

Wiltshire Council

Environment Select Committee

07 June 2016

Executive Response to the Final Report of the Resident Engagement Task Group

Purpose of the report

1. To present the response of the Cabinet Member for Housing, Leisure, Libraries and Flooding to the Final Report of the Resident Engagement Task Group.

Background

2. On 12 April 2016 the Environment Select Committee endorsed the Final Report of the Task Group.
3. The Committee resolved to refer the following Task Group's recommendations to the relevant Cabinet member for response at the Committee's next meeting on 07 June 2016.

Executive response to the Task Group's recommendations

Recommendation No.1	To ensure that Wiltshire Council has defined a precise purpose and overarching aims for its resident engagement programme as a framework for the identification of the most appropriate resident engagement mechanisms.		
Reason for recommendation			
Cabinet member	Cllr Jonathon Seed	Lead Officer	James Cawley
Executive Response:			
<p>We agree that having a defined purpose and overarching aims for resident engagement helps to create a clear framework.</p> <p>The Resident Engagement Strategy approved by the Housing Board in July 2014 defines the purpose and aims of resident engagement. It sets out the framework for the engagement process together with a structure with agreed direction, objectives, intended outcomes and effective delivery arrangements.</p> <p>The strategy is currently under review and the amended version will be presented to the Housing Board for their input / comment / approval in July 2016.</p>			

Recommendation No.2	<p>To ensure that the Wiltshire Council Resident Engagement team has targets and objectives for their engagement programme developed in line with the agreed purpose(s) set for resident engagement. These targets and objectives should be based on either or both of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Involvement-based: objectives which measure the number of residents involved in resident engagement activities or engagements performed. b. Outcomes-based: objectives which measure the total number of meaningful outcomes or organisational changes made as a result of resident engagement activities.
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Reason for recommendation	
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Cabinet member	Cllr Jonathon Seed	Lead Officer	James Cawley
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Executive Response:

Alongside the Resident Engagement Strategy approved in 2014 was an action plan detailing the actions to be undertaken to achieve the five main objectives identified in the strategy. Each objective was developed and aligned with the Council's vision to create stronger and more resilient communities, ensuring that people work together to solve problems locally, and to foster collaborative working with its tenants and leaseholders.

A detailed resident engagement impact assessment was undertaken by the resident engagement team and presented to the Housing Board in November 2015. The report included the profiling data of the tenants involved by age group, measured what was undertaken against what was agreed in the strategy and action plan. It measured the impact that our activities had, any changes to service delivery as a result of the activity, showed how much the involvement had cost and whether the activity has been value for money. Since then we have worked with our Housing Assurance Panel to further develop an impact assessment rating system which assesses value for money and outcomes against a set of indicators and a scoring system. This will be implemented over the course of the next 12 months.

The WCHB 2015/16 Annual Plan which was presented, alongside the Annual Report to Cabinet in April 2015 contained specific resident engagement actions and desired outcomes. The progress of which was reported to WCHB on a quarterly basis.

Recommendation No.3	<p>To follow the more focused approach as defined within the report (paras 55 to 75) in order to enable an inevitably limited budget to be used more cost effectively, and to agree priorities with the resident engagement team as a crucial part of the resource allocation process.</p>
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Reason for	
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recommendation			
Cabinet member	Cllr Jonathon Seed	Lead Officer	James Cawley
Executive Response:			
<p>As detailed above in No.2 an impact assessment rating system has been developed with input from the Housing Assurance Panel that will measure value for money and outcomes achieved against a set of indicators and a scoring system. During the next 12 months we will certainly be reviewing all budgets including that for tenant participation to ensure that we align expenditure with agreed aims and objectives.</p>			

Recommendation No.4	<p>That the following methods should be pursued by Wiltshire Council as ways to perform the various resident engagement roles explained in diagram 2 (para 67):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. To establish Community Representatives who will perform routine local surveys to check for issues and provide a point of contact for local residents within every estate/locality where the council has housing stock. b. To develop a resident scrutiny panel that considers topics in discussion with Wiltshire Council officers to develop effective and realistic recommendations. c. To set up Focus Groups to address single topics of importance as they arise in order to make practical recommendations and for the implementation of such recommendations to remain the discretion of management, but reasons should be given for any decision not to implement. 		
Reason for recommendation			
Cabinet member	Cllr Jonathon Seed	Lead Officer	James Cawley
Executive Response:			
<p>We have responded to each point separately.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Local Housing Panel (LHP) meetings have proven to be a very successful method of engagement and in a number of areas we have recruited local 'champions' who work closely with us to 'report' information to us about any issues in their local area and to act as a conduit to pass information back. For example, in Bemerton Heath the resident engagement officer works very closely with the Streetwatch volunteers; who share information about the estate with us and who will deliver flyers and talk to residents about any activities we are undertaking on the estate. We are keen to establish community representatives / local champions across all of our housing stock and are gradually building relationships with those that attend the LHP's. 			

- b. Housing Assurance Panel (resident scrutiny) undertook training in early 2015 and began its first project in summer 2015. By the close of the financial year 2015/16, it had completed 3 reports and began its fourth in April 2016. Topics are decided between the Housing Assurance Panel, Wiltshire Council's Housing Board and council officers. Recommendations have been welcomed by the Board and implemented by the service.
- c. We have a number of residents who have identified that they are willing to be involved in topic related focus groups. We are able to respond to any request we receive from other departments who wish to consult with tenants on a particular topic area such as repairs, planned maintenance, tenancy management. For example, a group of tenants worked with our systems team to help develop iHousing which is an online facility where tenants can view their rent account, make payments, log and monitor repair requests, see links to H4W and see other useful housing information.

