

Tenant Participation Review

Waverley Borough Council



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1 Executive Summary

TPAS were commissioned by Waverley Borough Council to review their tenant participation and assess current delivery.

In addition to a desktop review of current tenant participation information, the assessment involved interviews and focus groups with local youth, residents, a councillor and staff.

There is a history of tenant participation at Waverley Borough Council. In general, staff and residents are working together in partnership to improve services.

There is evidence of Good Practice in:

- Innovative approaches to tenant participation such as mystery shopping, participatory budgeting and a neighbourhood agreement
- A strong approach to community development
- Processes such as those for customer research and walkabouts that ensure these activities are planned and responsive.
- An independently funded Tenants Panel which produces its own newsletter directly to residents and is focusing on its improvement
- Involving local residents in contractor procurement
- Involving residents in Council committees and in particular, the Service Improve Group where councillors and tenants work jointly
- A menu of participation options that include neighbourhood and borough wide, individual and collective
- Strong leadership from senior staff and the portfolio holder for Housing to embrace the principles of tenant participation

No organisation is perfect and areas to focus on for the future include:

- The development of a Compact that reflects recommendations made throughout this report.

- A greater link between the Corporate aims, departmental aims and tenant participation – reflected in the new Compact
- Systematic outcome driven planning of involvement with residents within the Compact that is then evaluated for its outcomes and its value for money (a SMART action plan)
- Embedding tenant participation with all staff to achieve greater ownership of tenant participation which leads to consistent delivery across the organisation.
- The raising of the profile of tenant participation from the top and throughout the organisation, a greater focus on promotion of the successes of tenant participation
- Implementation of “quick wins” in tenant participation and prompt feedback post participation
- A more proactive and innovative approach to tenant participation including the use of technology
- The need to continue to develop profiling of all its residents and their specific needs and to use this information to target tenant participation
- The need to develop equality and diversity action plans targeting involvement across neighbourhoods and especially to involve those groups under-represented in involvement.
- Quick and consistent responses by staff to collective queries and monitoring of those responses – the development and delivery of service standards in this area
- Involving residents more at neighbourhood level in strategic issues
- The development of a clear scrutiny role which is resident led
- Benchmarking reported to residents
- Increased support of the Tenants Panel to enable it to develop representativeness, skills and accountability whilst developing other participation mechanisms outside of the Panel which direct the organisation.
- The need for a clear collective dispute resolution and mediation to enable different tenants groups to work together

Further details of these recommendations can be found throughout the report and the framework attached as appendix A.

2. Methodology

1. Self–assessment by Waverley using the Landlord Accreditation excellence in resident involvement toolkit matrix
2. TPAS desktop assessment of documentation produced as evidence for the self-assessment
3. Interviews with staff including staff with strategic responsibility for resident involvement.
4. Reality checks took place during December 2009 – March 2010

Reality checks included:

- 1. Interviews:**
 - 1 Councillor
 - 5 Residents Active at a Policy Level
 - 1 Senior Manager – Director of Housing Services
 - 1 Manager responsible for TP
 - 2 Managers responsible for service policy (Repairs Manager and Housing Manager)
 - 4 Experienced active residents
 - 2 Housing staff with explicit TP/CD responsibility
 - Meeting with youths from Eashing Youth club
- 2. Observation:**
 - Observation of a central TP activity – Tenants panel meeting in January 2010
- 3. Focus groups:**
 - 1 with tenants involved in TP
 - 1 with staff

4. Telephone surveys

Surveys of 10 randomly selected not involved residents

The results of the semi structured interviews and focus groups are included in the report under the title “Reality Check findings”. These findings are able to give a snapshot view of how involvement currently works in practice and how the main players perceive it.

TPAS would like to thank the staff of Waverley Borough Council, in particular for arranging meetings, focus groups and providing names of residents to contact.

3. Background

Waverley Borough Council currently owns and manages 5,500 homes providing a housing service to tenants and leaseholders. The Council has supported and funded the Waverley Tenants Panel for some years and developed a Tenant participation Compact in 2000. The current compact was developed in partnership with the Panel in 2007.

Policy and Regulatory Context

Resident involvement has continued to move up the Government’s agenda - all social housing providers now have to demonstrate how they involve residents in their decision-making processes.

