

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, SOCIAL SERVICES & HOUSING

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| TO: | HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS & LEISURE COMMITTEE | | |
| DATE: | 17 JULY 2013 | AGENDA ITEM: | 7 |
| TITLE: | TENANT SCRUTINY PANEL TACT | | |
| LEAD COUNCILLOR: | RICHARD DAVIES | PORTFOLIO: | HOUSING |
| SERVICE: | HOUSING | WARDS: | ALL |
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide information and background to the development of Reading's Tenant Scrutiny Panel "TACT" (Tenant and Council Together). This report will accompany a presentation to the Committee made by representatives of TACT setting out their experiences and their achievements to date.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That members note the contents of the report.
- 2.2 That members commend the work of TACT and its' tenant members

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The foundations for a regulatory system, for both housing associations and local authorities that formally incorporated tenants' views and concerns were set in the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008. Part of the context for the development of Tenant-Led Scrutiny in Reading is the new system for the regulation of social housing introduced in 2010 and since revised to take effect from April 2012.
- 3.2 Tenant scrutiny aims to give tenants more power in holding their landlords to account for their decisions, performance and conduct. It is based on the specific principle that the priorities and views of tenants should be at the heart of a housing organisation's framework for directing, monitoring, assessing and modifying its own activities.
- 3.3 Where it works well, the benefits of tenant scrutiny include service improvements, efficiency savings, enhanced tenant satisfaction and staff confidence, tenant input into self-assessments; and a high level of challenge as to how landlords operate. Tenant scrutiny is intrinsically linked to the delivery of value for money services that meet local needs with transparency about how investment is made.

- 3.4 The original six national standards are now known as either consumer standards or economic standards. Consumer standards are concerned with all the housing services received by residents and applicants for housing.
- 3.7 The co-regulatory principles underpin the regulatory approach. Co-regulation is different to the previous system of regulation in how it defines the roles of each of the parties involved in it. Under co-regulation the role of:
- The Housing Regulator is to set clear standards for social housing.
 - A Registered Provider and its tenants is then to work together to achieve the required housing service standards.
 - Boards or councillors are responsible for meeting the standards and accountable for their organisation's delivery of its social housing objectives."¹
- 3.9 Tenant scrutiny is an approach rather than a process. It is flexible in terms of context and application. There is no "one size fits all" model and there are many examples of different Scrutiny structures and tenant arrangements employed by social housing providers. The guidance recommends that structures are established that work best for the organisation and are responsive to tenant wishes and needs. There should be formality around these structures however reflecting the status of the scrutiny function within the organisation.

4. THE PROPOSAL

Background:

- 4.1 In 2011 the Housing Service began working with a steering group of tenants and with a TPAS representative (employed as an independent mentor for the tenants) tasked with establishing and setting up scrutiny arrangements for Reading Borough Council tenants. The steering group activities included:
- Raising awareness of the context and role of scrutiny for all stakeholders to achieve understanding of the role of tenant scrutiny and "buy-in". There was an initial launch event in March 2011 and a subsequent promotions campaign involving posters, information packs and publicity at local events.
 - Agreeing a terms of reference for a Scrutiny panel covering panel remit, scope, composition, levels of authority, code of conduct, safeguards and escalation/disputes process. The terms of reference also set out how review topics are to be identified and selected.
 - Designing a recruitment process for panel members based on an agreed competency model and "job description."
 - Developing training, support mechanisms and succession planning to those who want to get involved ensuring that the scrutiny function is sustainable.
 - Establishing and undertaking a pilot or test scrutiny review for evaluation prior to wider role out.

Current Position

- 4.2 So far, TACT has undertaken 2 Scrutiny Reviews into the delivery of Housing Services resulting in excess of 50 recommendations, all of which have been accepted by Reading Borough Council's Housing Management Team:

¹ The regulatory framework for social housing in England

- Appearance of Estates - focussing on whether Local Offers are being applied effectively
 - Anti-social behaviour - focussing on quality of communication, access and tenant satisfaction
- 4.3 TACT has provided update reports to Tenants through Housing News Articles in December 2012 and June 2013. They are also looking to provide an update in the Annual Report (Autumn 2013)
- 4.4 The choice of service area/provision for the third scrutiny review is currently under consideration by TACT.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 The overall aim of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel "TACT" is to "Ensure that RBC Housing is a well managed, viable organisation which places the Tenant at the heart of its business through tenant led scrutiny." The development of a Tenant Scrutiny Panel will contribute to the Council's strategic aims by ensuring that priority is given and resources directed to those areas of service of most concern and importance to service users and customers (customer focus). The focus on performance and comparison with other housing providers will encourage the adoption of best practice and learning from others.

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 6.1 The development of a Tenant Scrutiny Panel was driven by a steering group of involved tenants and council officers. Tenants were (and continue to be) supported in undertaking this role by an independent tenant advisor (TPAS) responsible for offering independent advice, examples of good practice and direct training.
- 6.2 Widespread publicity and recruitment campaign was carried out 2011/12 to raise awareness of tenant scrutiny and encourage tenants to apply to join the panel from the whole of the tenant body. Through an extensive and effective recruitment process (billed as 'Have you got the Tenant Factor?) incorporating open information sessions attended by in excess of 50 tenants, and a rigorous selection process to find the best candidates, a Scrutiny Panel with 12 members was established.
- 6.3 This approach followed an independent review of RBC Tenant Involvement mechanisms that recommended a concerted focus on expanding both the number and the diversity of tenants taking part in formal tenant involvement mechanisms.

The development of the **Tenant Academy** a structured 10 week training programme for tenants (leading to an NVQ qualification) has been very well received and has gone some way to support and empower tenants to take on their new role within the co-regulation framework.

- 6.4 The action plans arising from Scrutiny Reviews will be monitored by the relevant Tenant working Groups with progress and achievements being reported to JCC (Joint Consultative Panel - the Strategic and Policy arm of the Tenant Involvement mechanisms).
- 6.5 It is intended that reports, recommendations and progress resulting from Scrutiny will be made available via the website and summarised within future Annual Reports and Housing News available to all tenants.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 A “preferred composition” for Panel membership was agreed that, as far as possible, aims that membership of TACT will reflect the existing tenant profile/composition.
- 7.2 Training and (independent) support will be available for Panel Members.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The National standards for Social Housing became a requirement for Housing Providers in spring 2010.
- 8.2 The Tenant involvement and Empowerment standard sets out a requirement for social housing landlords to offer all tenants opportunities to be involved in the management of their housing. This must include opportunities to :
 - Influence housing related policies and how housing related services are delivered.
 - Be involved in scrutinising performance in delivering housing related services
- 8.3 Housing providers must offer tenants support so that they are more able to be effectively engaged, involved and empowered.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) supports the operation of TACT with a commitment to resource both the operational costs and expenses associated with each review and the overhead costs associated with the Panel Structure (further recruitment, training, administration, expenses and publicity).
- 9.2 It is intended that a system of regular review/assessment of the Panel’s effectiveness and impact is undertaken by a nominated group of stakeholders.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 Summary of regulatory standard on Tenant Involvement and Empowerment