

Report to: Policy & Performance Improvement Committee - 28 October 2024

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Lead Officer: Jane Diver, and Robyn Henry, Tenant Engagement Officers, HHW

Report Summary	
Report Title	Tenant Engagement Update – Embedding the Tenant Voice at NSDC
Purpose of Report	To provide a progress report on tenant engagement methodology and practices and new activities towards maximum compliance with the new consumer regulation regime.
Recommendations	<p>That the Policy & Performance Improvement Committee:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) review and note the responsibilities of the Council (both members and officers) as a housing authority in relation to consumer regulation; b) note the progress and planned engagement with the Tenant Participation Advisory Services (TPAS) on creating a new tenant engagement structure; c) note how feedback from the tenant engagement survey will be used alongside Tenant Satisfaction Measures performance and learning from complaints to inform the workplan for service improvement for next 18 months; d) consider how this activity fits in the programme of scrutiny for Policy & Performance Improvement Committee; and e) note that the results of the TPAS re-engineering project will be reported to Committee in June 2025 to scrutinise the detailed action plan and plans for implementation and endorse for approval by Tenant Engagement Board and Cabinet.

1.0 Background

1.1 Tenant engagement has changed a lot over the past few years, mostly due to the introduction of The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 and the new consumer standards that were introduced from 1 April 2024. The Act and consumer standards aim to drive forward significant change in holding all landlords to account, placing the needs of tenants at the heart of government reforms to improve the quality of life for those living in social housing.

1.2 Having the consumer standards is another step in addressing systemic issues identified following the Grenfell Tower tragedy, and other major failings by social landlords, not just on the safety and quality of social housing, but about how tenants are treated by their landlords and the stigma associated with social housing. The new Consumer Standards are as follows:

- **Safety and Quality standard:** Requires landlords to evidence they are providing safe and good-quality homes for their tenants, along with good-quality landlords services.
- **Transparency, influence and accountability standard:** This requires landlords to be open and honest with tenants and treat them with fairness and respect so they can access services, raise concerns, when necessary, influence decision making and hold their landlord to account.
- **Neighbourhood and Community standard:** This requires landlords to engage with other relevant parties so that tenants can live in safe and well-maintained neighbourhoods and feel safe in their homes.
- **Tenancy standard:** This requires landlords to have a fair allocation process for the letting of homes, as well as requirements for how tenancies are managed by landlords.

1.3 ***Genuine consideration of tenants' views should be at the heart of registered providers' different levels of decision-making about the delivery of landlord services.'***

Regulator of Social Housing (RSH), Consumer standards Code of Practice April 2024.

1.4 In preparation for this focus on engagement, the Council created two full time Tenant Engagement Officers in 2022, funded through savings of bringing housing services back into The Council. In line with consumer standards that engagement is everybody's role, when considering the reward and retention project, tenant engagement will be added in to all relevant job descriptions and listening and responding to tenants' views will be included as a key responsibility.

1.5 The new Regulatory framework consists of:

- a new set of Consumer Standards which social housing providers will be inspected against by the Regulator of Social Housing and awarded a rating of C1-C4 for compliance with the standards. The grading descriptions are as follows:
 - C1, our judgement is that overall, the landlord is delivering the outcomes of the consumer standards, The landlord has demonstrated that it identifies when issues occur and puts plans in the place to remedy and minimise recurrence.
 - C2, our judgement is that there are some weaknesses in the landlord delivering the outcomes of the consumer standards and improvement is needed.
 - C3, our judgement is that there are serious failings in the landlord delivering the outcomes of the consumer standards and significant improvement is needed.
 - C4, our judgement is that there are very serious failings in the landlord delivering the outcomes of the consumer standards. The landlord must make fundamental changes so that improved outcomes are delivered.