New challenges for Waverley will arise from the impact of several national policies and studies that have been launched over the last few years:

- “Every Tenant Matters : A review of social housing regulation”, Andrew Cave who recommends a new system of co-regulation June 2007
- “Delivering Housing and Regeneration - Communities England and the future of social housing regulation”, June 2007

- “Tenant Empowerment”, Communities and Local Government (CLG), June 2007
- The establishment of the new housing regulator through the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008, the Tenant Services Authority which became operational on 1st December 2008 and has recently launched national standards taking effect from 1st April 2010. Their approach encourages greater co-regulation with residents and landlords holding housing organisations to account jointly. The TSA also expects landlords to consult with residents and deliver local service offers.
- The establishment of the Homes and Communities Agency through the same legislation to fund the supply and quality of new housing and deliver regeneration and housing programmes.
- The establishment of the National Tenant Voice by the Communities and Local Government - a tenant led organisation to enable tenants to be able to ‘speak for themselves – nationally, regionally and locally’, in influencing government and key partners like the new regulator, the Tenant Services Authority (TSA)

4. Key Findings

This has been an intensive process, which has resulted in a clear overview and understanding of how Waverley BC involves residents and how that activity helps to drive the housing service.

The assessment matrix is attached in the appendix for information

4.1 Strategic Involvement

Overall, the approach to strategic involvement could be stronger and this is a priority for improvement. The Tenant Participation Compact at Waverley was produced three years ago with its Tenants Panel. As such it is now out of date and its urgent review awaits the conclusions of this report. The new Compact should reflect:

- The Council’s corporate objectives

- Residents' priorities and aspirations
- A clear menu for involvement that includes formal and informal, local and strategic and scrutiny options
- Support for residents such a clear grants, expenses and training plans (or at least signposting to separate policies)
- Links to other policies and service plans such as housing management, policy and performance, income management etc.
- Links to community activities and partnerships with other agencies
- A clear action plan agreed with residents set annually with SMART targets based on measurable outcomes which is monitored regularly by a special resident led working party.

There are examples of high quality strategic involvement, such as participatory budgeting which we can demonstrate has led to changes in policy and will hopefully achieve real outcomes. However, this approach is not systematic and in general relies too heavily on the input of a struggling but improving Tenants Panel. Outside of the Tenants Panel, there is less opportunity for residents to be involved in strategic issues, especially locally.

Excellent ad hoc activities such as contractor selection involvement, mystery shopping and participatory budgeting can be spoilt by a lack of feedback and follow through. Residents generally reported that they were unclear as to what effect their involvement had in most of the activities that they had taken part in. These included estate walkabouts, void checks, mystery shopping, participatory budgeting and meetings. This consistency of resident reporting of a lack of follow through causes TPAS concern and needs to be addressed as a priority.

Although there is evidence of resident involvement in strategic areas, these tend to be ad hoc rather than planned. Sometimes there is no clear method to select which residents take part in which activities, nor that they are trained effectively to take on these responsible roles. For example, the Chair of the Tenants Panel was invited to a discussion with councillors and senior officers on budget setting. The invite was last minute and the Chair had no time to prepare, consult

or feedback. This was similar to a neighbourhood resident involved in contractor selection who was given neither training nor personal feedback about her role although this was mentioned in the magazine.

The Tenants Panel is working to build their skills and to deliver a good service. Non involved residents consulted via telephone surveys and focus group showed Waverley had a much higher awareness of the Tenants Panel than is usual. However, the Panel is only one mechanism for the Council to gain views. There needs to be a better use of alternative consultation involving different residents to those involved in the Panel. These could include service improvement groups, one off focus groups, mystery shoppers or surveys – the results can then be fed through the Panel.

Good Practice Example – Lewisham Homes

This Arms Length Management Organisation held a series of business planning focus groups to determine the organisation's spending priorities. These focus groups involved 2 representatives from the existing, established tenants' group but a further 40 residents never previously involved which matched the age and diversity profile of all residents in the borough. The results were reported to the established tenants' group but formed the basis for strategic planning at Lewisham.

