



Housing Engagement Board

Quarterly Meeting

8 July 2024 – 2pm to 4pm

Agenda Pack

Housing Engagement Board Agenda

Date: **Monday, 8 July 2024**

Time: **2pm – 4pm**

Venue: **Zoom (Virtual Meeting)**

			Page no.
1.	Welcome and Apologies	Chair	1
2.	Quorum	Chair	1
3.	Minutes of Previous Meeting – 28 March 2024	Chair	1 – 9
3.1	Matters Arising from previous Meeting		10
	Item 4.3 – Resident Involvement Framework Review Update	Chair	10
4.	Standing Items		11
4.1	Forward Plan	Julie Fletcher	11 – 13
4.2	Resident Involvement Framework Restructure	Dave Armitage	14 – 29
4.3	Estate Inspections Report	Bronwen Taylor	30 – 35
5.	New Matters		36
5.1	Contracts Review Panel	Dave Armitage	36 – 39
5.2	Policy and Procedure Panel	Dave Armitage	40 – 43
5.3	Tenant Satisfaction Measures and Key Performance Indicators Review Panel	Dave Armitage	44 – 47
5.4	Mutual Exchange Policy – Monitoring Report	Julie Fletcher	48 – 52
5.5	Communications Charter	Uzma Ali	53 – 62
5.6	Council Stock Condition Survey	Eddie Spicer	63
6.	Any Other Business	All	64
7.	Proposed Meeting Dates for 2024 / 2025	Chair	64
8.	Closing	Chair	64

1. Welcome and Apologies

The Chair will welcome all present and apologies will be noted.

2. Quorum

A quorum shall consist of 50% of members.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting – 28 March 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 March 2024 are included for approval.

Housing Engagement Board
Minutes of the Quarterly Meeting
held on Thursday, 28 March 2024
from 2pm to 4pm via Zoom

- Attendees:** Cllr John Batchelor – Chair
Peter Campbell (SCDC – Head of Housing)
Dave Kelleway – Vice Chair
Jim Watson
Les Rolfe
Margaret Wilson
Oana Sutherland
- By Invitation:** Julie Fletcher (SCDC – Service Manager – Housing Strategy)
Geoff Clark (SCDC – Services Manager – Tenancy and Estates)
Eddie Spicer (SCDC – Service Manager – Housing Assets)
Dave Armitage (SCDC – Resident Involvement Team Leader)
Bronwen Taylor (SCDC – Resident Involvement Officer) – Minute taker
Gina Manderson (SCDC – Resident Involvement Communications Officer) –
Admin Support
- Apologies:** Cllr Mark Howell (absent – no apology received)
Cllr Jose Hales (absent – no apology received)
Bob Buss (absent – no apology received)

1. Welcome and Apologies

The Vice-Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting at 2.13pm as the Chair was having issues logging into the meeting.

2. Quorum

The meeting was quorate.

3. Minutes of previous meeting – 14 December 2023

The Chair referred to the minutes of the meeting held on 14 December 2023.

Margaret Wilson referred to the Item 5.3 – Grounds Maintenance Contract under 3.1 – Matters Arising from previous Meeting and Item 5.1 – Homelessness Review under New Matters in the minutes from 14 December 2023, as follows:

3.1 – Matters Arising from previous minutes – Item 5.3 – Grounds Maintenance Contract

Margaret Wilson asked if the Grounds Maintenance Contract had been finalised and what amendments had been made.

Geoff Clark said that it had not been finalised however a project group would be meeting regularly to discuss the contract and bring forward alterations and improvements as they saw fit. He added that towards the end of last year they had met to discuss the service standards and that the meeting scheduled for February 2024 had been cancelled due to clashing with another meeting, however, he would be setting up another meeting.

Margaret Wilson said that as this contract had been awarded six months ago, why had it not been finalised.

Geoff Clark said that the contract had been finalised, however, the project group were working through the service standards to see if there were any services that we wanted SP Landscapes to focus on or anything that we wanted them to change, for example frequency of grass cuts. He added that the contract was in place until October 2026.

Dave Kelleway said that he understood that adding extra grass cuts would increase the costs, however, often on estate inspections ad-hoc quotes were requested for extra work to be done which added more costs. He referred to an overgrown shrub bed where he lives and said that although SP Landscapes sometimes trimmed the bushes, the brambles were so overgrown, they were over the grass, nearby flower beds and the pathway.

Geoff Clark said there were 12 grass cuts and that if more services were added to the contract, it would cost more money. He added that the project group would be looking at bringing in more efficiencies.

Cllr Batchelor joined the meeting and resumed as the Chair.

Margaret Wilson said that when the contract was being discussed and negotiated, tenants were not invited to be a part of this and when they asked why they were not

invited, they were told that it had already been awarded. She added that it did not seem logical to award a contract before looking at what services were provided.

Geoff Clark said that the contract was awarded based on the quality and value of work and SP Landscapes were by far the cheapest. He added that if we had gone with another contractor, it would have cost more for them to deliver the same services.

5 – New Matters – Item 5.1 – Homelessness Review

Margaret Wilson referred to the second bullet point, “Applicants may approach us when they were threatened with homelessness, ...”, on page seven of the previous minutes and said that she knew of private tenants who were being evicted due to the house they were renting being sold and they have been told that they were not high priority and the Council would not be helping them until they got the eviction notice to go to court. She said that this did not seem to correspond with what the document said and to work with them at the prevent stage. She said that they were on the Home-link system as they live in South Cambridgeshire and had applied for housing but had only been given priority and not high priority.

Julie Fletcher said that she assumed that they would be in discussions with the Housing Options and Homelessness Team in terms of the advice, and that it was not purely based on their application. She said it would depend on their circumstances which we were not privy to, however, we do work towards a prevention and relief stage, but there may be reasons that were not apparent in terms of that current situation. She suggested taking this issue offline and to look at it in more detail.

Margaret Wilson referred to the word “voids” and said that it had previously been agreed not to use this word to describe empty homes.

The minutes were approved by the board as a true reflection of the meeting.

3.1 Matters Arising from previous Meeting – 14 December 2023

The matter arising from the previous meeting is below.

Item 6.1 – Accounts in Communal Halls

Geoff Clark advised that he had shared additional information with Margaret Wilson and had offered for her to have a conversation with colleagues in Accounts.

Margaret Wilson said that these were to be published in every hall so that all tenants could see the accounts and how their money was spent.

4. Standing Items

4.1 Repairs Performance Group

Eddie Spicer advised that due to the new framework, the group had been disbanded and the monthly meetings had stopped from the beginning of this year therefore there was no update.

4.2 Forward Plan 2023 / 2024 and 2024 / 2025

Julie Fletcher referred to the Forward Plan included in the pack and said that this document was for everyone to add suggestions on items that they wanted to be presented to the Housing Engagement Board (HEB). She went through the items planned for the coming months, as follows:

- March 2024 – Tenant Satisfaction Survey – the results were presented by M.E.L Research the day before.
- June 2024 – Communications Standard – Uzma Ali has arranged a meeting with the tenant volunteers to discuss this item.
- June 2024 – Mutual Exchange Policy – to give a follow up report six months after implementation. A report would be sent to the board.
- June 2024 – Resident Involvement Framework – to approve the updated document following the changes agreed to in the framework and to provide a document of activities for Resident Involvement.
- June 2024 – Council Stock Condition Survey – to provide an overview report on the results of the survey.
- TBC – Anti-Social Behaviour Policy and Assignment and Succession Policy – these would be looked at once the Policy and Procedure Panel was established.
- TBC – Together with Tenants Charter – Jennifer Perry had been keen to look at this as a type of accreditation which Dave Armitage would now look into.

The Chair asked about the findings of the Empty Property Re-let Disposal and Standards project and asked if the date of October 2023 was correct.

Eddie Spicer said that they were still busy collating the information and that the standards were in the process of being put together. He added that the date should read October 2024.

The Chair said that a lot of items were going to be presented at the June 2024 meeting.

Julie Fletcher said that there were a lot of items and as we would be working with tenant representatives on these documents, there would be no surprises when they were presented to the HEB for sign off. She added that she was not sure if the Council Stock Condition Survey report would be ready in June 2024.

Eddie Spicer said that the overview report of the survey would be ready, however, the finer details and analysis of what was being planned for the future would be an ongoing project.

Dave Kelleway said that he was concerned that the Empty Property Re-let Disposal and Standards project had been going on for a long time. He added that tenants had a number of concerns about relets in terms of the amount of wastage, the ability to recycle and the lack of coordination with other authorities. He added that he felt that there should be some tenant input.

