

Agenda Item 53.

TITLE	Tenants' Charter – Modernising the Customer Experience in Wokingham Borough Council – 1 Year on Update Report
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Council on 17 September 2020
WARD	None specific
LEAD VOLUNTEER	Steve Bowers – Chairperson of the Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel (Involved Tenant Volunteer)

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

In September 2020, the Involved Tenants outlined the following benefits to the Community and positive outcomes.

- Negative perceptions of council housing challenged and a more positive language used, resulting in the community feeling respected, equal and valued.
- Wokingham Borough Council tenants receiving a more personalised service.
- Introduction of self-serve opportunities for tenants, making processes more streamlined, efficient and increasing productivity of the Housing, Income and Assessments service.
- Increased knowledge about future patterns of housing need and demand and tenants having the opportunity to shape the communities in partnership with the council.
- Building new homes and refurbishing others to a 'fit for a lifetime' standard – adaptable homes so people do not have to move in response to age, disability etc.
- Eco-friendly homes – environmentally friendly, lower cost for tenants and supporting Wokingham Borough Council's climate change agenda.
- Increased accessibility to the council housing service – self-serve, digital engagement but also supporting more traditional methods e.g. appointments etc for those who still wish to have this form of contact.
- Offering tenants more choice.
- Responding to the ageing population.
- Tenants who once may have been struggling, are more confident about their finances – leading to a reduction in rent arrears and increase in revenue to be invested in to the housing service.
- Greater transparency in relation to health and safety – accessible through the online personalised customer record.
- Assurance that the housing service fulfils its data protection obligations.

Please see the attached report – Tenant Charter – 1 Year on – What have we achieved together.....so far? This sets out all that has been achieved in the last year in partnership with Wokingham Borough Council Housing Services.

RECOMMENDATION

The Involved Tenants would like to ask the Council to:

- 1) consider the aspirations outlined in the Tenants' Charter and continue to work in partnership with them to achieve these;

- 2) agree to formally review Wokingham Borough Council's progress in terms of addressing this Charter in one years' time.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The purpose of the report is to formally update the Council on the progress of the work, already completed over the last year, to achieve the aspirations of the Tenants' Charter.

This report was developed by the Involved Tenants and has been subject to review and approval by the Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel.

The charter sets out the views of Wokingham Borough Council's Involved Tenants on what is needed to modernise the customer experience and ensure continuous improvement.

It is intended as a series of aspirations, rather than demands, and to stimulate a broader discussion within the council as a corporate body.

There are ten key priorities of Wokingham Borough Council tenants in the modernisation of housing services:

1. *Tackling the stigma associated with being a council tenant*
2. *Identifying future patterns of tenant need and demand*
3. *Maximising the accessibility of council services*
4. *Modernising tenant engagement techniques to increase active involvement*
5. *Creating an easy 'friction-free' customer experience for tenants*
6. *Giving tenants greater choice on who does repairs and when*
7. *Responding to an ageing tenant population*
8. *Helping tenants manage their personal finances more effectively*
9. *Greater transparency regarding tenant health and safety inspection results*
10. *Developing a protocol for the analysis and protection of tenant data*

The formal update report also includes future aspirations of the Involved Tenants and ideas of how they would like to get involved in other areas. The Involved Tenants would appreciate any help and support to achieve these.

Background

Several factors make it timely to reflect on the future of housing services for council tenants:

- The emerging lessons from the Grenfell Tower disaster in 2016 – notably the need for a greater focus on health and safety, tenant involvement in refurbishment schemes and transparency over landlord decision-making.
- The government's housing Green Paper of 2018, which promised enhanced consumer regulation applicable to councils and housing associations and challenged landlords to raise service standards and levels of resident engagement.
- The emerging opportunities for digital transformation of service delivery and resident involvement in respect of increased efficiency and an improved tenant customer experience.
- Other social trends such as an ageing population, increasing demand for disability and social care support, increasing customer expectations (particularly amongst younger generations) and the rapid rise of social media and so on.
- The Covid-19 pandemic driving more services and activities online along with virtual viewings and meetings commonplace now.

We believe that the Council and tenants need to respond to these issues by working together to plan for the modernisation of housing services over the next decade and beyond if:

- Current levels of satisfaction are to be maintained,
- Opportunities to increase efficiency are to be realised and
- Ideas to help the Council achieve Carbon Neutrality by 2030 a reality.

Where this Charter refers to new digital technologies, explanatory text boxes explain the options available to Wokingham Borough Council and how the council and its tenants can benefit.

Where suppliers are named, this is for illustrative purposes and does not constitute an endorsement.

Some of the proposals can and have been implemented relatively easily, some will require additional funding, some will be reviewed in the next year and others will require corporate agreement by full Council.

List of Background Papers

Tenants Charter – Modernising the customer experience in Wokingham Borough Council

Tenant Charter – 1 Year on – What have we achieved together.....so far?

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