

Item No.	Classification: Open	Date: 14 March 2013	Meeting Name: Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing Management
Report title:		Resident Involvement Strategy	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All wards	
From:		Strategic Director of Housing and Community Services	

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the resident involvement strategy, as set out in appendix A, be agreed.
2. That an action plan is produced showing how and when the resident involvement strategy will be implemented.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3. The first draft of the resident involvement strategy went out to consultation in late 2010/early 2011. This involved presentations at Area Forums and a survey of residents, followed by reports to Tenant Council on the 24 January 2011 and to Home Owners Council on the 9 March 2011.
4. The issues raised during the 2010/11 consultations were to do with the capacity of the council to deliver the strategy given the changes that had occurred in 2010 to how the council supported tenant and resident associations. Moreover, there was some concern expressed at a perceived downgrading of the present involvement structures in favour of "wider engagement", and it was felt that the 2011 version of the strategy could be shortened so as to make it easier to read and understand.
5. Further work has now happened, and an updated and much shorter strategy has been produced. We have taken into account all of the points made in 2010 and 2011, and then consulted with engaged and non engaged residents in 2012/13. Tenant Council have agreed the updated strategy at their meeting on 11 February 2013, and Home Owners Council agreed the strategy on the 20 February 2013.
6. The latest consultations have all supported the updated strategy, as well as providing some precise and interesting suggestions which have been incorporated into the final strategy document.
7. The updated strategy underpins the need for the present involvement structures, and explains how presently non-engaged residents can become engaged with their communities and with their tenant and resident associations. The strategy is clear that there is no contradiction between supporting residents already involved and supporting the development of larger numbers of engaged residents.
8. The challenge will be to make the best use of our resources to achieve our ambitions. To ensure that this happens; the newly created community engagement team has put the implementation of the resident involvement strategy at the core of its work programme in 2013/14, alongside equally important matters such as consultations about the housing commission report.

9. Developing further the information and consultation processes with area forums and tenant and resident associations is an important aspect of the new community engagement team. To do this three new posts, called capacity and partnership posts, have been created by the restructuring of former posts. These three officers will be tasked to step forward when communication and consultation with area forums, tenant and resident associations and local communities needs to be improved, and so their role will be dedicated to fixing exactly the type of problem flagged up by the consultations.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Policy implications

10. In July 2011 the council published the Council Plan, which contained ten Fairer Future promises summarising the ten priorities of the council. The Housing and Community Services Department are implementing two of the ten Fairer Future promises of the council, namely to;
 - deliver the first three years of our five year plan to make every council home warm, dry and safe, and
 - to improve our customer service with more online services, including delivery of a better housing repairs service, independently verified by tenants.
11. Resident involvement in both of the above two Fairer Future promises is vital, both to ensure our work is targeted at the exact problems identified by residents, and to get feedback from people affected on progress.
12. The Future Approach to Community Engagement, agreed by cabinet on the 11th December 2012, sets out nine activities that will take place in 2013/14 in order to create the genuine dialogue we need to have, and amongst these key activities is the implementation of the resident involvement strategy the subject of this report.
13. The consultations around the Housing Commission's recommendations are due to take place in March to May 2013. These consultations will put into practice the core ideas in the resident involvement strategy, and allow the council to demonstrate that the strategy has lead to meaningful, genuine consultations with the residents of council housing via a wide range of methods that will appeal to a diversity of people.

Community impact statement

14. There are 39,000 rented council homes and 14,500 home ownership properties in council freehold management, making Southwark one of the largest housing providers in the country. The 53,500 households who rent or are home owners in Southwark managed properties make up just about half of all the people who live in the borough. It is clear from comparing the 2001 to the 2011 census figures that the borough is becoming more diverse in terms of ethnicity and religion and is becoming younger in age profile. Improving the "involvement offer" will ensure many more residents gain from their involvement with their local tenant and resident association; and with other ways on offer to them to have their say and to offer their skills and knowledge to their own local community.

Resource implications

15. The support to resident involvement explained in the strategy will be carried out within existing financial and staffing resources.

Consultations in 2012/13

16. From November 2012 to January 2013 a resident involvement working party has met twice, three focus groups, including one with young people, have been undertaken, an on-line and paper survey have been sent out (82 responses) and a number of “vox pop” interviews have been done with residents asked at random to give their views at shopping centres. All ideas have been considered and improvements have been made to the strategy, detailed below.

17. The resident involvement strategy working party discussed the importance of :

- Reviving the tenant compact.
- The working party recommended an information pack be available at sign-up and that better use could be made of tenancy checks to collect equalities information.
- More use of on-line engagement methods recommended, e.g. facebook, twitter and local websites, so as to engage better with younger residents.
- Partnership training should be continued and increased.
- Making available financial advice was considered very important, and should better be described and designed as “financial capability and literacy”.
- Recognising the important role of Southwark Group of Tenant Organisations; which is something that the strategy does and which has been supported through the consultation exercise.

18. The points made by the residents who attended focus groups, who returned copies of the survey and who stopped to be interviewed in the street have also been incorporated into the strategy, or where appropriate, noted for management actions when it comes to implementing the strategy. These points were:

- Residents from communities who have not often supported their tenant and resident associations because of linguistic and cultural barriers do however often have experienced and knowledgeable community groups and community workers (paid and voluntary). The new community engagement team has good links with community groups and community workers. Therefore the implementation of the strategy will include more work being done to introduce residents from communities who do not often take part to the role of their tenant and resident associations; to ensure they do take part and join in.
- Younger people also wanted to join in more with their local communities, and the thoughts of the working party about using ways of communicating that appeal to younger residents are important and will be taken forward.
- The vast majority of people we consulted were very positive about seeing the actions in the strategy take place, as long as the council doesn't start up a whole new set of ways of engaging at the expense of existing tried and tested methods.

19. The conclusion from the consultation exercise in 2012/13 is that the council needs to work in partnership with communities and with the existing resident engagement structures to implement the ambitions of the resident involvement strategy. The council needs to ensure that we understand the diversity of residents and work out how to also diversify the range of engagement methods we offer.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Director of Legal Services

20. The council is required by law to have arrangements in place to consult with its tenants on matters of housing management that it considers likely to substantially affect tenants as a whole or a group of them who form a distinct social group or occupy homes which constitute a distinct class. The council has in place a resident involvement structure that forms part of its consultation arrangements with Tenants. The proposed Resident Involvement Strategy sets out the council's strategy to improve on the existing consultation structure with the aim of encouraging engagement from all council tenants and long leaseholders. The report confirms that the draft strategy has been consulted on. The cabinet member should consider the outcome of this consultation when taking a decision on the recommendation in this report.

21. The recommendation in this report for agreement to the proposed Resident Involvement Strategy is a matter reserved for decision for individual cabinet member under paragraph 6 of Part 3D of the council's constitution and is in the area of responsibility of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing Management.

Strategic Director of Finance and Corporate Services

22. The adoption of the strategy outlined in this report will not result in the Council having to commit any additional resources, as it will be managed within existing resources. Any future news commitments currently not foreseen will have to be approved by way of the Council's standard budget setting process.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None	

APPENDICES

No.	Title
A	Resident Involvement Strategy

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Gerri Scott, Strategic Director of Housing and Community Services	
Report Author	Stephen Douglass, Head of Community Engagement	
Version	Final	
Dated	14 March 2013	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments included
Director of Legal Services	Yes	Yes
Strategic Director of Finance and Corporate Services.	Yes	Yes
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team		14 March 2013