

To: Housing Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee)

Date: 3rd April 2014

Report of: Acting Resident Involvement Manager (Housing & Property)

Title of Report: Resident Involvement Strategy Update

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: The report sets out progress on the delivery of the Resident Involvement Strategy objectives.

Scrutiny Lead Member: Councillor Scott Seamons

Executive Lead Member: Councillor Scott Seamons

Recommendations:

1. That the contents of this report are noted
2. To note that a final update will be provided in autumn 2014

Introduction

The City Executive Board approved the Resident Involvement Strategy at its meeting of 23rd November 2012.

<http://mycouncilpages.oxford.gov.uk/documents/s11591/Tenant%20and%20Resident%20Involvement%20Strategy%202012.pdf>

This report is to update on progress against the Strategy.

Background

The Tenant Services Authority Regulatory Framework for Registered Providers of Social Housing came into effect in April 2010 with the requirement for a process of co-regulation with Oxford City Council tenants supported by a meaningful scrutiny of the services provided.

Involvement Strategy Aims

The Tenant Involvement Strategy has five specific aims to be achieved within the lifetime of the strategy, which are as follows:

- Ensure that there is a strategic commitment to involvement & empowerment.
- Ensure that there are a wide range of opportunities to be involved and influence what happens.
- Better use of Resident Intelligence.
- Deliver a resident-led scrutiny and involvement model that can demonstrate Value for Money for both the resident and the organisation.
- Provide training opportunities that will empower residents to be involved in improving communities, neighbourhoods and homes.

Project Deliverables

- Establish a tenant-led, Local Offer Group (LOG) to identify and monitor transparent and easily understood standards for services provided by Oxford City Council. The LOG will hold providers to account for service standards.
- Establish a Tenants Scrutiny Panel to carry out a structure of reviews which examines the effectiveness of the scrutiny process, that the tenant body involved is representative of the wider Oxford City demographic and produce an annual report.
- Establish a Tenant Involvement & Empowerment Standard Task Team (TI&E STT). This team will support and develop existing Tenants & Residents Associations (TRAs) across Oxford City, such as to develop new TRAs where none exist or to look at specific policies or areas which are being reviewed on developed.
- Establish a Youth Panel to review the local offer from a young tenant's perspective and ensure young persons have opportunities to influence services provided by Oxford City Council.
- Provision of support, training and performance information in an appropriate format for tenants involved in the scrutiny process.
- Produce a map of existing TRAs and identify where gaps occur on priority areas.
- Produce a plan to develop TRAs on the priority/regeneration areas where none exist.
- Produce a start-up pack for new TRAs including draft documentation and information regarding funding streams.
- Produce an internal briefing program with supporting information package for new employees of Oxford and existing teams. The briefings will include analysis of the 3Cs service improvement process, staff performance objects relating to tenant involvement and opportunities to volunteer support.

Current Position

A project plan is in place to deliver the key strategic objectives.

Local Offer

The Local Offer Group (LOG), consisting of involved tenants, officers and a Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) representative, was setup in 2013. Negotiation training was provided to tenants and best practice examples of Local Offers were reviewed by the LOG.

The tenants on the LOG were given the option to include in the Local Offer, any of the services being provided by the Council as a landlord. The tenants decided that they would focus the 2013/15 Local Offer on the following key priority areas:

- Anti-Social Behaviour
- Planned Maintenance
- Day to Day Repairs

The tenants decided that they did not wish to include other service areas such as Rents or Customer Services at this time.

The draft Local Offer has been through the review and design phase and the relevant performance measures have been agreed with the three service areas. The Local Offer is undergoing final editorial checks with the Communication Team and the LOG and it is due to be signed off by the City Executive Board in July 2014.

Annual Report

The Annual Report has been delayed until September so that it includes information on the Local Offer, the activities of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel and other involvement initiatives. The involved tenants are to be the authors of the Annual Report, with advice and assistance being given by officers.

Tenant Scrutiny Panel

The Tenant Scrutiny Panel (TSP) was formed in 2013, following a detailed recruitment and selection process carried out by tenants. A series of training events for TSP members were delivered to ensure that they had the skills required to undertake the scrutiny role.

The TSP selected Emergency Repairs as the first area to scrutinise. This involved the TSP requesting information from Direct Services (DS), which was delivered to them in their January meeting. The TSP has now written their first scrutiny report, including their recommendation, will be presented to the April Housing Programme Board.

The TSP has already agreed on the second review and will be working jointly with the Housing Panel to review the Asset Management Strategy and the Oxford Standard. This process is due to commence late April 2014.

Standard Task Teams

Alongside the recruitment process for the TSP we set out to recruit tenants and leaseholders willing to be part of Standard Task Teams (STT) which will help develop and integrate involvement and service improvement priorities.

At recruitment events, tenants completed a brief questionnaire to indicate which areas of the housing service is of most interest to them. These tenants are now being called upon to help to review specific policy or service areas.

So far, in the last six months, the STTs have been involved with the development of the revised Tenancy Agreement, the on-line repairs portal and customer service standards for the contact centre.

