments (pledges) has been provided via social media channels, and the newsletter to show that we have listened to customers and have used their initial feedback in the HRA business plan. We showed that their requests around replacing aluminium windows, upgrading all storages heaters, and focusing on kitchens and bathrooms was where the council would be investing.
- A recent positive example of collaboration and engagement took place is a recent coffee morning held by Bell Group before **fire improvement works** started at St Johns Court. The feedback on this was really positive.

## 5 Future Engagement Activity

5.1 As a landlord, we take tenant engagement seriously, and it is an area of continuous improvement. In 2023/24, key activities include:

- **Annual Report** in summer 2023: this will be an extended version of the tenant newsletter, in providing information to customers, but also incorporating information around performance of MBC as a landlord and also key information about the services we provide to customers.

- Complete an **annual survey of tenant satisfaction** in line with the Government's Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM'S) and submit the outcome to the Regulator for Social Housing from 2024. Housemark has been commissioned to undertake this survey on behalf of the council for the next three years. Alongside 12 standardised questions, we can ask an additional 3 questions to tenants and leaseholders. This is a key programme of work.
- Launching a **digital engagement platform** for all customers to sign up to. The digital platform will be somewhere we can send surveys, request feedback, and provide information quickly, in order to shape and improve services.
- Finalise and launch the **housing microsite**, using the feedback from our customers on what they would want to see included, ensuring it is clear and user friendly.
- Review cases where it has not been possible to access to properties (for example, to carry out a stock condition survey) in order to engage proactively with residents and to understand any reasons for anxiety about enabling access. This often requires a case-by-case approach to build trust, ahead of (and to seek to prevent the need for) more formal action being taken.

5.2 An **engagement tracker** is in place to log engagement activity and outcomes. This is also key to being able to provide confidence and assurance on meaningful engagement and improvements made to tenants, officers, members and the Regulator for Social Housing. This also shows us what we have learned so that we can implement in future projects, processes and amend the ways we work. This is reviewed by managers on a quarterly period to check that its being managed and updated correctly with all engagements/ consultations we have undertaken.

5.3 Significant progress has been made in 22/23, but the Council is still on a journey of housing improvement and is not complacent. Our teams are committed to putting customers at the heart of what we do and continued focus and emphasis on tenant engagement – not as a nice to have but as a core responsibility as a landlord – will continue.

## 6 Financial Implications

6.1 There are no cost implications arising directly from this annual report. However, regulatory change in the social housing sector does create cost pressures for the council and at present, the availability of new burdens funding from central government is uncertain.

6.2 For example:

6.2.1 The cost for the **Tenant Satisfaction Survey** subscription in 2023/24 is £15,832 plus VAT. From 24/25 onwards, a procurement exercise will be undertaken to secure a longer-term contract to meet the emerging regulatory requirement [see Decision Notice Ref CEX295]

6.2.2 **Housing Services Benchmarking** via House Mark will provide a much-needed benchmarking facility and access to best practice in the sector which we can learn from to improve services for our tenants and leaseholders, whilst also enabling the council to best manage performance and value for money. The total cost for a three-year period (2023/24 to 2025/26 inclusive) is £13,755 plus VAT. A 3-year subscription has been paid upfront at £13,755+VAT with no CPI increase incurred. Year 1 £4435+VAT, year 2 and 3 at £4660+VAT [see Decision Notice Ref CEX288]

- 6.3 Finance and HR Implications:
- 6.3.1 Landlords await further clarity from Government regarding proposals to **professionalise the housing sector** through specific qualifications. Cost implications associated with the required training and development pathways will be considered when this information becomes available. It is so far suggested that any staff working at SLT level should have a level 5 qualification, and any manager responsible for a service a level 4. What is not clear yet is does it have to be a housing specific qualification, timeframes to meet the level required, and if any support for the sector will be available.
- 6.3.2 Officer time and resource across a range of teams contributes to fulfilling tenant engagement requirements effectively and to be able to report to the Regulator robustly. It is a core responsibility as a landlord.

**Financial Implications reviewed by: Director for Corporate services**

## **7 Legal and Governance Implications**

- 7.1 Regulatory change on the housing sector has been on the horizon for some time, and whilst details of legislation and regulations are still emerging, landlords are actively preparing for change.
- 7.2 The government has been explicit in its commitment to enhance consumer regulation in the social housing sector. This means the powers of the regulator to oversee the services provided to residents and intervene if they are not good enough. The legislation will also remove the existing ‘serious detriment test’, which currently sets a high legal bar on the Regulator’s power to intervene in any alleged service failures.
- 7.3 The Regulator of Social Housing has developed an implementation plan but bringing it into force requires legislation. This legislative change will be driven by the Social Housing Regulation Bill.
- 7.4 As a landlord, we are actively preparing for regulatory change. For example, we know the regulator plans to carry out routine inspections of social landlords with more than 1,000 homes and will check compliance with new consumer standards whilst also using tenant satisfaction measures (TSM) to track a landlord’s performance. A robust approach to this is key.
- 7.5 A requirement to undertake an in-depth self-assessment (IDA) based on the new regulatory and legislative requirements is expected in 2023.
- 7.6 Until the final bill is passed into legislation, some of the details and implications remain uncertain. However, the Council is clear that meaningful tenant and leaseholder engagement is at the heart of what is expected, and we will be expected to be able to demonstrate this when the time for an inspection is required.

**Legal Implications reviewed by: Alison McKane, Assistant Director for Governance & Democracy and Monitoring Officer**

## 8 Risk & Mitigation

Risk No	Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Risk
1	Failure of in-depth assessment/ inspection	Low	Critical	Could lead to regulatory intervention
2	Customer feedback ignored or not acted upon, and lessons not learnt	Very Low	Marginal	Failure to follow policy and regulations
3	Unable to provide evidence to report on TSM's	Very Low	Critical	Regulatory requirement failing

		Impact / Consequences			
		Negligible	Marginal	Critical	Catastrophic
Likelihood	Score/ definition	1	2	3	4
	6 Very High				
	5 High				
	4 Significant				
	3 Low			1	
	2 Very Low		2	3	
	1 Almost impossible				

Risk No	Mitigation
1	Lead person named within MBC (Assistant Director for Housing Services) for ensuring compliance with regulatory changes and learning from other organisations through House Mark and other supporting posts within the organisation (Housing Regulatory Lead).
2	Tracker created and over seen by several leads within Housing Services to ensure we are on track with engagement/ consultations and that we are providing feedback to customer and learning from our experiences.
3	TSM provider signed up too and initial kick of meeting taken place, plan to go live with TSM survey in late Sept/ early Oct 2023 to provide plenty of learning and understanding from results and time to submit before summer 2024 deadline.



## 9 Background Papers

- 9.1 [Tenant and Leaseholder Framework \(melton.gov.uk\)](https://www.melton.gov.uk)
- 9.2 [Melton Borough Council Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Policy](#)
- 9.3 Decision Notice: Housing Benchmarking Services
- 9.4 Decision Notice: Tenant Satisfaction Survey
- 9.5 Engagement Tracker (internal document)

## 10 Appendices

- 10.1 Appendix A: Homes for Melton, Tenant Newsletter August 2022
- 10.2 Appendix B: Homes for Melton, Tenant Newsletter March 2023

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