- Introduction of annual Tenant Satisfaction Measures to enable landlord performance to be compared across the sector against key performance indicators.
- Strengthening the role of the Regulator of Social Housing's powers to carry out regular inspections and utilise an array of enforcement tools.
- With plans to:
 - introduce (following consultation) powers to set strict timescales for social landlords to address hazards ([Awaab's Law](#))
 - introduce an additional standard for Conduct and Competency to set out the qualification requirements for staff involved in the management of social housing.
- Alongside this, the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) powers have increased, requiring all social landlords to comply with and publish the Complaint Handling Code, producing spotlight reports and training relating to failings in the management of complaints. The Housing Ombudsman are working closely with the Regulator for Social housing by sharing information and data about landlords that are having complaints made against them more regularly and being found of maladministration judgements, which is shaping part of the inspection regime.

1.6 To show compliance with the consumer standards, the Council needs to clearly evidence how tenants have influence on the services the Council provides and how they hold the Council, as their landlord, to account.

1.7 These enhanced regulations and standards have been an opportunity for the tenant engagement team to review the approach to tenant engagement and create meaningful opportunities for tenants to influence the services they receive.

1.8 The Housing Teams have completed a self-assessment against the consumer standards and are creating an action plan to address any gaps, in preparation for the Regulator giving six weeks' notice of an inspection of our housing services.

1.9 This report sets out the current arrangements for Council tenants to have their say and influence specifically housing services that the Council provides, and changes proposed to ensure continued meaningful opportunities for tenants continue.

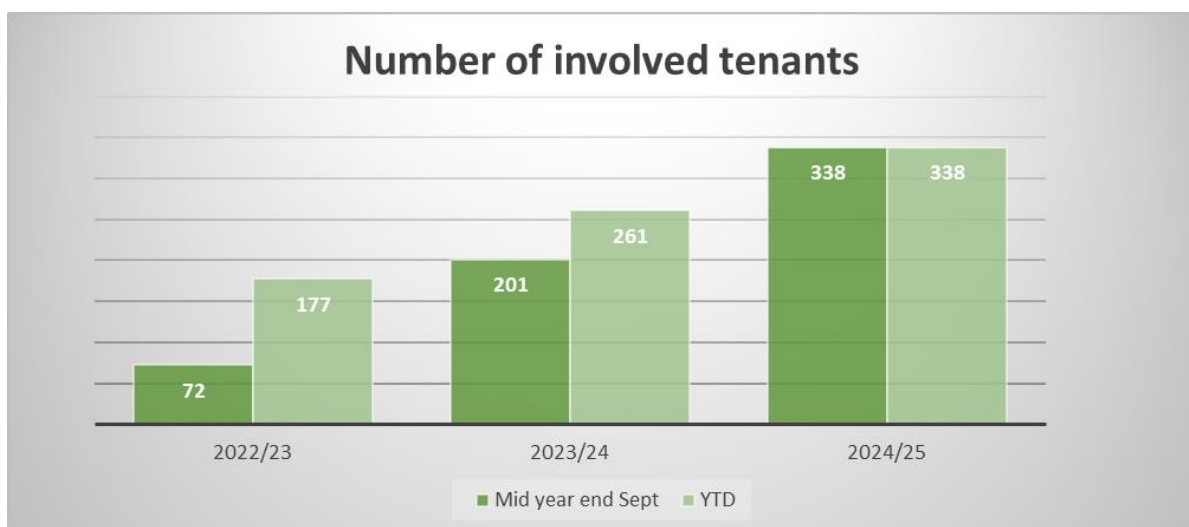
2.0 Performance Around Tenant Engagement to Date

2.1 The table below shows how our 2023-24 tenant satisfaction measures (TSMs) outturn compares against the benchmark for measures relating to tenant engagement. Overall, our performance was good with some areas for improvement. For the current year, the Council changed its TSM methodology from an annual snapshot to a rolling programme of monthly sampling of tenant's views. As of August 2024, our performance is strong and improved against previous results.