The Panel themselves need to develop further skills in dealing with conflict, negotiation, accountability and reporting back. Waverley should expect and support the Panel in producing a Tenants Panel Annual Report, consulting all residents and developing value for money reporting. The development of this annual plan should be the Panel's first priority. In return for its funding of the Panel, the Council could negotiate clear expectations of the Panel such as a minimum reporting and consultation level and core training attendance.

Recommendations for improvements to strategic consultation

- A new compact as above
- That a WAVERLEY BC led working group of residents, staff and a Councillor monitor the progress of the forthcoming action plan on a regular basis to ensure outcomes are achieved.

- A planned approach to strategic involvement by the new Tenant Involvement Officer in partnership with residents and senior staff
- Project management of involvement activities which includes systematic objective setting, project planning, monitoring, evaluation and feedback of outcomes
- Developing an area feed into the Tenants Panel through new area/neighbourhood mechanisms
- An annual residents conference run by the Council for all residents to consult and raise awareness of strategic issues particularly in setting housing service objectives
- Evaluation of equality and cost impacts of tenant participation
- Development of particular service panels which scrutinise performance and deliver and report service improvements. These could start with residents' priorities such as repairs and anti-social behaviour. Service managers could take responsibility for service area involvement plans for each year, which are assessed for impact.
- Support for the Tenants Panel in consulting residents, using existing research to set annual priorities, reporting back, mediation with those who do not currently support them and an annual plan which shows value for money in its use of the Council's funds.
- Develop processes which select representatives to take part in contractor/staff selection, provide training and promote outcomes of such activities.
- Develop engagement in strategic issues such as imaginative ideas that build on participatory budgeting techniques.
- Conduct an imaginative recruitment drive through face to face contact and telephone to encourage residents to volunteer for new activities

Good practice Example – Waitrose, Godalming

Waitrose supermarket issue a green plastic disc to all shoppers who pass through their tills. They encourage shoppers to drop the disc in one of three charities to help them direct community donations. This idea could be extended to tenants and leaseholders using the offices or with rent cards – encouraging residents to support community or housing spending priorities at low cost.

Good Practice Example – Westlea HA

They involve over 100 customers in its business planning process through the development of a tenants' business plan that links up with the association's business plan. Customers input through a series of public events, which asks them to draw up priorities.

4.2 Neighbourhood Involvement

There were a number of areas of good practice identified including:

- Community development work with community groups by the Community Development worker and partnership working by Senior Housing staff
- Development of a new tenants association
- An neighbourhood agreement that provides excellent information on service standards on the Chantry
- Systematic approach to estate inspections
- Estate Monitor programme which enable residents to be involved at an individual level

However, Waverley needs to be more systematic in its approach to neighbourhoods to ensure every neighbourhood has access to involvement. In addition, the Chantry's neighbourhood agreement needs to be further developed and more resident led. This work could coincide with gathering data on the new TSA driven "Local Offers".

Good Practice Examples – Affinity Sutton Housing Association and Eastbourne Homes

Affinity Sutton and Eastbourne Homes have developed Area panels to ensure local residents can influence strategic and local issues. Such panels are serviced by the landlord and held quarterly and feed into the main tenants' group. Such panels can set local priorities and an action plan for improvement.

Good Practice Example - Carrick Housing

An ALMO with Beacon status, Carrick have involved 18 communities in drawing up neighbourhood visions and have consulted over 900 people, this has led to 11 neighbourhood panels involving 100 people and attracted over £450,000 in funding.

Recommendations

- Consult residents about neighbourhood opportunities, local priorities and what they consider to be local
- Set each area housing management officer a target of neighbourhood involvement in each area – this could be tenants/residents association, neighbourhood improvement plan, area panel (serviced by Waverley), social event that collects views
- Ensure feed in to tenants panel by Waverley officers
- Develop neighborhood agreements and ensure that they include a resident led improvement plan that is reviewed and measured for outcomes
- Record and feedback to neighbourhoods the outcomes of estate inspections
- Continue to seek funding for existing community development work.

Good Practice Example

CityWest Homes in Westminster encourage and support excellent neighbourhood agreements with clear targets for improvements for the community and for the Council. CityWest also promote and encourage Tenant Management Organisations and have pioneered Local management Agreements, enabling residents to take on gardening and cleaning locally.

