



Report to: Cabinet Meeting - 10 December 2024  
 Portfolio Holder: Councillor Lee Brazier - Housing  
 Director Lead: Suzanne Shead, Director – Housing, Health & Wellbeing  
 Lead Officer: Jane Diver, Tenant Engagement Officer, Ext. 5549

Report Summary	
<b>Type of Report</b>	Open Report, Non-key decision
<b>Report Title</b>	Tenant Engagement Update – Embedding the Tenant Voice at Newark & Sherwood District Council
<b>Purpose of Report</b>	To provide a progress report on tenant engagement arrangements and new activities, to work towards maximum compliance with the social housing consumer regulation regime.
<b>Recommendations</b>	<p>That Cabinet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) review and note the responsibilities of the Council (both members and officers) as a housing authority in relation to consumer regulation;</li> <li>b) note the progress and planned engagement with the Tenant Participation Advisory Services (TPAS) on creating a new, strengthened tenant engagement structure;</li> <li>c) note how feedback and insight from the tenant engagement survey 2024 will be used alongside Tenant Satisfaction Measures performance and learning from complaints, to inform the workplan for service improvement for next 18 months;</li> <li>d) note that the results of the TPAS re-engineering project will be reported to the Policy and Performance Improvement Committee in June 2025 to scrutinise the detailed action plan, proposals for implementation and endorse for approval by the Tenant Engagement Board and Cabinet; and</li> <li>e) approve and endorse a bespoke training session for all Members, to be led by the Tenant Engagement team, to raise awareness and understanding of the Council’s obligations regarding tenant engagement and the broader consumer regulations.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Alternative Options Considered</b></p>	<p>Continue with current methods and structure – this would impact the ability of the Council to meet the Consumer Standards, as set out in the Regulator of Social Housing’s regime, and potentially result in a worse rating upon inspection.</p> <p>This option has been discounted since compliance with the standards is a regulatory requirement.</p>
<p><b>Reason for Recommendations</b></p>	<p>To keep Members updated on progress towards maximum compliance with the Consumer Standards and to highlight how we are aiming to achieve this within the tenant engagement team.</p> <p>These recommendations align to objective 2, and 8 of the Community Plan. Specifically:</p> <p>Objective 2 - Explore further ways to seek out imaginative and effective ways to engage with and involve tenants; Design and implement a ‘New Housing Management System’ for Council owned homes, to provide a modern system and better user experience for both tenants and staff; Embed and evaluate our new ‘Repairs Online’ service.</p> <p>Objective 8 - Plan and implement arrangements to respond to new regulatory inspections and requirements.</p>

**1.0 Background**

- 1.1 Tenant engagement has changed significantly over the past few years, mostly due to the introduction of The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 and the new Consumer Standards that were subsequently introduced from 1 April 2024. The Act and consumer standards aim to drive forward important changes to hold all landlords to account, placing the needs of tenants at the heart of reforms to improve the quality of life and experience for those living in social housing.
- 1.2 The review of the consumer standards was undertaken in response to 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.
- 1.3 The regulatory framework contains economic and consumer standards.
- 1.4 The economic standards are:
  - **Governance and Financial Viability Standard**
  - **Value for Money Standard**
  - **Rent Standard and guidance:** This sets out the required outcomes for how registered providers set and increase rents for all their social housing stock in line

with government policy as outlined in their Policy Statement on Rents for Social Housing.

Only the Rent Standard applies to Local Authorities.

1.5 The Consumer Standards are:

- **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.

1.6 There are further plans to introduce further guidance and instruction around how landlords respond to damp and mould and other hazards through Awaab's Law ([Awaab's Law](#)); and further consultation expected shortly on proposals for an additional standard for Conduct and Competency to set out the qualification requirements for staff involved in the management of social housing.

1.7 The Regulator of Social Housing (RSH), Consumer Standards Code of Practice April 2024 states that "Genuine consideration of tenants' views should be at the heart of registered providers' different levels of decision-making about the delivery of landlord services" and the Council are committed to this approach.

1.8 The Council created a full time Tenant Engagement Officer in 2020 and a further role in 2022, funded through savings of bringing housing services back into the Council to provide dedicated resources to support tenant engagement in housing services. In addition, when job roles are next reviewed, they will include responsibilities around tenant engagement and listening and responding to tenants' views.

