



## SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 17 November 2022

<b>Subject</b>	Review of How the Council Engages with Housing Tenants
<b>Report by</b>	Cabinet Member with responsibility for Housing - Councillor Richard Kerry
<b>Supporting Officer</b>	Heather Tucker, Head of Housing <a href="mailto:heather.tucker@eastsuffolk.gov.uk">heather.tucker@eastsuffolk.gov.uk</a> Samantha Shimmon, Tenant Services Manager <a href="mailto:Samantha.shimmon@eastsuffolk.gov.uk">Samantha.shimmon@eastsuffolk.gov.uk</a> 01502 526451

Is the report Open or Exempt?	OPEN
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Category of Exempt Information and reason why it is <b>NOT</b> in the public interest to disclose the exempt information.	N/A
<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All Wards All Wards with ESC homes.

## Purpose and high-level overview

### **Purpose of Report:**

Scrutiny Committee requested a review of the how East Suffolk Council (ESC) engages with its tenants.

This report will set out the current opportunities for tenants to be engaged with ESC and the transformational work already in progress, which will provide opportunities for tenants to effectively engage in a meaningful way.

This report will include a review of these five key areas, as agreed by the Scrutiny Committee:

- How and when do we engage with tenants – how do we communicate with our tenants? Is it regular or ad hoc?
- Do we have a good level of engagement with our tenants?
- What is considered best practice?
- Do we have a policy/SLA detailing our commitment and how we will engage with tenants?

What are tenants' expectations of how the Council engages as a landlord?

### **Recommendation/s:**

That the Scrutiny Committee consider this report of how East Suffolk Council (ESC) engages with its tenants and makes any recommendations as required.

## Corporate Impact Assessment

### **Governance:**

The Social Housing White Paper sets out the expectation that landlords inform and engage with their tenants in an effective way. It suggests that engagement opportunities can range from involvement in surveys, focus groups and local events to membership of the organisation's board or scrutiny panel. A more detailed summary and links to the relevant documents can be found in the 'Background' section of this report.

The Tenant Engagement Strategy currently in production will propose a model of engagement that includes a Residents Board and a Tenant Scrutiny function made up of tenants and residents (leaseholders). The strategy will be taken to Cabinet for formal adoption in early 2023.

The purpose of the Resident Board is through co-production with Officers and Members to develop the Council's policy and strategy for its landlord service. It will review our Budgets and Finances, and our housing services within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). Performance of the HRA including arrangements for monitoring and reviewing performance, addressing shortcomings and remedial actions will be a key part of the Board's responsibility.

The purpose of the Tenant Scrutiny function is to take an unbiased view of areas of concern, to drive up performance, and give advice and suggestions to influence standards

and improve service delivery. The reviews conducted by the Tenant Scrutiny function will feed into the Residents Board.

The insight that tenants can provide in the scrutiny process, as recipients of the service will be invaluable and enable us to strengthen the way we deliver the service in the future.

We wish to discuss as part of this review how we embed Tenant Governance into the existing corporate governance structure to ensure we give tenants a voice and influence in how their landlord service is run as well as ensuring Members are able to meet their governance responsibilities.

**ESC policies and strategies that directly apply to the proposal:**

[Housing Strategy 2018- 2023](#)

[Housing Asset Management Strategy 2019 – 2024](#) (Under Review)

[Housing Development Strategy 2020 - 2024](#)

**Environmental:**

There are no Environmental impacts from this report. However, as we look to improve the environmental credentials within our housing stock, we will ensure tenants and residents are fully engaged.

**Equalities and Diversity:**

An EQIA will be developed prior to the Tenant Engagement Strategy being presented to Cabinet for approval.

**Financial:**

An adequate Tenant Engagement Budget will be required to deliver the Tenant Engagement Strategy, and this will be identified as part of the annual budget setting process with our Finance Business Partner.

**Human Resources:**

The resource required to support future Tenant Engagement and to deliver the Tenant Engagement Strategy will be reviewed while developing the strategy.

We will also be identifying learning and development opportunities for anyone involved in working with tenants, to ensure they have the rights skills, knowledge and expertise.

**ICT:**

We currently use a platform called 'TP Tracker' which completes the STAR Survey (Customer Satisfaction Survey) carried out monthly. We have recently invested further in this platform and received training to enable us to carry out our own tailored surveys.

We are looking at using the platform to capture the Tenant Satisfaction Measures required under the Social Housing Regulation Bill, which is currently going through the formal adoption processes.

Any additional ICT requirements will be developed as part of the drafting and finalising of the Strategy and will be submitted as part of the cabinet report for the adoption of the new Strategy.

**Legal:**

The Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 sets out that Local authorities with social housing stock are "registered providers of social housing". Registered Providers are governed by the [Regulator of Social Housing](#).

The Social Housing Regulation Bill which is currently going through Parliament introduces a stronger regulatory regime for Registered Providers and delivers the measures set out in the Social Housing White Paper. A more detailed summary and links to the relevant documents can be found in the 'Background' section of this report.

