



COMMITTEE TITLE: Housing, Health, and Community

DATE: 11th March 2024

REPORT TITLE:	Resident Engagement
REPORT OF:	Lauren Stretch, Director of Housing

REPORT SUMMARY

In 2022 Housing conducted a soft launch for the new Tenant Talkback resident engagement options. As we moved through 2023, we conducted several events with stakeholders to find which types of events worked best and where.

As we approach April 2024, with the introduction of the new Housing Consumer Regulations, we are entering a phase of more frequent and varied resident engagement which is in line with the Resident Engagement Strategy 2022 – 2027 found in appendix 1.

The Resident engagement action plan 24/25 (Appendix 2) provides further detail on what has already been done, what is planned for this year and the longer-term vision for resident engagement beyond 2024/25.

SUPPORT ING INFORMATION

1.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Resident engagement is now a pivotal part of the day-to-day operations of the Housing Service. Our residents have for some time, not been wholly involved in the decisions made which directly affect their properties and estates and in line with the new Consumer Regulations being enforced in April 2024, now is the time to change this and ensure residents can have their say in a constructive and considered manner.

In 2022 the Estates team redesigned the outdated Tenant Talkback structure to make it more inclusive of all residents. Rather than just having panels, we introduced a Resident Menu of involvement (Appendix 3).

There are 3 main ways to engage;

1: Take away – This is for all residents who do not want to attend anything formal but would like to have a say and be involved at the lowest level. They will receive a

quarterly copy of the Housing Bulletin informing them of things that are upcoming, events and important topics for the quarter and they agree to be sent the occasional digital feedback for the complete.

2. Lite Bites – This option is for those residents who might not have lots of time to engage but want to be more involved. They may complete short surveys, attend a focus group of their choice or conduct estate inspections.

3. All you can eat – Perfect for those who have more time available to attend a Repairs, Estates or Policy panel and have the opportunity to directly engage with officers and scrutinise the service at a more granular level. They may take part in larger projects and be involved in procurement of contracts.

Whilst the menu provides a backdrop for the types of engagement, we are conscious that not everyone will have had sight of this across our stock, as such, a copy will be distributed in the rent letter, which is sent to all Tenants, and within the notice of estimates which is sent to all leaseholders.

Throughout 2024/2025 we have also planned a series of engagement events including two community days with our Repairs and Maintenance Contractors Axis. These will be held at key estates in the borough, Woodlands Avenue in June 2024 and Warley in August 2024.

The days will vary but there will be a focus on resident DIY to assist with some of the resident responsibility jobs such as changing a lightbulb, fun activities for the children to get involved with, litter picking and general estate maintenance, Housing Officers available for rent and tenancy queries and repairs officers to be on hand for property inspections if needed.

In addition to the above, we have recently set up a consultations page on the housing website where we will be placing all future consultations. This has already launched, and our first consultation for the Leasehold Payment Options Policy, closes on the 15th March.

Some important resident engagement also comes from our 'Business as Usual' activities, how we handle complaints and how we engage with our residents and use this as an opportunity during every conversation we have with them. There will be a renewed focus on Tenancy Audits in 2024 as part of the ongoing work we are doing in relation to the Build Safety Act and the Consumer Regulations. The aim of these is to provide more detail on the residents living within our stock, their medical needs, general needs, their views on the housing and estate they live on and current condition of their property.

By gathering this data, we can provide the correct assistance to residents who may be struggling, for example to tackle overgrown gardens proactively to improve the overall look of our estates, build rapport with residents so that they feel more confident approaching the Housing officers and allow us to be a caring, supportive, considerate landlord who takes on board the comments from residents and incorporate these into key decision making.

In addition to the above, in line with the Building Safety Act and Fire Safety Act, we will be creating a landing page of all safety information for all of our higher rise blocks. Residents will be given details on how to access this and provision will be made for paper versions where required. The information will include but is not limited to, safety inspection regimes for fire doors, evacuation procedures and much more.

Whilst a lot of our engagement is moving online, we are aware there are a smaller number of residents, particularly within our Independent Living Schemes, who do not have access to a computer. In order to ensure they can engage with our services; regular coffee mornings have been set up where key officers including the Director of Housing attend. All officers no matter their level within the authority are responsible for engaging with residents and these coffee mornings have been welcomed by residents. During the next wave, Axis our repairs contractor will be attended to openly discuss any concerns and take away actions for repairs as necessary.

The longer-term vision for Resident Engagement beyond 2024/2025 is to provide a platform where residents can choose an improvement to their estate such as a new play area, flowerbed etc. We envisage this to be a voting style system where the majority vote would win. A separate budget would be set up for these improvements and residents will have the overall decision and will lead to meaningful improvements that really matter to residents.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

This report is for noting only

3.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

Many options have been considered as resident engagement is not a one size fits all.

One of these considerations was to leave the Tenant talkback structure how it was with just one panel that discusses all issues. However, it was felt that by just having one meeting, residents did not have the opportunity to learn each area (Repairs and Estates) in detail which would be required to provide constructive criticism of the service and scrutinise how we work and engage with residents.

All ways of communication have been considered as not all residents have access to a computer. So, whilst consultations will be online, officers can attend a resident's property and assist them in completing this via the officer's tablet, paper copies can be sent, or residents can either speak in person or on the phone to their housing officer.

4.0 RELEVANT RISKS

Whilst we have a variety of ways for residents to get involved, take up has been slow. In order to get a good oversight of the resident satisfaction and concerns we will need to find new way of involving residents.

5.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

Tenant Talkback were consulted on the Resident engagement strategy and the resident menu of involvement.

6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Name & Title: Tim Willis, Director – Resources & Section 151 Officer
Tel & Email: 01277 312500 / tim.willis@brentwood.rochford.gov.uk

Any estate improvements will be met from current budgets and residents will have their say on where they think we should direct our spending. However, most resident engagement does not have any financial impact.

7.0 LEGAL/GOVERNANCE IMPLICATIONS

Name & Title: Claire Mayhew, Acting Joint Director – People & Governance & Monitoring Officer
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There is a requirement on all social landlords under the consumer regulations, Build Safety Act and Fire Safety Act to ensure residents are engage, consulted and informed on all aspects of their Tenancy, buildings and estates. The Resident Engagement Plan supports this requirement.

8.0 EQUALITY & HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Name & Title: Kim Anderson, Corporate Manager - Communities, Leisure and Health
Tel & Email 01277 312500 kim.anderson@brentwood.gov.uk

The Resident Engagement plan takes into account the different types of engagement and ensures all residents can access it depending on their needs.

9.0 ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

Name & Title: Laurie Edmonds, Corporate Manager – Economic Development
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There are some areas within the Housing Stock which cover business owners. This plan would mean that these businesses will be consulted where the proposals affect them.

10.0 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Name & Title: Henry Muss, Sustainability & Climate Officer
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None

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Resident Engagement Strategy 2022 - 2027

Appendix B: Resident Engagement Action Plan 24/25

Appendix C: Resident Menu of Involvement

BACKGROUND PAPERS

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Environment, Enforcement and Housing Committee – Resident Engagement Strategy	7th March 2022