4.3 Equalities and under-represented Groups

Waverley's approach to this essential part of resident involvement needs to be further developed. There needs to be a more robust and systematic approach to this issue than profiling of the Tenants Panel. Profiling data can be used to target particular groups of

dissatisfaction and involvement. The Tenants Panel also needs development in this area – many members seemed unaware of the diversity issues affecting those they represent, particularly with working tenants or those with small children. Non involved residents and many involved residents seemed unaware of the expenses and support they were entitled to.

Recommendations

- Work with the Tenants Panel to develop an approach to equality and diversity that includes a mixture of targeted involvement (youth focus groups, and attracting more under-represented groups to mainstream involvement)
- Training the Tenants Panel in consultation and involving everybody
- Introduce less formal measures to attract under-represented groups such as more social activities combined with consultation
- Signpost to existing specialist forums and groups such as Waverley's Top Youth council to ensure council tenants' children are involved
- Introduce equalities training for all involved residents and make it a core part of group funding
- Advertise measures such as care allowances and varied meeting times, accessible venues, hearing loops, translations etc.
- Introduce and promote advocacy care costs to encourage residents with support needs to get involved

Good Practice Example – A2 Dominion

A2Dominion recently worked with young people who live in their housing to develop a junior wardens scheme to encourage young people to take an interest in their homes. The Youth Action Panel ran a cleanest estate competition to encourage more youth involvement. Competitions and awards particularly attract Young people.

Good Practice Example – Downland Housing Association

Downland support and fund an organisation called Travelers Friends and Family – an organisation that supports housed traveler’s projects in the community. Through this they have built up a relationship with a hard to reach community and are able to find out their views on housing and neighbourhoods

4.4 Measuring and evaluating Tenant Participation

It is difficult to assess whether Waverley’s current participation is effective and value for money because there is no evaluation or measurement currently.

Recommendations

- In partnership with residents, measure the effectiveness of tenant participation by recording outcomes against those set in annual action plan, measure costs and report annually
- Introduce monitoring form for all staff to complete when carrying out consultation that sets outcomes and a planned approach

Good practice example – Soha Housing Association

Soha set desired outcomes from its resident involvement together with its residents based on STAUS survey findings and a resident involvement group. At the end of each year they produce a short annual report for residents showing how these outcomes have been achieved at what cost, and what difference they have made to residents.

4.5 Key information and feedback

Feedback to involved residents has been covered above and needs to be addressed through timely feedback on what has been achieved.

Staff also showed a surprisingly low knowledge of tenant participation outcomes.

Generally, Waverley need to do more to ‘sing’ about what has been achieved through tenant participation both internally to staff and residents through a range of mediums, not just the written word. Feedback needs to be timely and if in writing, using a plain and simple language. Imaginative ways of doing this need to be explored

such as a poster campaign and greater use of advertising and branding. Use appropriate language and methods for target groups such as branding youth consultation in “youthspeak” etc. The website has improved in recent months with a blog for tenants to engage with. There has also been developments recruiting residents to have an editorial influence on Waverley Homes and People magazine.

Good Practice Example – Drum Housing

Drum Housing in Petersfield have resident involvement straplines and branding on all of their correspondence, newsletters and leaflets, poster campaigns and a telephone queue message promoting involvement events. They also place key resident involvement successes around staff offices including bathroom doors to embed with all staff.

Good Practice Example – Portsmouth City Council

Portsmouth City Council has excellent housing communication with an imaginative magazine, poster campaign and a resident involvement communication strategy.

The Independent Tenants News by the Tenants Panel is an imaginative way of feeding back to residents and proved effective during our telephone surveys. However, the magazine does need some outside resident influence and an overhaul.

Recommendations

- Form a tenant participation communications strategy that looks at imaginative ways to feedback involvement that explores alternative ways of branding tenant participation at a low cost to staff and residents. This can combine with an imaginative recruitment campaign.
- Decide and feedback 5 key messages on involvement each year which can be repeated
- Panel members supported by staff should consult readership on the ITN through a telephone survey just after an issue goes out. The survey should seek to target the resident profile

- Revamp the ITN using residents' suggestions following a training course on publicity and marketing – Waverley staff should support the Panel members to do this.
- Greater use could be made to develop the tenant participation web page by making it more attractive to those thinking of getting involved and a Tenants Panel website – this needs to be done in partnership with residents.
- Promote all of the options for involvement with colour photos of events and a clear guide to what is on offer
- Develop a “You said – we did” area on the website to show how involvement has made a difference

Good practice Example – Winchester City Council

TACT (Tenants and Council together group) produce their own newsletter “Independent News” and this includes an annual pre-paid survey to its readers asking key questions in order to review the newsletter.