The [Building Safety Act 2022](#) details requirements to engage with residents on decisions related to the management of buildings. This is especially relevant to higher risk buildings such as high-rise accommodation or Retired Living Schemes. The Building Safety Act will be regulated by the Health & Safety Executive (HSE).

The [Fire Safety \(England\) Regulations 2022](#) come into effect on 23 January 2023.

The regulations place significant new duties on "high-rise residential buildings". This means a building containing two or more sets of domestic premises that is at least 18 metres above ground level; or has at least seven storeys.

In all multi-occupied residential buildings, the regulations require responsible persons to provide residents with fire safety instructions and information on the importance of fire doors. The regulations apply to existing buildings, and requirements for new buildings may be different.

In high-rise residential buildings, responsible persons will be required to :

**Building Plans:** provide their local Fire and Rescue Service with up-to-date electronic building floor plans and to place a hard copy of these plans, alongside a single page building plan which identifies key firefighting equipment, in a secure information box on site.

**External Wall Systems:** provide to their local Fire and Rescue Service information about the design and materials of a high-rise building's external wall system and to inform the Fire and Rescue Service of any material changes to these walls. Also, they will be required to provide information in relation to the level of risk that the design and materials of the external wall structure gives rise to and any mitigating steps taken.

**Lifts and other Key Fire-Fighting Equipment:** undertake monthly checks on the operation of lifts intended for use by firefighters, and evacuation lifts in their building and check the functionality of other key pieces of firefighting equipment. They will also be required to report any defective lifts or equipment to their local Fire and Rescue Service as soon as possible after detection if the fault cannot be fixed within 24 hours, and to record the outcome of checks and make them available to residents.

**Information Boxes:** install and maintain a secure information box in their building. This box must contain the name and contact details of the Responsible Person and hard copies of the building floor plans.

**Wayfinding Signage:** to install signage visible in low light or smoky conditions that identifies flat and floor numbers in the stairwells of relevant buildings.

In residential buildings with storeys over 11 metres in height, responsible persons will be required to undertake annual checks of flat entrance doors and quarterly checks of all fire doors in the common parts.

In all multi-occupied residential buildings with two or more sets of domestic premises, responsible persons will be required to:

**Fire Safety Instructions:** provide relevant fire safety instructions to their residents, which will include instructions on how to report a fire and any other instruction which sets out what a resident must do once a fire has occurred, based on the evacuation strategy for the building.

**Fire Door Information:** provide residents with information relating to the importance of fire doors in fire safety.

**Risk:**

If we fail to develop, adopt and deliver the actions set out in our future Tenant Engagement Strategy, we will lose the trust of our tenants, their ability to influence and shape our services and their opportunities to hold us to account.

If ESC does not meet the required standards as set out by the Social Housing Regulator, a performance improvement plan notice could be issued to ESC. If we failed to comply with the notice, the Regulator can issue enforcement action, which could have significant reputational damage.

<b>External Consultees:</b>	TPAS – The Tenant Engagement Experts
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## Strategic Plan Priorities

Select the priorities of the <a href="#">Strategic Plan</a> which are supported by this proposal: (Select only one primary and as many secondary as appropriate)		Primary priority	Secondary priorities
<b>T01</b>	<b>Growing our Economy</b>		
P01	Build the right environment for East Suffolk	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P02	Attract and stimulate inward investment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P03	Maximise and grow the unique selling points of East Suffolk	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P04	Business partnerships	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P05	Support and deliver infrastructure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>T02</b>	<b>Enabling our Communities</b>		
P06	Community Partnerships	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P07	Taking positive action on what matters most	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
P08	Maximising health, well-being and safety in our District	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P09	Community Pride	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>T03</b>	<b>Maintaining Financial Sustainability</b>		
P10	Organisational design and streamlining services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P11	Making best use of and investing in our assets	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P12	Being commercially astute	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P13	Optimising our financial investments and grant opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P14	Review service delivery with partners	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>T04</b>	<b>Delivering Digital Transformation</b>		
P15	Digital by default	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P16	Lean and efficient streamlined services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P17	Effective use of data	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P18	Skills and training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P19	District-wide digital infrastructure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>T05</b>	<b>Caring for our Environment</b>		
P20	Lead by example	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P21	Minimise waste, reuse materials, increase recycling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P22	Renewable energy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P23	Protection, education and influence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>XXX</b>	<b>Governance</b>		
XXX	How ESC governs itself as an authority	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>How does this proposal support the priorities selected?</b>  The governance model that will be proposed in the Tenant Engagement Strategy will need to be developed with tenants, and will support how ESC governs itself as an authority and more specifically as a landlord.			