Eddie Spicer said that were busy collating the background data on the Empty Property Re-let Disposal and Standards project.

Geoff Clark said that if the floor coverings were in a good condition when properties became empty, they tried to re-use them instead of removing them.

4.3 Resident Involvement Framework Review Update

Dave Armitage advised that meetings to discuss and finalise the structure of the new framework were held with officers and tenant representatives on 5 February 2024 and 6 March 2024. He said the Housing Performance Panel had held its final meeting on 14 March 2024 as it would be replaced by the new structure made up of the following three panels:

- Contracts Review Panel
- TSM and KPI Review Panel
- Policy and Procedure Panel

Dave Armitage said the panels would feed into the HEB who would then form Task and Finish Scrutiny Groups on issues they felt were necessary. He said each panel would be Chaired by existing tenant representatives and we had a volunteer to Chair for each panel and most of the tenant volunteers had advised which panel they would like to be a part of. He added that each panel was not exclusive and tenant representatives could join any panel that they had an interest in. He said this structure had been agreed by tenant representatives and senior management within Housing. He added that Eddie Spicer had

agreed to send out information to the Contract Review Panel as and when it was needed for their meetings.

Dave Armitage said the Resident Involvement team would look at suitable meeting dates for each panel in order to feed into the HEB in a timely manner and that some topics would have more regular meetings than others. He added that we were looking at other activities to get tenant involvement and suggestions were using comms, having armchair readers on specific policies who did not want to join a panel but wanted a more flexible interaction, area action days in areas with high volumes of litter or fly tipping, and getting out to the estates with tenant volunteers to make ourselves more visible.

Dave Armitage said this had been agreed to in principal and that there may be some changes as we went along. He added that this would be implemented from 1 April 2024 when the new legislation came into effect and the Terms of Reference documents for each panel would be presented at the next HEB meeting for approval. He said that he would send the notes from the last meeting to the Chair.

The Chair asked to whom the sub-groups would report.

Dave Armitage said the Chair of each panel would report to the HEB at the quarterly meetings.

Julie Fletcher said the new structure would be in place by the June 2024 meeting and that the framework document would be presented at the meeting for approval by either the HEB Chair or by Cabinet. She added that the agenda would be slightly different.

Geoff Clark asked if future HEB meetings would be in person or over zoom.

Margaret Wilson asked to have one meeting in person and suggested December 2024.

Julie Fletcher said that we would also be looking at the time the meeting was held as some councillors were unable to make the afternoon meetings.

Dave Kelleway suggested asking the councillors if the time was a problem or if they were not interested in attending.

Margaret Wilson said that she believed that they worked full time and were unable to attend the meetings.

Peter Campbell said that Cllr Batchelor was the Chair as he was the portfolio holder, however the other two councillors were appointed by their respective party leaders which was an annual appointment, and therefore the new appointments would need to be done through Councillors Bridget Smith and Heather Williams. He asked Dave Armitage to draft a briefing note for them.

Les Rolfe said to ask the party leaders to nominate people who could regularly attend the meetings.

Action: Dave Armitage

5. New Matters

5.1 Tenant Satisfaction Survey

Julie Fletcher said that M.E.L Research had presented the findings of the recent Tenant Satisfaction Survey the day before and she advised that she had sent the full report and recording to all tenant representatives earlier. She reported that the overall feedback was positive but there were a few areas that we needed to concentrate on, for example, complaints. She said that a lot of work had been done internally in terms of complaints over the past few months and our complaints champion was meeting regularly with service managers to go over complaints and to make sure that we were responding to them in terms of time scales, etcetera.

Margaret Wilson asked how SCDC measured complaints and if it was through the official complaints system or if it was something else.

Julie Fletcher advised that they were measured through the official route. She said there were different stages of complaints and different ways of complaining, for example, in person. She added that we need to make sure we point people in the right direction and encourage them to complain if they were not happy.

5.2 Tpas Webinar – Housing Ombudsman – Annual Complaints Review

The Chair referred to the report from Eleni Koutso (HPP member) who attended the Tpas Webinar – Housing Ombudsman – Annual Complaints Review (online) on 7 February 2024 for noting and said it was a good report.

5.3 HQN Residents Network Annual Conference

The Chair referred to the reports from Oana Sutherland and Eleni Koutso (HPP member) who attended the HQN Residents Network Annual Conference (online) on 20 February 2024 for noting and said they were good reports.

Oana Sutherland said that she was impressed with the amount of work that was being done in the background.

6. Any Other Business

None

7. Proposed Meeting Dates for 2024 / 2025

The Chair referred to the proposed meeting dates for 2024 / 2025 as follows:

- 27 June 2024 (Zoom / venue to be confirmed)
- 26 September 2024 (Zoom / venue to be confirmed)
- 12 December 2024 (Zoom / venue to be confirmed)
- 27 March 2025 (Zoom / venue to be confirmed)

The Chair said that he would be on leave for the June 2024 meeting and asked the Vice Chair to chair the meeting in his absence.

Dave Kelleway said he would chair the meeting, however, he may be away for the September 2024 meeting.

The Chair confirmed that the new structure would be in place from the June 2024 meeting.

8. Closing

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting ended at 2.55pm.

3.1 Matters Arising from previous Meeting – 28 March 2024

Item 4.3 – Resident Involvement Framework Review Update

Actions:

- 1.) Dave Armitage to send the notes from the framework meetings to Cllr Batchelor.
- 2.) Dave Armitage to draft a briefing note on the new structure for Cllr Batchelor to send to Cllrs Bridget Smith and Heather Williams.

Report back:

- 1.) Dave Armitage emailed the notes from the framework meetings to Cllr Batchelor on 29 April 2024.
- 2.) Dave Armitage to send the approved Resident Involvement Strategy document to Cllr Batchelor after this meeting.

For noting.

4. Standing Items

4.1 Forward Plan

Julie Fletcher to provide an update on the Forward Plan which is included in the pack.

Housing Engagement Board – Forward Plan – 2024 / 2025

Date of Meeting	Topic	Description	Lead Officer	Decision Route
March 2024 Defer until June 2024	Communications Standard	To consider the Communications Standard and make recommendations following wider tenant involvement	Julie Fletcher	Housing Engagement Board / Lead Member for Housing
June 2024	Mutual Exchange Policy	Monitoring report of mutual exchange policy – 6 months following implementation	Julie Fletcher	For Information
June 2024 [new]	Resident Involvement Framework	Approve updated document following changes agreed to the framework	Dave Armitage	Housing Engagement Board / Lead Member for Housing
June 2024	Council Stock Condition Survey	Outcome of the Stock Condition Survey	Eddie Spicer	For Information
January 2024 Carried forward The mobilisation of the Mears Contract has taken more time than expected. Currently working on some preliminary works around this but will not be progressing with residents until at least October 2024.	Empty Property Re-let Disposal and Standards	Consider findings and recommendations following the outcome of the project working group – Empty Property Re-let Disposal and Standards. Currently undertaking some internal process mapping to feed into the project working group	Eddie Spicer	Housing Engagement Board
TBC	Together with Tenants Charter	Review what actions are required to achieve the Together with Tenants Charter	Resident Involvement Team Leader	Cabinet
TBC [new]	Anti-social behaviour Policy	To approve the ASB policy following tenant consultation	Julie Fletcher	Cabinet

Date of Meeting	Topic	Description	Lead Officer	Decision Route
December 2023 TBC – as part of programming of Policy Panel	Assignment and Succession Policy	Linked policy / procedure to Tenancy Policy	Julie Fletcher	Housing Engagement Board / Lead Member for Housing

4.2 Resident Involvement Framework Restructure

Dave Armitage to present the Resident Involvement Framework Strategy, which is included in the pack.



Resident Involvement Strategy

for Tenants and Leaseholders of
South Cambridgeshire District Council
2024 – 2027



**Tenant
Involvement**

South Cambridgeshire
District Council



Contents

Introduction	3
Vision and Values	4
Objectives	4
Regulatory Requirements	5
Consumer Standards	6
Our approach.....	7
Tenant Engagement Framework	8
New Tenant Engagement Framework	9
The Housing Engagement Board (HEB).....	9
Panels.....	10
Task and Finish Scrutiny Group.....	10
Tenant Estate Inspections	11
Tenant Communication.....	12
Tenant Programmes	14
Accountability.....	14
Resources.....	15



Introduction



The purpose of the Council's Resident Involvement Strategy is to set out the Council's commitment to provide opportunities for those tenants (including leaseholders) living in Council homes to fully participate in the development and improvement of their housing service.



