
Select Committee on Environment – 29th January 2007

Report of the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services

Tenant Participation

Purpose of the Report

1. To update members on the progress with the implementation of the Tenant Participation review.

Introduction

2. Since the introduction of the National Framework for Tenant Participation Compacts in 1999, far greater emphasis has been placed on tenant involvement. In that time tenant involvement has rapidly climbed up the housing agenda and is now considered as important as improving re-let times and reducing rent arrears levels.
3. More recently the inspection process has clearly focused on local authorities commitment to involving tenants in the decision making process and the drive to providing a customer focused service.
4. During this time the methods used to deliver tenant participation have re-emphasised the value of the more traditional methods of involvement such as tenant and resident groups. Whilst there is a clear need for this to continue other more modern and flexible approaches are required to meet the increased demands of tenants and residents in today's modern society.

Background

5. The Housing Service Improvement Plan 2005/08 identified the need for a review of the tenant participation service following consultation with senior officers. In addition, the introduction of the Audit Commission Key Lines Of Enquiry 5 - Resident Involvement, has placed a renewed emphasis on the need to reconsider the approach to tenant participation.
6. Consequently, a review group of tenants and officers was established and a series of Review Group meetings were held to coordinate evidence and information on the approach to resident involvement within the Housing Service. The recommendations for improvement were included in a Tenant Participation Improvement Plan and presented to Department Management Team in April 2006

The Extent of the Review

7. The review considered four key areas; Accessibility, Diversity, Value for Money and Resident Involvement methods. The key targets set within the review process included: -
 - (i) Improve Accessibility to Service Provision
 - (i) Extend the Diversity and Equality of the Service
 - (ii) Maximise Value For Money
 - (iii) Improve Resident Involvement Opportunities

Progress against Key Targets

The improvement plan outlines the actions required to achieve the key targets set out in the review.

8. Improve Accessibility to Service Provision

The restructure of the Tenant Participation team has been completed, with the Principal Participation Development Officer (PPDO) now responsible for a small patch as well as managing the team on an operational basis.

The relocation of the team to the Stourbridge Office for part of the working week is currently in progress and will be completed in January 2007 subject to IT requirements.

The Borough Forums have been replaced by an annual tenants conference, the first of which will take place in May 2007 and will focus on Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB).

Strategic meetings have been established with Dudley Federation of Tenants and Residents Association (DFTRA) and focus on the development of the service. To date a comprehensive tenant training plan has been developed as well as the introduction of public liability Insurance for all Tenants and Residents Associations (TRA).

9. Extend Diversity and Equality of the Service

Within existing resources a Diversity Development Officer has been appointed on a 12 month temporary contract and a detailed work plan has been agreed.

Links have been established with Community Leaders and BME voluntary organisations to develop the borough wide approach to consulting BME tenants more effectively

10. Maximise Value For Money

The Participation Team have been successful in establishing the Black Country Tenant Participation Benchmarking group, which includes Wolverhampton, Sandwell and Walsall. To date the group have met on two occasions and have developed their terms of reference.

External funding sources have been identified and several TRAs have been successful in accessing external funding. In addition, a grant of £1000 has been successfully obtained to fund a drama based group for the forthcoming ASB conference

A pilot scheme has been introduced in the Stourbridge area to undertake a six month evaluation of the use of press advertisements to promote forthcoming Tenant and Resident Associations meetings as opposed to the traditional method of flyers which are currently distributed to individual properties within the catchment area. To date early indications are that the attendance has increased and savings identified using this method of communication. At the end of this pilot a report will be produced and taken to DFTRA to consider the way forward.

Local Performance Indicators have been identified, which will be used to measure progress within the service. The criteria, collation and monitoring of the indicators are currently being developed and will be in place for April 2007

11. Improve Resident Involvement Opportunities

An In-house training programme, which included Chairing skills, minute taking etc, has been developed and as a result 194 tenants have attended and subsequently received certificates of achievement during the year.

The tenant participation pages on the Dudley MBC website have been amended and improved to include access to the Dudley Tenant Participation Strategy and Agreement (Compact) as well as details of all TRAs and Area Panels.

The options for involvement are now included within the tenants handbook.

The Post tenancy visit form has been amended to include a focus on tenant participation. There is now a greater emphasis on promoting tenant participation with new tenants during the post tenancy visit carried out by the Housing Manager

12. Audit of Tenant Participation

An audit of the Tenant Participation service was carried out during August 2006 as part of the Audit Services Plan for 2006/07.

Six areas of the service were considered as part of the audit, which included areas such as Benchmarking, the ability of tenants to influence strategic and service plans and tenants comments are taken on board etc. All six areas were identified as good or satisfactory.

Conclusion

13. The review of tenant participation has been extremely successful in deciding on a clear way forward for the service with Dudley. There has been a clear emphasis placed on achieving an excellent service.
14. The improvement actions have been successfully developed with DFTRA and represent a joint approach between DFTRA and Housing services to improving the service for all tenants. The achievement of the actions as outlined within the Improvement Plan will ensure that the service continues to develop and meet our customer needs as well as provide an excellent Tenant Participation service.

Finance

15. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Law

16. The Housing Act 1985 s105 requires consultation to be undertaken on any significant changes to the provision of the housing management service.

Equality Impact

17. The appointment of a temporary Diversity Development Officer for twelve months will allow for a greater focus on improving consultation with tenants from hard to reach groups

Recommendation

18. Members are asked to note the content of this report.



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