

## The Tenants Charter – 2 Years on – the story so far....

### Introduction

Thank you to everyone who has been involved in the work of bringing this to fruition so far. The aim of this report is to highlight the work the Involved Tenants have achieved in partnership with Wokingham Borough Council Housing Service, Members of the Council and local stakeholders through their six working groups (RMG, TING, ILG, TISG, Communications Group and Chairs Group) and TLIP (Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel).

The Involved Tenants have achieved and progressed in a number of topics highlighted in the Tenants Charter. Even during the incredibly challenging year due to the unforeseen COVID-19 pandemic, the involved tenants have continued to work online via Microsoft teams to complete meetings, engage with internal and external stakeholders and produce recommendations for service improvements.

During the last year, the Involved Tenants have prioritised reviewing the regulatory standards, understanding the Housing White Paper, and keeping up to date with new policies being produced. This has allowed the groups to sustain the partnership and be engaged from initial discussions through to implementation.

#### Acronyms:

- WBC – Wokingham Borough Council
- RMG – Involved Tenants Repairs and Maintenance Group
- TING – Tenant Involvement Neighbourhoods Group (formally NCG – Neighbourhoods and Communities Group).
- ILG – Involved Tenants Independent Living Group (Age Specific)
- TISG – Tenant Involvement Strategy Group
- TLIP – Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel
- TPAS – Tenants Participation Advisory Service
- ARCH - Association of Retained Council Housing Tenants Group
- STAR – Survey of Tenants and Residents

### 1. Review of Tackling the stigma associated with being a council tenant

Involved Tenants work hard to break down barriers between themselves as Tenants and anyone who stigmatises them because they live in Social Housing. They do this by:

- Building up partnerships,
- Proving that they have a voice,
- Showing they are professional at what they do,
- Showing they can work together, in partnership, and not against the Council, and
- Aiming to improve and bring in new services to help Tenants everywhere.

#### ACHIEVEMENTS

- **ARCH (Association of Retained Council Housing) Tenants Group** – An Involved Tenant sits on this group and attends meetings online via Microsoft team. ARCH is a National Group – <http://www.arch-housing.org.uk/about.aspx>
  - o See the Person Campaign – they have offered to come to Wokingham Borough Council to introduce the work of the campaign to all Neighbourhoods and Communities staff. This is to be a presentation in partnership with the involved tenants to provide more understanding to staff regarding stigma- <https://seetheperson.org/>. This was due to occur at the June 2021 ‘neighbourhoods and communities’ meeting, this was postponed due to Surge Testing, but we are in contact to organise this going ahead at a future meeting.

- **Involved Tenant Chosen Charities**
  - o Charities we have supported in the past have included: Thames Valley Air Ambulance, Wokingham in Need, First Days, Diana Brimblecombe Animal Rescue Centre, Help for Heroes, and the Poppy Factory.
  - o The Involved Tenants have continued to support charities with charity 'online' coffee mornings.
  
- **Involved Tenants work in Partnership with various groups including:**
  - o Active Groups to help support Tenants across the Borough – such as the Vulnerable Persons (Syrian Refugees) Steering Group and Local Neighbourhood Action Groups (Sonning, Remenham, Hurst, Twyford, Ruscombe, Wargrave, Finchampstead and Wokingham).
  
- **Communications, Engagement and Marketing**
  - o The language that Wokingham Borough Council Staff and volunteers use has been recommended by the Involved Tenants with an emphasis on the use of 'Neighbourhoods and Communities' rather than estates and schemes.
    - The Involved Tenant Communications Group continues to approve all letters going out to more than 10 households. This provides an opportunity for the group to remind staff about the language used, proofread and check for ease of reading.
  - o The Involved Tenants have created a Partnership with Communications, Engagement and Marketing team within Wokingham Borough Council.
  - o Housing Matters:
    - Working in Partnership with the Communications, Engagement and Marketing Team of Wokingham Borough Council – sharing articles with the Borough News, sharing ideas on social media, and working on joint articles to share in all Medias.
    - Working in Partnership with the Local Housing Companies teams to make the magazine relevant to all tenants.
    - The Magazine goes to Tenants of the Wokingham Borough Council, Loddon Homes and BerryBrook Homes along with Councillors, Parish Councillors and Libraries across the Borough.
    - Spring Edition 2021 included an article 'What is and What is not and Involved tenant' which was completed in response to discussions about a stigma of being an Involved Tenant. An extract of this article is shown below:

## What is a Tenant Volunteer, what does it involve and how do I become one?

### Definition of Volunteering

The definition of volunteering that the Wokingham Borough Council Tenant Volunteers have adopted is as follows:

We define volunteering as any activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment and communities. Central to this definition is the fact that volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual.

