



<b>Committee</b>	Cabinet
<b>Date</b>	04/06/2024
<b>Subject</b>	Tenant Engagement Strategy Consultation Launch
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Councillor David Beavan, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Housing
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Key Decision?	Yes
Is the report Open or Exempt?	OPEN

Category of Exempt Information and reason why it is <b>NOT</b> in the public interest to disclose the exempt information.	This report is to be considered during the <b>OPEN</b> part of the Agenda.
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## Purpose/Summary

The purpose of the Tenant Engagement Strategy 2024-2027 is to solidify our commitment to nurturing inclusive and vibrant communities.

- The strategy is aligned to 'Our Direction 2028', ESC's strategic plan, focusing on tackling equalities, fostering thriving economies, and developing sustainable housing and communities.
- The strategy also responds and encompasses legislative changes and enhancements stipulated in the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023. The regulatory standards we must adhere to are, inclusive tenant consultation, tenant involvement, access to information, tenant empowerment and obligations to promote transparency, accountability across Housing and broader ESC.

The strategy aims to facilitate / demonstrate meaningful interactions, transparency, and collaborative decision-making with residents, partners, businesses, and the community and voluntary sector. By understanding diverse perspectives and empowering every voice.

This approach is crucial in addressing key challenges such as rapid population growth, ageing populations, increased service demands, persistent high levels of deprivation, and declining local government resources over the next five years. Through leveraging technology and innovative approaches, the expectation is to aspire to strengthen community connections and enhance well-being through targeted initiatives, partnerships, and inclusive events.

## Recommendation(s)

That Cabinet:

1. Approves the draft Tenant Engagement Strategy 2024-2027, subject to consultation.
2. Approves the commencement of a 12-week consultation period on the draft Tenant Engagement Strategy with any amendments proposed to the Strategy resulting from the consultation to be reviewed and, where considered appropriate, made by the Strategic Director with Responsibility for Housing and the Head of Housing, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing.

## Strategic plan

How does this proposal support Our Direction 2028?

### Environmental Impact

The Tenant Engagement Strategy plays a crucial role in supporting the ESC Strategic Plan (Our Direction 2028) concerning environmental impact by fostering a culture of sustainable practices and environmental stewardship among tenants. Through proactive engagement initiatives, the strategy can educate and empower tenants to adopt eco-friendly behaviours, such as energy conservation, waste reduction, and sustainable transportation choices

### Sustainable Housing

By actively involving tenants in the decision-making process, the strategy will help to deliver housing solutions that are tailored to the diverse needs of our communities, ensuring that homes meet safety standards, are environmentally sustainable, and align with residents' preferences. Through collaborative initiatives and engagement programs, tenants will be

	empowered to contribute to the enhancement of their homes and neighbourhood's / localities fostering a sense of ownership, belonging, and civic pride. This approach not only improves housing quality but also strengthens community cohesion and creates vibrant, sustainable living environments across East Suffolk.
<b>Tackling Inequalities</b>	Through co-creation and collaborative involving our tenants in decision-making processes and engagement initiatives, the strategy will ensure that housing / service solutions are equitable and responsive to the diverse needs of our communities. Through targeted outreach, feedback mechanisms, and inclusive participation, the strategy promotes fairness, accessibility, and inclusivity. It will also ensure our services, policies and procedures do not disadvantage our tenants, on the basis of the characteristics defined in the Equality Act 2010
<b>Thriving Economy</b>	The strategy will provide opportunities for tenants to upskill and actively participate in resident associations, panels, and recognised groups / bodies in the ESC governance processes. The strategy ensures that tenant voices are heard and considered in key decisions impacting their communities. Through partnerships with ESC, tenants can contribute valuable insights and perspectives, fostering collaborative decision-making and impacting inclusive economic development initiatives.
<b>Our Foundations / governance of the organisation</b>	The strategy will support East Suffolk to ensure tenants are involved in the good governance of the organisation.

## Justification for recommendations

### 1. Background

- 1.1. This will be the first Tenant Engagement Strategy for East Suffolk Council.
- 1.2. Community engagement across the landlord service is not integrated effectively, especially concerning the nuances for housing approaches.
- 1.3. While various ESC services engage the community, a comprehensive approach is needed to cater for tenants.
- 1.4. The new legislative changes set out in the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023, mandates local authorities and Registered Providers to produce a tenant engagement strategy covering pathways for tenant involvement, access to information, tenant empowerment and obligations to promote transparency, accountability across Housing and broader ESC.
- 1.5. This new strategy outlines ESC's proactive and inclusive approach to engaging tenants across all services and functions.