TSM Survey Question	NSDC Result 2023/24	HouseMark Top Quartile Threshold 2023/24	NSDC rolling result August 2024
TP01 Satisfaction with overall service	77.9%	78.0%	81%
TP06 Satisfaction that the Council listens to views and acts upon them	68.0%	67.3%	70%
TP07 Satisfaction with being kept informed	69.8%	76.7%	74%
TP08 Satisfaction that treated fairly and with respect	80.8%	83.3%	85%
TP09 Satisfaction with approach to complaints	27.6%	40.0%	45%

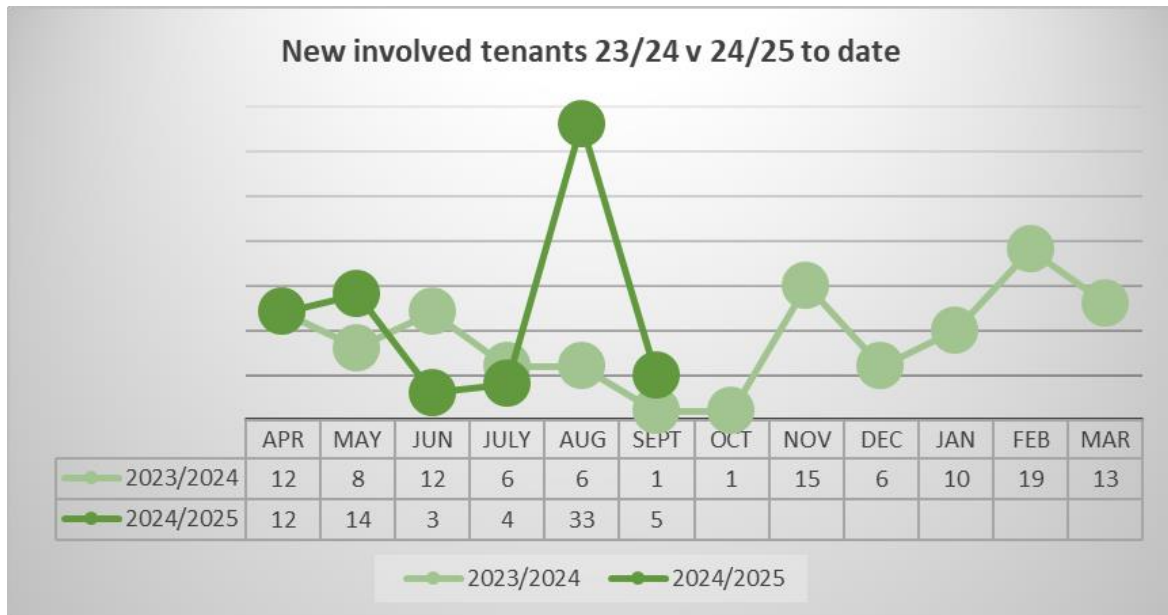
2.2 The following charts show data we collect relating to the Council’s involved tenants. There are tenants who engage in many of the ways that are available, attending meetings across the district in person, attending workshops to feedback on policies and procedures, joining online sessions and in person events. Some tenants provide feedback by email, preferring to have influence from the comfort of their own home; others prefer to receive information about the services the council provides, and the opportunities to join in, but have no intention of being actively engaged.

2.3 This chart shows the number of involved tenants, as at the mid-point and the end of the year. Those tenants who have identified themselves as having an interest in being involved. This group receive all communications regarding opportunities to be involved.