This can include formal and informal volunteering across the Housing Service as well as wider community participation and social action. Everyone has the right to volunteer and volunteering can have significant benefits for individuals.

By volunteering to become a Tenant Volunteer and working in partnership with Wokingham Borough Council you can help improve the Housing Service.

You will also learn how the Council works and begin to see the bigger picture and how complicated things can be.

Volunteering can be incredibly rewarding and some of the benefits of being involved are:

- The chance to meet new people
- Social opportunities
- Understanding what is going on in your community and having a positive input
- Gain new skills through training

with the Annual Report.

The first three groups are open to all tenants from Wokingham Borough Council housing and the Local Housing Companies (Loddon Homes and Berry Brook Homes).

### The Independent Living Group - Sheltered Housing

This group is made up of Tenant Volunteers who live in one of the 8 sheltered housing properties in the Borough. They meet to discuss the current and future services for this group of tenants.

They would like Tenants who live in the following properties to volunteer and be part of this group, thus ensuring that a full cross section of the Tenants living in these properties can have their own voice:

Meachen Court, Palmer Court, Sale Garden Cottages, Dickens Court, Harman Court, Polehampton Court,

- **Training**
  - o The Involved Tenants and Tenancy Involvement Team attended a TPAS training course regarding the 'value of Tenant Involvement' which included discussions on tackling the stigma of being a council tenant as well as the stigma of being an Involved Tenant.
  - o Council and staff members are now suggesting trainings' that Involved Tenants can attend along with them. In the past year, these have included Legionella, Fire Safety and Asbestos training.

- **Maximising the appearance of Neighbourhoods**
  - o The Involved Tenants have been considering the appearance of Neighbourhoods, which was identified as an area of concern in the STAR satisfaction survey. Improving neighbourhoods reduces the stigma of living in council housing.
  - o TLIP had an input into the Grovelands Park Project. Discussion was had on the look of the new units being developed, to make them more attractive to Tenants and their Neighbours. Additionally TLIP have received regular reports on this project.
- **Tenant Involvement Strategy Group**
  - o The TISG have developed a Tenant Involvement Strategy Action Plan with links to stigma and maximising accessibility of council housing services.
  - o The TISG members have attended the other Involved Tenant groups and have identified, that although a large amount of progress has been made regarding stigma, there is a stigma of being an Involved Tenant and a stigma of being a sheltered scheme tenant.

## **FUTURE ASPIRATIONS**

- o We want to continue to work in partnership with as many organisations, stakeholders, partners, contractors, staff, and Wokingham Borough Council to break down barriers and continue to grow and evolve.
- o We want to investigate Stigma further, working with the See the Person campaign and looking at papers/research, such as 'It's not okay – Chartered Institute of Housing and See the Person Campaign, 2020', that have already been produced on Stigma. This will help us when reviewing the Tenants Charter.
- o The TISG have identified that being an Involved Tenant and being a Sheltered Scheme Tenant also holds a stigma, due to this, the Involved Tenants want to update this aspiration in the Tenants Charter to reflect these additional stigmas.

## **2. Review of Identifying future patterns of tenant need and demand**

### **ACHIEVEMENTS**

- **STAR Satisfaction Survey**
  - o The letter accompanying the survey was written by the Involved Tenants and all survey questions were agreed with the Involved Tenants.
  - o The STAR Satisfaction survey went out to all Tenant households to provide an opportunity for tenants to express their opinions/experiences of the Housing Service. The STAR Satisfaction survey results were then reviewed with every Involved Tenant Group to provide recommendations to the service.
- **Housing Ombudsman Self-Assessment of Complaints Policy and Processes**
  - o The Housing Ombudsman Self-Assessment and Complaints Code has resulted in a number of changes to the Housing Complaints Policy. The Involved Tenants have been involved through the assessment and engaged in consultation on changes.
  - o The Involved Tenants are currently working with the Tenant Involvement team to set up a Designated Tenant Complaints Panel to replace the current 'stage 2' in the complaints process. This panel will also look at complaints patterns and performance frameworks to identify areas of concern and make recommendations to the service when identified.
  - o The Involved Tenants now have an Involved Tenant sitting on the National Residents Panel for the Housing Ombudsman Service. They report back to the chairs group meetings on the meetings they attend and national patterns in housing complaints.

