

## **Review of Tenant Engagement Strategy 2021-2024**

This review will inform the development of the new Tenancy Engagement Strategy. It sets out the achievements and challenges encountered in working towards the aims set out in the strategy.

Priority 1: To improve the way we communicate with tenants and leaseholders.

Priority 2: To promote and support tenant involvement.

Priority 3: To improve the service by listening to what tenants tell us.

The effects of the Covid 19 pandemic had a major impact at the introduction of this strategy. Resources were re-prioritised and focused on delivering front line services meaning that work on implementing the Tenant Engagement Strategy was delayed. In addition, as a consequence of Covid, there was a move away from in person meeting which made it more difficult for the Council to engage with Tenants. In person meeting have now been re-established with a Customer Engagement Panel established to enable Tenants Representatives to have an overview of and ability to scrutinise the Councils Landlord services in addition to the Area Housing Panels.

There have been considerable achievements in meeting the aims of the strategy but there are some areas where work is yet to completed. The new Tenant Engagement Model has been developed, though there is work still to be done in its implementation.

The following sections sets out what we said we would do to implement the strategy, what we have done, what we are in the process of doing and what is still outstanding and may be considered for inclusion in the new Tenant Engagement Strategy.

### **PRIORITY 1: TO IMPROVE THE WAY WE COMMUNICATE WITH TENANTS & LEASEHOLDERS**

**We said we would develop, in conjunction with tenants, a new model of tenant engagement and scrutiny.**

The Tenant Engagement Model has been developed and is in the process of being implemented. The Customer Engagement Panel has been established to provide Tenant scrutiny of the Councils Landlord functions. The number of Area Housing Panels been rationalised from 3 to 2 Panels to reflect the how Landlord services are provided on a geographical basis within the Borough.

**We said we would review and, if necessary, revise our service standards. Publish and promote our service standards and ensure tenants know how to challenge them.**

New Local Service Standards are being developed in line with revised Regulator for Consumer standards and are being developed alongside the new Tenant Engagement Strategy 2024-2027. The Customer Engagement Panel will provide tenant input into the development of the Local Service Standards.

**We said we would make it easier for tenants to report problems to us and take prompt and appropriate action.**

Housing Online is up and running, Tenants able to report and track repairs, manage their rent account, and update their personal details.

**We said we would regularly advise tenants about our complaints process and share improvements and learning from complaints.**

A Tenant Satisfaction Measure for Complaints handling has been established and the Councils performance is reported on our website on a quarterly basis.

The development of a Tenant complaints handling scrutiny panel is included with in the Tenant Engagement Model and will be progressed in due course.

With the introduction of a Joint Complaints Handling Code from the Housing Ombudsman and the Local Government Ombudsman the Council will review its Complaints Policy and procedure.

As a response to complaints about estate related issues, for example, rubbish, untidy gardens etc. we are developing a planned approach to "Estate Inspections", whereby we will have scheduled estates inspection dates publicised with the option for residents and stakeholders to attend with housing officers. The outcome will be a more joined up approach, accountability to actioning issues and having a more visible presence in our communities.

**We said we would review and engage with tenants regarding the information provided regarding building and health and safety.**

The tenant representative bodies, the Customer Engagement Panel and the Sheltered Improvement panel have been consulted with during the development of the Asset Management Strategy.

A standing agenda item for the Sheltered Improvement Panel is the review of Fire Safety measures in Sheltered Schemes.

**PRIORITY 2: TO PROMOTE AND SUPPORT TENANT INVOLVEMENT**

**We said we would consult with tenants about their preferred methods of engagement (digital, face to face, groups etc.)**

We held a "Meet the Teams" event in October 2023 on the Cornhill to give tenants to meet representatives of Housing Services and to promote Tenant Engagement. The feedback from that event was that there is lack of communication from the Council, with minimal in person contact following the Covid-19 pandemic. Particularly, tenants felt that Housing Officer presence on estates has not been reinstated to how it was before the pandemic. This feedback will be used in development of how the Council delivers its Housing Services

We recognise that our website could be improved and as a Council this is being reviewed. We will engage with tenants to get their input as to what website content they would like to see.

**We said we would ensure that the Tenant Engagement team have the proper resources to action meaningful change.**

We have ensured that there is financial provision in place to cover transport costs and training for Tenant Representatives.

**We said we would use the newly proposed national training programme for tenants to ensure that all interested tenants are supported to have the skills and training needed to become actively involved.**

A proposal for Tenant Representatives to study for a relevant Chartered Institute of Housing Level 2 qualification is to be worked up. Currently in progress is the development of an Ipswich Borough Council training programme for involved tenants. We have enabled Tenant Representatives to attend TPAS Scrutiny training in December 2023, and Chairing meeting training in February 2024.

**We said we would promote tenant involvement at every opportunity including through our Tenants Newsletter, tenancy sign up and visits.**

We are working on a Tenant Empowerment policy alongside the development of the new Tenant Engagement Strategy. We are developing Tenant Engagement focused Tenant Times newsletter. The Tenants Handbook, including information about Tenant Engagement has been reviewed and updated, and is now being used at tenancy sign ups.

**We said we would work with a national recognised body to achieve Tenant Engagement Accreditation**

We still need to carry out this work once we have fully implemented the Tenant Engagement Model first.

### **PRIORITY 3: TO USE WHAT WE ARE TOLD TO IMPROVE OUR SERVICES**

**We said we would develop action plans to address the three areas highlighted for improvement from the Tenant Survey. (Complaint Handling, Anti-Social Behavior, Ease of dealing with Ipswich Borough Council)**

We are as a Council, going to review our approach to Complaints handling before April 2024. As part of this we will introduce a simpler to understand 2 Stage complaint process rather than the current 3 Stage system.

We are in the process of creating an Anti-Social Behaviour procedure specifically for low-level housing related cases, which will ensure we have regular contact with tenants and work with them to resolve issues.

As part of the development of the new Tenant Engagement Strategy we will look to see how we can improve the ease of dealing with the Council.

**We said we would develop a model so that data and learning from performance, complaints and satisfaction feedback can help in identifying areas that need review / scrutiny.**

We have introduced a process where we review all feedback from Tenant Satisfaction Measures surveys and investigate where an issue has been flagged up to resolve the issue and see if any service improvements can be made.

**We said we would use complaints as a source of intelligence to identify issues and introduce positive changes in service delivery.**

We have trialed “The Noise App” in response to complaints around the use and validity of Anti-Social Behaviour diary sheets.

We have re-introduced the pre-tenancy “risk assessment matrix” (RAM) to ensure any new tenants with vulnerabilities are linked with appropriate support to sustain and manage their tenancies. This has been in response to complaints around Anti-Social Behaviour and income management.

We have developed new policies, Tenancy Management Policy and Succession Policy to provide transparency and mitigate complaints around succession and sole to joint tenancy applications.

**We said we would make more use of survey technology to capture the views of tenants and advise of findings.**

We have commissioned Acuity to undertake quarterly, independent satisfaction surveys of the Councils Tenants to collect data on their opinions of, and attitudes towards, their landlord and services provided. The findings of the surveys are published on the Councils website and in the Tenants Times newsletter.

**We said we would involve tenants in overseeing collated complaints information and monitoring lessons learned.**

As part of the implementation of the Tenant Engagement Model we will establish a forum for the Customer Engagement Panel to scrutinise complaints handling and how the Council learns from complaints.