This Strategy sets out a new framework that provides the means and methods for tenants to have meaningful engagement. It encourages more tenants to be engaged through better communications and providing a variety of opportunities that allow tenants to participate either a little or a lot.



The outcome of implementing this Strategy will be a better informed, empowered tenant community. It promotes a relationship of trust and cooperation between South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC) and their tenants.



Vision and Values

The Resident Involvement Strategy supports a partnership between SCDC and our tenants. It provides tenants meaningful engagement, influence and scrutiny in housing services decisions. Tenants have a key role in helping SCDC deliver a responsive housing service that reflects SCDC's business plan – to deliver a caring, affordable and environmentally responsible housing service for current and future tenants.

SCDC Corporate Values:

- Ambitious
- Collaborative
- Compassionate
- Accountable



Objectives

The Resident Involvement Objectives reflect the need to provide the means and methods of delivering effective, meaningful and collaborative tenant engagement. It provides tenants with the opportunity to influence and scrutinise the housing service. This involvement should result in tenants and SCDC working together to deliver an exceptional housing service.

1. Develop a collaborative tenant engagement programme between SCDC, our tenants and leaseholders.
2. Establish and support a tenant engagement framework that delivers tenant involvement, influence, and scrutiny opportunities. Support the new framework by recruiting and building the skills and capacity of involved tenants.
3. Create multiple communication channels between SCDC and their tenants.
4. Promote environmental engagement, community cohesion, resident wellbeing and reduce stigma associated with social housing.
5. Tenant involvement is planned, resourced, monitored and reviewed regularly with tenants.



Regulatory Requirements

The Resident Involvement Strategy has been developed in accordance with the current regulatory requirements set out in the Social Housing Regulations Act 2023 and specifically within the Consumer Standards published in 2024, which are governed by The Regulator of Social Housing.

The Regulator of Social Housing regulates registered providers of social housing to promote a viable, efficient and well-governed social housing sector able to deliver homes that meet a range of needs. Regulations cover economic and consumer standards.

The economic standards do not apply to local authorities because these are regulated by central government.

The consumer standard applies to both local authorities and registered providers of social housing, such as housing associations. The aim of the consumer standard is to support the provision of social housing, to ensure that it is well-managed and of appropriate quality.





Consumer Standards

The four consumer standards are:

Safety and Quality Standard

Which requires landlords to provide safe and good quality homes and landlord services to tenants.

Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard

Which requires landlords to be open with tenants and treat them with fairness and respect so that tenants can access services, raise complaints, when necessary, influence decision making and hold their landlord to account. This standard incorporates Tenant Satisfaction Measure requirements.

Tenancy Standard

Which sets requirements for the fair allocation and letting of homes and for how those tenancies are managed and ended by landlords.

Neighbourhood and Community Standard

Which requires landlords to engage with other relevant parties so that tenants can live in safe and well-maintained neighbourhoods and feel safe in their homes.



Our approach

The Resident Involvement Strategy sets out the Council's approach to giving tenants a greater voice and influence in the services they deliver.

This Strategy sets out how the Council will:



- Provide the methods and means for tenants to engage, influence and scrutinise housing decisions.



- Make it easy for tenants to access information and share their views by creating user friendly communication channels.



- Promote higher levels of engagement so that more people become involved tenants and that the interests of the whole community are represented.



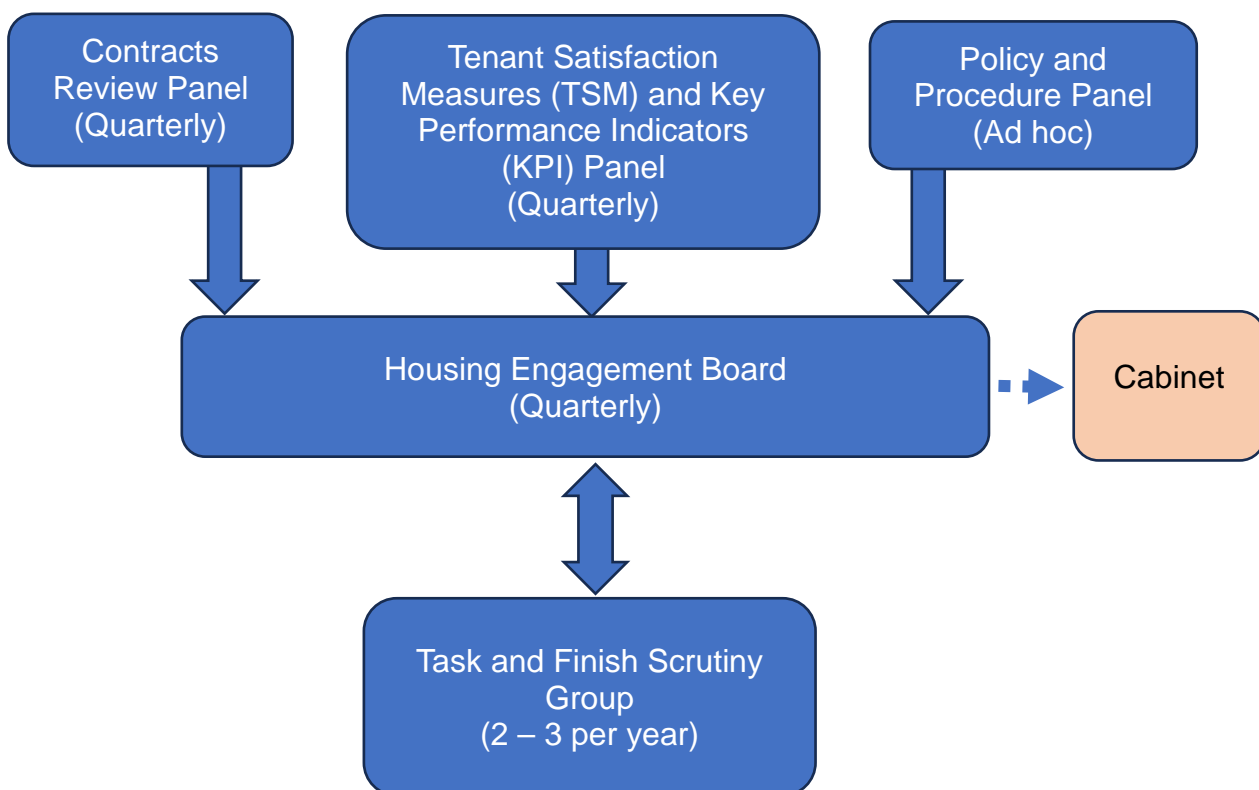
Tenant Engagement Framework

The Council conducted a review in 2023 / 2024 in consultation with tenant representatives regarding the structure of how SCDC engage with tenants, takes on their views in decision making, shapes service delivery, reviews current and new contracts, as well as scrutinises SCDC services.

The Resident Involvement Framework includes a strategic Housing Engagement Board (HEB) and three panels that report directly into the Board.

The HEB will be able to create task and finish groups to carry out scrutiny projects on SCDC services and also feed into the decision-making process when making decisions relating to the Housing Service.

All subgroup panels will be non-exclusive, and tenants can be a member of as many or as little as they choose.



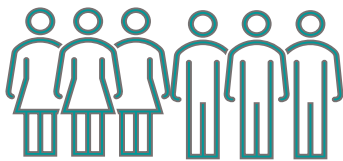


New Tenant Engagement Framework

The Tenant Engagement Framework provides a means for tenants, council members and housing colleagues to have meaningful engagement. It creates formal methods to engage, inform, discuss, scrutinise and debate issues that impact on tenants. The Tenant Engagement Framework offers a wider range of opportunities. Tenant engagement also includes informal engagement through customer contact and social media. We will look to develop opportunities for tenants / leaseholders to become involved at a level where they feel comfortable, this may include surveys or armchair reviews. Delivering tenant engagement requires a variety of communication channels that makes it easier for tenants to access information in a timely manner. Digital communication channels are a key method of communication in line with the Council's overall communication strategy for its residents.

The Housing Engagement Board (HEB)

The Housing Engagement Board (HEB) consists of three district councillors, including the Lead Member for Housing, five elected tenant representatives and one elected leaseholder representative, and the Head of Housing. The resident involvement team will provide secretariat support. Tenant representative board members are entitled to a remuneration of up to £400 a year and are expected to meet the criteria set within the terms of reference for the Board, as well as the Code of Conduct for all tenant representatives. Elections to the Board are held every four years. The HEB meet four times a year.