- **Satisfaction Surveys and Focus Groups**
  - o The Involved Tenants have been working with the Tenant Involvement Team to create a suite of surveys for all service areas. The aim of this is to provide more engagement with Tenants and allow them the ability to talk to the council about their needs and wants.
  - o The Involved Tenants have also been included in the initial setting up of focus groups and documents which the Tenant Involvement team will begin to implement in the next few months.
  
- **Technology**
  - o There has been Sustainable technology encouragement from the Involved Tenants. The Independent Living Group have met with the Asset Management team where the Service Manager came to discuss the use of solar panels on sheltered scheme properties.
  - o 6 Yeosfield – Project to increase the energy efficiency of the property. Solar panels, Air Source Heat Pump and insulation were installed. A video Walkthrough was produced for the March TLIP meeting and is available to be shared at request.
  - o USB charging points – The involved tenants have been involved in discussions regarding USB charging points for Grovelands, New Builds and voids properties.

### **FUTURE ASPIRATIONS**

- We would like to become more involved in the upcoming lettings policy and continue our work on the pet policy and setting up the Designated Complaints Panel.
- We would like to become more involved in scrutinising satisfaction surveys as more adhoc surveys are set up, govmetric data is in place for the Housing teams to use and discovering the opinions of neighbourhood-based focus groups that we have been helping to set up the admin for. The more surveys the teams are able and capable of setting up, the more information and opinions from different tenants/households we will be able to look at and make recommendations based on these.
- The TISG would like support from other involved tenants, WBC staff and the partnership to help review the Tenants Charter going forward and investigating future patterns of tenant need and demand. This will be possible with further, more in-depth, reviews of the 2021 STAR survey results and further involvement in the creation of a suite of focused surveys to tenants once they have used a Housing service.

### **3. Review of Maximising the accessibility of council services**

#### **ACHIEVEMENTS**

- **Involved Tenants Meeting Accessibility**
  - o All Involved Tenants, who wish too, are online and meeting regularly using Microsoft Teams for formal meetings, training and engaging with Wokingham Borough Council Staff. The Involved Tenants have access to IT equipment and support from Tri-Computers to aid with their access into meeting.
  - o An Involved Tenant, who is a member of the Repairs and Maintenance Group, attends weekly online Voids Meetings and regular contractors' meetings through Microsoft Teams during the pandemic.
  - o An Involved Tenant attends the Housing Ombudsman complaints panel which is currently online during the pandemic.
  - o We have an Involved Tenant regularly attending Loddon Homes Board Meetings (as a Non-Executive Director) and Registered Provider Partnership meetings through Microsoft Teams
  - o The Tenant Involvement team are regularly approached by internal and external people who would like to attend Involved Tenant meetings

- **Strategy Group Action Plan**

- Accessibility of services was a key focus of the Tenant Involvement Strategy Group Action Plan with links to maximising accessibility to council services for all.
- The Strategy Group have also been consulted on the new Housing Complaints policy which will be implemented at a later date, the policy includes a Reasonable Adjustments policy to make sure that all tenants can access the complaints process. The group have made very productive suggestions to the team.

- **Customer Journey**

- The Involved Tenants regularly give feedback on what they have experienced when using a service, what went well and what could be improved in the future. This is important as it helps to shape process from the customer's point of view.
- The Involved Tenants have been considering the Housing White Paper and STAR survey results and the focus on ease of the customer journey when using the service. The Involved Tenants are being consulted on processes, focus groups, surveys regarding the customer journey and initial contact (letter sign offs, templates for complaints. Etc.).
- The Involved Tenants were invited to an initial consultation regarding the Wokingham Borough Council Equality Policy, many attended and took part in discussions.

**FUTURE ASPIRATIONS**

- Due to Covid restrictions, there have been increased challenges in 'Maximising the accessibility to council services' as services became accessible online considerably earlier than was expected. This has meant that several the aspirations and aims for accessibility increasing in council services require re-assessment to better suited aims in the upcoming Tenants Charter amendments.
- We are already reviewing all letters coming from the Housing to more than 10 tenants and would like support in continuing this to ensure letters are proofread and written in plain English. This is something that is important to all Tenants, and we are happy to help as much as we can.
- We would like to continue to be consulted on the Customer Journey, getting more involved in this in the next year to make sure it is accessible to all. We would like to be involved in the standardisation of the formatting and language of documents that are sent out from the Council – ensuring that all Tenants and Residents can receive, understand, and open all documents. We would also like to work more closely with the Housing Assistants to make sure that consistent information is given at the first stage (right first time) when tenants call in.
- We would like to make sure that Tenants and Residents are given as many options for engagement as possible, whether that is in person or online, therefore, the involved tenants will be continuing with online meetings and thinking about 'hybrid meetings' into the next year.