## Background and Justification for Recommendation

1	Background facts
1.1	East Suffolk Council (ESC) is the social landlord for approximately 4,500 properties, which are owned by the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).
1.2	The stock consists of a mixture of bungalows, flats and houses and includes 13 Retired Living Schemes, one block over 18m tall and a number of properties used as Temporary Accommodation under s188 and s193(2) of the Housing Act 1996.
1.3	There are also some commercial units and some units, which are leased to other providers.
1.4	Prior to East Suffolk Council being created, only Waveney District Council had retained its housing stock. Suffolk Coastal District Council had transferred its properties to a Registered Provider a number of years before. Therefore, the stock is predominantly located in the north of East Suffolk. However, the Council has an ambitious development programme planned, including a new exemplar scheme at Deben Fields in Felixstowe, which will be built to Passivhaus Standard.
1.5	Local authorities with social housing stock became "registered providers of social housing" pursuant to the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008.
1.6	Registered Providers of social housing, which includes both Councils and Housing Associations, are governed by the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH).
1.7	The Housing and Regeneration Act 2008, sets out the role of the RSH.
1.8	The RSH has a set of standards, which all Registered Provider (RP) landlords, must comply with. These include 3 economic and 4 consumer standards. The consumer standards are applicable to all RP's, including Councils. Most of the economic standards do not apply to Councils, because the RSH does not have the power to set their standards. The only economic standard, which Councils must comply with is the Rent Standard.
1.9	<p>The Consumer Standards are:</p> <p><b><i>The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard</i></b> – Customer Service, Choice, Complaints, Involvement and Empowerment and ensuring there is an understanding of the diverse needs of tenants</p> <p><b><i>The Home Standard</i></b> – Quality of accommodation, repairs and maintenance. This includes compliance with the 'Big 6' areas: Fire, Gas Safety, Electrical Safety, Water Safety (Legionella), Asbestos and Lifting Equipment (Lifts and Stairlifts).</p> <p><b><i>The Tenancy Standard</i></b> – Allocations, Mutual Exchanges and Tenancy Management</p> <p><b><i>The Neighbourhood and Community Standard</i></b> – Management of neighbourhoods and anti-social behaviour.</p>
1.10	This report is focussed on the how the Council engages with its tenants. The <a href="#">Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard</a> sets out the following required outcomes:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customer service, choice and complaints <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Registered providers shall: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provide choices, information and communication that is appropriate to the diverse needs of their tenants in the delivery of all standards</li> <li>▪ Have an approach to complaints that is clear, simple and accessible that ensures that complaints are resolved promptly, politely and fairly.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>• Involvement and Empowerment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Registered providers shall ensure that tenants are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and can be involved in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The formulation of their landlord's housing-related policies and strategic priorities</li> <li>▪ The making of decisions about how housing-related services are delivered, including the setting of service standards</li> <li>▪ The scrutiny of their landlord's performance and the making of recommendations to their landlord about how performance might be improved</li> <li>▪ The management of their homes, where applicable</li> <li>▪ The management of repair and maintenance services, such as commissioning and undertaking a range of repair tasks, as agreed with landlords, and the sharing in savings made, and</li> <li>▪ Agreeing local offers for service delivery</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>• Understanding and responding to the diverse needs of tenants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Registered providers shall: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Treat all tenants with fairness and respect</li> <li>▪ Demonstrate that they understand the different needs of their tenants, including in relation to the equality strands and tenants with additional support needs</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>
1.11	<p>In November 2020, the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government published the Social Housing White Paper called <a href="#">The Charter for Social Housing Residents</a>. The charter set out seven expectations that every social housing tenant should be able to expect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To be safe in your home</li> <li>• To know how your landlord is performing</li> <li>• To have complaints dealt with promptly and fairly</li> <li>• To be treated with respect</li> <li>• To have your voice heard by your landlord</li> <li>• To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in</li> <li>• To be supported to take your first step to ownership</li> </ul>
1.12	<p>The proposals in the Social Housing White Paper were later set out in the <a href="#">Social Housing Regulation Bill</a>, which began its passage through Parliament at the House of Lords in June 2022 and is due to commence its third reading in late 2022. The Bill has been broadly supported and it is expected to receive Royal Assent relatively quickly.</p>