5 tenants and
1 leaseholder



3 councillors



Head of Housing

It provides a forum to consult and scrutinise on new policy or major revisions to policy; to monitor performance on key areas; to receive presentations on topics of interest, request more in depth work on an area, for example through a task and finish group; and receive feedback in the form of minutes from forums and other working groups (see overleaf).

It provides a platform to engage with and consult with tenant and leaseholder representatives at a strategic level, and for those views to feed into the decision-making process in line with the



Council's constitution by the Head of Housing and the Lead Member for Housing or recommendation to Cabinet.

Panels

Any tenant volunteer can participate in the Panels. The Panels will be made up of both tenant representatives and appropriate Officers. Each Panel will have a tenant representative acting as Chair, who will feedback into the Housing Engagement Board at its quarterly meetings. Terms of Reference will be agreed for each Panel and all tenant representatives must comply with the Code of Conduct.

All members of the Panels will be entitled to claim up to £400 per year in line with the HEB subject to the terms of reference.

➤ **Contracts Review Panel**

To monitor current contracts and address areas of concern, as well as participating in the award of new contracts.

➤ **Tenant Satisfaction Measures and Key Performance Indicators Panel**

To monitor the new Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM), alongside existing Key Performance Indicators (KPI). Areas of concern to be reported to HEB.

➤ **Policy and Procedure Panel**

To input into housing policy development and review existing policies, prior to consideration by HEB.

Task and Finish Scrutiny Group

Task and Finish Scrutiny Groups will be tenant-led, giving tenant representatives / volunteers the opportunity to undertake a 'deep dive' on a particular topic. The topic will be identified by the Housing Engagement Board for further scrutiny, with the outcome and recommendations reported back to the HEB.

It is anticipated that between 2 and 3 topics will be scrutinised per year.





Tenant Estate Inspections

Tenant Estate Inspections are done in conjunction with housing officers, trained tenant inspectors and local tenants. The inspections run from April until October. Estate inspections are promoted using social media, newsletters and by the housing officers. Estate inspections are a valuable activity in building relationships with the local community, gaining their feedback and to monitor the condition of estates.








Tenant Communication


A successful tenant involvement programme requires good communication between the Council and their tenants. Good communication relies on understanding tenants' priorities, staff engagement, multiple communication channels and monitoring. The benefit to the tenants and the Council is being able to build a productive, positive working relationship that delivers a better, value for money housing service.


The tenant communications' objective is to enable tenants to:


-  • Have access to the latest news, events and meetings
-  • Easily find information regarding housing services
-  • Share their views and be consulted on tenant issues


To achieve these objectives, the Council uses multiple communication channels:

 **Tenant and leaseholder newsletter** – This is available online, published every month.

 **Sheltered Housing newsletter** – This is a dedicated newsletter for our sheltered housing tenants and leaseholders which is printed and delivered to every sheltered housing property every month.

 **Tenant satisfaction survey** – SCDC will undertake an annual tenant satisfaction survey and publish the findings on its website, alongside other performance measures.

 **Website** – Our website has a housing section which is being developed further to include additional features to improve communications.

 **Meetings** – Meetings and groups provide valuable person to person contact with tenants. The opportunity to talk to someone about concerns, grievances or ideas is important to tenants.



Other forms of tenant contact are also being explored, such as after service surveys, on-line reporting of repairs and the ability to track repairs and the development of a customer portal.

Digital technology is key to increasing contact, provide information and to gain feedback. Digital tools that are available include:



One view portal to deliver personalised content



Social media to inform and gain feedback



E-newsletter to inform



Surveys and polls to respond to specific questions



Analytics to gauge response and popular content



The housing management system may provide other options including emailing or SMS messaging.



Tenant Programmes

Community Gardens is a new initiative to bring local tenants together to create outdoor space that will promote the Council's "Green to our Core" value. The Community Gardens initiative will not only help to improve the tenants' local environment, the Council's land, but will also bring tenants together socially which will help to tackle loneliness as well as promoting a healthy activity.

The resident involvement team works to promote tenant, community and individual wellbeing. The service is cross-cutting throughout the Council, promoting the work undertaken by the sustainable communities and the environmental teams that benefits our tenants.

Additional offers of wider tenant engagement will be offered in localities within the district led by tenant representatives and facilitated by the Resident Involvement Team.

Accountability

The resident involvement team provides an annual report to tenants and leaseholders regarding how the housing revenue account money is spent. There are numerous opportunities to provide more regular information to tenants.

This includes:



Regular updates on housing services and key performance indicators.



"You said, we did" – publish actions SCDC has taken in response to tenant requests, complaints or ideas.



Minutes of meetings – publish and promote outcome and actions from involved tenant meetings.



Resources

The Council supports a small team of resident involvement staff including:

- Resident Involvement Team Leader (full time permanent post) – covering policy and strategy and ensuring compliance with Consumer standards.
- Resident Involvement Officer (full time permanent post) – covering day to day resident involvement work such as supporting meetings, group activities, responding to requests.
- Housing Communications Officer (full time permanent post) – covering project work such as digital rollout and newsletters / promotional events.

It is important to allocate resources to ensure that resident involvement objectives are met.

1. Prioritise resident involvement activities to support the framework and communications. Set realistic targets.
2. Train, develop and support staff across the housing service, so they can identify and promote resident involvement opportunities.
3. Provide support and training for involved tenants and leaseholders so they can be effective in their roles.
4. Consistently deliver social media and newsletters content. Support staff to deliver digital engagement by providing training and mentoring.
5. Regularly review resident involvement outcomes to determine that activities are delivering objectives and offering value for money.

4.3 Estate Inspections Report

Summaries of the Estate Inspections held on 18 April and 23 May 2024 are included for noting.

The inspections which were scheduled for 25 April and 30 May 2024 were cancelled due to the weather and have been rescheduled to later in the year.

Estate Inspections – April and May 2024

Issues and Actions

Meldreth – 18 April 2024

Gables Close

Issue	Action Taken	Date Action Taken	Updates after 4 weeks	Date Authorised (if applicable)
Back garden – number 20 – over-grown and shrubs blocking access to the rear passageway.	None taken yet	-	-	-
Number 10 – litter in the side garden – shrubs overgrown and broken trellis.	None taken yet	-	-	-
Fence at number 3 being propped up by makeshift posts.	None taken yet	-	-	-
Gardening / building debris has been removed. I will still need to speak to them about the metal fences that were still there	Gardening / building debris has been removed. I will still need to speak to them about the metal fences that were still there	21 May 2024	-	-
Drain blocked near 64 Gables Close	Dave Armitage to attend to this issue	-	-	-
Alleyway blocked by wheelie bins from number 58	None taken yet	-	-	-
Large lavender bush at number 60	Included within SP quotation	09 May 2024	Quotation received from SP, with Debbie Barrett for authorisation	-
Large conifer to the side of 74 and 72.	Site Visit booked with SP 9 May 2024	09 May 2024	Quotation received from SP, with Debbie Barrett for authorisation	-
Trailer being kept in a position which would impede work by SP to the large conifer tree	Conversation with owner of the trailer, he can move it when the tree work is scheduled, he agreed the tree is causing a concern due to its size.	09 May 2024	Quotation received from SP, with Debbie Barrett for authorisation.	-

Issue	Action Taken	Date Action Taken	Updates after 4 weeks	Date Authorised (if applicable)
Jean Lawrence at number 24 enquired about removing a shrub to create new parking spaces because parking is an issue in the Close.	Emailed Sean Gentle who will visit to assess w / c 29 April 2024.	25 April 2024	need to ask Sean Gentle for an update	-
Electric charging point – possible location if we do create parking by removing this shrub	Awaiting updates from Sean Gentle	25 April 2024	need to ask Sean Gentle for an update	-
Chase SP tree work on large tree which has off shoots pushing up the pathway	Site Visit booked with SP 9 May 2024	09 May 2024	Quotation received from SP, with Debbie Barrett for authorisation	-
Courtyard edging between 7 – 17 overgrown shrubs and Ivy to be cleared.	Site Visit booked with SP 9 May 2024	09 May 2024	Quotation received from SP, with Debbie Barrett for authorisation	-