1.9 The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 strengthened the role of the Regulator of Social Housing's powers and introduced a four-year inspection regime with a variety of tools should enforcement action be required. From April 2024, Social Housing Landlords will be inspected against the revised set of Consumer Standards set out in section 1.2 and awarded a rating of C1-C4 for compliance with the standards. The gradings are described as:

**C1** - RSH 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** – RSH judgement is that there are some weaknesses in the landlord delivering the outcomes of the consumer standards and improvement is needed.

**C3** - RSH judgement is that there are serious failings in the landlord delivering the outcomes of the consumer standards and significant improvement is needed.

**C4** - RSH 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.

1.10 The Act also introduced the annual collation of Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) to enable landlord performance to be compared across the sector against key measures of performance which are published on the Council's and government website and considered by the Regulator when landlords are inspected.

1.11 In a similar timeframe, the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) powers have increased, requiring all social landlords to comply with and publish their compliance with the Complaint Handling Code. The Ombudsman regularly produces spotlight reports and training relating to failings in the management of complaints for landlords to learn from. The Housing Ombudsman are working closely with the Regulator for Social Housing through a memorandum of understanding to share information and data about landlords relating to complaints findings including maladministration judgements, which helps shape and direct the inspection regime.

1.12 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.

1.13 These enhanced regulations and standards have been taken as an opportunity for the Council to review the approach to tenant engagement and create meaningful methods for tenants to influence the services they receive.

1.14 The housing teams have completed a self-assessment against the consumer standards and have created an action plan to address gaps, in preparation for the Regulator giving six weeks' notice of an inspection of the Council's housing services. The progress of the action plan is a standard agenda item of the Housing Advisory Board to provide challenge and scrutiny by tenants and members.

1.15 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.

#### **1.16 Performance Around Tenant Engagement to Date**

1.17 The table below shows how our 2023-24 tenant satisfaction measures (TSMs) perform against the benchmarking data in relation to tenant engagement. Overall, our performance is 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 October 2024, performance is strong and improved against previous results.

1.18

TSM Survey Question	NSDC Result 2023/24	HouseMark Top Quartile Threshold 2023/24	NSDC rolling result October 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%	43%

1.19 The following charts show data the Tenant Engagement team 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, strategies 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.

1.20 This chart shows the number of involved tenants, 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.

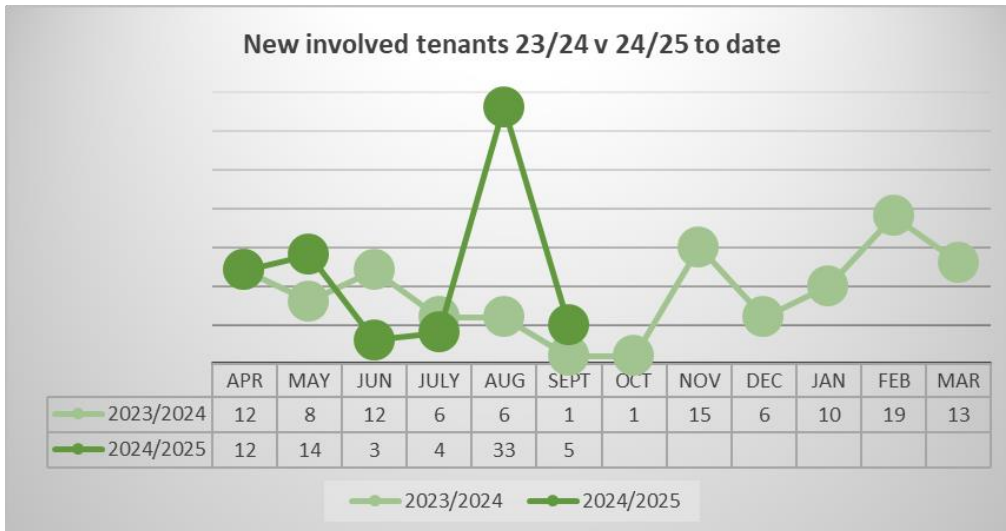
1.21 The data shows a steady increase in the number of tenants stating an interest in



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.

1.22 The next 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.



1.23 The chart below shows the number of engagement activity opportunities that have happened this year. 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.



