

**EXETER CITY COUNCIL**

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – COMMUNITY  
12 NOVEMBER 2013**

**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE  
26 NOVEMBER 2013**

**IMPROVING HOUSING RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT**

**1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 To seek Members' approval to improving the way that the Council involves its housing residents in the management and strategic direction of the services they receive.

**2.0 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The Localism Act 2011 made changes to housing regulation in England from April 2012. These changes revolve around the principle of 'co-regulation', which requires landlords to be more proactive in self-regulation, and in involving tenants in the scrutiny process. In addition, the Act promotes a greater role for service users at a local level to influence and scrutinise service delivery.

- 2.2 The Council's existing strategy for involving its housing residents sets out to integrate it with the delivery of the Landlord service. Whilst this has had some success, Resident Involvement is predominately on performance monitoring and improvement. With the Council embracing systems thinking, performance management in the Housing Service is changing, with the focus now on real-time performance against defined purposes, rather than lagging performance measures and arbitrary targets. As a result, the Performance Digest has been radically amended. This is a welcome improvement but is not sufficient in itself to meet the new requirements for resident involvement. Residents need the ability to consider new policies, influence budget decisions and scrutinise the operation of the service to ensure that the services meet their needs, now and in the future.

- 2.3 The new regulatory framework, with its enhanced and proactive approach to economic regulation, requires landlords to demonstrate better value for money services. A greater scrutiny role for residents will improve the way that the services are planned and delivered by:

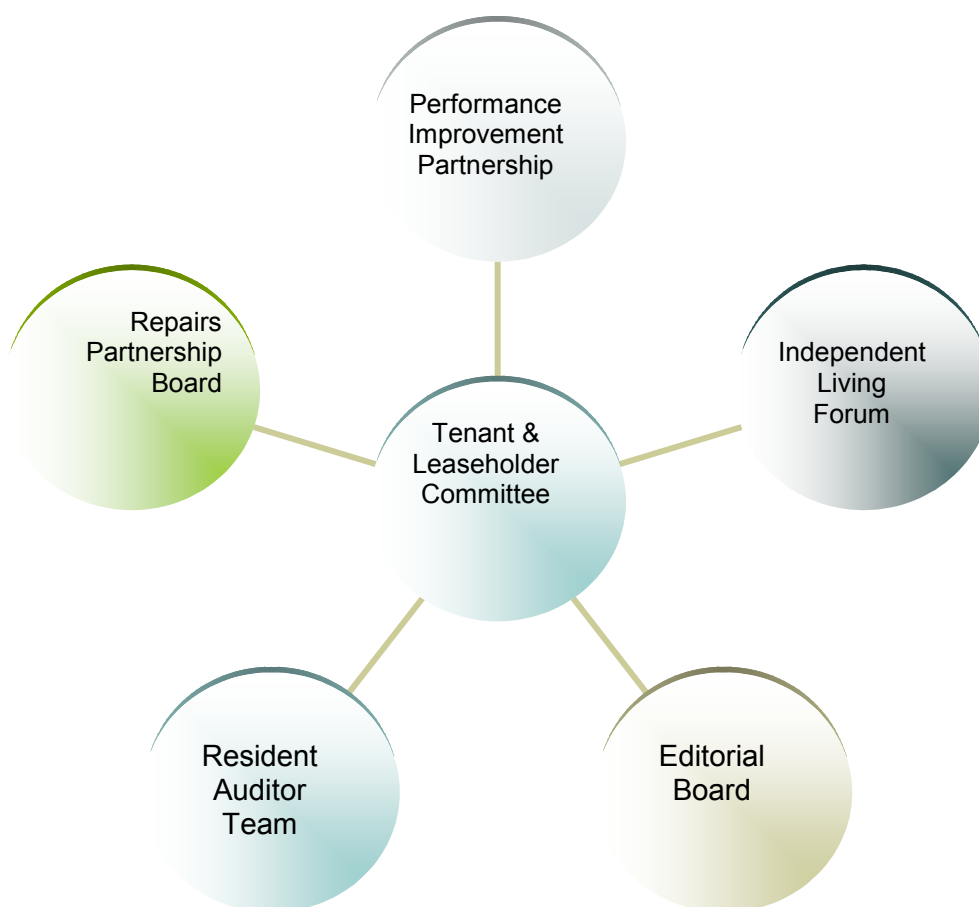
- providing a mechanism for us to deliver the services our tenants want, tailoring them to reflect local needs and priorities
- enabling us to determine how resources can be targeted where needs, wants and preferences are identified. This can lead to services which are better value for money
- improving the service experience for tenants and therefore customer satisfaction

- 2.4 The Localism Act and the new regulation framework that stems from it has prompted a review of how we involve our residents in the work of the service.

