

To: Cabinet
Date: 11 December 2024
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Tenancy Engagement and Management

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present the Scrutiny recommendations for Cabinet consideration and decision
Key decision:	No
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Lizzie Diggins, Chair of the Housing and Homelessness Panel
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities
Corporate Priority:	All
Policy Framework:	Corporate Strategy 2024-28
Recommendation: That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report.	

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee

Introduction and overview

1. The Housing and Homelessness Panel met on 27 November 2024 to review a Cabinet report on Tenancy Engagement and Management. The report, which is due for consideration on 11 December 2024, recommends that Cabinet approve the adoption and implementation of the new approach to Tenant Engagement; and to delegate authority to the Executive Director of Communities and People (Interim) to make any further changes necessary, in line with service development and new legislation.
2. The Committee was grateful to Councillor Linda Smith (Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities) for attending to present the report as well as to Peter Matthew (Executive Director – Communities and People) and Nerys Parry (Head of Housing Services) for attending the meeting and answering questions from the Committee.

Summary and recommendations

3. Nerys Parry, Head of Housing Services introduced the report, highlighting its focus on resetting the Council's approach to tenant engagement and landlord. The report alludes to key outputs from the Grenfell report which informed a new approach, including improved tenant engagement, clearer governance structures, enhanced communication of performance data to tenants, and the development of a comprehensive strategy. In addition, the reorganisation of the landlord services, planned for the next calendar year, aims to better respond to tenant needs and deliver a more cohesive and effective service.
4. The Panel asked a range of questions, including why the Young People's Forum was proposed as a separate group within the tenant engagement structure, given concerns about their underrepresentation and distinct needs as a demographic. Questions were also raised seeking clarity on how the Young People's Forum would integrate with other engagement mechanisms, and how these structures would address the unique challenges faced by younger tenants (such as mobility and differing engagement styles).
5. The Panel also queried how the new approach to tenant engagement would differ from the current model. The Panel was particularly interested in understanding how the new model would allow for earlier identification of issues and vulnerabilities within the tenant community. It was noted that the new structure aims to shift from reactive work to more responsive approaches, focused on meaningful contact with tenants to address concerns before they escalate into more significant problems.
6. The Panel refocused its discussion on the engagement of younger tenants, noting that though they represent a smaller proportion of the Council's tenant population, their unique needs and perspectives are crucial to consider. The Panel highlighted the value of bespoke initiatives, such as interest-based activities and youth-focused programmes, to foster greater participation and engagement among this demographic. Recognising that traditional forms of engagement may not resonate with younger tenants, the Panel suggested reconsidering the approach to ensure their voices are effectively represented within the tenant engagement structure.

Recommendation 1: That Cabinet reconsiders its approach of Young People within the tenant engagement structure to ensure their representation is given greater prominence, by elevating their role within the governance structure, providing a direct pathway for their contributions to the Tenant Representative Forum and creating a bespoke mechanism for their input to be highlighted at the top level; and that innovative and youth-focused methods of engagements are continually explored to ensure their voices are actively included in strategic decision-making.

Report author	Celeste Reyeslao
Job title	Scrutiny and Governance Advisor
Service area or department	Law and Governance
Telephone	01865 252946
e-mail	creyeslao@oxford.gov.uk