4.6 Support for Tenant Participation

There has been a gap in the service since the decision to not have a dedicated member of staff in this area. However, the recent decision to appoint a new Tenant Involvement Officer should help the Council to drive these important changes forward. However, it should be a different role – one that supports the strategic approach to tenant participation and supports all staff to develop this area within their own jobs.

Training is very ad hoc currently. However, there have been recent innovative projects sharing resident training with Guildford. Training needs to be planned and evaluated for outcomes and value for money could be directed further at residents outside of the Tenants Panel to encourage volunteering.

Support could be better advertised and arranged. One member of the resident's focus group had to pay in advance for her £30 taxi fare. Many members of the group were not fully aware that travel expenses were covered. The new Tenants Association reported problems in accessing funding. This delay in support could lead to

volunteers dropping out at an early stage. There is no policy on incentives either and this has led to an ad hoc approach, which could be confusing to volunteers and to staff.

The decision to pay the Tenants Panel their own grant is a good practice initiative in principle. However, there are no clear processes by the Council to ensure that the use of such money provides good value of residents. The Panel will need officer support to make this case.

Good practice Example – Sutton Housing partnership

This ALMO have worked out a comprehensive grants policy for all tenants' groups together with a comprehensive expenses and incentives policy. They have produced a leaflet advertising such support and send it to all residents registering on the volunteering database.

Recommendations

- A separate chapter on support in the new compact is necessary and I would suggest headings on financial support, staffing and training.
- Support to the Tenants Panel to consult, feedback and develop
- Support to the Tenants Panel to demonstrate value for money against outcomes
- Mediation between the Tenants panel and those historically opposed as a result of differences of opinion on stock transfer so that everybody can work together and move on
- There should be a commitment to an annual involved residents training audit, training programme that includes community training and to monitoring and evaluation
- The Compact should show the Current budget for tenant participation at Waverley Borough Council – including resident monitoring arrangements of this budget and possible resident led budgets
- A grants policy for residents groups – including how much, how to access, examples of spend items.

- Expenses for residents including travel, care, subsistence and advocacy for those with support needs that is well promoted and advertised.
- Support for involvement – this could cover support in kind such as help completing funding applications, advice, photocopying etc.
- Staffing support – arrangements for non-specialist staff to support involvement i.e. housing staff attending meetings, maintenance staff attending walkabouts, feedback response times etc.
- Consideration to funding or providing community equipment support such as lending of Barbecues, bouncy castles etc.

Good Practice Example – Stockport Homes

Stockport Homes ALMO run a skills for life programme which all customers can vote for courses. Courses are split into Green courses such as energy efficiency, orange courses are housing related such as ASB or housing finance, yellow courses are skills based such as first aid or budgeting, blue courses are for tenants representative skills and pink courses are in IT skills and learning. All this for a budget of £12,000 in 2007/8.

4.7 Staff ownership of Tenant Participation

There is much support from senior management to change the culture of the council to be more customer orientated and to strive to be thought leaders in tenant involvement. There needs to be more at Waverley to encourage staff to take greater ownership of tenant participation. For example, staff have not received training on the Compact or regular briefings or updates on the growing importance of tenant participation

There are no existing measures in the outdated Compact that ensure that all staff take on responsibility for tenant participation within their own jobs.

The staff focus group showed that staff are generally positive about the principles of involving residents but lack knowledge or information in this area. Comments included the fact that there is a perception of

little information about involvement performance. Knowledge and profile of involvement was fairly low amongst staff although some members of staff showed interest and ambition in this area. Many staff felt there was not enough time to deal with involvement rather than seeing it as a core function of the business.

Staff stated that some Housing Management staff had a provision in their job description to attend residents meetings but there appears to be no other reference to involvement.