	<p>The Bill seeks to improve the regulation of social housing by having a stronger and more proactive regulatory regime. The measures announced in the Bill include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enabling the regulator to intervene with landlords who are performing poorly on consumer issues and guarantee timely action where the regulator has concerns about the decency of a home</li> <li>• Enable the regulator to inspect landlords and arrange emergency repairs to ensure tenants are provided good quality accommodation</li> <li>• Provide tenants with greater transparency about their landlord's performance by introducing a new set of Tenant Satisfaction Measures</li> <li>• Enable tenants to access information related to the management of social housing</li> <li>• Add safety to the regulator's objectives and require registered providers to appoint a health and safety lead</li> <li>• Require the housing ombudsman and the regulator to cooperate to provide better protection for tenants</li> </ul> <p>The House of Lords has also recommended the following amendments to the Bill:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A requirement for the government to publish a strategy within which standards for reducing energy demands for social housing properties could be set</li> <li>• Enabling the regulator to set standards for registered providers regarding the competence and conduct of individuals involved in the provision of services in connection with the management of social housing</li> <li>• A requirement for the Regulator to make a plan concerning inspection of registered providers.</li> </ul>
1.13	<p>As part of the Social Housing Regulation Bill, all RP's will be expected to report on a standard set of measures. This data will need to be available to view and will be published on the ESC website. These are now referred to as <a href="#">Tenant Satisfaction Measures</a>.</p> <p>From April 2023, these are the measures, which all RP's including ESC will need to report on.</p> <p><b>Overall satisfaction</b></p> <p>1. Overall satisfaction with the service provided by the landlord. Measured by: tenant perception survey</p> <p><b>Keeping properties in good repair</b></p> <p>2. Satisfaction with repairs. Measured by: tenant perception survey</p> <p>3. Satisfaction with time taken to complete most recent repair. Measured by: tenant perception survey</p> <p>4. Satisfaction that the home is well-maintained. Measured by: tenant perception survey</p> <p>5. Homes that do not meet the Decent Homes Standard. Measured by: landlords' management information</p> <p>6. Repairs completed within target timescale. Measured by: landlords' management information</p> <p><b>Maintaining building safety</b></p>

	<p>7. Satisfaction that the home is safe. Measured by: tenant perception survey</p> <p><b>Safety checks</b></p> <p>8. Gas safety checks. Measured by landlords' management information</p> <p>9. Fire safety checks. Measured by landlords' management information</p> <p>10. Asbestos safety checks. Measured by landlords' management information</p> <p>11. Water safety checks. Measured by landlords' management information</p> <p>12. Lift safety checks. Measured by landlords' management information</p> <p><b>Respectful and helpful engagement</b></p> <p>13. Satisfaction that the landlord listens to tenant views and acts upon them. Measured by tenant perception survey</p> <p>14. Satisfaction that the landlord keeps tenants informed about things that matter to them. Measured by tenant perception survey</p> <p>15. Agreement that the landlord treats tenants fairly and with respect. Measured by tenant perception survey</p> <p><b>Effective handling of complaints</b></p> <p>16. Satisfaction with the landlord's approach to handling of complaints. Measured by tenant perception survey</p> <p>17. Complaints relative to the size of the landlord. Measured by landlords' management information</p> <p>18. Complaints responded to within Complaint Handling Code timescales. Measured by landlords' management information</p> <p><b>Responsible neighbourhood management</b></p> <p>19. Satisfaction that the landlord keeps communal areas clean and well-maintained. Measured by tenant perception survey</p> <p>20. Satisfaction that the landlord makes a positive contribution to neighbourhoods. Measured by tenant perception survey</p> <p>21. Satisfaction with the landlord's approach to handling anti-social behaviour. Measured by tenant perception survey</p> <p>22. Anti-social behaviour cases relative to the size of the landlord. Measured by landlords' management information</p>
1.14	<p>It is important that ESC reviews its approach to Tenant Engagement ahead of the Social Housing Regulation Bill being implemented.</p> <p>The Landlord Service had already started a key piece of work to review the approach to Tenant Engagement prior to Scrutiny requesting a report.</p>
	<b>Our Historical Approach to Tenant Engagement</b>
1.15	<p>We have engaged with tenants in various forms for nearly three decades through tenant and resident associations set up across East Suffolk (formerly Waveney District Council area). With the growth in the number of tenant and resident associations in the district a Tenants' Panel was established in 1996, which</p>

	representatives from the associations would attend. These meetings were held around the district in pubs, clubs, village halls and council offices.
1.16	Over time the Tenants Panel reinvented itself as a Tenants' Forum with open access to tenants and residents at its meetings. The Council invested in a dedicated Tenant Involvement Officer and new subgroups were set up such as the Housing Benefits and Tenant Services Consultation Group, which included Members and third sector stakeholders.
1.17	All our residents' groups including the Tenants Forum and Housing Benefits and Tenant Services Consultation Group were paused during the Covid 19 pandemic as face-to-face meetings were not possible and the residents who attended didn't want digital meetings.