1.24 The chart below 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).

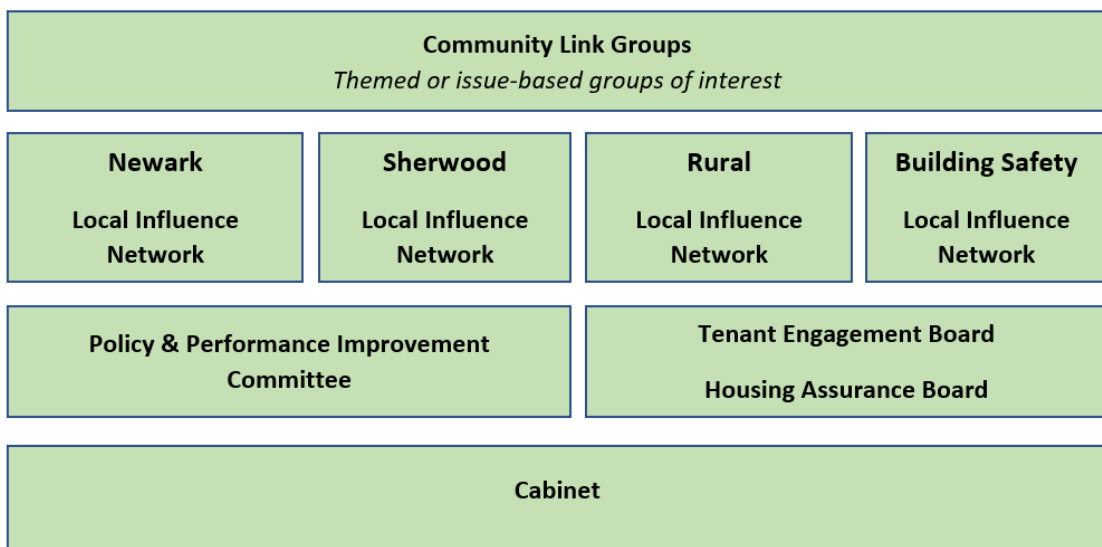


1.25 We understand the benefit of data collection and have been more rigorous in collection this year; how we do that going forward will be part of the TPAS scope of work and the use of the new Housing Management System due to be implemented in Summer 2025.

**1.26 Existing Tenant Engagement Framework**

1.27 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 the following framework was devised.

1.28



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

- 1.30 Four tenant representatives were appointed to chair these meetings who would feed back into the Tenant Engagement Board (TEB) to represent the tenant view of the formal changes. To provide and increase focus on the regulatory regime, a Housing Assurance Board (HAB) 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.
- 1.31 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 reflect the feedback from tenants.
- 1.32 There have been successes with the current tenant engagement structure, including involvement in scrutinising the gas servicing programme, assistance with tenders for 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 the TEB & HAB.
- 1.33 Subsequently in 2023, Community Link Groups were introduced in eight locations to give tenants an informal forum 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 Tenancy Officers who took over organising the meetings on their patch, and across all community centres.
- 1.34 This increase in opportunity has meant more tenants have been able to attend and give feedback on topics that matter to them, seeing an increase in the number of actively engaged tenants from 190 to 311 between June – September 2024.
- 1.35 Review of Tenant Engagement Framework**
- 1.36 The Tenant Engagement team and the LIN Chairs recognised from tenant feedback and when sharing information about the Local Influence Networks, that despite advertising, many tenants did not really know what the meetings were about, and those that did felt the format was too corporate; therefore, were poorly attended.
- 1.37 As tenant engagement arrangements should be reviewed regularly, and the last review was 2021-2022, a working group was formed with tenants, staff, and the portfolio holder for housing with the purpose of identifying changes that could improve the way we engage with tenants in February this year.
- 1.38 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 from only 1.9% of our tenant base.
- 1.39 The Council is seeking 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 necessarily represent the views of their neighbours and the wider tenant population more generally.



1.40 In agreement with the Tenant Engagement Board and the four LIN chairs the Local Influence Network meetings were temporarily postponed whilst conducting the survey. At the same time Tenancy Officers were assigned full responsibility for expanding the number of face-to-face Community Link Groups and encourage wider attendance from their patches across the district.

