

REPORT TO

WILTSHIRE COUNCIL'S ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE

23 May 2017

RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT UPDATE

Attachments:

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update to the Environment Select Committee about the outcome of the resident engagement strategy and its outcomes since 2016.

2. Background

- 2.1 On 12 April 2016 the Environment Select Committee presented a report on the findings and recommendations of the Resident Engagement Task Group to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Leisure, Libraries and Flooding

3. Recommendations (from the ESC report) and update

- 3.1 The Task Group recommended that the Cabinet Member for Housing, Leisure, Libraries and flooding considered the following:

Recommendation One

To ensure that Wiltshire Council Resident Engagement team 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.

Update

Resident engagement priorities are reflected and linked across a number of key strategies and business plan objectives. These include the Corporate vision, values and objectives.

Resident engagement is performed for a variety of benefits which include; driving service improvements, enhancing accountability and providing social value to the

individual and the communities they live in. At the point of design, all engagement is intended to add social value and strengthen communities as per the Council's vision of creating stronger and more resilient communities, ensuring that people work together to solve problems locally and to foster collaborative working with tenants and leaseholders.

The Council wants to encourage and support local communities to get involved and work with the council to strengthen their ability to deal with local challenges, to establish community needs and to meet those needs in the most effective way. Strong communities can cope with changing and challenging circumstances and they will often find their own solution to many of the problems they face.

The Council wants to effectively consult with residents about Council-wide and local strategies and policies, and to demonstrate strong partnership working with residents and partners to develop, set and monitor agreed service standards to deliver continuous improvement.

The Resident Engagement Strategy was reviewed in 2016 and approved by Wiltshire Council Housing Board and the Housing Assurance Panel. Our approach to engagement is planned, monitored and reviewed regularly with the Housing Assurance Panel (HAP).

Recommendation Two

To ensure that 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 should be based on either or both of the following:

Involvement-based: objectives which measure the number of residents involved in resident engagement activities or engagements performed.

Outcomes-based: objectives which measure the total meaningful outcomes or organisation changes made as a result of resident engagement activities.

Update

Resident engagement activities are identified in a number of ways and for a number of reasons dependent upon the priorities that have been identified by the housing board, staff and residents and from the priorities identified on the 'Housing Priorities workplan'. The Housing Priorities Workplan was developed with stakeholders in a number of different ways. The priorities were developed in consultation with staff, members, WCHB and formally involved residents. Sitting under the Housing Priorities Workplan are individual departmental priority workplans which includes the Resident Engagement workplan. The workplan details the priority, the actions, the outcomes and the target date.

We use local community profiling information to prioritise the community work that we undertake. In addition, we use information from the 'Joint Strategic Needs Assessment' to inform the work that we do in communities in partnership with other organisations. For example, the Salisbury JSNA / Health and Wellbeing strategic group identified that lack of exercise was an issue for older people. We have been able to access funding from the Salisbury Area Board to put on activities such as free weekly Zumba classes for residents in our sheltered schemes. We also received funding to undertake an oral history project in sheltered schemes in partnership with health and social care students at the local college. We are working closely with Salisbury City Council and Foragers Farm to establish a community garden on the Friary estate. The garden will be co-designed by the community and a residents committee will be set up to manage the garden. A number of the aims of setting up a community garden link directly to the corporate aims and objectives particularly the Council's vision of building stronger and more resilient communities.

A recent priority has been undertaking a landlord accreditation in Tenant Engagement process via Tpas (Tenant Participation Advisory Service) The accreditation process has enabled us to conduct a detailed self-assessment and to review the approaches we use to tenant engagement. The self- assessment process has highlighted service gaps and areas for improvement, alongside a range of current strengths. This is work in progress and we are awaiting feedback from Tpas to enable us to develop an action plan for improvement.

The departmental dashboard allows us to collect involvement data which details the number of residents involved in resident engagement activities and resident engagements performed. Using this profiling data to identify and target priority needs we are able to 'target' under-represented groups in our tenant population and focus activities and prioritise resource allocation towards them. (see 4.9 b) The number of residents involved currently stands at 11% of all tenants.