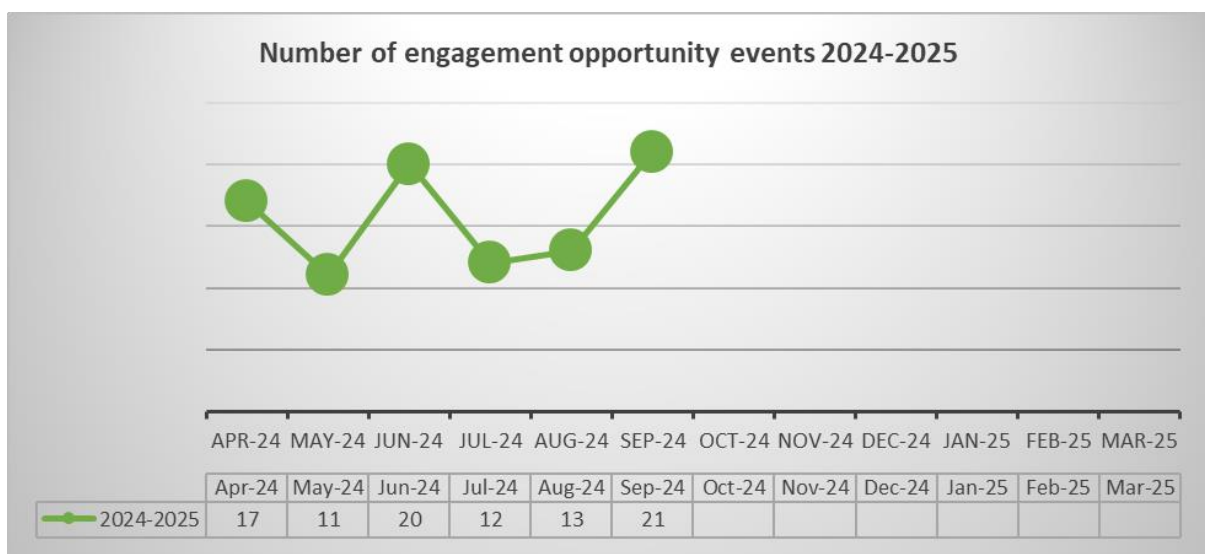


The data shows a steady increase in the number of tenants stating an interest in getting involved. Tenants are identified through a variety of ways including 'Getting To Know You Visits' and Tenancy Sign up, completed by tenancy officers; attendance at community events such as local litter picks and the local Community Link Meetings; by word of mouth from other tenants; from social media requests and website enquiries; and from general enquiries.

2.4 This chart shows the number of new involved tenants joining the database by month and year. There have been 24 requests for removal from the list.



2.5 This chart shows the number of engagement activity opportunities, in this current year, which includes community link group meetings, local litter picks, Boughton Hub open day, empty home inspections prior to re-let, grounds maintenance champion audits, and events such as the Yorke Drive community day and the Alexander Lodge open day. We now have 33 involved tenants on the new Sounding Board – the first point of call that we use for consultations, workshops, and policy feedback.



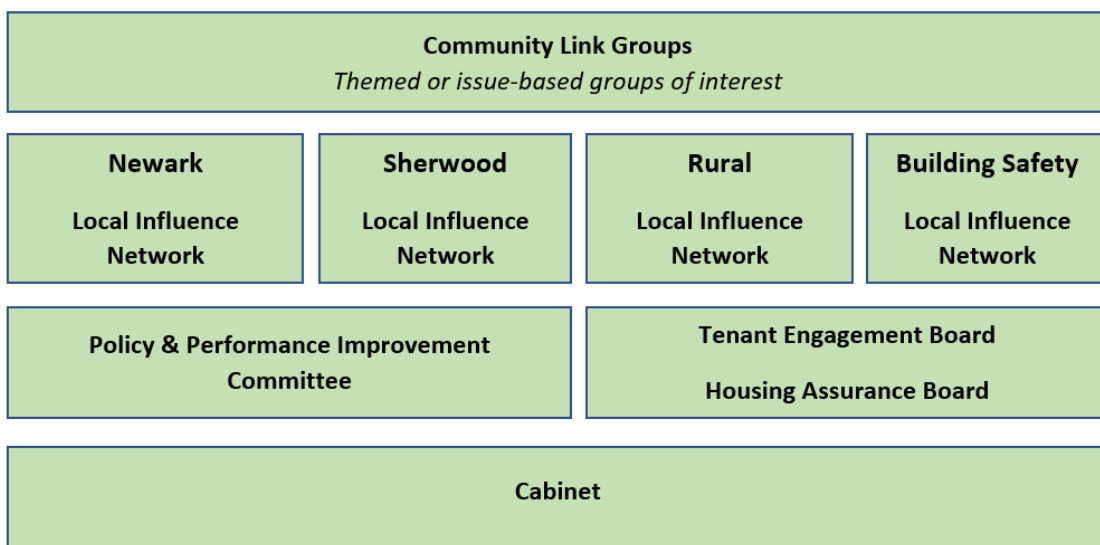
2.6 This chart shows the number of tenants attending the engagement opportunity events. The peak in August is the number of tenants who completed the tenant survey (609).