## 2 Current position

2.1	<p><b>How and when do we engage with tenants – how do we communicate with our tenants? Is it regular or ad hoc?</b></p> <p>This section of the report will start by setting out how and when we currently engage with our tenants, the communication methods we use and also the frequency.</p>
2.2	<p><i>Residents Group – St Peters Court</i></p> <p>We have created a Residents Groups for St Peters Court, Lowestoft. This is our high-rise block of flats. We have been working with the residents to set priorities for their group in the same way the Community Partnerships do to ensure there is a focus to the meetings, and resident agreed actions to deliver on.</p>
2.3	<p><i>Tenant Newsletter</i></p> <p>A tenant newsletter was founded in 1995, which was hand delivered to every tenant by staff and volunteers. This evolved into a tenant led and edited magazine that was delivered to every tenant twice a year until 2019.</p> <p>The magazine continues to be produced in-house, although this was disrupted by the Covid Pandemic across much of 2020 and 2021. The last edition was in Winter 2020 and can be found here: <a href="#">Tenants-Magazine-Winter-2020.pdf</a>.</p> <p>There has been a recent piece of work to create a new edition of the newsletter, which will be delivered to our tenants at the end of November/early December 2022.</p>
2.4	<p><i>Monthly Surveys</i></p> <p>We use an engagement platform called 'TPTracker', which carries out regular customer satisfaction surveys on 100 tenants, selected randomly per month. This is initially sent by email or text if we have a tenant's mobile number and email address and followed up by phone call to ensure we receive a minimum of 30% response rates.</p> <p>The survey is made up of 16 questions, some of which are standard under the STAR Survey (Survey of Tenants and Residents) a nationally recognised survey.</p>

	<p>Other questions are unique to East Suffolk and are about, for example, the 'myHome' digital portal. The questions we ask tenants can be found in Appendix 1.</p> <p>Any complaints and feedback received via the STAR survey are followed up and put through the corporate customer feedback process or actioned if they are a service request such as a repair.</p> <p>Our overall satisfaction rates fluctuate and are impacted by whether we receive more digital responses or phone responses. The more digital responses we receive the lower our overall satisfactions rates. Our overall satisfaction levels can be seen in the table below.</p> <p>Overall, our average satisfaction rate from 2016 to present is 88%, which is positive, but we hope this will increase further when we launch our new Tenant Engagement Strategy.</p> <p>The graph below sets out the average overall tenant satisfaction from 2016/17 to present, which is currently at 86%:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Financial Year</th> <th>Average Overall Tenant Satisfaction</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2016/17</td> <td>90%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2017/18</td> <td>90.5%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2018/19</td> <td>91.5%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2019/20</td> <td>87%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2020/21</td> <td>88.5%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2021/22</td> <td>85.5%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2022/23</td> <td>86%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Housemark is the leading data and insight company for the UK housing sector, in their monthly pulse benchmarking surveys the median average overall satisfaction is 80%. Therefore, we are currently above the average satisfaction levels for the sector.</p> <p>Officers have recently met with Housemark who have advised that the current method of regular monthly surveys is considered good practice and will be beneficial as we will be able to adapt it to meet the requirements set out in the Social Housing Regulation Bill's proposed Tenant Satisfaction Measures.</p> <p>In 2022, we have expanded our access to the TPTracker platform and are now able to design and send out our own surveys digitally. We have successfully used this for several surveys, including one to help us understand the interest in the resident's group at St Peters Court and will be using this far more going forward.</p>	Financial Year	Average Overall Tenant Satisfaction	2016/17	90%	2017/18	90.5%	2018/19	91.5%	2019/20	87%	2020/21	88.5%	2021/22	85.5%	2022/23	86%
Financial Year	Average Overall Tenant Satisfaction																
2016/17	90%																
2017/18	90.5%																
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2020/21	88.5%																
2021/22	85.5%																
2022/23	86%																
2.5	<p><i>Ad Hoc Communication</i></p> <p>The remainder of our communication with tenants is ad hoc, it is either communicating information with them such as the annual rent increase letters, or a localised letter about their building and works that are being completed.</p> <p>Alternatively, communication is about repairs, tenancy management or customer feedback and can be initiated by the tenant or by ESC. This can be via digital</p>																

	channels such as the East Suffolk 'myHome' portal, by telephone, written communication or face-to-face.
2.6	<p><b>Do we have a good level of engagement with our tenants?</b></p> <p>This section of the report will set out the current level of engagement we have with our tenants at present. It will also detail an external review of our tenant engagement model, which we commissioned in late 2021.</p>
2.7	<p>We have a very traditional model of engagement which was sufficient historically but does not deliver what is expected of us as a landlord by our tenants, the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) or best practice.</p> <p>Unfortunately, largely due to the restrictions the Country faced as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, our opportunities to engage with tenants were reduced, especially as a number of tenants who were engaged at the time, did not wish to move to digital communication methods such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams.</p>
2.8	<p>Therefore, in late 2021, East Suffolk Council engaged <a href="#">TPAS</a> an industry leading specialist in Tenant Engagement, to conduct a review of our engagement with tenants.</p> <p>The review highlighted that ESC did not meet any of the required tenant engagement standards, which is something we had anticipated.</p> <p>However, the main purpose of the review was to provide ESC with a clear action plan and proposed models of engagement to ensure we are able to deliver what is expected by our tenants, the RSH and best practice.</p>
2.9	The review provided ESC with a total of 48 actions to work on to develop and embed an effective approach to tenant engagement (although some of these are very similar and can be grouped together).
2.10	It is not possible to work on all these actions at the same time, so we have prioritised the development of a co-designed Engagement Strategy, as this will underpin many of the other actions.
2.11	We have commenced work on 6 out of the 48 actions and these are detailed below with indicative timescales:
2.12	<p><i>Action:</i></p> <p><i>Organisational leaders setting a clear sense of direction, stating intent and following through with action – including challenging incomplete information that fails to set out tenant influence in the strategic direction, service improvements, etc</i></p> <p>Current Progress:</p> <p>The Housing Management Team within ESC led by Heather Tucker, Head of Housing have commenced a service review and transformation programme of the landlord service.</p> <p>This work will feed into the new Housing Strategy, which is due for renewal in 2023/24 and will set a clear vision and direction with tenants at the heart of everything we do.</p>
2.13	<p><i>Action:</i></p> <p><i>Leaders across the organisation continuing the messaging by identifying resources to support change and implementing the actions identified in the TPAS review</i></p> <p>Current Progress:</p>

