

Item No. 5	Classification: Open	Date: 11 July 2017	Meeting Name: Housing & Community Safety Scrutiny Subcommittee
Report title:		Review of resident involvement	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Head of Overview and Scrutiny	

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Housing & Community Safety Scrutiny Subcommittee:

1. Consider the findings of the review of resident involvement in Southwark.
2. Make recommendations for next steps following the review.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3. Southwark is the largest council landlord in London and the sixth largest in the UK. There are 38,000 council tenants and 17,000 council homeowners in the borough and many people also rent from leaseholders on council estates. The council intends to remain a large landlord for many years to come; investing £326 million to improve the standard of existing council homes and pledging to build 11,000 new homes by 2043.
4. The council is committed to engaging with its 55,000 tenants and homeowners and giving them a genuine say in the decision-making process. We have a duty to ensure that we engage with residents in ways that are accessible, representative, effective and represent value to all council tenants, homeowners and other residents. Alongside this duty, the council's values, reflected in the Fairer Future principles, shape our approach to effective, open, honest and productive engagement by treating residents as if they were a valued member of our own family; being open, honest and accountable; spending money as if it were from our own pocket; working for everyone to realise their own potential; and making Southwark a place to be proud of.
5. This commitment also places engaged and empowered communities at the heart of the council's approach to social regeneration across Southwark. This recognises that enabling people's voices to be heard in local regeneration helps to shape better outcomes, strengthens communities and connects individuals to local resources and opportunities.
6. The council's Housing & Community Safety Scrutiny Subcommittee is seeking to develop recommendations for improvement in the way the council engages with and involves residents. In December 2016 and February 2017, the subcommittee heard evidence from council officers, the Cabinet Member for Housing and members of the Tenant Council. It was noted that the current structures for engaging with tenants and homeowners were built and formalised in the late 1980s and early 1990s at a time when face to face engagement was

the best way to reach out to people and hear what they had to say. These structures also reflected the corporate and decision making arrangements of the council at the time, which have changed considerably since. Many committed residents dedicate valuable time and service to engaging with the council on housing issues. In addition, TRAs perform important and valued community roles, supporting vulnerable residents and building community networks. However, less than 0.5% of our 55,000 residents in council homes currently engage with the council through the existing formal routes. The evidence showed that while there are many strengths and assets within the tenant and leaseholders movements, there is dissatisfaction on all sides with the current arrangements and a strong desire for change.

7. On 7 February 2017, having heard the evidence presented, the Housing & Community Safety Scrutiny Subcommittee recommended that a review into tenant and homeowner engagement be commissioned, to be carried out by an independent, expert body. The review would provide independent evidence to the subcommittee to support recommendations to the council's cabinet on improvements to how the council engages with residents.
8. Following this recommendation, the council invited organisations specialising in housing, public engagement and public service improvement to tender for the contract to lead the review. In March, following a competitive process, Kaizen Partnership and Social Engine were appointed to lead the review. The appointment was supported and advised by a representative of the Tenant Council and Homeowners Council were also invited to send a representative to participate in the process.

Aims and key research questions

9. The review was set up to explore independently and in depth how the council engages with tenants and homeowners as a housing provider and identify areas for improvement.
10. To support this aim, the review was structured to answer five key questions:
 - How aware and satisfied are tenants and homeowners, the council and other stakeholders with the current system and structures?
 - How can tenant and homeowner engagement be improved to reflect the way people live today and that deliver improved outcomes in Southwark?
 - How does the Southwark approach compare to other housing providers? What examples of good practice could Southwark Council learn from?
 - Do the current systems and structures provide good value for money? Can cost savings and efficiencies be made which could save money and not compromise engagement or improve engagement?
 - What might effective engagement look like in 5 years' time – how best to define an active and involved tenant / homeowner?

Methodology

11. The largest source of evidence for the review has been an extensive

engagement and evidence gathering exercise with council tenants, homeowners and other residents carried out between April and June 2017. This exercise was carried out to hear from as many people as possible from across the borough and from all backgrounds. Views were sought from people who do not currently get involved with the formal resident engagement structures and from those with longstanding experience and knowledge of the tenant and leaseholder movements at different levels.