Bells Close

Issue	Action Taken	Date Action Taken	Updates after 4 weeks	Date Authorised (if applicable)
Passageway to the back from 15 Bell Close moss at the end of the path	Site Visit booked with SP 9 May 2024	09 May 2024	Quotation received from SP, with Debbie Barrett for authorisation	-
Overgrown shrubs to the back of 24 Bell Close and along the border of the car parking area and stream	Site Visit booked with SP 9 May 2024	09 May 2024	Quotation received from SP, with Debbie Barrett for authorisation	-
Numerous broken fence posts in the car park.	Repair ordered with Mears. Sean Gentle confirmed we are responsible.	-	-	-
Missing tree – black water pipe still visible but the tree has gone – any plans to replant	None taken yet	-	-	-
Slightly scruffy soon to be overgrown gardens at 30 and 31 Bell Close	Calling card left 1 May 2024	-	-	-
Query from number 38 – fence in very poor condition.	None taken yet	-	-	-
No fence to the front of number 39 Bell Close	None taken yet	-	-	-
Tree outside 7 Bell Close – very tall and too close telephone wires.	Site Visit booked with SP 9 May 2024	09 May 2024	Quotation received from SP, with Debbie Barrett for authorisation	-
Possible abandoned car – No MOT and SORN	None taken yet	-	-	-
Uneven car parking area, large puddles.	None taken yet	-	-	-
Ivy and overgrown shrubs covering fencing surrounding car parking spaces.	Site Visit booked with SP 9 May 2024	-	Quotation received from SP, with Debbie Barrett for authorisation	-

Pampisford – 23 May 2024

Glebe Crescent

Issue	Action Taken	Date Action Taken	Updates after 4 weeks	Date Authorised (if applicable)
Shrub bed at front of car park needs tlc	SP contacted	30 May 2024	Quote received from SP 10 June 2024	10 June 2024
Grass to side of No.2 not cut. Why?	SP contacted for response	30 May 2024	Response received 10 June 2024	N / A

Stapleford – 23 May 2024

Coxs Close

Issue	Action Taken	Date Action Taken	Updates after 4 weeks	Date Authorised (if applicable)
Parcel of land behind No.27 needs cutting. Not been cut with the rest.	SP contacted	30 May 2024	Quote received from SP 10 June 2024	10 June 2024
Front / corner house (no.23). Front garden overgrown	Letter to 23 asking them to cut the grass	31 May 2024	Letter sent 5 June 2024	N / A
Path behind 27 – 31 full of weeds.	SP contacted for quote	30 May 2024	Quote received from SP 10 June 2024	10 June 2024
28 front garden overgrown (licensee). 29 is owner / occupier.	Letter to 28 asking them to cut the grass	31 May 2024	Letter sent 5 June 2024	N / A
Tree outside No.7 needs a trim. Branches are low at the pathway.	SP contacted for quote	30 May 2024	Quote received from SP 10 June 2024	10 June 2024
2 large potholes and 1 small pothole in car parking area	Email and photos sent to Operations team	30 May 2024	-	-
Kia Cee'd car abandoned?	None taken yet	-	-	-

Gradings at Inspections

Date of Inspection	Village	Street / Area	Litter	Weeds	Regular Grass Cutting	Roughly Cut Grass	Communal Area Shrubs	Tenant's Gardens	Electric Vehicle Charging Point
18 April 2024	Meldreth	Gables Close	2	3	3	N / A	2	3	Space to the side of 44 when we remove the bush
18 April 2024	Meldreth	Bell Close	4	4	3	N / A	2	3	Lay by opposite the junction to Gables Close
23 May 2024	Pampisford	Glebe Crescent	4	3	4	N / A	3	3	None
23 May 2024	Stapleford	Coxs Close	4	3	4	N / A	4	3	None
23 May 2024	Stapleford	The Chestnuts	4	3	4	N / A	N / A	4	None

5. New Matters

5.1 Contracts Review Panel

Dave Armitage to present the Terms of Reference document, which is included in the pack, for approval.

South Cambridgeshire District Council

Contracts Review Panel

Terms of Reference

Please note: The term “Tenant” is used throughout this report as a generic term and includes both renters and leaseholders.

Abbreviations:

SCDC – South Cambridgeshire District Council

HS – Housing Services

HEB – Housing Engagement Board

HSMT – Housing Services Management Team

The Panel – Contracts Review Panel

1. Aim

The panel works to improve housing services for all SCDC tenants by reviewing, assessing and challenging the performance of SCDC’s housing contractors. See attached Annexure A for list of housings contractors.

2. Objectives of the Panel are to Review:

- Tenants’ experience of the service
- Housings Contractors’ performance against contractual commitments
- Value for money
- Identifying areas for improvement

3. The Role of the Panel

The role of the panel is to look at SCDC’s housing contractors’ performance from the tenant perspective and to advise on performance so that it delivers tenants’ priorities, value for money and meets tenants’ expectations.

3.1 The panel will review performance and other data and reports which reflect the requirements on the council’s housing contractors.

3.2 The panel’s role is to monitor the performance of SCDC’s housing contractors in an objective way and to be able to see beyond their own experiences.

3.3 The panel will advise on the data they require for assurance that services are meeting expectations. The panel will identify underperformance and opportunities for SCDC’s

housing contractors to improve.

- 3.4 The panel will work collaboratively as a team and will constructively challenge and probe areas where improvements could be made. They may ask to review policies, procedures or processes that may improve outcomes.
- 3.5 Where areas of performance need a more in-depth review, the panel will suggest areas of focus and methods. For example, surveys, focus groups, task and finish groups and staff will gather the information from other tenant volunteers, and report the outcomes and recommendations to the HEB to discuss and approve.

4. Membership

- 4.1 The panel will be open to any tenant who volunteers and there is no limit to the number of tenants who are able to sit on the panel, although there should be a minimum of two tenants attending.
- 4.2 Members will volunteer to join the panel.
- 4.3 The relevant SCDC officers will attend all panel meetings.
- 4.4 The panel aims to achieve a balance of retaining skills and experience for consistency whilst encouraging new membership.

5. Chairing Meetings

- 5.1 The Chair will initially be a tenant who has volunteered and will in future be appointed annually at the first meeting of the financial year by the panel.
- 5.2 The Chair will liaise with officers and relevant others as necessary to plan for forthcoming meetings.
- 5.3 The Chair will provide a report / meeting notes to be included in the HEB Quarterly agenda pack and will be present at these meeting to report back if required.

6. Quorum

- 6.1 A quorum will be a minimum of two tenant representatives.

7. Frequency of Panel Meetings

- 7.1 The panel will normally meet quarterly.
- 7.2 To meet the demands of projects and reviews, the frequency of meetings may be increased.

8. Code of Conduct

- 8.1 Panel members will be required to sign a Code of Conduct, they will follow SCDC policy on GDPR.

9. How the Panel is Supported

- 9.1 Administrative support for the panel will be provided by the Resident Involvement Team.

10. Access to Information

- 10.1 The panel will be provided with relevant performance data relating to the contract that they wish to review, on a quarterly basis, as a minimum.
- 10.2 The panel will be enabled to request reports and information from contractors to carry out its activities.
- 10.3 All requests for information and evidence must be made via the Resident Involvement Team.

11. Accountability

- 11.1 The panel will ensure that reports and recommendations made by the group focus on improving SCDC's housing contractors' performance and services to tenants.

12. Reviewing the Terms of Reference

These Terms of Reference were approved by John Batchelor, Lead Member for Housing, and Peter Campbell Head, of Housing for SCDC, and ratified at a meeting of the HEB held on 27 June 2024.

Approved on: _____ **2024**

Next review: **First meeting after each financial year**

5.2 Policy and Procedure Panel

Dave Armitage to present the Terms of Reference document, which is included in the pack, for approval.

South Cambridgeshire District Council

Policy and Procedure Panel

Terms of Reference

Please note: The term “Tenant” is used throughout this report as a generic term and includes both renters and leaseholders.

Abbreviations:

SCDC – South Cambridgeshire District Council

HS – Housing Services

HEB – Housing Engagement Board

HSMT – Housing Services Management Team

The Panel – Policy and Procedure Panel

1. Aim

The panel works to improve housing services for all SCDC tenants by reviewing, assessing and updating the policies and procedures of SCDC.

2. The Role of the Panel

2.1 The panel will work collaboratively as a team to identify policies that need reviewing and oversee a programme for review.

The programme for review will be prioritised according to impact and urgency. In agreeing the programme, the following should be taken into account:

- Legislative changes and requirements by the Social Housing Regulator
- Health and safety implications
- Gaps in policy
- Operational issues, including trends in complaints, low satisfaction levels, points of clarification, etcetera
- Areas of concern raised by tenant representatives
- Areas of concern raised by councillors
- Date of last review

- 2.2 The panel will work together with the Policy Officer to help develop, amend / update policies in line with current legislation before policies are approved through the council's decision-making process.
- 2.3 The panel will constructively challenge and probe areas where improvements could be made.

