

Housing and City Development Scrutiny Committee

19 February 2024

Council Tenant Engagement

1. Background

- 1.1 This report outlines the approach being developed to ensure that tenants and leaseholders have a meaningful engagement with the landlord and are able to link to the governance of the Council.
- 1.2 Since 2 April 2023, the Council has had direct management of the housing management and maintenance services. This included the tenant and leaseholder involvement function. The format of the engagement activities is described in Section 2, but this report focusses on governance.
- 1.3 Under the Nottingham City Homes (NCH) partnership agreement with the Council, NCH was responsible for ensuring tenants empowerment and involvement in key decisions and monitoring of the services. At a governance level, the Board of NCH Limited had tenant representation as part of its constitution and indeed had a tenant chair for nine years. In addition, an 'Arms-Length Management Organisation Board' existed that was made up exclusively of tenants and who linked directly to the formal NCH Board structure.
- 1.4 Since the service has come back under direct Council control, it has been essential to consider how tenants will retain that level of empowerment and have a meaningful influence within the Council's Constitutional structure. One action by the Council was to create a new Housing and City Development Scrutiny Committee. The Committee forms part of the reviewing and holding to account the Executive in meeting its responsibilities in regard to tenant influence, as well as service delivery. The Committee maintains the Council's Constitution, but creates a clear focus on housing and other services under the Growth and City Development directorate.
- 1.5 In order to meet the full extent of the empowerment requirements, it is being considered that a tenant could be co-opted onto the Housing and City Development Scrutiny Committee for when pertinent housing related matters are under consideration. This would have the benefit of providing an independent tenant's view, in addition to the lived experience of City Councillors who are also Council tenants.
- 1.6 For the co-optee role to be effective, the tenant would need to possess a level of skills, as well as to be able to provide a representative view of matters of policy and strategy. To that end, work is being undertaken to refresh and strengthen the approach to tenant engagement. The object is to provide all tenants and leaseholders the opportunity to become involved, the support to allow them to be able to engage, and to ensure that engaged tenants are reflective of the

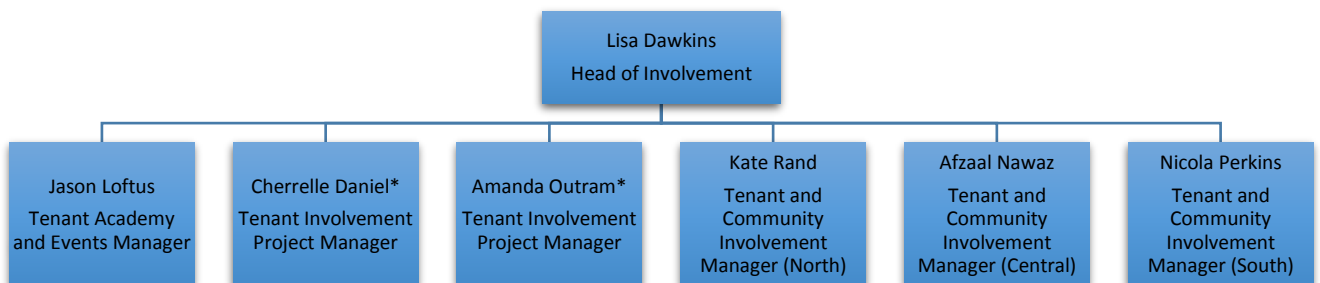
community of Nottingham and that under-represented groups are attracted to the engagement opportunities.

1.7 This report will explore how the tenant engagement structure is being developed to meet the Council's and the national regulator's statutory expectations and requirements.

1.8 It should be noted that all funding and resources utilised for tenant engagement activity comes from within the Housing Revenue Account, so this is not impacted by the current pressures in the Council's General Fund.

2. Tenant Engagement Framework and Strategy

2.1 The current structure of the Tenant and Leaseholder Involvement team (TLI) is shown at Table 1, below:



2.2 The functions and involvement opportunities in each area are:

- **Your Voice Your Choice:** A pool and database of all tenants who have opted into being contacted about involvement and engagement or consultation opportunities as and when they arise. Tenants can choose from a menu of involvement opportunities as to how and when they wish to be involved.
- **Service Improvement and Consultation:** A task-and-finish focus group approach is adopted for all service review and improvement and service consultation work. Groups are formed by recruiting tenants and leaseholders from the Your Voice Your Choice pool, inviting uninvolved tenants and/or tenants who have provided feedback or made a recent complaint.
- **Neighbourhood Champions:** Tenants and leaseholders are recruited to this role if they express an interest in wanting to make a difference and a positive contribution towards their local neighbourhood, no matter how big or small. They can focus on their street, block or estate. The recruited champions will be able to choose how they participate within the specified requirements of the role description, e.g., estate inspections, block and building safety, report issues on their street or signposting neighbours to the right services first time.