**4. Review of Modernising tenant engagement techniques to increase active involvement**

**ACHIEVEMENTS**

- **Involved Tenant Engagement**

- All Involved Tenants, who wish too, are now online and meeting regularly using Microsoft Teams – this includes formal meetings as well as training sessions
- In the last financial year (April 2020 to April 2021), the involved tenants have volunteered 2,868 hours, which is the equivalent to nearly 1.5 full time staff members over the same period!
- Since the beginning of the first lockdown in March 2020, the Involved Tenants have volunteered 3,503 hours, which is the equivalent to nearly 2 full time staff members in the same period, highlighting their dedication in volunteering and assisting the service.

- The Involved Tenant Communications Group have proofread large amounts of letters, sometimes checking groups of 7 letters at a time and within tight timescales to aid the service and make the ways in which the service engage with tenants clear.
- The development of the Involved Tenants Volunteer Policy will modernise tenant engagement and brings a clearer process to becoming an Involved Tenant. This is a living document and will be reviewed regularly.
- A question was placed in the STAR survey asking, 'would you like to become an Involved Tenant?' There were a number of interested tenants who are now going through the process to become formal volunteers.

- **Involved Tenant Training**

- TPAS training on the Value of Tenant Involvement with links to the Housing white paper, Stigma and Maximising tenant involvement etc.
- Housemark Training where the Involved Tenants attended the '10 days of data' training via Microsoft Teams.
- The Involved Tenants attended Equality Training which was WBC led.

- **Other Engagement Opportunities and Meetings**

- Voids Meetings are attended weekly throughout the year by an Involved Tenant.
- The Complaints, Compensation and Compliments Policy – The Involved Tenants have been a part of the complaints policy review process by leading on this project through proof reading and suggesting changes to the wording of the document to make it more user friendly.
- Garage Project – The garage project was the demolition of outdated garages in Bayley, Targett, Wilson and Goddard Courts in Winnersh and the regeneration of these areas into parking spaces which are better suited to the size of modern cars. Involved Tenants made decisions with the Council. The Involved Tenants made the decisions on how Tenants / those effected were to be consulted, all letters sent to Tenants / users were reviewed by the Involved Tenants. Involved Tenants sat on the panel to interview the contractor. An article was produced in Housing Matters Spring 2021, page 43, on this project and is available upon request.
- The formation of a Designated Tenants Complaints Panel – The Involved Tenants are currently putting together a code of Conduct for this panel. The panel will consider complaints which the tenants feel that the Council/Landlord have not dealt with to their satisfaction. The Panel will make recommendations to both the Tenant and Council on the outcome of their decision.
- Regulatory Standards Review with Housemark – The Involved Tenants reviewed the standards with Housemark, making recommendations to the service and considering these against the housing White Paper.

**FUTURE ASPIRATIONS**

- We have noted that there may be a challenge in recruiting new Involved Tenants and are looking at formalising the process to make this clearer to those interested. Unfortunately, a number of those interested decided they were no longer wanted to formally volunteer once they received more information and the observers form. This process is now under review regarding the response times to those interested in becoming an Involved tenant.
- We would like to become more involved with local charities and sponsoring their events in the later part of 2021, whilst we await involvement in the 2022 community Fundays. Unfortunately, the Community Fundays have been put on hold for 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 5. Review of Creating an easy 'friction-free' customer experience for tenants