A Resident Engagement Impact Assessment was undertaken to assess the effectiveness of LHP's (Local Housing Panels) in 2016 and reported to both the WCHB and the HAP. We have worked with the HAP to develop an impact assessment rating system which identifies high, medium and low cost and impact.

For the period 2017/2018 Housemark the annual core benchmarking service that we use has a new indicator that collects data about the number of services changed implemented or withdrawn during the year as a result of resident involvement. We are currently working with colleagues in the systems support and performance team to develop a method for capturing the data using the QL housing management system.

Recommendation Three

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

Update

We use a variety of mechanisms for engaging and involving residents dependent upon the planned outcomes identified from the priorities identified in the 'Housing Priorities Workplan', WCHB, staff and residents. A cost analysis is taken into consideration when deciding upon the mechanism for engagement.

Recommendation Four

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):

- 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.

Update

We are working closely with a number of 'involved residents' willing to act as a 'point of contact' to report issues and pass on information to other residents. In some areas this has gone a stage further, for example on Bemerton Heath a group of residents have formed a 'Keep Bemerton Tidy' group and undertake litter picking activities on a regular basis. We have recruited a number of volunteers who help out in a variety of activities at the two themed events we facilitate each year.

Local Housing panels Local Housing Panels offer an opportunity for residents to tackle local issues together and to speak with a collective voice on the issues that affect their local community. They have been in operation since the Board's decision to reconfigure Resident Engagement in 2014. Whilst there has been a mixed response to attendance in some areas since their inception over 300 meetings have taken place with over 1000 participants. Satisfaction levels for those who attend have been good with 88% of residents rating the meetings as good or very good. A recent report was submitted to Wiltshire Council's Housing Board (WCHB) that provided a detailed explanation about the achievements, outcomes and successes of the Local Housing Panel meetings that took place in 2016. A number of recommendations for improvements were approved by WCHB.

- b) To establish a resident scrutiny panel that considers topics in discussion with Wiltshire Council officers to develop effective and realistic expectations.

Update

The Housing Assurance Panel (HAP) established in late 2014 is the tenant and leaseholder scrutiny panel that investigates performance and customer satisfaction. The HAP have reported on a number of service areas that include:

- Introduction to a tenancy
 - Void properties and processes
 - Planned maintenance: kitchens and bathrooms
 - 'Housing Matters' publication
 - Grounds maintenance
 - Anti-social behaviour
- 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.

Update

We have facilitated a number of single topic focus groups as they have arisen. Focus groups have taken place to discuss issues that have been identified during Local Housing Panel meetings. A number of focus groups / working parties have taken place around the issue of parking in various places. Residents have worked with officers to identify solutions and to make recommendations. In addition groups of residents have worked with officers to look at the possibility of a decommissioned play park being reinstated. As a result of an initial focus group meeting residents formed a working group and worked with the Tenant Participation Officer to consult with other residents in the area. They are currently working closely with Salisbury City Council who are now responsible for play parks in the area and hope that the play park is soon re-opened.

In 2017 we want to work with both our residents and staff to develop a new 'Wiltshire Home Standard' for the long term maintenance of the housing stock. We plan to involve people in a number of different ways using focus groups, telephone, digital and paper surveys and other methods.

Recommendation Five

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):

- a) To ensure that all tenants are provided with an equal opportunity to engage.

Update

Both the Resident Engagement Strategy and Tenants Handbook detail the support available to tenants who wish to be involved. Support is available in many formats and is designed to make it as easy as possible for residents to get involved and have their say. Support includes:

- Providing support or training to help develop the skills and confidence required to enable someone to put their point of view across.
 - Information can be made available in a number of suitable formats, e.g. large print, audio, Braille and other languages if required.
 - Provision of staff, skills and resources.
 - Travel and other reasonable out of pocket expenses.
- 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.

Update

Through the use of dashboards the department has been able to gain an understanding of its tenant's profile data. We are able to access information relating to age, gender, impairment, housing patch area and area board area. We have adapted engagement methods to reflect those findings. We are also able to collect individual residents' preferences for involvement. For example, information from our profiling showed that we were very good at engaging with the 65-84 year age band but not as good at engaging with younger tenants with children. As a result we now offer an annual 'family' themed event aimed at tenants with children. We will be running a family film event in May 2017 aimed at families living on benefits / low income which will also provide them with an opportunity to find out about Universal Credit and how it may affect them or to get support from our tenancy sustainment service around maximising their income.