	As part of the Strategy development resources will be reviewed and increased to support the change required, this review will be completed in Quarter 4 of 2022/23.
2.14	<p><i>Action:</i>  <i>To develop an annual report that will provide tenants with statistics from the last financial year</i></p> <p>Current Progress:  This will be finalised by end of Quarter 3 with it being delivered to tenants early in 2023.</p>
2.15	<p><i>Action:</i>  <i>To develop in conjunction with tenants and staff a co-designed engagement strategy that clearly identifies the aims and objectives for engagement as well as the links to the key business aims and priorities</i></p> <p>Current Progress:  The strategy will be adopted by end of Quarter 4 in 2022/23</p>
2.16	<p><i>Action:</i>  <i>To publicise the 'named person' for fire safety and develop key messages and communications plans in conjunction with tenants and the wider community</i></p> <p>Current Progress:  The named person is Stephen Baker Chief Executive Officer as detailed in our Fire Safety Strategy which was approved by Cabinet in May 2022.</p> <p>We are currently developing some of the key messages and communications plans which are building specific as part of our ongoing work to ensure compliance with the Home Standard for which we were served a regulatory notice in May 2022 for breach of the standard.</p> <p>These will be completed by Quarter 4 of 2022/23.</p>
2.17	<p><i>Action:</i>  <i>To establish a working group to agree the priorities and issues for neighbourhoods and then do some targeted work within those communities utilising a strengths-based approach and a delivery action plan</i></p> <p>Current Progress:  We have commenced this work with our existing residents' groups which are localised. Some groups are further ahead than others in identifying their key priorities to enable us together to come up with specific action plans for those groups. We will continue to support tenants in this work, offering training where tenants want this.</p>
2.18	ESC employed a full time Tenant Engagement Officer in December 2021, who has undergone an extensive training programme, which included shadowing all aspects of the landlord service. They are currently completing a Chartered Institute of Housing qualification to further improve their knowledge and understanding of the housing sector.