3. Membership

- 3.1 Tenant representation is non-exclusive, with tenants able to attend panel meetings dependent on their interest to a particular policy. There is no limit on the number of tenants who are able to sit on the panel, although there should be a minimum of two tenants attending. There will also be opportunities for tenants to participate through other routes such as armchair reviews.
- 3.2 The Housing Policy Officer, or a substitute, will attend all panel meetings, with other officers in attendance as appropriate dependent on the subject matter.
- 3.3 The panel aims to achieve a balance of retaining skills and experience for consistency whilst encouraging new membership.

4. Chairing Meetings

- 4.1 The chair will be a tenant and appointed annually at the beginning of the financial year
- 4.2 The Chair will liaise with officers and relevant others as necessary to plan for forthcoming meetings.
- 4.3 The Chair will provide a report / meeting notes to be included in the HEB Quarterly agenda pack and will be present at these meeting to report back if required.

5. Quorum

- 5.1 A quorum will be a minimum of two tenant representatives.

6. Frequency of Panel Meetings

- 6.1 The panel will meet as and when policies need reviewing, and when meetings are called for.
- 6.2 To meet the demands of reviews, the frequency of meetings may be increased.

7. Code of Conduct

- 7.1 Panel members will be required to sign a Code of Conduct, they will follow SCDC policy on GDPR.

8. How the Panel is Supported

8.1 Administrative support for the panel will be provided by the Resident Involvement Team.

9. Access to Information

9.1 All requests for information and evidence must be made via the Resident Involvement Team.

10. Accountability

10.1 The panel will ensure that recommendations to policies made by the group focus on improving SCDC HS performance and services to tenants.

11. Reviewing the Terms of Reference

These Terms of Reference were approved by John Batchelor, Lead Member for Housing, and Peter Campbell Head, of Housing for SCDC, and ratified at a meeting of the HEB held on 27 June 2024.

Approved on: **27 June 2024**

Next review: **First meeting after each financial year**

5.3 Tenant Satisfaction Measures and Key Performance Indicators Review Panel

Dave Armitage to present the Terms of Reference document, which is included in the pack, for approval.

South Cambridgeshire District Council

Tenant Satisfaction Measures and Key Performance Indicators Panel

Terms of Reference

Please note: The term “Tenant” is used throughout this report as a generic term and includes both renters and leaseholders.

Abbreviations:

SCDC – South Cambridgeshire District Council

HS – Housing Services

HEB – Housing Engagement Board

HSMT – Housing Services Management Team

The Panel – Tenant Satisfaction Measures and Key Performance Indicators Panel

1. Aim

The panel works to improve housing services for all SCDC tenants by reviewing, assessing and challenging the performance of SCDC.

2. Objectives of the Panel are to Review:

- Tenants’ experience of the service
- Landlord performance
- Cost of the service, value for money
- Identifying areas for improvement

3. The Role of the Panel

The role of the panel is to look at performance from the tenant perspective and to advise on performance so that it delivers tenants’ priorities, value for money and meets tenants’ expectations.

- 3.1 The panel will review performance and other data and reports which the council collects.
- 3.2 The panel’s role is to monitor the performance of SCDC Housing Services in an objective way and to be able to see beyond their own experiences.
- 3.3 The panel will advise on the data they require for assurance that services are meeting expectations. The panel will identify underperformance and opportunities for SCDC to improve.
- 3.4 The panel will work collaboratively as a team and will constructively challenge and probe

areas where improvements could be made. They may ask staff to review policies, procedures or processes that improve outcome.

- 3.5 Where areas of performance need a more in-depth review, the panel will suggest areas of focus and methods. For example, surveys, focus groups, task and finish groups and staff will gather the information from other tenant volunteers, and report the outcomes and recommendations to the HEB to discuss and approve.

4. Membership

- 4.1 The panel will be open to any tenant who volunteers and there is no limit to the number of tenant who are able to sit on the panel, although there should be a minimum of two tenants attending.
- 4.2 Members will volunteer to join the panel.
- 4.3 The relevant SCDC officers will attend all panel meetings.
- 4.4 The panel aims to achieve a balance of retaining skills and experience for consistency whilst encouraging new membership.

5. Chairing Meetings

- 5.1 The Chair will initially be a tenant who has volunteered and will in future be appointed annually at the first meeting of the financial year by the panel.
- 5.2 The Chair will liaise with officers and relevant others as necessary to plan for forthcoming meetings.
- 5.3 The Chair will provide a report / meeting notes to be included in the HEB Quarterly agenda pack and will be present at these meetings to report back if required.

6. Quorum

- 6.1 A quorum will be a minimum of two tenant representatives.

7. Frequency of Panel Meetings

- 7.1 The panel will normally meet quarterly.
- 7.2 To meet the demands of projects and reviews, the frequency of meetings may be increased.

8. Code of Conduct

- 8.1 Panel members will be required to sign a Code of Conduct, they will follow SCDC policy on GDPR.

9. How the Panel is Supported

9.1 Administrative support for the panel will be provided by the Resident Involvement Team.

10. Access to Information

10.1 The panel will be provided with performance data on a quarterly basis.

10.2 The panel will be enabled to request reports and information from HS to carry out its activities.

10.3 All requests for information and evidence must be made via the Resident Involvement Team.

11. Accountability

11.1 The panel will ensure that reports and recommendations made by the group focus on improving SCDC HS performance and services to tenants.

12. Reviewing the Terms of Reference

These Terms of Reference were approved by John Batchelor, Lead Member for Housing, and Peter Campbell Head, of Housing for SCDC, and ratified at a meeting of the HEB held on 27 June 2024.

Approved on: _____ **2024**

Next review: **First meeting after each financial year**

5.4 Mutual Exchange Policy – Monitoring Report

Included in the pack are the following documents:

- Mutual Exchange Monitoring Report to HEB
- Mutual Exchange Statistics Report

Julie Fletcher to report.

Report to:	Housing Engagement Board (HEB) 27 June 2024
Lead Officer:	Julie Fletcher : Service Manager – Housing Strategy

Mutual Exchange Monitoring Report

Recommendations

1. That the Housing Engagement Board (HEB) note the mutual exchange monitoring report for information, and to agree an amendment to the Mutual Exchange Policy to be made by the Lead Member for Housing. The amendment being a point of clarification in that the financial incentive scheme is only available to our council tenants downsizing and the amount is reduced for those exchanging to another landlord – see point 9 below.

Reasons for Recommendations

2. The Monitoring Report has been requested by the Board following six months since the revised Mutual Exchange Policy was implemented.
3. As part of monitoring the policy, it has highlighted that the policy is not explicit that the financial incentive is only available to our council tenants. It is therefore recommended that the policy wording is amended to ensure there is no ambiguity.

Details

4. The Mutual Exchange Policy was reviewed in 2023, with Cabinet approving the policy at its meeting on 28 September 2023.
5. Appendix A provides a breakdown of the Mutual Exchanges between October 2023 and April 2024.
6. Between October 2023 – March 2024, there have been 22 successful mutual exchanges. The number of mutual exchanges previously implemented per year ranged from between 25 in 2018 / 2019 to 40 in 2021 / 2022. Based on current information available, it would appear that the flexibilities written into the policy may have slightly increased the number of mutual exchanges.
7. Of the 22 mutual exchanges, 14 moved to the same size of property, with two moving to a larger size property and six moving to a smaller size property.
8. Of the two households moving to a larger size property, both had a two-bedroom requirement but moved to a three-bedroom home.

9. Of the six households moving to a smaller size property, only one household would have been eligible for the financial incentive to downsize (swapping a 3-bedroom property to a two-bedroom property within SCDC housing stock). However this was not applied as the application was received on 4 October 2023 before the scheme had been established.
10. As part of the monitoring of the policy, it is recommended that additional wording is added to the mutual exchange policy to clarify the council's position that the financial incentive is only available to our council tenants downsizing and not those downsizing from a housing association property or from outside of the District. The intention of the incentive was to help our tenants to downsize to more suitable accommodation. It is also recommended that for our council tenants downsizing by way of an exchange to another landlord, that the financial incentive available should be reduced to £500; the rationale being that cost savings made for not having to go through the relet process would only apply to one property and not two within our stock. The following wording (highlighted in **bold**) is therefore proposed to be amended within the mutual exchange policy.