2.7 We understand the benefit of data collection and have been more rigorous in collection this year; how we do that going forward will be part of the TPAS scope of work and the use of the new Housing Management System.

3.0 Existing Tenant Engagement Framework

3.1 Tenant Engagement is integral to the culture within the council and represents all our core values. The Council last reviewed its tenant engagement framework in 2021/2022 following the reintegration of housing services into the Council, and investment of efficiency savings to provide two dedicated officers to oversee this service.



- 3.2 These arrangements aimed to entice more tenants into engagement and included the introduction of Local Influence Networks which were formal meetings with agendas and minutes, taken out to communities, utilising our community centres & online to update and welcome feedback from tenants on changes to policies, strategies, and service delivery.

We appointed four tenant representatives to chair these meetings who would feed back into the Tenant Engagement Board to present the tenant view of the formal changes.

To provide and increase focus on the regulatory regime, a Housing Assurance Board was created to scrutinise the Council's compliance with the consumer standards. Members of PPIC and the Local Influence Network chairs are on both Boards.

In June 2023 a menu of involvement was created and added as an appendix to the tenant engagement strategy and presented to PPIC. The menu of involvement has been adapted to suit the feedback from tenants.

- 3.3 There have been successes with the current tenant engagement structure, including involvement in scrutinising gas servicing provision, helping with tendering contracts, tenant feedback on both internal and external consultations, internal policy and procedure changes, and representation from tenants (the LIN Chairs) in the formal governance structure at TEB & HAB.

- 3.4 Subsequently in 2023, Community Link Groups were introduced in 8 different locations to give tenants an informal meeting to raise their concerns about issues that affect them locally such as anti-social behaviour, car parking, and lighting. These meetings were well attended and as such, the programme was expanded geographically in June 2024 by having the Tenancy Officers run the meetings on their patch, across all our community centres.

The increase in opportunity has meant more tenants have been able to attend and give feedback on topics that matter to them.

This method of engagement has seen an increase in the number of actively engaged tenants from 190 to 311 between June – September 2024.

4.0 Review of Tenant Engagement Structure

- 4.1 The Tenant Engagement team and the LIN Chairs recognised from tenant feedback and when sharing information about the Local Influence Networks, many tenants did not really know what these meetings were about, and the format was too corporate; therefore, were poorly attended.

Tenant engagement arrangements should be reviewed regularly so in February 2024, a working group was formed with tenants and staff, with the purpose of identifying changes that could improve the way we engage with tenants.

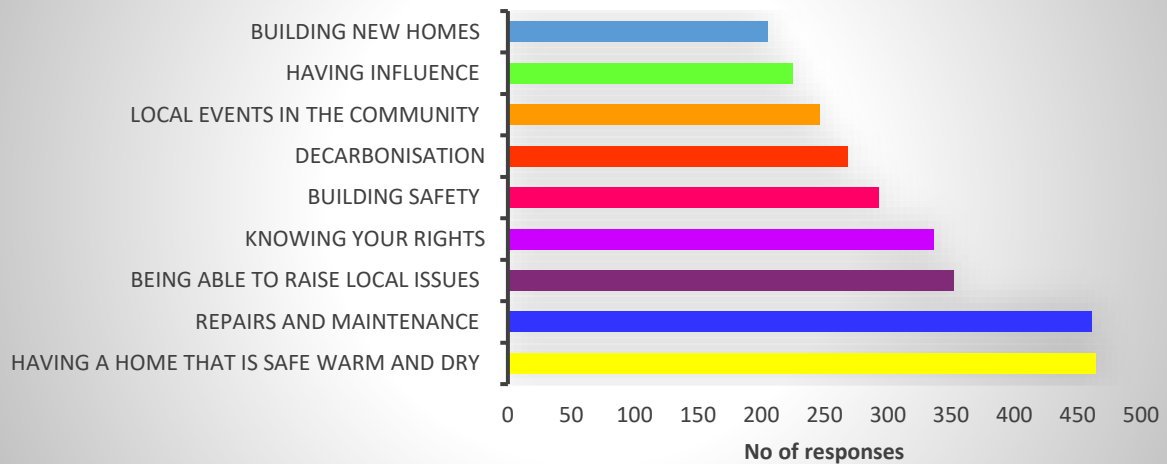
The Tenant Engagement team commenced a strategic review of the formal engagement framework, starting with a review of current meetings and attendance. It was evident from collected data that the 'Local Influence Network' meetings were poorly attended, and not representative of the tenant population with involvement of only 107 tenants out of a possible 5553 tenancies (as of Aug 2024) which equated to 1.9%.