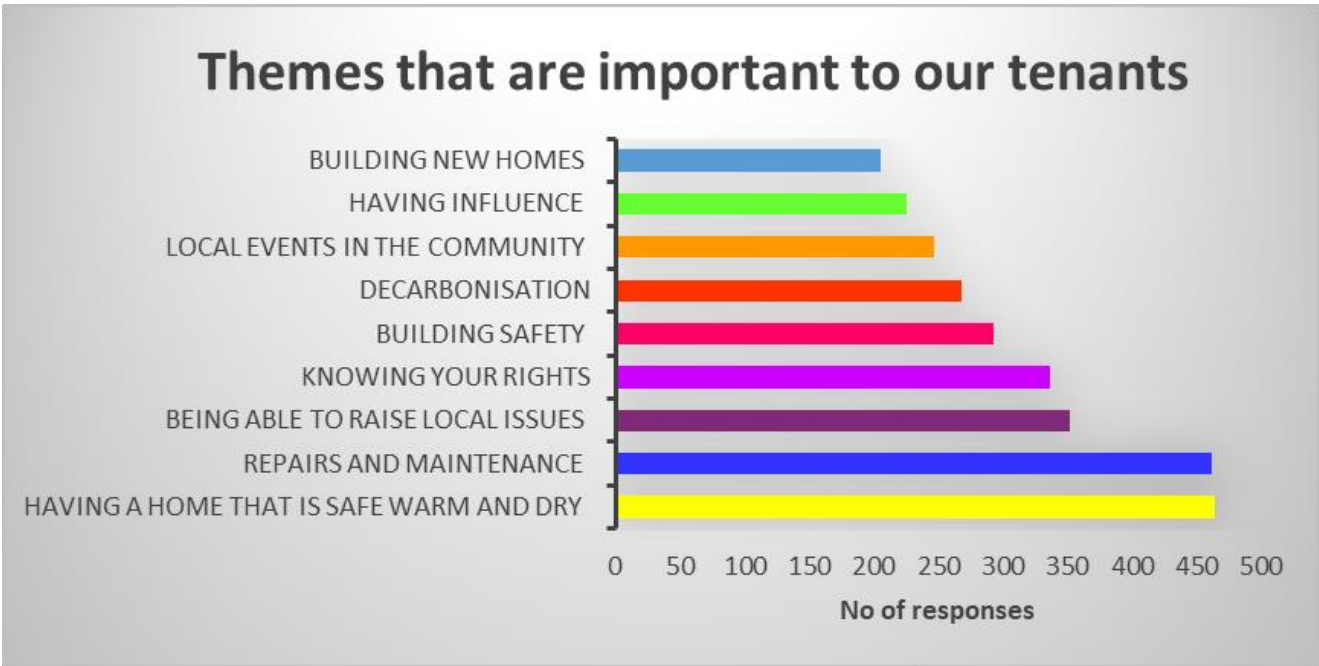
**1.41 Tenant Engagement Survey 2024**

1.42 The working group co-created a survey which was promoted to tenants across the district over an eight-week period with the purpose of helping the Council understand how tenants want to engage, and which topics are a priority for them.

1.43 One of the primary aims of conducting the survey was to reach as many tenants as possible, the engagement rate with our tenant base 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 such as over the phone, in person, online, on social media, via tenancy officers during home visits and in the local newspaper.

1.44 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.

1.45 The survey responses evidence the main themes important to tenants.

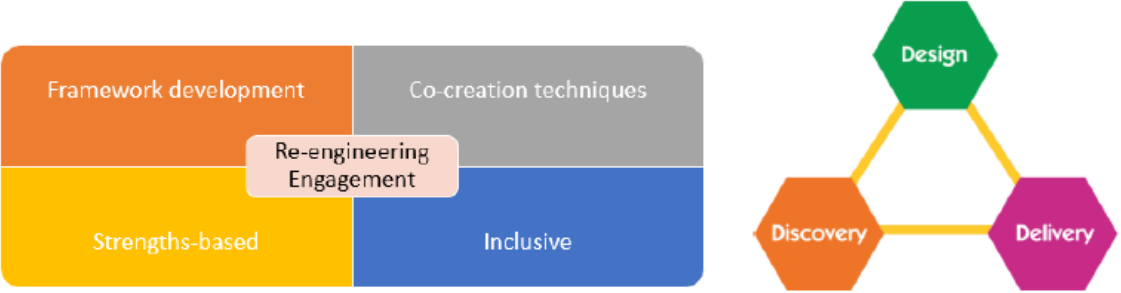


1.46 The data collected has been evaluated by the team, and a report of the findings is being produced; to be presented to the Tenant Engagement Board and shared with PPIC. This data will be used alongside the results of Tenant Satisfaction Measures and feedback collated through complaints to influence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

**2.0 Proposal - Re-Engineering ‘The Tenant Voice’ at NSDC**

- 2.1 The Tenant Engagement Team attended the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (known as TPAS) conference in July 2024 as part of the Council’s membership. TPAS have a compelling reputation, built over thirty years, 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.
- 2.2 SLT approved the commissioning 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. PPIC and the Tenant Engagement Board have endorsed the activity. The project commences in November 2024 and completion is anticipated by April 2025.
- 2.3 This re-engineering process will help to create the mechanisms and opportunities for the Council to further 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.
- 2.4 A bespoke training session, led by the Tenant Engagement team, co-created with involved tenants, will be scheduled for all members to access, to raise understanding of the Council’s obligations.