### ACHIEVEMENTS

- The **Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel** is a Council constituted Group with members from the five formal Involvement groups covering:
  - o Tenant Involvement Strategy Group,
  - o Neighbourhoods and Communities,
  - o Communications Group,
  - o Independent Living Group, and
  - o The Repairs and Maintenance.
- Other Group Members include:
  - o The Assistant Director for Neighbourhoods and Communities.
  - o The Service Manager of Tenancy Involvement, and
  - o Councillors representing all four parties.
- This Group has co-opted members from a local Housing Association and the Voluntary Sector to ensure expertise and best practice is shared.
- This Group works in partnership with the Council and invites guest speakers and presenters to attend meetings such as:
  - o The Chief Executive – Susan Parsonage
  - o The Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Resources and Assets – Graham Ebers
  - o The Leader of the Council – Cllr John Halsall
  - o Local Housing Companies – Directors of Loddon Homes and Berry Brook Homes
  - o Lead Specialist - Asset Management
  - o Specialist - Policy and Performance
  - o Rental Income Manager
  - o Strategic Housing Management Specialists
  - o Localities and Communities representatives
  - o Housing Management Specialists
  - o Income and Assessments Specialists
  - o Consultants – Housing Revenue Business Plan – Glen Smith and Asset Management Strategy - Richard Medley
  - o Contractors – Reading Borough Council and Robert Heath Heating
- **Customer Journey (also links to Review 4)**
  - o The Involved Tenants regularly give feedback on what they have experienced when using a service, what went well and what could be improved in the future. This is important as it helps to shape process from the customer's point of view.
  - o The Involved Tenants have been considering the Housing White Paper and STAR survey results and the focus on ease of the customer journey when using the service. The Involved Tenants are being consulted on processes, focus groups, surveys regarding the customer journey and initial contact (letter sign offs, templates for complaints. Etc.).
  - o Training and interviewing of front line staff. Involved Tenants sit on all permanent or fixed term contract staff thus ensuring that individuals are aware of tenant involvement and tenant journeys through the service provided.
  - o Reviewing Response times. Involved Tenants monitor Key Performance Indicators each month and set targets each year. For instance, ASB response times were reviewed during Covid to support staff to support tenants during difficult times.
  - o Working with Contractors to ensure response times are monitored and the contracts are adhered to, this is through the monitoring of Key performance indicators, as well as attending contractor meetings

### FUTURE ASPIRATIONS

- We would like continued support and attendance for TLIP as well as timely responses to actions from the Involved Tenant meetings and information to inform the Performance Frameworks.

- As a Group of Involved Tenants, we are happy to continue to work in partnership with WBC staff, councillors, local stakeholders and local housing companies to achieve this aspiration.
- We would like to continue to be consulted on processes, focus groups, surveys regarding the customer journey and initial contact (letter sign offs through the Involved Tenant Communications Group, Etc.).
- We would like to work more closely with the local housing companies (BerryBrook Homes and Loddon Homes) regarding the customer journey and experience.

## 6. Review of Giving tenants greater choice on who does repairs and when

### ACHIEVEMENTS

#### - Meetings and Engagement

- An Involved Tenant, who is a member of the Repairs and Maintenance Group, attends weekly online Voids Meetings and regular contractors' meetings through Microsoft Teams during the pandemic.
- Garage Project – Involved Tenants made decisions with the Council. The Involved Tenants made the decisions on how Tenants / those effected were to be consulted, all letters sent to Tenants / users were reviewed by the Involved Tenants. Involved Tenants sat on the panel to interview the contractor.
- Contractors' meetings – Involved Tenants participated in contractors' meetings for the following but not limited to:
  - Reading Borough Council
  - Voids Contractor - Gilmartin's
  - The new Kitchens and Bathrooms Contractor – R Benson
  - The new External Decorations Contractor – George Jones
- Procurement Involvement. The Involved tenants have been engaged in the tender process including interviews such as for the Housing Matters Designer/distributor and Gas Contractor.

### FUTURE ASPIRATIONS

- Due to Covid restrictions, there have been increased challenges in 'Giving tenants greater choice on who does repairs and when' progress.
- We will be looking at how we can improve the performance framework figures scrutinised in repairs and maintenance group by working in partnership with the Contractors, the Tenants, and WBC to ensure continued learning, reviewing and the improvement of services.
- We would like to ensure that a customer satisfaction survey is issued for every repair and encourage more Tenants to complete and return these.

## 7. Review of Responding to an ageing tenant population

### ACHIEVEMENTS

#### - Independent Living Group

- The Independent Living (age specific) group (Sheltered Housing Tenants) have been set up since 2019. The Independent Living Group is made up of Involved Tenant volunteers who live in sheltered accommodation across the Borough.
- The STAR Survey was split to ensure those currently living in sheltered accommodation have appropriate questions asked. The results were assessed by the group and recommendations to the service given.
- The Independent Living Group have been working on creating a suite of surveys suitable to the sheltered schemes. They have also been looking at the formation of focus groups and forums.
- The Independent Living Group and Strategy Group have begun reviewing the Sheltered Tenants Handbook.
- The Independent Living Group have had guests attend the group including the Friendship Alliance – Link Visiting Scheme, Age UK Berkshire, who have been working to develop ways to tackle loneliness and improve the mental and physical

wellbeing of Wokingham Borough residents have attended the group at different points in the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **FUTURE ASPIRATIONS**