### 2. Introduction

- 2.1. The strategy seeks to create an environment where every tenant feels valued, heard, and involved in shaping the future. By fostering open dialogue, leveraging technology, and implementing innovative approaches, we aspire to build stronger connections and enhance community well-being for our tenants.
- 2.2. Through targeted initiatives, partnerships, and inclusive events, we understand the important role the community can play in:
  - Empowering tenants by developing comprehensive training, skills and techniques to significantly influence the shaping and delivery of services.
  - Becoming an equal partner with our tenants through ESC governance, tenant scrutiny, equal partnerships and regular communication processes to shape policies and services that directly impact their lives.
  - Creating a culture where tenants work with ESC through co-design to measure performance, hold us accountable so we can better respond to challenges faced by our tenants.
  - Cultivate a sense of belonging and ownership among tenants where ESC Listen, measure, and implement the right metrics that improve the lives of our tenants.

### 3. Proposal

- 3.1. The proposal is through four detailed guiding principles, ESC will create a more inclusive, fair and accessible service for tenants – this extends to the activities of our contractors, suppliers, partners and volunteers.

Outcome 1: Tenants possess the capacity, educational resources, and structured governance systems to exert influence on matters that significantly affect their daily existence.

Outcome 2: Establish open communication by engaging in two-way dialogue, responding to concerns, and sharing information promptly.

Outcome 3: Tenants are at the helm of co-creation, co design of solutions, initiatives, and resources to address identified community needs.

Outcome 4: Creating a culture where tenants support ESC to measure performance using data to understand the diverse make up of our housing communities.

#### **4. Financial Implications**

4.1. None specific.

#### **5. Legal Implications**

5.1. It is a legal requirement under the Social Housing Regulation Act 2023, that landlords actively engage with their tenants and provide mechanisms for their voices to be heard, provide transparency as to how services are delivered and allow tenants to be part of decision making and holding their landlords to account.

#### **6. Risk Implications**

6.1. Miscommunication or Misunderstanding: Ineffective communication channels or methods could lead to misunderstandings or misinterpretations of tenant feedback or priorities. This can result in misaligned strategies or initiatives that do not meet tenant expectations or needs.

6.2. Negative perceptions from ineffective engagement practices could damage the council's reputation and hinder future engagement endeavours.

6.3. Compliance with legal and ethical standards needs to be considered e.g., completing EQIA's and reflecting how the strategy responds to the equalities act.

6.4. Limited participation from tenants: especially those from marginalised or hard-to-reach groups. This could result incomplete data or insights that do not accurately represent the diverse needs and perspectives of all tenants.

6.5. Limited Impact or actionable Insights: Engaging tenants without a clear plan for acting on feedback or implementing changes based on insights would result in disillusionment, frustration and distrust among tenants. It may also lead to missed opportunities for improving services or addressing key concerns.

- 6.6. Privacy and Data Protection Concerns: place considerations for collecting personal data or sensitive information during the consultation. Failure to handle this data securely or in compliance with data protection regulations will lead to breaches, legal issues, and erosion of trust among tenants.

## **7. Options**

- 7.1. Option 1: Do Nothing - The council maintains the status quo regarding tenant engagement without implementing a formal strategy. The current ad-hoc approach may involve occasional interactions with tenants through routine communications, surveys, or ad-hoc feedback mechanisms. However, there is no structured framework or defined processes for consistent and meaningful engagement across all housing services. The absence of a formal strategy may result in missed opportunities to proactively addressing tenant concerns, limited channels for gathering comprehensive feedback, and challenges in ensuring equitable participation from all tenant groups.
- 7.2. While this option may require minimal immediate resources or changes, it will lead to non-compliance and a failure to meet tenant expectations of the legislative changes set out in the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023, which mandates local authorities and Registered Providers to produce a tenant engagement strategy covering paths ways for, tenant involvement, access to information, tenant empowerment and obligations to promote transparency, accountability across Housing and broader ESC.
- 7.3. Option 2: Implement a Tenant Engagement Strategy to enhance communication, collaboration, and responsiveness between the council and tenants. The strategy will yield long-term benefits in terms of tenant satisfaction, trust, transparency and the overall quality of housing services provided by the ESC.