**2.5 TPAS Methodology – Re-engineering The Tenant Voice at NSDC**



- 2.6 The TPAS re-engineering project will take place in three parts, Discovery, Design and Delivery. This will include:
  - Discovery - conducting research with key stakeholders to understand the detail of what is already working well. This research is undertaken by TPAS 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.

2.7 A key component of the delivery phase is the continued involvement of stakeholders, with the group involved in the Design phase also overseeing delivery and governance: holding the Council to account. The main stakeholders in Delivery are: Involved tenants and applicants on the housing register, the Tenant Engagement Team, Housing teams, Business Managers and Director; Portfolio Holder for Housing; and the Policy Performance and Improvement committee.

## 2.8 **Tenant Feedback**

Tenant views about the TPAS re-engineering were captured at the monthly LIN chair meetings, and at the Tenant Engagement Board, the summary of this feedback is:

- The proposal is endorsed by the involved tenants that sit on the Tenant Engagement Board.
- When complete, tenants will experience more 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.

2.9 The Regulator publishes the outcome of its inspections and the results for Councils that have been inspected can be seen below:

Reg Code	Provider	Con	Con Date	Con Change
29UB	<a href="#">Ashford Borough Council</a>	C3	August 2024	First Grading
00CC	<a href="#">Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council</a>	C1	October 2024	First Grading
17UC	<a href="#">Bolsover District Council</a>	C2	August 2024	First Grading
00ML	<a href="#">Brighton and Hove City Council</a>	C3	August 2024	First Grading
00HB	<a href="#">Bristol City Council</a>	C3	June 2024	First Grading
12UB	<a href="#">Cambridge City Council</a>	-	-	-
22UE	<a href="#">Castle Point Borough Council</a>	C3	September 2024	First Grading
26UC	<a href="#">Dacorum Borough Council</a>	C2	August 2024	First Grading
43UD	<a href="#">Guildford Borough Council</a>	C3	July 2024	First Grading
22UJ	<a href="#">Harlow District Council</a>	C3	September 2024	First Grading
17UH	<a href="#">High Peak Borough Council</a>	C2	August 2024	First Grading
00AM	<a href="#">London Borough of Hackney</a>	C3	August 2024	First Grading
00BB	<a href="#">London Borough of Newham</a>	C4	October 2024	First Grading
31UG	<a href="#">Melton Borough Council</a>	C2	August 2024	First Grading
17UJ	<a href="#">North East Derbyshire District Council</a>	C2	August 2024	First Grading
5179	<a href="#">North Yorkshire Council</a>	C3	September 2024	First Grading
00CS	<a href="#">Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council</a>	C3	October 2024	First Grading
00CG	<a href="#">Sheffield City Council</a>	C3	June 2024	First Grading
17UK	<a href="#">South Derbyshire District Council</a>	C3	August 2024	First Grading
00BE	<a href="#">Southwark Council</a>	-	-	-
44UF	<a href="#">Warwick District Council</a>	C3	September 2024	First Grading

2.10 SLT requested that the Tenant Engagement Team consult with Legal on the Terms of Reference if a change to the constitution is required following the TPAS project if it results in material changes to the Tenant Engagement and Housing Assurance Board.

#### 2.11 PPIC Feedback

This report was well received and endorsed by PPIC and generated a number of broader questions around how the Council engage with tenants and how we ensure that engagement is spread across the district. PPIC also recommended a training session for Members to broaden their knowledge and understanding of the Councils role as a landlord which will be delivered by the Tenant Engagement Team in early 2025.

### **3.0 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.

#### **3.1 Financial Implications - FIN24-25/3707**

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Should any costs be recognised as a result of the TPAS re-engineering project then a separate report will be taken for approval.

#### **3.2 Equality & Diversity Implications**

The focus of tenant engagement is to make sure that all tenants voices are heard, including those with protected characteristics. This can be seen throughout the report.

#### **3.3 Tenant Implications**

The involved tenants are fully supportive of the approaches outlined in this report, and fully support the TPAS re-engineering activity.

#### **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.

- The Social Housing (Regulation) Act, 2023
- Regulatory standards for landlords, April 2024
- Consumer standards Code of Practice, April 2024
- Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code, April 2024
- Cabinet Report, 11 July 2023
- Community Plan, 2023-2027
- Minutes Policy & Performance Improvement Committee, 28 October 2024