12. Overall, following widespread promotion, well over 1,000 people contributed their views through outreach and street engagement, focus groups, stakeholder interviews and online consultation. A summary of the extensive consultation carried out is set out in paragraphs 32 to 36.
13. As well as holding new conversations with residents, the review also looked at data already held by the council to explore the relationship between engagement and satisfaction with council services and whether there are patterns to this, which could help inform wider service benefits that might be gained from improving resident engagement. To support the assessment of value for money, data relating to efficiency and effectiveness of the current tenant and leaseholder engagement structures was also reviewed, including the costs of supporting and servicing the structures and evidence of impact and outcomes from the tenant fund and homeowners fund.
14. The final element of the review was a process of peer review and benchmarking. A desk-based Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) was carried out looking at the evidence of effective tenant engagement within local government and among other housing providers. Following this REA, a series of interviews were carried out with local authority and social housing providers where good or useful practice had been identified. Finally, to further support the value for money assessment, engagement support costs were also benchmarked against other housing providers.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

15. The full report of the review and a shorter summary version are included as appendices to this report. The report sets out detailed findings and recommendations mapped against the five key questions set out in paragraph 10.
16. The review has identified significant need for change, to be addressed jointly by the council and residents, in order to improve the reach and effectiveness of resident involvement in Southwark. It has also identified opportunities for improvements in outcomes for residents and the borough as a whole that may be realised by transforming the way resident involvement takes place.
17. Some of the key issues highlighted by the review include a widespread lack of awareness of how to get involved among residents across the borough, with a particular sense of exclusion present among young people. It found several challenges with weaknesses identified throughout and across the current structure and culture of resident involvement, with a need to fundamentally refresh the meaning, purpose and approach to engagement. There is also significant scope for improvement in how communication is designed and targeted to encourage engagement. Encouragingly, there is strong evidence that

many more people want to get involved but they want to do so in different ways, which are more flexible and more suited to their lives and priorities.

18. Looking forward, the review makes a number of recommendations under three broad headings:
 - reviewing the overall approach to resident involvement
 - reconfiguring the engagement structures
 - introducing more effective and up to date engagement methods.
19. The report provides a thorough and comprehensive analysis of key issues and opportunities arising from the review. Given the depth and complexity of the report and in response to the evidence presented by the review, there is a significant opportunity to now establish a collaborative co-design process in which the council is a participant alongside residents. Such an approach is recommended to develop a shared plan for change in response to the review, which is owned by all stakeholders and builds on the widespread participation achieved during the review itself.

Policy implications

20. The council's Fairer Future principles underpin this review, shaping its scope and objectives. These are:
 - Treating residents as if they were a valued member of our own family
 - Being open, honest and accountable
 - Spending money as if it were from our own pocket
 - Working for everyone to realise their own potential
 - Making Southwark a place to be proud of
21. The council's Housing Strategy to 2043 includes the key principle: "We will support and encourage all residents to take pride and responsibility in their homes and local area". It goes on to state that "Our approach to resident involvement across all tenures acknowledges one central premise – that one size does not fit all. The council will develop a menu of options, so that everybody has the opportunity to choose their level and method of engagement. These options will prioritise digital methods of communication both for speed and ease of contact for the majority of residents and the council, but also to minimise cost." This review builds on these commitments. It sets out recommendations to widen the scope for engagement to enable people to choose their preferred way of engaging and communicating, according to their needs and priorities.
22. The council's 'Approach to Community Engagement', adopted in December 2012 sets out the principles for actively engaging residents in decision-making. It notes the need to move beyond purely formal processes of consultation to a model that engages people more actively. It also recognises that many residents are not involved in traditional structures, so as well as seeking to improve engagement through our existing structures we must offer more new methods for others to engage, reflecting their interests and the time they can give. The review responds to this need. The review has been conducted according to the council's adopted key principles for community engagement and its recommendations will also be taken forward in line with these principles:
 - Be clear about what the scope of our engagement is, whether we are communicating, consulting, deciding together or acting together.
 - Engage when we know it will

make a difference, when there is a real opportunity for people to have an impact and influence decisions on issues that local people care about.

- Engage at the right time, at an early enough stage for there to be an opportunity to genuinely influence a policy or service.
- Allow sufficient time for good quality engagement to take place.
- Be clear about what we are asking, what opportunities there are to shape services and be honest about what can and can't be achieved.
- We will ensure that our engagement is accessible and targeted to those it needs to reach using a variety of engagement methods to broaden participation and overcome any barriers people may have in engaging with us.
- Aim to engage as widely as possible so that we increase engagement with those who are not already in touch with the council.
- Tell people what has happened as a result of their engagement.

Community impact statement

23. The review has highlighted that overall there is a low level of awareness of how to participate among borough residents. The majority of residents stated that they were not well aware of TRAs, Homeowners and Tenant Councils and Area Housing Forums and that they did not feel well informed about opportunities to have their say. The review therefore recommends changes to the current approach to resident involvement to include a wider group of people by establishing more flexible and quicker methods of participation. It also makes recommendations for improved communication, to encourage better engagement.
24. The review also considered engagement across Southwark residents with different characteristics, including age, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, employment status, housing status, and length of residency in the borough.
25. The most significant variation identified between different groups related to age, with young people likely to feel and be less represented than older people. People under 25 were twice as likely to say they did not feel informed about opportunities to have their say, compared with older people and the majority of young people felt that their views were not heard and that they did not matter to the council. The review also found that the association between engagement and satisfaction is strongest with younger people, with the 18-34 age group most likely to report satisfaction with council services when they believe the council listens to residents.
26. Other variations were identified, including residents of Asian background feeling less engaged compared to other ethnic groups and leaseholders feeling less engaged than tenants. The detailed data may highlight further areas for consideration in terms of potential impact on different communities and where these are identified they will be fed into the process of taking forward the recommendations.
27. A key driver for implementing the findings of the review is therefore to have a positive impact on how the council involves a diverse range of residents across the equality strands and across the community as a whole.