In addition we have a small but dedicated group of volunteers that are willing to help out at our larger topic based events. For example a group of tenants helped out at the recent family event that we held in April by organising refreshments for both those who attended and for the stallholders.

<p>Recommendation No.5</p>	<p>That the following methods should be pursued by Wiltshire Council as ways to implement the various resident engagement roles explained in diagram 3 (para 72):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. To ensure that all tenants are provided with an equal opportunity to engage. b. To work towards collecting tenant data to assist in the identification of residents for the role of community representatives and participation on focus groups and the scrutiny panel. c. To review the cost effectiveness of the housing magazine as a means of communicating the outcomes of resident engagement with the possibility of developing it into an annual publication created with the involvement of voluntary residents in a standing task group, and to develop a more frequent associated newsletter detailing, among other things, the outcomes of the tenant engagement activities. 		
<p>Reason for recommendation</p>			
<p>Cabinet member</p>	<p>Cllr Jonathon Seed</p>	<p>Lead Officer</p>	<p>James Cawley</p>
<p>Executive Response:</p>			

- a. The resident engagement team have undertaken an equality impact assessment. We use a variety of methods to communicate and ensure that adequate support is given to those that need additional support to participate. The venues that we use are accessible, and our strategy states that residents who need help with travel and / or childcare costs to actively participate will be assisted.
- b. We already collect information on residents who have expressed an interest in a particular area such as being involved in a topic related focus group. In addition we are able to use profiling data to identify by age, gender, diversity etc who is involved and have been able to target participation activities at underrepresented groups (such as those with young children)
- c. We would be concerned about reducing this to an annual publication. At present it is the best method we have to give information to our tenants – this includes regulatory changes which need to be given in a timely manner and couldn't wait for an annual publication. If we decide to go down that route then we will end up having to undertake very costly mail outs to pass on information that tenants need to be informed about. Housing Matters is currently being scrutinised by the HAP so would recommend that we await their recommendations and look at them in tandem with the report's recommendations

Recommendation No.6	For the results of successful resident engagement activity to be fed back to all residents to actively demonstrate the extent, and effect of tenant engagement.		
Reason for recommendation			
Cabinet member	Cllr Jonathon Seed	Lead Officer	James Cawley
Executive Response:			
This is supported and we also report this in the Annual report that goes out to all tenants & in Housing Matters. We have in the past sent out newsletters after LHP's based on a 'you said, we did' type theme.			

Recommendation No.7	To raise social media as a topic to be examined by the resident scrutiny panel as a potential marketing method to promote, among other things, resident engagement.		
Reason for recommendation			
Cabinet member	Cllr Jonathon Seed	Lead Officer	James Cawley
Executive Response:			
The housing team have made considerable effort over the last few months to increase the number of e-mail addresses we have for our tenants. This has already proven to be a valuable method of marketing resident engagement activities. For example we held an event at Easter to inform families with children about the changes to the welfare system and used e-mail to promote the event. Within a few days of sending the e-mail out 250 people had registered to attend the event. In addition we have a housing facebook page that we also use to promote resident engagement activities.			

Recommendation No.8	To review the resident engagement information available on the Wiltshire Council website and ensure that it is relevant and provided in a logical structure which is friendly to the customer's journey in order to encourage resident's IT usage and communication.		
Reason for recommendation			
Cabinet member	Cllr Jonathon Seed	Lead Officer	James Cawley
Executive Response:			
<p>In 2014 a project group was set up to review the content of the housing pages on the Wiltshire Council website with the objective of improving the website to make it more appealing, more consistent and more interactive to our tenants and to ensure better dissemination of information. The project was led by Simon Hough and Dot Krona with representatives from across housing management and also representation from our communications team. A number of recommendations were made but we were limited in what we were able to achieve as the main Council website was in the process of being reviewed and upgraded. We were told that individual departments would eventually have their pages upgraded and all we were able to do at that time was to update the information that was already there. We will therefore update the web pages in line with the corporate update.</p>			

Recommendation No.9	To recognise the importance of digital training and to continue encouraging residents to take up available training opportunities.		
Reason for recommendation			
Cabinet member	Cllr Jonathon Seed	Lead Officer	James Cawley
Executive Response:			
<p>We are working closely with Salisbury City Council in the Salisbury area to provide training for tenants who would like to be able to use technology. Digital training has been identified as an area that tenants would like support with and will be particularly relevant in the future with the introduction of Universal Credit which requires applicants to apply for benefits online. We are also in the process of developing a training package for tenants to enable them to gain the necessary skills required to support the work of the HAP by becoming mystery shoppers, members of topic specific focus groups etc.</p>			

Recommendation No.10	To raise the development of customer-friendly surveys as a topic to be examined by the resident scrutiny group and to make available to residents narrowly-focused surveys which are targeted to relevant residents and are provided through a variety of methods both online and offline.		
Reason for			

recommendation			
Cabinet member	Cllr Jonathon Seed	Lead Officer	James Cawley
Executive Response:			
Good recommendation – Agree.			

Recommendation No.11	For the Environment Select Committee to receive an update report on the progress of Wiltshire Council’s resident engagement strategy and its outcomes in twelve months.		
Reason for recommendation			
Cabinet member	Cllr Jonathon Seed	Lead Officer	James Cawley
Executive Response:			
Housing would be more than happy to provide the ESC with an update on progress in 12 months.			

- As well as responses to the individual recommendations above, this section is space to provide a general response or comment as necessary.

Proposal

- To note the executive response to the Final Report of the Resident Engagement Task Group.

Cllr Jonathon Seed, Cabinet Member for Housing, Leisure, Libraries and Flooding

Officer contact: Adam Brown, Senior Scrutiny Officer, 01225 718038,
adam.brown@wiltshire.gov.uk