- 4.2 In agreement with the Tenant Engagement Board and the four LIN chairs the Local Influence Network meetings were temporarily postponed, whilst at the same time Tenancy Officers were assigned full ownership to expand the number of face-to-face Community Link Groups and encourage wider attendance from their patches across the district.
- 4.3 The Council seeks more diverse opportunities for involved tenant roles and responsibilities to widen and deepen the tenant voice; fundamentally changing the makeup of the involved tenant framework. Whilst the current four LIN chairs present their own (valid) views, they do not represent the views of their neighbours and more generally the wider tenant population.

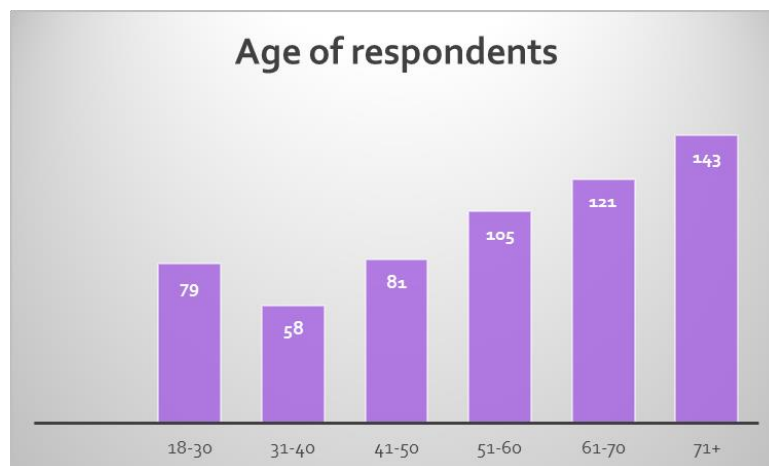
5.0 Tenant Engagement Survey

- 5.1 The working group co-created a survey which went to tenants across the district over an eight-week period to help the Council understand how they wish to engage, and which topics are a priority for them.
- 5.2 One of the primary aims of conducting the survey was to reach as many tenants as possible, the engagement rate with our tenant population is an area which has been challenging in the past, and the working group employed a variety of methods to encourage as many tenants as possible to take part in the survey.
- 5.3 The first question asked the respondent to confirm whether they are a tenant of NSDC, those who answered 'no' were unable to complete the rest of the survey. In total, the survey received 444 complete responses and 170 partial responses totalling 614 responses. At the time of writing, 5,553 properties are tenanted which means that we reached tenants who represent just over 11% of our total stock.
- 5.4 The survey responses evidence the main themes important to tenants.

Themes that are important to our tenants



Age of respondents



5.5 The data collected has been evaluated and a report of the findings is being produced and presented to the Tenant Engagement Board, this will be shared with PPIC when it is available. This data will be used alongside the results of Tenant Satisfaction Measures and feedback collated through complaints to influence how tenant engagement activities are conducted in future and will influence the Council's priorities and work streams.

6.0 Re-Engineering 'The Tenant Voice' at NSDC

6.1 The Tenant Engagement Team attended the TPAS conference in July 2024 as part of the Council's membership to TPAS. TPAS have a strong reputation for pioneering tenant engagement, sector best practice and providing an independent challenge to landlords to improve and reset the relationship with tenants; whilst as a minimum, meeting the requirements set out in consumer regulation.