This review has concluded that, despite a plethora of meetings, resident involvement lacks proper integration with the service and proposes changes to the governance structure and management of the existing arrangements to address this.

### 3.0 A NEW GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE FOR RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT

3.1 At present, the governance structure for Resident Involvement consists of six different groups, as per the diagram below. It is unwieldy and repetitive, with the same volunteers sitting on a number of differing panels. This results in confusion over the different areas of responsibility for each group as well as duplication when the same topic is discussed at a number of different meetings. As a result, it is also expensive and time-consuming.



It is proposed that all groups, apart from the Independent Living Forum are dismantled and replaced by a single Performance Scrutiny Partnership (PSP).

3.2 The remit of the new Performance Scrutiny Partnership will be to:

- Review and comment on service performance and consider areas that would benefit from further in-depth resident review
- Work with officers to discuss, consult on and suggest improvements to new proposals, policies and strategies to ensure they meet service purposes
- Provide residents' views on future spending priorities

- Advise on the services communications to tenants and leaseholders, including social media, to ensure content is relevant, jargon free and engaging.
- 3.3 The Partnership will initially consist of the ten existing resident members of the various groups and will meet monthly.
- 3.4 As current members leave the Partnership, new members will be recruited from our existing residents, rather than elected as at present. Currently, elections are held every other year but, despite wider advertising than in previous years, this year not a single new member put their name forward to be a TALC representative and all current members were elected un-opposed in June 2013. This formal way of standing for election is clearly no longer an attractive proposition for potential volunteers. It is proposed that future members are recruited on an *ad hoc* basis when required, with the involvement of the new PSP.
- 3.5 Exeter City Council would not be the first housing landlord to move away from a formal election process for tenant representatives. Mid-Devon District Council changed to an application process five years ago. This has enabled them to recruit volunteers with the potential skills to undertake the work required and has proved very successful. East Devon District Council has never had an elected group, preferring to recruit representatives on the skills and experience they can bring to the organisation. In addition, Peabody's new Resident Involvement Strategy has created a Resident Scrutiny Panel to implement co-regulation which is not directly elected but drawn from other resident groups.
- 3.6 Not having an elections process will also reduce the confusion that occurs between the role of Council Members' in scrutiny and decision making and the Involved Residents' role in scrutinising and making recommendations.

#### **4 PROPOSED MANAGEMENT CHANGES**

- 4.1 The Chartered Institute of Housing and the Tenant Participation Advisory Service agree that for resident scrutiny to be effective, it must integrate with the landlord's strategic and performance management framework. It is proposed that the servicing of the new Partnership would become the responsibility of the Housing Performance and Projects Manager, supported by a new part-time administrative post, with the role of Housing Resident Involvement Manager becoming redundant. The production of *InSight* will be transferred to the Council's Policy, Communications and Community Engagement team and they will liaise with the Partnership to agree and proof-read content.
- 4.2 The Independent Living Forum will initially be led by the Tenancy Services Team whilst a systems review of "Be a good landlord" is completed and clarification of the future of older persons support services in Exeter is provided by Devon County Council.
- 4.3 Housing Managers will take responsibility for involving residents in their areas of work under the direction of the Assistant Director Housing and Contracts. This involvement may take the form of task and finish groups, surveys, consultation or similar and will draw on the PSP as required. This ensures

that involving residents in decision-making is embedded in the work of the service.

## **5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 It is estimated that savings of around £33,800 will be achieved in the Housing Revenue Account.

Around £18,500 will be achieved through the deletion of the Housing Resident Involvement Manager post and replacement with a part-time Administration Assistant. The current post holder has made an application for voluntary redundancy.

5.2 A further potential saving of around £15,300 will be achieved by reducing the number of groups meeting and the use of external consultants.

## **6.0 CONSULTATION**

6.1 The Tenant and Leaseholder Committee (TALC) has been consulted on these proposals and supports both the rationale for change and the opportunity to make financial savings. In the year 2012/2013 the authority benefited from 1000 hours of work from this group of volunteers. They are keen to ensure that their time is used to improve the service and agree that aligning tenant scrutiny with Housing Performance places them at the centre of operations enabling them to meet their purpose.

6.2 Consultation has not taken place with the wider tenant body. However, the lack of interest in the elections this year demonstrates that an elected forum is not of interest to the wider body.

## **7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

7.1 That Scrutiny Committee - Community and Executive Committee:

- a) Approves the new direction for Housing Resident Involvement;
- b) Approves the proposal to dismantle the existing Resident Involvement governance structure and create a single Performance Scrutiny Partnership from 1 April 2014;
- c) Approves the redundancy of the Housing Resident Involvement Manager from 1 April 2014;
- d) Approves the creation of a new part-time administrative role from 1 April 2014.

SARAH WARD  
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF HOUSING AND CONTRACTS

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)  
Background papers used in compiling this report:-

None