6.7 To incentivise **existing council** tenants to downsize through Mutual Exchange, SCDC will provide financial incentives **to its council tenants who are downsizing** based on the number of bedrooms released. For every bedroom released, **council tenants exchanging to a smaller council property within the district will receive £1,000 and council tenants downsizing to a housing association property or to another council will receive £500. Payments will be** payable upon successful exchange. Where those in receipt of the financial incentive to downsize, then go on to move again within a year, the financial incentive will be repayable.

11. Of the 22 mutual exchanges, one mutual exchange was not decided upon within the 42 days requirement. This was due to delays with the exchanging landlord.
12. There were a further three applications submitted during the six-month period that withdrew. This was because of personal circumstances and not wishing to proceed with the mutual exchange.
13. There were no refusals of a mutual exchange during that period and therefore no appeals.
14. As part of the new policy, the council subscribed to HomeSwapper. Unfortunately it has not been possible to identify how many mutual exchanges were achieved through HomeSwapper. From the 10 applications made on-line, we are able to establish that three of these were through HomeSwapper and seven through social media. The Council has

recently obtained Swap Tracker as an internal add-on module to our housing system, and going forwards we will be able to monitor mutual exchanges more robustly.

15. During the coming months, we will run a further promotional campaign to target households registered for a transfer who live in one of the council's homes. There are currently 265 SCDC tenant households registered for a transfer.

Background Papers

Appendices

Appendix A: Mutual Exchanges between October 2023 and April 2024

Report Author: Julie Fletcher : Service Manager – Housing Strategy

Telephone: (01954) 713 352

Between October 2023 and April 2024

22
successful mutual
exchanges

8
from SCDC
properties

11
within the
district

14
from non-SCDC
properties

11
from HAs / LAs
outside district

11
outside the
district

3
from HAs within
district

14
moving to same
size property

6
moving to smaller
size property

2
moving to larger
size property

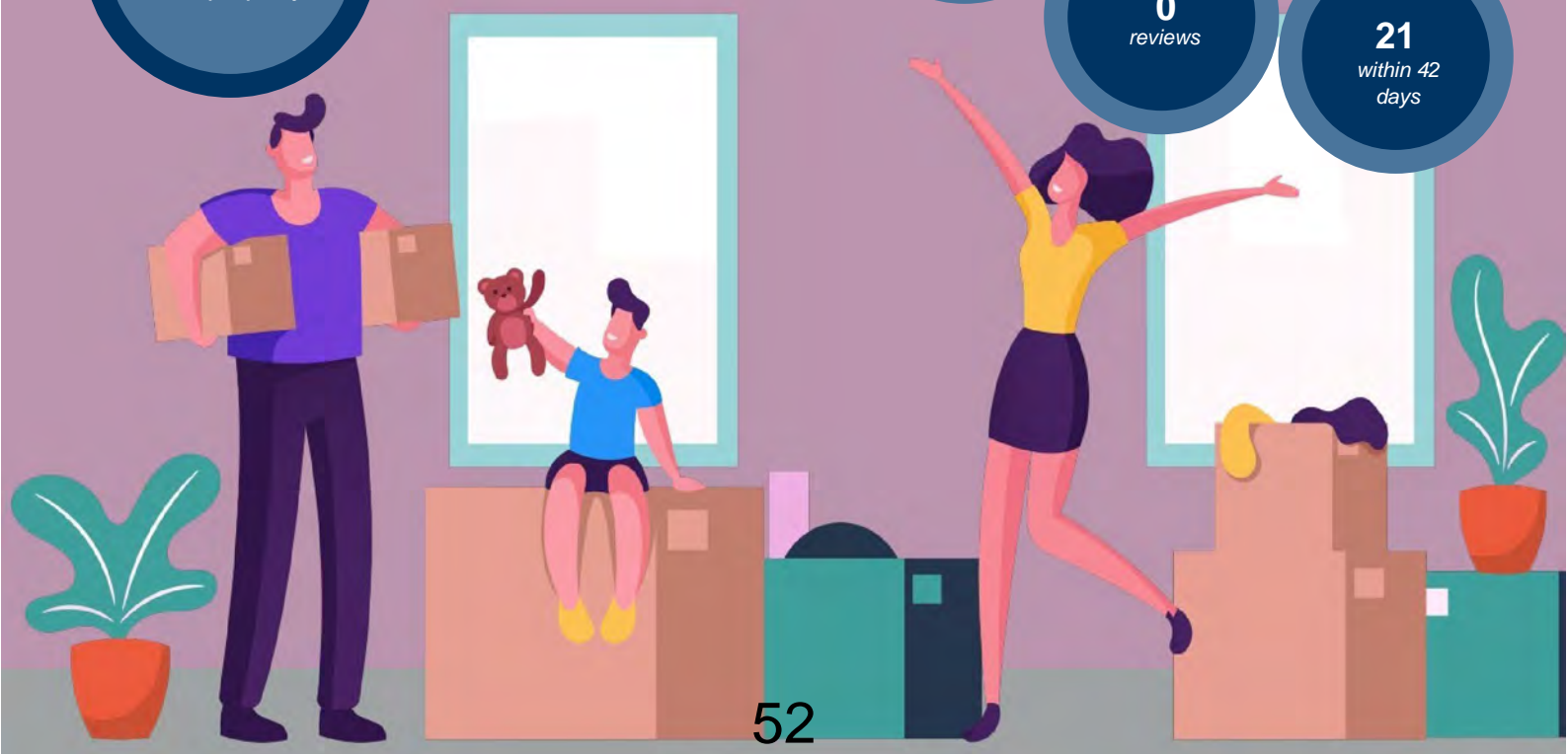
3
withdrawals

0
refusals

0
made use of
incentive scheme

0
reviews

21
within 42
days



5.5 Communications Charter

Included in the pack are the following documents:

- Communications Charter Report to the HEB
- The Communications Charter
- Review Notes from Meeting held on 30 April 2024

Uzma Ali to report.

Report to:	Housing Engagement Board (HEB) 27 June 2024
Lead Officer:	Uzma Ali – Housing Strategy

Communications Charter

Recommendations

1. That the Housing Engagement Board (HEB) note the Communications Charter at Appendix A and provide any further comments prior to approval by cabinet. It is anticipated that this will go to the cabinet meeting scheduled for September 2024.

Reasons for Recommendations

2. The Communications Charter has been produced in response to the results of the tenant and leaseholder satisfaction surveys. Communication was highlighted as an area for service improvement in both the 2022 and 2023 surveys.
3. The 2022 survey results in response to the question about satisfaction in relation to the landlord listening to tenants' views and acting upon them, had a 51% satisfaction this was below the benchmark figure for all other comparable organisations in that group.
4. This result improved in the more recent survey, which was conducted in 2023, the satisfaction rating was at 63.5%, however this was still below the benchmark figure which was between 71% – 82%.
5. Both sets of survey results clearly show that there is some work to be done to improve communications, hence looking at a communications standard to provide clarity and consistency to all our tenants and leaseholders.
6. The charter also aligns with the focus of the new consumer standards for social housing tenants, which was introduced by government to ensure greater scrutiny and regulation on social landlords and their communications with tenants and leaseholders. The Social Housing Regulation Act which came into effect from the 1 April 2024, introduced new consumer standards to ensure greater regulation of social housing landlords.

The standards include the following:

- Be accountable to tenants and treat them with fairness and respect.
- Listen to tenant's complaints & respond promptly to put things right.

Details

7. The Communications Charter sets out the standard for communicating with tenants and leaseholders. It includes the timescales for responding to the different methods of communications and provides clear and consistent information.
8. A focus group was held on 30 April with tenant representatives and housing managers in attendance. Note the minutes of the meeting at Appendix B.
9. The Communications Charter is based on good practice in other organisations, South Cambridgeshire District Council corporate communications standards and feedback from tenants and leaseholders at the focus group.
10. Following the approval of the Communications Charter, this will be rolled out to all housing staff accompanied by a set of clear guidelines that will include the style and language to be used and the expectations around response times. This will ensure that there is a standard set within the housing service for communicating effectively.
11. We will expect all contractors and those working on behalf of the council to also adhere to these standards in respect of the housing service.
12. The aim of improving communications with our tenants and leaseholders will ensure a consistent approach in how we communicate, as well as helping to manage tenants' and leaseholders' expectations. We will look to send out a copy of the Charter to all tenants and leaseholders, as well as publicising through newsletters and on the website.
13. The effectiveness of the communications charter will be measured by the annual tenant surveys, and questions around communications are a key part of the survey. It is envisaged that the communications charter will help reduce the number of complaints to the housing service around not being able to contact someone or receiving a response to an issue that has been raised using any of the communications methods listed.