Wiltshire Council uses STAR (survey of tenants and residents) as its framework for measuring and benchmarking customer satisfaction. We undertake the STAR survey every two years. This enables us to understand the customer experience and measure how well our services are performing. The information we receive enables us to focus effort and resources to improve satisfaction and on areas that are of concern to our residents.

- c) To review the cost effectiveness of the housing magazine as a means of communication 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.

Update

In June 2016, our Housing Assurance Panel (HAP) took a detailed look at the housing magazine 'Housing Matters' to review the quality of articles, to see if it offered value for money, and to make recommendations about any improvements that could be made. In addition residents were invited to take part in a readers' survey. Participants were asked to tell us what they did and didn't like about the magazine and the most important things they wanted to see in the magazine. Overwhelmingly respondents told us they found the magazine interesting and that they wanted to receive a printed copy of the magazine four times a year in the post. We used the recommendations made by the HAP and the suggestions from the respondents to make some changes to the magazine. The magazine is also available online via the housing pages of the Wiltshire Council website.

Recommendation Six

For all the results of successful resident engagement activity to be fed back to all residents to actively demonstrate the extent, and effect of tenant engagement.

Update

Feedback about resident engagement activity is published in the housing magazine 'Housing Matters'. An annual report sent out to all residents. In addition all staff receive two newsletters that are distributed quarterly, these include a performance newsletter and a newsletter detailing an update from each department. In this way staff are kept up to date with resident engagement activity.

Recommendation Seven

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.

Update

The HAP have been undertaking a joint project with the scrutiny panel of Paragon Housing (now PA Housing) The project is entitled 'New Ways of

Working: Recruitment and Collaboration'. They have a joint session booked in June to start drafting a Social Media Plan.

Recommendation Eight

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.

Update

The Council Housing website contains a wealth of information relevant to our residents. From the website residents can directly access information on how to pay their rent, report a repair etc. The i-Housing web portal is a secure online account where residents can view their rent history, make payments, request repairs and monitor the progress of them.

Prior to launching the i-Housing web portal we worked closely with a small group of residents to develop the portal. Over the course of a number of sessions the group helped us to develop a user friendly service. Residents were previously involved in developing the housing pages of the Wiltshire Council website.

Recommendation Nine

To recognise the importance of digital training and to continue encouraging residents to take up available training opportunities.

Update

We were able to gather evidence of understanding of our residents preferences for digital engagement on the STAR survey report 2016. In considering moving away from traditional forms of communication to improve efficiency, save costs and make services available 24/7 we asked a number of questions to find out if our tenants had the desire and ability to use online methods. It was clear from the results that on the whole traditional methods are still preferred although as expected younger tenants expressed a much higher preference for online services.

We provide opportunities for residents to take part in online surveys such as the STAR survey, and a recent survey about Housing Matters. Technology based systems are in place for residents to provide feedback, views and ideas, these include:

- Repairs survey
- Maintenance survey
- Servicing survey

- Lettings survey
- ASB survey

In areas where residents have identified that they would like opportunities to develop their IT and online skills we have worked with colleagues in the Family Learning team and other partners to facilitate IT sessions. We are currently supporting a group of residents in the Friary to attend sessions in Salisbury library to enable them to further develop their IT skills.

Recommendation Ten

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.

Update

This has been touched on in a number of reports which has led the service to suggest that rather than dealing with surveys piecemeal a working group may be appropriate which could include the HAP or other residents.

Recommendation Eleven

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.

Update

This report fulfils the recommendation.

Conclusion

The Resident Engagement team has welcomed the ESC report and the opportunity to respond to, and implement the recommendations that were made.

Whilst we have made progress, the ESC recommendations and Tpas accreditation process have highlighted service gaps and areas for improvement, alongside a range of current strengths. We now have a baseline that will allow us to work in partnership with residents to improve the services that they receive.

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