- There is a need to review the Tenants Charter with chapter 7 in mind due to the differences in tenure of the ageing population, e.g., Sheltered Schemes and those living in general needs properties, and therefore, the differences between them.
- It is important to note, that we currently have more of our older Tenants living in the General Needs accommodation, rather than our sheltered housing accommodation.
  - o We would like to work in partnership with Housing Services to look at how the support for these older Tenants can be improved as necessary.
- The stigma of living in Sheltered Accommodation – we are aware that there is a stigma attached to living in sheltered accommodation
  - o We would like to work in partnership with the Council to look at how we can change and improve the views of people that live in and out of sheltered housing.
  - o We would like to continue working with the Housing Services and Localities Team, within the Council, to improve facilities etc. within our sheltered properties across the Borough.
- Sheltered Tenants Handbook – we would like to continue TISG and ILGs review of the Tenants Handbook and associated Sheltered Tenants Handbook.
- Recruitment to ILG – We would like continued support in a recruitment drive for more ILG members and focus group volunteers specific to sheltered accommodation.

## **8. Review of Helping tenants manage their personal finances more effectively**

### **ACHIEVEMENTS**

- **Rents Team Engagement**
  - o The Independent Living (age specific) group (Sheltered Housing Tenants) were consulted on a pension credit scheme promotion, leaflet, and ways to engage with tenants who may be eligible. The rents team took their discussions on board.
  - o The Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel work in partnership with the Rental Income Team. The Rental Income Team Manager attends the Group on a monthly basis to present an update report on the Rents Team and Income.
  - o Involved Tenants Communications Group consulted by the rents team regarding text messages to tenants for access to Tenancy Sustainment Officers. This is provided through Mobysoft.
  - o The Involved Tenants have strongly recommended a need for a second Tenancy Sustainment Officer. Recruitment for this role has taken place and an Involved Tenant was present at the interview and involved in the process.
- **Other Ways to Engage**
  - o Since late 2020, Housing Matters have been publishing adult education courses. These are all free online/usually face to face courses for those over 19 years old living in Wokingham Borough (with some exceptions). The courses advertised in Housing Matters and provided include Essential Money Management, Skills toolkit (includes numeracy), data literacy, data analyst, managing your money and a CAP money course, helping your child with maths and get ready to get back into work or volunteering. This is an article that will now be produced in every Housing Matters Magazine publication with the courses that are starting soon. Extract of the article in the Spring 2021 edition is below:

## Useful courses from Wokingham Adult Education

Wokingham Adult Education is currently running all courses online until the end of the summer term - so you can do a course from the comfort of your own home! All courses are run by experienced tutors, with small groups of learners, on Zoom and are interactive.



If you've not used Zoom before, we can help you get started and offer support through our UK Online sessions including with basic IT skills

- Making better use of your PC, laptop, iPad, tablet or smartphone.

There is also support for video calling and support for email, Internet Search, Online Safety, Online Shopping and Services etc.

New courses for Summer 2021 include

- Managing your money and a CAP money course
- IT skills for job seekers
- Introduction to working in schools
- Helping your child with maths
- Baby loves Nature
- Coding for beginners
- Building your confidence to get back into work or volunteering
- Get ready to undergo Maths or English qualifications
- Paediatric First Aid
- Digital Skills
- Wellbeing in mind courses including Understanding Anxiety, Self Esteem and Self Confidence

Details of all of our upcoming courses are listed at:  
<https://sites.google.com/view/wokingham-acl> or you can contact us via: [adulteducation@wokingham.aov.uk](mailto:adulteducation@wokingham.aov.uk) or 07785 314603 or

### FUTURE ASPIRATIONS

- Due to Covid restrictions, there have been increased challenges in 'Helping tenants manage their personal finances more effectively' as a large amount of engagement 'in person' events were unable to go ahead.
- We would like to continue to work in partnership with the Rental Income Service Team:
  - o To continue to improve levels of arrears,
  - o To improve services to tenants and ensure they have the support needed to help them achieve their Tenancy sustainment.
- We work closely with the Wokingham Borough Council Communications, Engagement and Marketing team.
  - o Involved Tenants feel it important that we and the Council work in partnership to share more information on the support that is available to people across the Borough to manage their finances more efficiently.
  - o Continue to have regular articles in Housing Matters.
  - o Continue to share articles from Housing Matters to go out in the Borough News.