	They will be focussed on working with the Tenant Services Manager to ensure Tenant Engagement is embedded across the whole of the Housing Service and that the actions identified in the TPAS review are completed.
2.19	The TPAS review and full action plan can be found in Appendix 2.
2.20	<p><b>What is considered best practice?</b></p> <p>As well as considering the opportunities for best practice in relation to Tenant Engagement, ESC must ensure it meets the standards set out in the Tenant Engagement and Empowerment Standard, which is one of the Consumer Standards, set out by the Regulator of Social Housing.</p> <p>The regulator has identified that poor engagement could be an indication that an organisation has poor governance, which demonstrates the importance effective engagement has.</p> <p>TPAS is considered England's leading tenant engagement experts, they have been working for 30 years to promote, support and champion tenant involvement and empowerment in social housing across England.</p>
2.21	<p>TPAS have developed a set of 7 engagement standards or best practice which reflect the renewed focus on, and the recognition of, the importance of the residents' voice. They have been developed ensuring they more than cover the increased expectations of the Regulator of Social Housing, Housing Ombudsman as well as the <i>Building Safety Act 2022</i>.</p> <p>The 7 tenant engagement standards are:</p>  <p>TPAS stress the standards can only be delivered if an organisation has the right behaviours and attitudes (culture) to set the foundations for positive outcomes.</p> <p>TPAS firmly believe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A positive culture starts with the recognition of a mutually agreed role that shows the part residents can play in the governance of the organisation.</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• True transparency and unhindered information sharing increases trust and builds relationships between residents and landlords.</li> <li>• Continuous listening and learning allow organisations to respond positively to their environment and the changing needs of its residents.</li> <li>• Meeting the diverse needs of residents, removing barriers to engagement, and providing information in plain language is non-negotiable.</li> <li>• Providing a range of opportunities to engage, with appropriate support systems can produce more meaningful outcomes.</li> <li>• The acknowledgement and support for community-led solutions are a vital part of building local confidence and wider engagement opportunities.</li> </ul> <p>It is against these 7 engagement standards that TPAS reviewed ESC in their SMART Review.</p>
2.22	<p><b>Benchmarking – Nationally</b></p> <p>TPAS promote Hull City Council as having an excellent model of engagement, and scrutiny within a Local Authority setting. The Tenants Compact (Strategy Group) has eight involvement principles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open Information</li> <li>• Tenants will decide their own depth and degree of involvement</li> <li>• Everything in housing is open to influence</li> <li>• Involvement is everyone’s business</li> <li>• Early enough influence</li> <li>• Getting everyone involved</li> <li>• Demonstrating that everyone’s views have been taken into account and providing feedback</li> <li>• Planning for successful involvement – and keeping plans on track</li> </ul> <p>Their <a href="#">Tenant Engagement Strategy</a> is aimed at tenants who want to become involved, but they also have a shortened version for all tenants.</p>
2.23	<p><b>Benchmarking – Locally</b></p> <p>As part of the review of Tenant Engagement, we have considered what neighbouring Local Authorities and Registered Providers were doing and look for examples of best practice.</p>
2.24	<p>Ipswich Borough Council have a <a href="#">Tenant Engagement Strategy</a> which they developed from the results of a tenant survey to give three main priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To improve the way we communicate with tenants</li> <li>• To promote and support tenant involvement</li> <li>• To use what we are told to improve our services</li> </ul> <p>The strategy sets out Ipswich’s clear intent to work with residents to develop a new model of engagement and scrutiny.</p>
2.25	<p>Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils approved their Tenant Engagement Strategy in November 2022 and this can be found in Appendix 3.</p> <p>Like Ipswich they have used a Tenant Satisfaction survey as well as working with their existing Tenant Board members and Councillors to come up with five priorities for their Strategy:</p>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open &amp; Transparent Information</li> <li>• You said, we did</li> <li>• Valuing Diversity &amp; Inclusion</li> <li>• Engagement is Everyone's Business</li> <li>• Early and Planned Engagement</li> </ul>
2.26	<p>New Tide Housing which is the majority stockholder for the southern end of the district splits its engagement into 3 areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal – a digital platform for surveys</li> <li>• Local – Spotlights for localised concerns, residents associations and Community champions</li> <li>• Group – Tenant Overview panel, Tenant experience group and a Digital experience group</li> </ul> <p>Further information can be found here: <a href="https://www.newtide-homes.co.uk/your-feedback/get-involved/">https://www.newtide-homes.co.uk/your-feedback/get-involved/</a></p>
2.27	<p>Havebury Housing Partnership worked with tenants, their teams, Board and Committee members to review the ways their tenants could influence and engage with them and have produced a new strategy/booklet in September 2022 which identifies seven levels of engagement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be Aware</li> <li>• Opt In</li> <li>• Chip In</li> <li>• Co-create</li> <li>• Collaborate</li> <li>• Tenant Voice Panels</li> <li>• Lead</li> </ul> <p>Havebury also have a digital platform that allows them to carry out surveys and share the results.</p>
2.28	<p>Orwell Housing Association developed their Customer Engagement Strategy 2021 – 2024 with 4 key areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance our engagement with choice and reward</li> <li>• Empower customers through ambitious training and development</li> <li>• Engage with all customers via a blend of equitable practices</li> <li>• Enable insight into what is important to our customers</li> </ul> <p>A digital version of the strategy is not available; however, a copy has been included at Appendix 4.</p>
2.29	<p><b>Summary</b></p> <p>The range of strategies demonstrate that whilst there are similarities, a one size fits all approach is not possible with tenant engagement.</p> <p>Tenants need to be involved in the development of the Strategy and the models of engagement for their landlord. This will ensure it delivers what tenants want and meet the seven engagement standards outlined by TPAS.</p>
2.30	<p><b>Do we have a policy/SLA detailing our commitment and how we will engage with tenants?</b></p> <p>We do not currently have a Tenant Engagement Strategy, but this is being developed at present and further information on the work currently underway can be found in section 3 of this report.</p>