- **Tenant and Resident Associations and Local Community Groups:** These groups play an important role in fostering a sense of belonging and community amongst local residents. They provide a vehicle for tenant recruitment, communication, organisation and delivery of needs-led events and initiatives and addressing service, neighbourhood or community issues or concerns to create thriving neighbourhoods where residents can feel proud, involved and safe.
- **Tenant Academy:** A comprehensive programme of free needs-led training for tenants, providing them with valuable skills, knowledge and community engagement tools and confidence to influence decision making and/or enhance their quality of life in their home and/or neighbourhood.
- **Events and Activities:** Design and delivery of planned or bespoke events and initiatives to recognise, reward and celebrate the valuable contribution tenants and leaseholders make towards their neighbourhoods/neighbours and the wider community. Design and delivery of large-scale or pop-up consultation and engagement events to communicate and listen to tenant's views about changes to national, regional or local policy or legislation that may have a direct impact on their lives.
- **Tenant Involvement E-Newsletter:** A digital mechanism to communicate current opportunities to get involved, progress of live activity and final outcomes achieved following the valuable contribution of tenants and leaseholders. Opportunities to participate and influence are shared from services across the Housing division, the Council and local partners.

2.3 In 2023, Housing Services commissioned a review of the tenant engagement structure and impact. This review was undertaken by the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS), which is regarded as industry leaders in engagement and advocacy. Amongst their recommendations were measures to meet the new governance regime, set out below:

Consider creating a Tenant Influencing Vehicle with links into the Governance arrangements within the current housing services structure

- i. The Tenant Influencing Vehicle (TIV) should not be a consultative body but should be embedded into the Governance Structure with direct links to elected Members and EMT to ensure its role in influencing is visible and respected. The TIV should also have oversight of scrutiny and commission scrutiny when there is a need.
- ii. Create a Terms of Reference that outlines the remit for gathering formal, informal and 'noticed' tenant insight. It should also state how it will monitor and review any Tenant Influencing plans and hold NCC Housing Services to account.
- iii. Membership should be primarily tenants.

- iv. Appointments to the Panel should be made by a skills and expertise-based recruitment process, open to all tenants. Some of the skills needed might include effective challenging, analysing and interpreting data, understanding tenant influence.
- v. Training and support should be provided to ensure it is effective at detecting and implementing influencing opportunities and able to proactively gather and act on insight from formal channels, other mechanisms and the wider resident base to help it provide more evidenced-based challenge.
- vi. Utilise behavioural science techniques (see The Engagement Maximiser by TPAS) and develop an engaging communication and recruitment campaign to encourage tenants to be a part of this opportunity.
- vii. Set up a Tenant Influence Working Group (TIWG) to support the TIV. This could evolve from those who took part in this project. TPAS recommends that staff should be empowered to drive key actions on behalf of the TIV as well as provide robust challenge when needed, to ensure the TIV operates as intended. Considerations may be needed to determine whether the TIWG is timebound and in place in the initial set-up and implementation phase.
- viii. Ensure the TIV members are confident and feel they are making a difference with overt support from senior leaders to operational teams.

3. The New Regulations and Expectations

3.1 The Social Housing Regulations Act 2023 has overtly strengthened the role and rights of tenants in regard to an influence over their landlord services. The driver for this are the two tragic events at Grenfell and Rochdale. In both cases, the issues and warnings of tenants and leaseholders were disregarded and dismissed by the landlords.