### 9. Review of Greater transparency regarding tenant health and safety inspection results

#### ACHIEVEMENTS

- **Monitoring**
  - The Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel and the Repairs and Maintenance Group receive a monthly report on Health and Safety issues that have occurred during the previous and that month, along with any measures that have been put in place to lower the risk of these happening again.
  - We work in partnership with the Housing Services Management team to mitigate any further health and safety issues and if the need arises, we look at changing policies and procedures to help support Tenants and Staff members.
- **Gas Compliance**
  - Gas Compliance has remained at 100% since 2016.
    - o Independent Living Group and Repairs and Maintenance Group have had attendance from the WBC Compliance Manager to discuss health and safety in sheltered schemes.
    - o Housing Matters published an article in Spring 2021 regarding Gas safety checks and what to expect during the pandemic. The extract of the article is below:

## What To Expect From our Gas Safety Check During the Coronavirus Pandemic

As a landlord Wokingham Borough Council are legal responsible for the safety of their tenants. Even during the current climates, annually all gas pipework, appliances and flues provided for tenants need to be checked and a Landlord Gas Safety Record completed. All the engineers who carry out these checks and the maintenance throughout the year are registered with Gas Safe, and will carry Identification bearing the company they work for logo, plus the Gas Safe logo, on the reverse of their badges are the qualifications of the engineer. As a tenant what can you expect from your Gas Safety Check.

Around 2 months before your current Landlord Gas Safety Record (LGSR) expires you will receive a letter advising of an appointment date and time for Robert Heath Heating to come and complete your Annual Gas Safety Check.

If you are not able to complete this appointment please contact Robert Heath Heating to rearrange. The person who needs to be in must be over 18 years of age.

On the day of the test the engineer will arrive, he/she will be in corporate clothing and carrying an ID badge, they will be wearing PPE, face mask, gloves.

The engineer will ask that you adhere to government guidelines with social

The Gas Safety Check will last around 30 minutes longer if you have more than one council owned gas appliance.

The engineer will check for damage on or around the gas appliance and pipework. He/She will complete a series of visual and operational checks and also complete tests on the gas appliance, to check compliance with the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations, and that the appliance is operating at the correct operating pressure. This will include checking flues and chimneys are clear from any vegetation and enable the appliance to emit gases and fumes safely to the outside. That all safety devices on the appliances such as cut out devices are working correctly.

The engineer will test all Smoke, Heat and CO Alarms in the property, changing batteries when required. If the alarm has expired or is due to expire within the next year they will replace the alarms. If it is an alarm which is wired into the electrics these will be referred to the council's electrical contractor to replace, but the Gas engineer will leave a battery alarm in its place.

When the engineer has completed all of their tests and the safety check the tenant is normally asked to sign the engineers PDA but this is not in place at the moment due to Covid-19.

Within 28 days of you Gas Safety Check being completed you will receive a copy of your Landlord Gas Safety Record in

### - Risk Assessments

- are completed for all large-scale engagement events including the Community Fun Days and a copy is shared with all staff, contractors, and suppliers in attendance. Consideration of Risk has resulted in the 2020 and 2021 summer Community Fun Days being cancelled due to the risk to staff, the public and volunteers regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.
- a Risk Assessment is completed for Targett Court (Residents Resource Centre) to ensure any risk to visitors and staff is kept to a minimum and this is displayed on the noticeboard within the main areas.

### - The Business Continuity Plan

- The Tenancy Involvement Specialist Team Business Continuity plan was updated prior to lockdown and reassessed as lockdown restrictions eased. This included:
  - Information on potential risks that can affect the health & safety of Involved Tenant Volunteers, staff members, engagement opportunities and to buildings,
  - Any risk in the event that Staff members are ill / away for prolonged periods of time, therefore unable to support Involved Tenants and what plans are in place to ensure continuation, and
  - Risk Assessments for staff members, visitors and Volunteers when re-entering the Council and Community Buildings as the lockdown is eased.
- We as a group of Involved Tenants have voted to keep our meetings online for the foreseeable future and are assessing the fact that keeping an element of the meetings online going forward would benefit the council to help achieve carbon neutrality by 2030.

### FUTURE ASPIRATIONS

- As a group of Involved Tenant Volunteers, we will continue to work with our partners, the Council, Public Health and Central Government and be guided by their advice ensuring we:
  - Adhere to risk assessments – lowering the risk to members of the public, Involved Tenants and Staff.
  - Adhere to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, working with Public Health to consider the risk to community events.
  - Work towards being carbon neutral by 2030.

- Engage with all groups of people across the Borough through online mediums such as Microsoft Teams and SharePoint.
- Equality and diversity impact assessment training is completed by staff and Involved Tenants to ensure these assessments are completed for all activities organised.

