

## **UPDATE ON TENANT CONSULTATION**

Further to the presentation to the Housing Committee on 20 June 2016, where the findings of a consultation exercise on how tenants wanted to be consulted and recommendation of a new structure and approach was proposed, with a follow up briefing to Housing Committee on 27 September 2016, this briefing note provides an update on progress since.

Please note that a verbal update was given on this matter to housing committee on 21 February 2017, and can be referred to via the committee web cast, found in the governance section on the SDC web site.

### **1. Recap on consultation findings**

We contacted 1000 tenants between March and April 2016 to ask how they would prefer to be involved.

- 84% would prefer to provide their views themselves
- 65% only want to give their views if they have a problem or strong feelings about something
- 59% were interested in giving their views on a regular basis
- Text messaging was a preferred feedback method for 59.4% of residents aged 16 to 34
- Email was a preferred feedback method for 46.8% of respondents aged 35 to 64
- Post was a preferred feedback method for 50.1% of respondents aged 65 or over

**Note bullets 1-3 relate to answers to separate questions**

Conclusions drawn from the above were that our involvement processes at the time, which were fairly extensive, focussed too much on formal structures, such as SCHF and SDG's, each requiring a time commitment which put off many tenants from being involved. This, together with other factors meant that we were really engaging with a small group of tenants, who were not necessarily representative. We wanted to do something to change the way we engage and to widen the group of people with whom we engage.

### **2. Decision of Housing Committee 20 June 2016**

- a) The membership of the Housing Committee be amended to include 2 co-opted tenant members (with no voting rights) who may speak in committee on council housing matters.
- b) That SCHF be replaced by informal and more effective tenant consultation arrangements and events.

**Tim Power, Head of Housing Management**  
**Ext: 4155**  
**Email: [tim.power@stroud.gov.uk](mailto:tim.power@stroud.gov.uk)**

### **3. Progress update**

#### **3.1 Appointment of tenant reps to Housing Committee**

In order to ensure that we appointed two tenants, as representatives on the Housing Committee, and did so in an independent manner, with no officer or member influence, Committee set up a T&F group consisting of members, officers and tenants to lead on this process and appoint an external and independent organisation to do this for us.

Membership of the T&F group was: (Cllrs) Mattie Ross and Catherine Braun, (tenant reps) Pam Blanch and xx (staff) Tim Power and Christine Welsh. It should be noted that independent tenant advisory organisations (ITA's) regularly undertake this task, appointing; and doing so independently: tenants to housing association boards.

A tendering exercise took place with six organisations invited to bid, from which the Housing Quality Network, were appointed to run this process. The T&F group agreed with HQN the objectives of the process, job descriptions & person specs, advertising and promotion, timescale and other administrative issues, plus the priority that we were seeking to appoint two excellent representatives who could most effectively operate as part of the housing committee.

A campaign was then run during September and October 2016, using the local press and also; for the first time, the use of mass text and email messaging, to tenants, which involved some 3000 texts and 1000 emails. Drop in sessions with the ITA also took place, and a freephone contact with them to discuss the vacancy and find out more, was also available.

The process closed prior to this committee's meeting on the 27 September 2016, with one strong candidate interviewed and recommended to committee for approval. This was Mr Iain Allen. A difficult decision was made at the time to not appoint a second candidate and instead to re-advertise, this being to ensure that we really did have the right two representatives.

A second campaign took place, which repeated the process of the first campaign, but did not need to repeat the administration, set up and design process developed first time. It also linked text and email messages to an advert in the December 2016 edition of Keynotes, giving a greater and more central focus to the campaign, with messages this time sent on three occasions. This process closed prior to this committee meeting on 20 December 2016, with a second strong candidate interviewed and recommended for approval. This was Sadie Tazewell.

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**Ext: 4155**  
**Email: [tim.power@stroud.gov.uk](mailto:tim.power@stroud.gov.uk)**

Through the above, we now have two strong and effective candidates: both of whom have, or will be receiving induction training, and who will be effective tenant representatives on this committee.

I would like to thank those members of the T&F group for their time, commitment and help in the above, a group which has now successfully completed and finished its task.

Questions have been raised about the cost of this process. It should be noted that given the importance of completing this process independently, advertising it widely, developing a wholly new role, function and process (which we do not have to do again in future) the costs incurred were not unreasonable. Looking at the cost of recruiting new council staff they are also not incomparable, particularly when we consider the cost of making a wrong appointment.

Overall, we also estimate that comparing the new structure with the previous one which included supporting SCHF and SDG's, the new structure's costs are expected to be less.

### **3.2 Informal tenant engagement, 'Have Your Say' events**

These are planned to offer informal opportunities for tenants to 'turn up' find out what they want to know, ask questions, provide feedback and get involved in any discussions or activities regarding housing service planning and delivery, to whatever level of involvement they feel comfortable with, or not. So if they only want to find out where they are on the new kitchen refurbishment programme, or wish to raise a complaint about service, they can do so. If they wish to stay on and join in an activity to discuss the parking issues on their estate and possible solutions; for example, they can as well. Our first event took place in September at Severn View Primary Academy.

Further events are planned during the coming year, where we plan to widen the scope of discussion, in part because we now have an agreed asset management plan and budget priorities for 2017/18, meaning that we can bring in more issues with greater certainty. A timetable of these events together with an agenda for each, including: the information, activities, consultation, views and information sought, etc., is being developed, together with scheduling the staff who will lead on each. This will be circulated to members of the Housing Committee and a short member's information/discussion meeting set up to confirm the running of these events (probably prior to a future housing committee meeting). These are planned to run in: Stroud, Cam, Stonehouse and Wotton, during 2017/18.

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#### **4. On line 'Have Your Say'**

In response to the outcome of the consultation exercise referred to in section (1), we have improved access for tenants to comment on services on line. A 'have your say' link is now prominent on the Council's web page, which enables tenants to raise any issue they wish via our web site and receive an answer, they can also click a link to raise an issue with their housing committee tenant representative.

We are also in discussion with ICT, to develop a link enabling tenants who request it, to receive a reminder of and link to, housing committee papers, which they can then read and make comments directly to their tenant representatives on this committee, who may then raise these as part of any debate.

Briefing drafted by:

Tim Power, Head of Housing Management  
[tim.power@stroud.gov.uk](mailto:tim.power@stroud.gov.uk)

**Tim Power, Head of Housing Management**  
**Ext: 4155**  
**Email: [tim.power@stroud.gov.uk](mailto:tim.power@stroud.gov.uk)**