Background Papers

Appendices

Appendix A: Communications Charter

Appendix B: Notes from Focus Group Meeting held on 30 April 2024

Report Author: Uzma Ali – Housing Development Officer – Housing Strategy

Telephone: (01954) 712 995

Communications Charter for Tenants and Leaseholders

Our commitments to you:

- We will respond to your enquiry promptly and in a fair and respectful manner.
- We will use plain language free from jargon in a way that is appropriate to your needs. This may include in a larger font, a different language or format.
- We will listen and learn from your feedback and use this to improve the service we provide to you.

The Council's values are linked to our communications commitments to you.

Ambitious – Our ambition is to improve the way we communicate with you. To make sure we respond promptly when you contact us.

Collaborative – We will work with you and use your feedback to improve our service.

Compassionate – We will respect and listen to you and be empathetic when communicating with you.

Accountable – We will take ownership when you contact us and make it our responsibility to ensure you get a response. We will apologise and make sure we learn from our mistakes if we get things wrong.

How we will communicate with you

These are our standard response times, but we will always aim to answer your query as quickly as possible.

By telephone

We will answer your call within two minutes.

We will tell you the name of our organization and the person answering your call. We aim to resolve your enquiry there and then. If we cannot, then we will get the appropriate person to ring you by the end of the next working day.

By email

We will acknowledge all emails within three working days, and fully respond within ten working days.

By post

We will reply to all letters within ten working days.

In person

If we visit you, we will carry identification that you can check with a phone call to our contact centre on 01954 713 000.

We will arrive at the time we say we will or give you as much notice as possible if we have to change the time.

If you would like to visit our offices, please call and make an appointment.

How you can contact us

- Report your repair at www.scambs.gov.uk/report-your-repair or call our freephone repair line on 0800 085 1313
- For enquiries about your tenancy or grounds maintenance email duty.housing@scambs.gov.uk
- For enquiries about planned upgrades to your home email operations@scambs.gov.uk
- For enquiries about getting involved in tenant groups or activities email resident.involvement@scambs.gov.uk
- For any shared ownership, leasehold or right to buy enquiries email home.ownership@scambs.gov.uk
- You can find online forms for many housing services at www.scambs.gov.uk/housing
- You can call us on 01954 713 000
- You can write to us at South Cambs Hall, Cambourne Business Park, Cambourne, CB23 6EA

If you are unhappy with the way your enquiry has been handled, please follow our complaints procedure. We take all complaints seriously and will provide you with a response within ten working days. Visit: www.scambs.gov.uk



This charter has been reviewed by tenants who are part of our resident involvement groups. If you would like to get involved, get in touch at resident.involvement@scambs.gov.uk



Communications Charter Review Meeting

Held in the Jeavons Room, South Cambridgeshire Hall, Cambourne

on 30 April 2024 at 10am

Attendees:

Peter Campbell – SCDC

Julie Fletcher – SCDC

Eddie Spicer – SCDC

Debbie Barrett – SCDC

Zoe Cox – SCDC

Uzma Ali – SCDC

Gina Manderson – SCDC

Margaret Wilson – Tenant Representative

Paul Bowman – Tenant Representative

Jim Watson – Tenant Representative

Introduction

Uzma explained with a presentation, the importance of good and effective communication within an organisation such as South Cambridgeshire Housing Service, and that looking at other organisations and good practice a communications charter would be a good place to start in terms of setting a standard for the South Cambridgeshire Housing Service. She also explained that she had been tasked as the project lead for working on the Communication project following her apprenticeship course with the Open University. Her final project was around stigma in relation to social housing and one of the recommendations that she made was to improve communications within the housing service both internally and externally. This will help us to improve the service for our residents, tenants and leaseholders. Tenant satisfaction measures include surveying tenants yearly.

Communication was highlighted as an area which scored low as part of the 2022 STAR survey. We want to work on this area and make sure that both tenants and staff in housing know what the expectations are regarding communications. Once we have worked together on this charter, we will publicise it to staff internally and to tenants through newsletters and publications. This is the standard that everyone should expect. The measure of the success of the charter can be measured by the results of future surveys.

Methods of Communication

There was a discussion around the different ways to contact South Cambridgeshire mentioned in the charter, but the survey came back saying that the most popular way to be contacted was by post.

It was explained that we do have a corporate objective to move over to digital forms of communication. It is up to us to show residents the benefits of doing things digitally, this includes accessibility benefits for those who find talking on the phone difficult. We will also continue offering the telephone and written options but if we can move those who are willing and able over to digital ways this will hopefully make it easier for those who do need to contact us by phone or letter to be able to do so.

Contacting a housing officer

There was a discussion around what happens when someone calls to speak to a housing officer and their message is passed on to a duty officer to triage the issue. Should there be more of an explanation of the duty housing system, how it works and why it is in place?

The triage system is there to make sure any urgent issues are picked up and any annual leave is covered.

It was suggested that this system sometimes mean that the less urgent issues are pushed further down and may sometimes be forgotten.

A comment was made that this is where the communications charter comes in to provide standards that we can be held accountable for, and which also shows clear timescales for responding.

4-day week

It was commented that there has not been much, if any positive press about the 4-day week. All the stories have been negative, and the council have just defended those negative stories.

There was also a point made that anything the council says about the 4-day week sounds self-congratulatory so it is difficult to counter the negative as of course the council will be positive about it.

Could we do something with some practical examples such as the improvement in the turnover of housing officer staff, and how this benefits tenants directly?

Complaints

There was a discussion around complaints and that the definition of a complaint should be up to the person making the complaint and not for the council to decide or define.

Another comment was made that one of the benefits of moving to digital means there is a record of your communication.

There was a comment made that tenants may not get in touch when they have an issue as they think there is no point as nothing will be done.

This is another reason for the communications charter to make sure people know what to expect from us and how to let us know when this does not happen. If we are not made aware of the issue, then we are not able to make changes to fix them.

This may also come down to us needing to do more to publicise what changes we make because of any feedback we receive – you said, we did.

The discussions moved on to some amendments to the wording within the charter and these amendments are captured below:

Wording of the charter

“Ambitious – Our ambition is to improve the way we communicate with you. To make sure we respond promptly, ~~and satisfactorily~~ when you contact us.”

It was thought that the word satisfactorily can be very subjective, there is a difference between us answering someone's query and them being satisfied with what the answer is. There are some instances when we may have to give an answer that someone is not satisfied with.

“By telephone –

We will answer your call within 2 minutes.

We will tell you the name of our organization and the person answering your call. We aim to resolve your enquiry there and then. If we cannot, then we will get the appropriate person to ring you by the next working day.

~~We will also follow this up with you to ensure your enquiry has been resolved.~~”

We had a discussion around the practicality of follow-up from a phone call as the contact centre takes calls and does not have the capacity to follow up on all their calls.

If you email us directly, we have an automatic acknowledgement for emails so you should get a response straight away to know your email has been received.

It was asked if there can be a line added to the email with the name of who has taken on the issue? It was explained that this may not be possible as our duty housing take on a triage so if there is annual leave or an officer is unavailable and if it is an urgent issue, it will be passed to someone else to deal with. This would also cause a lot more work and may add time to the query being dealt with.

It was thought that the main issue is taking responsibility for the query and following it through, and this would be covered by the statement on page 1 – **“Accountable – We will take ownership when you contact us and make it our responsibility to ensure you get a response. We will apologise and make sure we learn from our mistakes if we get things wrong.”**

It was asked if we should we have something that explains how we came up with these standards specifically, that is, based on industry standards, or they are the same as the corporate standard.

It was also asked if we can add a google map next to the address of the office as well as adding a website link to the complaints page of the website.

It was also asked if we can add the stamp for resident involvement, so people know that tenants have been involved in reviewing it.

The question was also raised about whether the charter will apply to anyone working on behalf of South Cambridgeshire, such as contractors.

A comment was made that South Cambridgeshire are overall a good landlord, and tenants are happy with their service. We can learn just as much from the positive comments as we can from the negative.

5.6 Council Stock Condition Survey

The Final Report of the Council Stock Condition Survey was included in the pack. (In order to upload the agenda pack to the website, the report was removed as it was a scanned copy and not accessible. Should you wish to see the scanned copy of the survey, please contact resident.involvement@scambs.gov.uk

Eddie Spicer to report.

6 Any other Business

Any additional issues to be raised.

7 Meeting Dates for 2024 / 2025

- 26 September 2024 (Zoom / venue to be confirmed)
- 12 December 2024 (Zoom / venue to be confirmed)
- 27 March 2025 (Zoom / venue to be confirmed)

8 Closing