2.31	<p><b>What are tenants’ expectations of how the Council engages as a landlord?</b></p> <p>We are currently engaging with tenants to understand what their expectations are in relation to how ESC engages with them, as their landlord. More information on this can be found in section 3 of this report.</p>
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3 How to address current situation	
3.1	<p>East Suffolk Council are actively developing a Tenant Engagement Strategy. To ensure that our tenants are at the heart of the strategy and that the involvement opportunities are maximised and designed to meet tenants’ expectations, we have already communicated with many tenants, using the ‘TPTracker’ platform.</p> <p>We contacted tenants using digital communication methods and asked if they would be interested in joining a group to co-produce our Tenant Engagement Strategy. We are delighted that we have already received contact from over 80 tenants who have registered their interest in being part of this group.</p> <p>We will facilitating focus groups with TPAS, which will enable us to co-produce our Tenant Engagement Strategy 2023 – 2027.</p> <p>The aim of these focus groups is to ensure we understand what our tenants’ expectations are of how we engage with them as their landlord.</p> <p>We will be asking tenants for honest feedback of their current experience of their interactions with ESC and use their insight to support the development of engagement models going forward.</p> <p>There are a number of opportunities we could develop with tenants, which will have different levels of engagement and require more or less of their time. This will give all tenants the opportunity to engage as much or as little as they want whilst still being aware of key information that they need such as Fire Safety in their building.</p>
3.2	<p><b>Vision</b></p> <p>As part of our initial scoping work for the development of a Tenant Engagement Strategy, we have created a ‘vision’, which aligns with a vision the Housing Management Team have developed.</p> <p>Our Vision is:</p> <p><i>At East Suffolk, we want to ensure tenants are at the heart of everything we do, and we want all of our homes to be Safe, Suitable and Sustainable, in communities where residents are proud to live.</i></p> <p>As the development of the strategy is only at a scoping stage, we will be seeking the views of tenants before putting it forward for adoption in the Tenant Engagement Strategy.</p>
3.3	<p><b>Outcomes</b></p>

	<p>To deliver the vision, we have identified 4 proposed key outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure tenant engagement is an integral part of our housing service by involving and consulting tenants to enable services to be shaped to meet their needs.</li> <li>• Maximise the opportunities residents have to scrutinise the service ESC delivers as a landlord. This will ensure residents have the confidence in our services by listening and working together to make a difference.</li> <li>• Widen and increase engagement by offering a range of ways that tenants can get involved, including improved access to digital communication methods.</li> <li>• Enable tenants to make a difference in their neighbourhoods, and communities.</li> </ul>
3.4	<p><b>Aspiration</b></p> <p>We want to engage with tenants to help us deliver good quality housing services. Hearing from as many tenants as possible, through multiple engagement channels will improve services, neighbourhoods, and communities.</p> <p>We want tenants to be at the heart of our service because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Tenant feedback matters</u> – tenant feedback is important to understanding what our tenants want, and improve and provide those good quality services</li> <li>• <u>Tenants hold us to account</u> – tenants monitoring our services against our published standards, this challenges us to continually improve our performance and services</li> <li>• <u>Improving communities</u> – empowering and helping residents to tackle and care for issues in their communities leads to a better environment to live in</li> <li>• <u>Building confidence</u> – by getting involved, tenants can learn valuable skills and gain experience which can help in gaining employment. By meeting new people in their communities, it can help tackle loneliness and improve wellbeing</li> <li>• <u>Engaging with disadvantaged groups</u> – ensuring we provide clear and accessible information. Engaging with minority groups to ensure fair representation and keep equality and diversity at the core of what we do</li> </ul>
3.5	<p><b>Model of Engagement</b></p> <p>A formalised model will need to be developed with tenants, there are some aspects that must form part of the model from a governance perspective such as a Residents Board, and a Scrutiny function to ensure tenants are part of our Landlord Governance model.</p>

We also want to have clear engagement channels developed in the Strategy for certain groups of tenants such as:

- St Peters Court, Lowestoft our high-rise tower block
- Retired Living Schemes
- Leaseholders and Shared Owners

This will enable us to engage with residents on Fire and Building Safety to ensure we meet the duties set out in the Building Safety Act 2022 and Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022.

We also want to be able to engage with tenants and leaseholders in relation to Service Charges and other aspects that are important to them, such as Community facilities or grounds maintenance.

The picture below demonstrates a draft model to consult with tenants on as to how they want to engage with us as their landlord.

3.6 The model shows areas/channels of engagement as opposed to methods of engagement. As we want to work with tenants to co-produce the model and the strategy.



3.7	<p><b>Timescales</b></p> <p>These are the milestone dates for the new Tenant Engagement Strategy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• November 2022 - Focus groups with tenants</li> <li>• Early January 2023 – Draft Strategy</li> <li>• Late January / Early February - Consultation with tenants on the Draft Strategy</li> <li>• 21 February 2023 - Cabinet Briefing</li> <li>• 7 March 2023 - Cabinet</li> </ul> <p>Once the Tenant Engagement Strategy has been approved by ESC Cabinet, the new model will be implemented in 2023/24.</p>
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4 Reason/s for recommendation	
4.1	This report is intended to provide an overview of the current models of tenant engagement at ESC and the project currently being delivered to transform the engagement opportunities, which will ensure ESC is compliant with relevant legislation and guidance.

## Appendices

Appendices:	
<b>Appendix 1</b>	STAR Survey Questionnaire
<b>Appendix 2</b>	TPAS Review
<b>Appendix 3</b>	Babergh & Mid Suffolk Tenant Engagement Strategy
<b>Appendix 4</b>	Orwell Housing Association Customer Engagement Strategy 2021 – 2024

Background reference papers:		
Date	Type	Available From
N/A	Engagement Standards 2021	<a href="http://www.tpas.org.uk">www.tpas.org.uk</a>