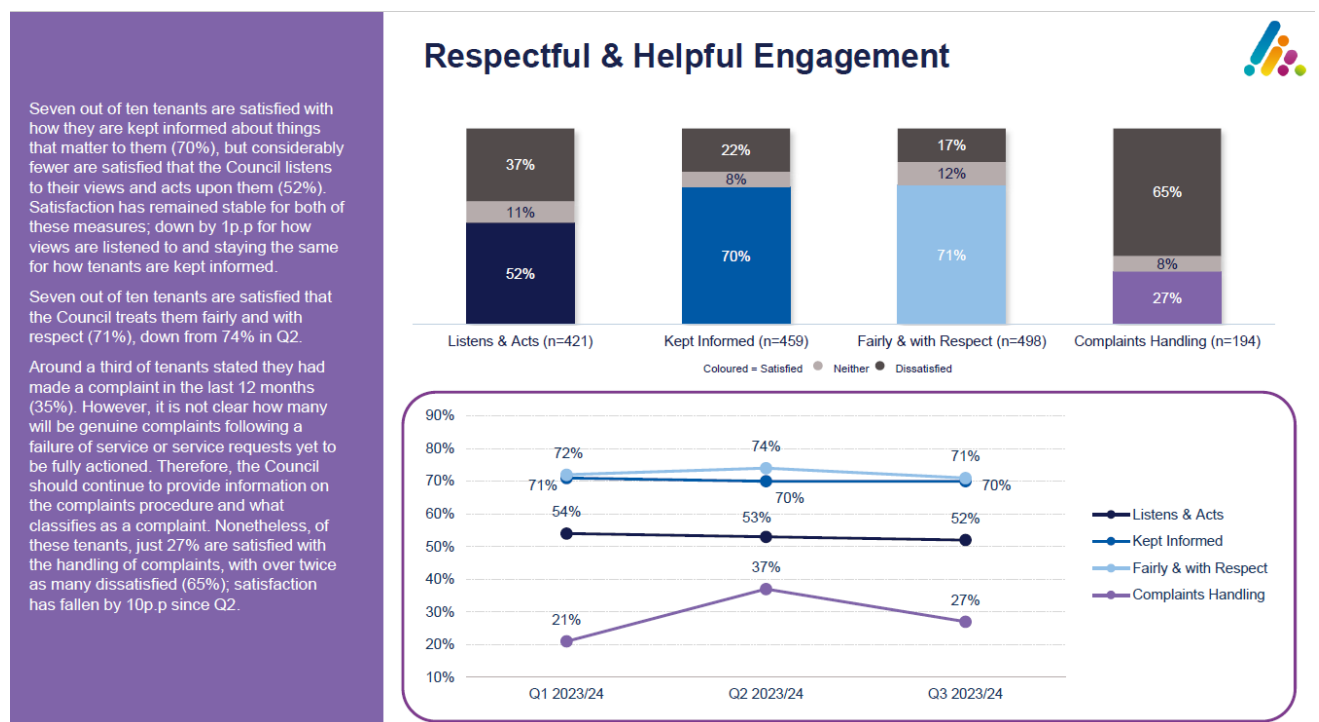
3.2 Within the Act are new powers for the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) that include a new regime of intrusive inspections. RSH will inspect all landlords on a four-yearly programme. RSH will sit in on existing forums to observe how the landlord makes decisions and how it takes account of the tenant perspective in doing so. RSH will also observe how the service is monitored and how senior members gain assurance about core delivery and compliance.

3.3 As part of this new regime, landlords have been required to collect tenant satisfaction measures (TSMs) since April 2023. These are a standard set of 22 questions to allow proper comparison and analysis. The first annual set of reports will have to be submitted by all Social Landlords by June 2024, at which point a national benchmark analysis will be possible between landlords. RSH will use the individual outturns as one of the factors that decide the order of the first intrusive inspections.

3.4 Among the 22 standard satisfaction measures are ones related to engagement and landlord treatment, specifically:

- satisfaction that the landlord listens to tenant views and acts upon them;
- satisfaction that the landlord keeps tenants informed about things that matter to them; and
- agreement that the landlord treats tenants fairly and with respect.

3.5 The third quarter of TSMs has now been completed and the year-to-date levels of satisfaction are replicated below. Whilst the overall levels are in the lower-medium quartile, they have dropped slightly through the year. The November/December edition of the tenants' newsletter was focussed on the Quarter 2 TSMs and included an invitation for tenants to be involved. The results of this information will not be seen until Quarter 4.



3.6 It should be noted that there can be a high degree of accuracy in the satisfaction levels as an external agency (Acuity) conducts 550 randomly selected calls each quarter. This ensures confidentiality and a high response rate, giving assurance that the levels are accurate.

3.7 In addition to the 2023 Act, there is a new set of regulatory consumer standards being introduced and effective from April 2024. These expand and clarify the previous standards description. Increasingly, the intrusive inspection will be focussed on TSMs, compliance with the consumer standard and observation of how the landlord involves tenants, particularly in the decision-making process.