Youth Panel

The Youth Panel recruitment process will begin later this year, once we have recruited into other areas. This will involve linking in with Communities and Neighbourhoods' Youth Engagement Officer who is already working with younger people. The aim is to have a Youth Panel in place by the end of 2014 and sooner if possible.

Training Programme

A Modular Training Plan has been agreed with the OCVA which includes the subjects identified within the Resident involvement Strategy. The first session of this programme will be Diversity Training, taking place in April

Invitations will be sent to members of the TSP, LOG and TRA's. .

Future training sessions scheduled for this year include:

- **Running Effective Meetings - Speak Up, Speak Out**
- **Diversity Training – Consultation –**
- **Monitoring and reviewing a project - Skills for Funding Applications**
- **Identifying Strengths, skills and areas for development – Recruitment**

As more tenants become involved we will introduce additional sessions and re-run the same courses when needed.

We are also looking to re-start the in house Computer training programme which provides free training to our tenants who have little or no computer literacy, as well as courses for more advance users.

Last year saw the start of our first 7 week Gardening Course run by the Parks department. We are looking to repeat it this summer, especially as more tenants become involved in the Oxford Garden Revival programme.

Tenant and Resident Associations

We current support and fund seven TRA's across the city. There are two more that do not fit within the funding criteria, but we still provide non-financial support.

We are also working to create a virtual TRA of the Sheltered Housing schemes. Currently one of the ten sheltered schemes has a TRA (Cardinal House).

We have mapped the groups and identified that many of the priority or regeneration areas have no TRAs. While there is a wish for more TRA's developing, many tenants are unable to devote the time required or otherwise do not feel comfortable in a meeting environment. It is also worth noting that although some existing TRA are well developed and provide a great benefit, some others are less representative or inclusive of the local community and its needs.

There is also a risk that the wider tenant community who are not able to find time to devote to TRAs would find their views ignored in favour of TRAs. It is therefore essential that non-traditional methods of involvement are promoted, such as virtual groups who can comment on issues electronically or by phone, estate champions and themed interest groups.

Staff in housing continue to work with colleagues in other service areas to promote involvement with tenants on an individual basis, which has worked particularly well as part of the Tower Block consultation work.

Start-up Pack for New Tenant and Resident Associations

A start-up pack has been created to assist new TRAs and this is being updated to include the new Involvement branding.

Internal Staff Awareness of Involvement

Ensuring that involvement is embedded in the organisational culture is essential to on-going success. Involvement staff have attended team meetings across the organisation to promote involvement and to stress the benefits both to the tenants and to the service areas. These include:

- Tenancy Management
- Tenancy Sustainment
- Communities & Neighbourhoods
- Customer Services
- Estate Services
- Waste & Recycling

Staff from other service areas were encouraged to promote involvement and as a result, around 100 tenants have come forward to express an interest in being involved.

The Involvement Brand

Delivering successful involvement requires a recognisable brand that can run with all activities and promotions. This brand has now been launched following consultation with involved tenants.

Publicity for involvement has increased significantly and the Involvement Team and their activities are now a regular feature in Council Matters and the Tenants in Touch magazine.

Tenant's Influencing Change

There have been several areas of involvement which highlight how tenants are now being empowered to change service delivery.

The TSP has reviewed part of the repairs service and have already made recommendations to Direct Services on service improvements.

Customer Services now choose to call upon our tenant and resident mystery shoppers when reviewing aspects of their services, such as the telephony system and the proposed missed bin collection system. Tenants also helped change the new phone menu to make it more user friendly.

The Tower Block consultation work, one of the largest consultation exercises ever carried out in Oxford, has involved tenants and residents from the outset, influencing design and determining priorities for the project. The Involvement Team, together with colleagues across service areas, have supported tenants and residents through the process. The Involvement Team has also managed to recruit resident "block reps" for each of the tower blocks to ensure that tenants and leaseholders are consistently involved in the decision making process, including elements of the contractor procurement process.

Risks

The greatest risk to the delivery of the strategy on on-going involvement which is meaningful, is the ability to recruit and retain sufficient numbers of involved tenants and to avoid tenant burn-out.

Recruitment events and road-shows have been held on a number of occasions and opportunities to recruit at other events have been taken.

The initiatives with other staff teams are also seen as key to increasing awareness.

Increasingly, fewer and fewer tenants are interested in attending meetings and would prefer a more passive level of involvement i.e. consultation processes and surveys from home as opposed to becoming actively involved.

TPAS Accreditation

One of the key aims of the Strategy was the achievement of the TPAS Accreditation. As there are some strands of the strategy which remain to be delivered, such as the Annual Report and final sign off of the Local Offer, the assessment process has been delayed until late autumn.

Although there is some disappointment that there have been some delays from the initial project target dates, we are confident that accreditation will be achieved and acknowledge that we may have been over-ambitious on the timeframes when considering that the success of the strategy depends on a relatively small number of tenants volunteers.

Recommendation

3. That the contents of this report are noted
4. To note that a final update will be provided in autumn 2014

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