There appeared to be no performance appraisal measure for staff on involvement outside of frontline housing management staff and many staff said that they supported this idea.

Recommendations

- Introduce a set of measures to ensure involvement is a key part of all staff's jobs such as appraisal targets, standing items on team briefings and clauses within job descriptions throughout the department
- Allocate each service manager a brief to set a service involvement plan with residents which is evaluated for outcomes on an annual basis
- Start a staff working group on tenant participation/customer service and recruit from all levels
- Consider managing the new tenant participation post directly by a senior member of staff to raise the profile of the post and ensure culture change is driven from the top
- Introduce annual staff training on tenant participation
- Introduce standing agenda items on tenant participation for Team Briefings
- Consider mentoring staff/residents and appointing involvement champions

Good Practice Example – Raven Housing Trust

Waverley's neighbours in Reigate manage resident involvement directly by the Head of Housing to ensure that it is embedded in all staff practices and to provide senior management with a good overview of involvement.

4.8 Tenant Participation and Governance/Scrutiny

There are two Tenant Panel members on the Council's Scrutiny Committee and in principle this is good practice. The minutes do not give much indication of the level of influence. There is an inherent reliance on the Chair of the Panel to feedback and gather views – something which officers will need to help with.

The SIG group is one of the best cases of good practice I have seen and has an excellent Chair who encourages and supports resident members to contribute and Councillors willing to listen. Panel members could be encouraged and supported to plan and contribute more through training and capacity building in such areas as “Getting Your Point Across”, “Assertiveness” and “negotiation” and through mentoring by individual councillors.

There is a role for more resident led scrutiny within the Tenants Panel and all parties should consider this in the future. If Waverley introduce service improvement groups led by service managers, this will free the Panel up to take a lead role.

The formality of SIG meeting and tenants panel meetings will be off putting for new members and those trying to influence the Panel.

Recommendations

- Training for Panel members and other interested residents/councillors/staff on resident led scrutiny and how this fits in with the new TSA regime
- Consideration for the Panel to set a scrutiny plan for the year.
- Training for prospective Council Scrutiny Committee members on their role
- Training for Panel members on confidence and personal skills to enable them to be an even greater influence
- A less formal setting for such meetings and rotation of meetings across the Borough
- A mentoring scheme that buddies Panel members with councillors
-

Good Practice Example – Salix Homes

This ALMO leads the way in supporting a resident led scrutiny group who challenge service improvements and make recommendations to the Board.

Good Practice Example - SOHA

Soha Housing in Oxfordshire has a trained pool of 18 Resident Inspectors. The Inspectors decide on which service areas they want to inspect. They review and monitor Soha's service standards and make suggestions for improvements. The methods of monitoring include:

- Interviewing other tenants to find out their experience of services
- Deciding on topics for mystery shopping
- Comparing performance targets with actual achievement
- Interviews with staff to find out more about their roles, including work-shadowing
- Desktop reviews of Soha's policies and procedures

The team present their findings to Soha's executive team and draw up a joint action plan

5. Conclusions

The above report sets out the basis for a new Tenant Participation strategy to be agreed with involved residents in Waverley. The Council must discuss the recommendations with its involved residents and agree priorities for the coming year. Whilst Waverley BC has some good practice and has made some progress in involvement there is still much work to be done. These centre on the following:

- Development of a Compact that has true ownership and is used by all staff, councillors and active residents and is promoted to all residents
- A strategic approach to involvement which links into the business of the organisation

- The raising of the profile of tenant participation throughout the organisation especially with embedding staff
- An equalities plan that improves access to tenant participation, representation and accountability.
- Promoting involvement and raising its profile to residents
- Measuring and evaluating the costs and benefits of involvement and then promoting these – Waverley BC must know more about what involvement achieves
- More systems to provide effective and honest feedback of outcomes
- Ensuring involvement makes a difference.
- Ensuring excellent relations with all tenants' groups including those who are critical of the Council
- Working together to ensure the Tenants Panel sets goals, reports back and is accessible
- Consideration of an enhanced scrutiny role for the Panel
- New mechanisms led by service managers to set up service area groups to involve more people than just the Tenants Panel
- Area/neighbourhood feed ins to the Tenants Panel
- Linking up with corporate consultation