6.2 SLT has approved the engagement of TPAS to conduct a re-engineering activity with the Tenant Engagement Team, to help the Council further enhance and embed the Tenant Voice at NSDC. This project will commence in November 2024 and completion anticipated by April 2025.

6.3 This process will help to create the mechanisms and opportunities for the Council to harness the tenant voice; with frameworks that are deliverable and that also comply with the Regulatory Standards. By commissioning TPAS, the Council can build on known best practice, and TPAS' cross-provider experience, to produce a top-performing engagement model and have the ambition to achieve TPAS Exemplar accreditation.

6.4 The Council is keen to embrace continuous improvement; to evolve; a transparent, customer centric approach at all levels of staff and members.

7.0 TPAS Methodology

7.1 The TPAS re-engineering project will take place in three parts, Discovery, Design and Delivery. Typically, this would include:

- Discovery - carrying out research with key stakeholders to understand the detail of what is already working well. This research is undertaken virtually using the Zoom platform, with:

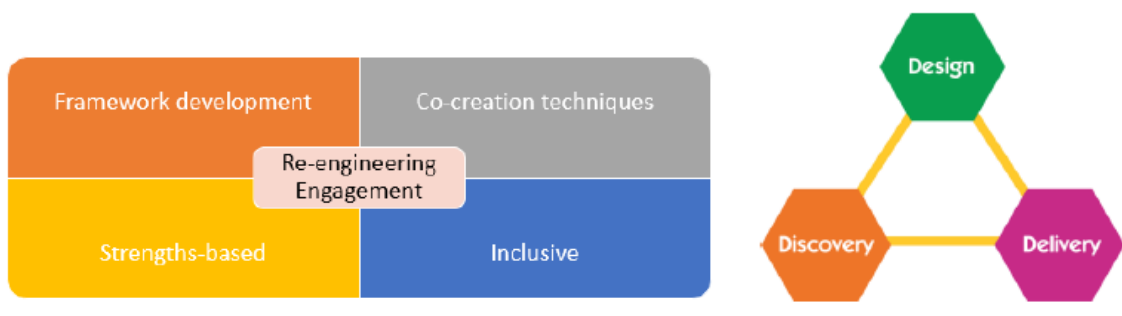
Key executive stakeholders - Members and SLT.

Currently involved residents.

Staff members (a mix from across the organisation).

Non-involved tenants.

- The lived experiences and views of tenants not involved in formal structures are as important as those that are involved. This will remain a key theme throughout the process, and we anticipate arrangements to achieve this being built into the new structure.
- Design - co-creation sessions to co-design the new approach.
- Drafting a new engagement framework and taking it back to the design volunteers for sign off.
- A full report presenting the findings and recommendations of a newly designed approach, including draft action plan.
- Delivery - building learning from this project alongside best practice to support the further development of the Council's engagement strategy.
- TPAS supporting the tenant engagement teams' recruitment to the new framework.



7.2 A key component of the delivery phase is the continued involvement of stakeholders, with the group involved in the Design phase may also oversee delivery and governance – holding the Council to account.

7.3 The main stakeholders are: Involved and housing applicants, the Tenant Engagement Team, Housing teams, Business Managers and Director; Portfolio Holder for Housing; and the Policy Performance and Improvement committee.

7.4 The tenant views about the TPAS re-engineering are captured below:

- The proposal is endorsed by the involved tenants that sit on the Tenant Engagement Board.
- Tenants will experience tenant-centric provision of services and engagement based on tenant needs, voices and influence.
- There will be more opportunities for more tenants identified as having protected characteristics to be involved.
- Will create positive impact upon currently ineffective communication loops with tenants.
- Will promote improved understanding of tenant engagement and how influence can have impact on services.
- Will promote retention of involved tenants.
- Will create a professional foundation for engagement which will encourage involvement, and support building trust.

8.0 Implications

In writing this report and in putting forward recommendations, officers have considered the following implications: Data Protection; Digital & Cyber Security; Equality & Diversity; Financial; Human Resources; Human Rights; Legal; Safeguarding & Sustainability and where appropriate they have made reference to these implications and added suitable expert comment where appropriate.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.