Resource implications

28. Immediate financial implications arising from taking forward the recommendations will be managed within existing budget commitments.
29. There are no further resource implications at this time.

Legal implications

30. The council is required by Section 105 of the Housing Act 1985 to maintain arrangements for consulting tenants on housing management issues which are likely to substantially affect them. The legislation provides discretion for landlord authorities to make the arrangements they consider appropriate to achieve the aims of informing tenants, hearing their views and considering their representations on relevant matters before taking a decision.
31. In addition, the Homes and Communities Agency's 2015 regulatory framework states that tenants should have opportunities to shape service delivery and to hold the responsible board and councillors to account. Providers are expected to engage meaningfully with their tenants and offer them opportunities to shape the tailoring of services to reflect local priorities. Tenants should have the ability to scrutinise their provider's performance, identify areas for improvement and influence future delivery.
32. The recommendations of the review point to methods of improving council engagement with tenants in line with the legal duties set out above.

Consultation

33. The review has been supported by an extensive consultation exercise held across the borough with residents and stakeholder groups that engaged over 1,000 residents. There were three main strands to the consultation.
 - Interviews with council staff and key stakeholders
 - Focus Groups with active residents
 - Outreach and engagement of residents, focussing on reaching those not currently involved, with a particular focus on under-represented groups.
34. Strands 1 and 2 focussed on hearing from key stakeholders as well as engaging with the formal resident structures and most active tenants and leaseholders. Focus groups were held with 5 TRAs, 2 Area Housing Forums, the Youth Council, a Sheltered Housing Unit, the Tenants Council, the Homeowners Council, and Southwark Group of Tenant Organisations (SGTO).
35. Strand 3 was aimed at hearing from residents of the borough who would not be expected to be involved in formal engagement structures. In order to hear from a diverse range of residents, and especially from those not currently involved, targeted outreach and direct engagement took place in estates and areas with a high proportion of council tenants and leaseholders. Within this strand the following variety of methods were used to widen participation and to ensure that less heard voices were included.
 - Targeted outreach in the community with individual street interviews which typically lasted from 15-20 minutes each. Interviews were conducted across the borough, on different days of the week (including weekends) and across a range of times of day and in a wide variety of types of locations.

- Street focus groups. This is a way to have broad discussions with people who are not typically accessible through a traditional focus group approach, such as groups of teenagers on the street, parents at the school gate or women in a hairdressers.
 - Peer to peer engagement and consultation delivered by the Southwark Young Advisors. This element comprised of a focus group with young advisors themselves to gather their ideas as well as street outreach where they engaged and interviewed other young people.
36. Additionally an online consultation was hosted on the Southwark Consultation Hub. The online questionnaire, which followed the same format as the street interviews, was promoted by the council via emails to all TRAs and other tenant and homeowner organisations, posters in public places such as libraries, customer service points and TRA noticeboards and through social media. More than 20,000 people were directly emailed about the consultation.
37. In total, the consultation conducted through the review resulted in well over 1,000 people contributing their views:
- 563 individual street interviews
 - 62 individuals participated in 20 street focus groups
 - 133 young people engaged through peer-research run by Southwark Young Advisors
 - 380 online survey responses
 - 12 focus groups with groups and bodies which are part of the formal engagement structures
 - 12 one-to-one interviews with people who are active in the current structures
 - 8 one-to-one interviews with Council stakeholders (Members and Officers) and all Ward Members were invited to contribute their views to the review
 - 6 in-depth interviews with other housing providers (RSLs and Local Authorities)

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Southwark Council's approach to engagement with council tenants and homeowners – report to Housing & Community Safety Scrutiny Subcommittee, 5 December 2016	Scrutiny team Hub 4, 5 th Floor 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH	Scrutiny team 020 7525 7344
http://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/documents/s65436/Resident%20involvement%20paper.pdf		
Minutes of Housing & Housing & Community Safety Scrutiny Subcommittee, 7 February 2017	Scrutiny team Hub 4, 5 th Floor 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH	Scrutiny team 020 7525 7344
http://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=44138		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Improving tenant and homeowner engagement in Southwark – a review carried out by Kaizen and Social Engine (circulated electronically)