
Housing and Safer Communities Committee – 20th November 2023

Report of the Director of Housing and Communities

Customer Engagement and Involvement

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to share with Scrutiny Committee Members an update on DMBC’s approach to customer engagement and involvement. The report sets out progress to date, to provide Committee Members with the opportunity to ensure that plans are robust, meet customer needs, and support the delivery of high quality, value for money services.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that Select Committee Members:
 - Note the aspirations and commitments of the Social Housing White Paper and its impact upon DMBC.
 - Note the activity in progress to review and refresh DMBC’s approach to engaging with our tenants to improve customer experience and facilitate consumer regulation.

Background

3. In November 2020, the UK Government published “The Charter for Social Housing Residents: social housing white paper”. The White Paper set out new regulatory arrangements for social landlords including local authorities. The Regulator of Social Housing, which now regulates local authority housing provision, will be responsible for a more proactive consumer regulatory regime which will strengthen the formal standards against which the Council is regulated, requiring the Council to:
 - Be transparent about their performance and decision-making – so that tenants and the regulator can hold the Council to account.

- Put things right when they go wrong.
 - Listen to tenants through effective engagement.
4. The Charter has seven commitments to tenants against which the Council will be judged:
1. To be safe in your home.
 2. To know how your landlord is performing, including on repairs, complaints and safety, and how it spends its money, so you can hold it to account.
 3. To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly, with access to a strong ombudsman who will give you swift and fair redress when needed.
 4. To be treated with respect, backed by a strong consumer regulator and improved consumer standards for tenants.
 5. To have your voice heard by your landlord, for example through regular meetings, scrutiny panels or being on its Board. The government will provide help, if you want it, to give you the tools to ensure your landlord listens.
 6. To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in, with your landlord keeping your home in good repair.
 7. To be supported to take your first step to ownership, so it is a ladder to other opportunities, should your circumstances allow.
5. In order to deliver the commitments within the Charter the Council is putting in place appropriate services, standards and performance measures to ensure that we are delivering against the commitments set out within the Charter and that we can evidence the positive impact of this work.
- Ensuring we have robust systems in place to capture and report on performance information that allows our customers to hold us to account.
 - Reviewing and improving our customer engagement and involvement model to ensure we hear our customers voice in breadth and depth.

Customer Involvement and Engagement Strategy

6. Our Customer Involvement and Engagement Strategy is under review, with the revised strategy being co-produced with involved customers, partners and Members. The strategy will provide a robust framework for listening and responding to feedback from our customers to continuously improve customer experience and satisfaction, and to ensure that we listen and respond to our customers' voice in breadth and depth.

7. The review of our current Customer Involvement Strategy will take into account the following:
 - Charter for Social Housing Residents
 - RoSH Consumer Standards
 - Tenant Satisfaction Measures
 - TPAS Engagement Standards
 - Current opportunities for customer involvement
 - Current quantitative and qualitative data on customer experience and involvement
8. All existing customer involvement groups are being reviewed to identify what we already have in place and any gaps, and refreshed Terms of Reference are being drafted for consultation.
9. Proposals are being developed to establish an overarching Customer Involvement Board to oversee delivery of the revised Strategy, to lead on the publication of the Customer Annual Report, and to scrutinise performance against the RoSH consumer standards, TSMs, Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code and other customer related activity.

TPAS Smart Review

10. TPAS are a not-for-profit organisation who promote, support and champion tenant involvement and empowerment in social housing across England, supporting over 300 Housing Associations, Local Authorities, resident groups and contractors covering over 3.5 million homes.
11. TPAS are currently undertaking a Smart Review of DMBCC's housing services which will help us to:
 - understand how we are performing against regulatory requirements;
 - understand how we are performing against the TPAS National Tenant Engagement standard themes;
 - ensure our engagement activities are based on sound strategic decisions;
 - understand what is working, what's not and where to improve.

The process includes a review of key documents and processes and listening to staff and tenants to capture and understand their direct experience of resident engagement.

12. The feedback from the review is due imminently and will provide a report that includes:
- a review of DMBC engagement against the TPAS standards;
 - recognition of good practice;
 - a practical and achievable action plan to deliver short, medium and longer term improvements;
 - clear analysis on where DMBC engagement is now and where it could go in the future.

Actions arising out of the review will be incorporated into the new Customer Engagement and Involvement Strategy.

Customer Communications

13. The Participation Team are working with CAPA on the communications strategy with the first tenants' Communications Group meeting for the first time on 26th October. A Readers Panel has also been established set up and we are about to start issuing documents through the group.
14. The Participation Team are supporting the ongoing work on building safety and compliance to communicate with customers, share information and to ensure customers are informed, involved and listened to.

A "Safety Matters Event" was held with customers in September, to discuss how we can work together to ensure our tenants receive important information related to their homes and communal areas. The event included four themed focus groups to stimulate discussion on key topics:

- I'm not letting you in - No Access problems
- This can seriously affect your health - Damp and Mould
- Not in my communal areas – shared landings and foyers
- Let's shout about it - Good Communications

A "You Said, We Did" summary of the day is being prepared along with plans for a follow up meeting.

High Rise Safety Events have been undertaken at Butterfield, Clent and Claverley Courts so far this year and these will continue to be rolled out across our high rise blocks.

Finance

15. There are no direct financial implications associated with this report.

Law

16. The actions set out within this report will help ensure the Council's compliance with Regulator of Social Housing's regulatory standards and the Housing Ombudsman Code.

Risk Management

17. As with any change programme there is a risk that there will be insufficient resources to deliver the programme given the urgency of securing some of these changes. This risk will be managed by the Directorate Management Team which will review the resources and prioritisation of the programme.

Equality Impact

18. There are no special considerations to be made with regard to equality and diversity directly associated with this report.
19. There are no specific implications of this report in relation to children and young people and they have not been consulted or involved in developing the proposals.

Human Resources/Organisational Development

20. There are no specific human resource issues directly associated with this report.

Commercial/Procurement

21. There is no direct commercial impact.

Council Priorities

22. Developing Housing services which meet the regulatory standards and the aspirations of the White Paper also support the delivery of all four priorities in the Dudley Council Plan 2022 - 25:
- Dudley the borough of opportunity
 - Dudley the safe and healthy borough

- Dudley the borough of ambition and enterprise
- Dudley borough as the destination of choice

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Appendices

- None