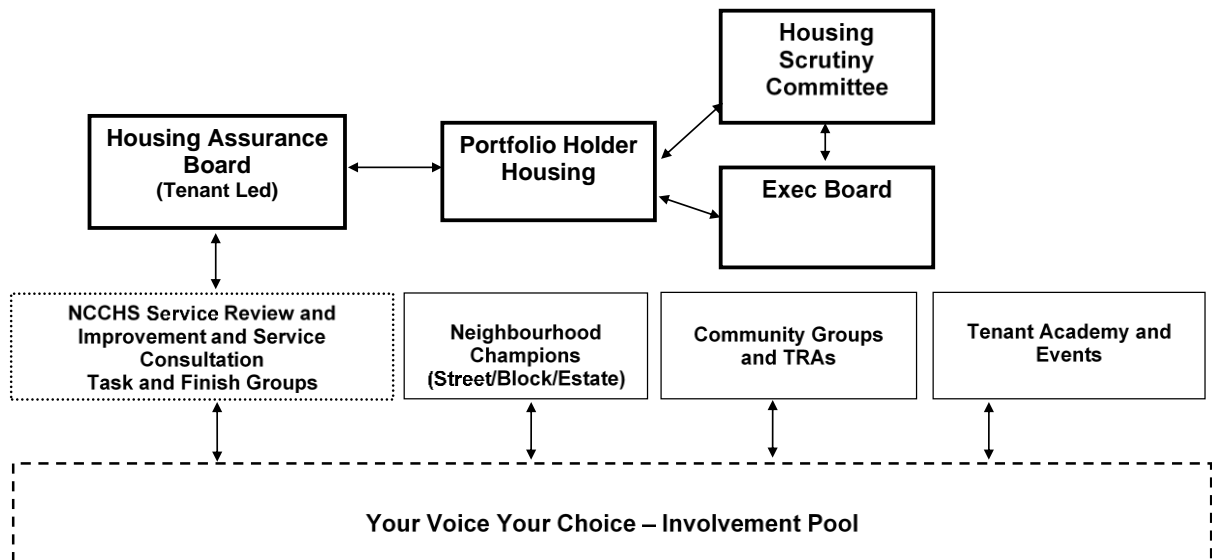
3.8 The Act is the most significant piece of legislation in a generation, in regard to giving power and influence to tenants. It reflects a view of Government, Regulator and Housing Ombudsman services that many social landlords had lost sight of their primary function. As the Council took over direct management of the

housing service on 2 April 2023 there is an opportunity to respond to the new expectations and ensure an effective structure of tenant empowerment.

4. Proposed Engagement Structures

4.1 The actions being followed are to build on existing structures, but to create a new higher level that will connect to the Council decision-making framework.

Proposed Tenant and Leaseholder Involvement Structure (subject to consultation and approval)



4.2 The significant proposal is the creation of a new Housing Assurance Board (HAB). This is the TIV recommended by TPAS. The process of recruitment to the HAB will be to recruit a representative cohort of 10 suitably skilled tenants and 2 leaseholders. The recruitment will be the most important and challenging piece of work and it will have to be ensured that the Council opens up these opportunities to all tenants and leaseholders through a variety of channels.

4.3 The Council will be developing a ‘fit for the future’ role description and a strong recruitment campaign and process. The process will involve initially inviting expressions of interest with a clear message that the Council will be seeking to recruit tenants from across the city who will reflect the community and diverse nature of tenants and have the necessary skills required. The Council will support with training those that have the interest and the potential to develop the required skills. Expressions of interest will then be considered and shortlisted candidates will be interviewed should the interest be sufficient, and the appropriate standard of candidates apply.

4.4 The Council will be advertising through a range of media and will make specific approaches to community, faith, support, voluntary and support groups to ensure that often hard-to-reach groups are aware and able to apply. The selection panel will be drawn from existing active tenant representatives, voluntary sector partners and will be supported by TPAS. Once established, the HAB will be supported at every level in order to fulfil its roles and objectives.

5. Wider activity

5.1 There is a wider package of activity to strengthen tenant engagement and empowerment in coming years and based on the TPAS review. This includes:

- **Consult early:** The essence of meaningful engagement is for early dialogue at the inception of a policy objective or initiative that affects tenant services or budgets.
- **Culture:** It is critical that all members of Housing Services, and other Council colleagues responsible for tenant service delivery (e.g., Customer Services) are aware of and committed to ongoing, open and continuous engagement.
- **Communications:** Reviewing all information material, websites and access will be critical to ensure that tenants are well-informed and aware of the opportunities to have influence.