## **8. Recommendations**

- 8.1. Approves the draft Tenant Engagement Strategy 2024-2027, subject to consultation.
- 8.2. Approves the commencement of a 12-week consultation period on the draft Tenant Engagement Strategy with any amendments proposed to the Strategy resulting from the consultation to be reviewed and, where considered appropriate, made by the Strategic Director with Responsibility for Housing and the Head of Housing, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing.

## **9. Reasons for Recommendations**

- 9.1. The recommendations to Cabinet outline a strategic approach to tenant engagement, aimed at enhancing communication, collaboration, and empowerment within our housing / tenant communities. By approving the draft Tenant Engagement Strategy 2024-2027 and initiating a comprehensive 12-week consultation period, the Cabinet demonstrates a commitment to inclusivity and responsiveness to tenant needs and preferences. The consultation period allows for valuable feedback from tenants, ensuring that their voices are heard, and their perspectives are considered in shaping the final version of the strategy. Any amendments resulting from the consultation will be

carefully reviewed by key stakeholders, including Strategic Director, and Head of Housing, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing. This collaborative approach ensures that the final strategy reflects a community incorporated vision that aligns with the priorities and aspirations of both tenants and the council.

## **10. Conclusions/Next Steps**

- 10.1. Strategy Development: Initiate the development of the Tenant Engagement Strategy, outlining clear objectives, key principles, and actionable steps for implementation.
- 10.2. Internal ESC approval – Cabinet sign off on initial tenant engagement draft.
- 10.3. Consultation and Feedback: Conduct a 12-week consultation process with tenants, stakeholders, and internal teams to gather feedback, insights, and suggestions for refining the strategy.
- 10.4. Review and Amendments: Review consultation outcomes and make necessary amendments to the draft strategy.
- 10.5. Finalisation and Approval: Finalise the Tenant Engagement Strategy based on consultation feedback and stakeholder input. Seek approval from relevant officers including the Cabinet Member Housing

## Areas of consideration comments

### Section 151 Officer comments:

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

### Monitoring Officer comments:

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted on this report and has no additional comments.

### Equality, Diversity and Inclusion/EQIA:

Included as Appendix B

### Safeguarding:

The Tenant Engagement Strategy prioritises safeguarding by implementing robust measures to protect vulnerable tenants. Regular staff training on safeguarding protocols ensures awareness and prompt action.

### Crime and Disorder:

The strategy addresses crime and disorder by fostering community cohesion. Through improved communication channels between tenants and ESC and wider partners. The engagement elements / training could provide strong platforms for other agencies (Police/ social services) to listen engage and enhance trust.

### Corporate Services implications:

*(i.e., Legal, Finance, Procurement, Human Resources, Digital, Customer Services, Asset Management)*

The tenant engagement strategy encompasses various considerations to ensure it is effective and aligns legal, financial operational standards. The strategy has an EQIA and addresses the equalities act. The services will build in regular reviews to ensure compliance with any changes in laws.

No formal Housing tenant engagement budget has been set (outside 1FTE), but there are ongoing rigorous / robust reviews of budget allocation in the interim for any additional spend.

No current implications for procurement at present.

In terms of digital engagement, the primary focus is on encouraging customers to utilise digital communication channels whenever feasible. However, alternative feedback methods will be available for tenants without internet access during the consultation process to prevent bias in feedback collection. This approach ensures quicker responses and improved accessibility. Additionally, enhancing customer services will facilitate more responsive tenant engagement, further supporting the effectiveness of the overall strategy.

### Residents and Businesses consultation/consideration:

The consultation of the strategy will be circulated to all Housing tenants, catering for language barriers and disabilities this will ensure the strategy reflects community needs, and includes their priorities. Through a variety of methods (surveys, focus groups, and public meetings) we will gather input and feedback, ensuring this shapes delivery and final outcomes.

## Appendices:

<b>Appendix A</b>	Tenant Engagement strategy
<b>Appendix B</b>	Equality Impact Analysis



**Background reference papers:**

None