## **10. Review of Developing a protocol for the analysis and protection of tenant data**

### **ACHIEVEMENTS**

- General Data Protection Regulations – the Involved Tenants have created and signed a Statement
- The Involved Tenants IT Equipment is independently supported by an external Wokingham Borough Council Contractor:
  - This ensures they are monitored constantly for external risks such as fire wall breaches
  - Involved Tenant Volunteers data is protected through the use of fire walls and constant monitoring

### **FUTURE ASPIRATIONS**

- Due to Covid restrictions, there have been increased challenges in, ‘Developing a protocol for the analysis and protection of tenant data’ and making a large amount of progress this past year.
- The Tenant Involvement Team are currently in the process of recruiting a Digital Apprentice:
  - This staff member will be trained on General Protection Regulations
  - Will adhere to the Volunteering Management Policy, which gives advice on external media engagement
  - Ensure compliance to the Regulatory Standards by opening up more opportunities for Tenants to engage and be part of the decision-making process within Housing Services.
- The Involved Tenants would like to explore this aspiration in greater detail to ensure it continues to be fit for purpose.
- The Involved Tenants would like training on data analysis so that we can work with our partners to suggest, plan, and create projects and policies, to better understand, the needs and aspirations of our tenants.
- The Involved Tenants would like to complete a training on the General Data Protection Regulations so that we can ensure we and our partners comply with these.

## **11. All Projects that the Involved Tenants have been working on this past year**

We would like to bring to your attention the amount of projects that the Involved tenants have been able to be involved in this past year. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic and sole online working/meetings, the Involved Tenants have been able to continue their partnership with Wokingham Borough Council.

The projects include, but are not limited to:

- Pet Policy initial consultation with ILG and the Involved Tenant Communications Group.
- Code of Conduct and Breaches of Conduct by the TISG.
- Homelessness policy consultation with TISG.
- Domestic Abuse policy consultation with TISG.
- Sheltered Tenants Handbook update initial consultation with ILG and TISG.
- Tenant Involvement Strategy Action Plan with TISG.
- Volunteer Management Policy with TISG.
- Welcome Pack Involved Tenant details with TISG.
- Equalities Policy initial consultation with Involved Tenants invited.

- Regulatory Standards Review overseen by Housemark with each Involved Tenant Group (Communications Group, Strategy Group, Repairs and Maintenance Group, Neighbourhoods and Communities Group, Independent Living Group) for the Chairs Groups and TLIP to review.
- Housing Restructure Review with all Involved Tenants invited to provide recommendations on the Housing Restructure.
- Housing White Paper Review and presentations from each service manager to TLIP.

The Involved Tenants have a number of projects that they will continue to focus on in the next year, these include (but are not limited to):

- The Welcome Pack
- The Involved Tenant Recruitment Process
- The Lettings Policy consultation
- The Pets Policy
- The Sheltered Tenants Handbook
- The General Needs Tenants Handbook
- The Complaints Policy and Tenants Panel Implementation
- The Communications and Engagement Policy

## Conclusions

During the Covid-19 pandemic, we have recognised that there are some things that haven't been able to be achieved to the best of our ability. Review areas 3, 6, 7, 8 and 10 have been challenging due to the COVID-19 pandemic but will be areas of focus moving forward. However, section 11 indicates the amount of projects we have been engaged in this year and, even more importantly, how our Involved Tenant groups have managed to continue holding monthly meetings online. We have continued participating in meetings with contractors, interviews with new staff and completed trainings to aid with the aspirations set out in the Tenants Charter.

Moving forward, there is a need to review and update the full Tenants Charter to better suit the current projects, aims and aspirations of the partnership. We are focused on this as so much has changed in the past year due to the pandemic and we would like to reflect this in areas that are overachieving and those that require further support. This review and update also comes at a time where other factors are affecting the future of housing services including the emerging lessons/review from the Grenfell Tower Disaster (creating a greater focus on Health and safety, tenant involvement and transparency), the Social Housing White Paper, The Housing Ombudsman Complaints code, Digital transformations in engagement, social trends and the COVID-19 pandemic.

A special thanks should go to the members of the Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel, for their continued governance, as well as the scrutiny and challenge of all policies and procedures and their dedication to making improvements to the lives of Tenants across the Borough. We would like to thank Kim Jakubiszyn, Rosalynn Funnell, and Simon Price along with all the Housing teams, for all their hard work and support helping us to achieve so much this year. We look forward to continuing to work together as one team on exciting and new projects, progressing more with the aspirations above. In addition, we would like to thank all of the staff and Councillors for their continued partnership working, which has helped us to achieve so much. We look forward to continuing that partnership.

## Footnote: Thank you from the Tenant Involvement Team

The Tenant Involvement Team would like to thank all of our Formal Tenant Volunteers for giving up their time to work in partnership with the staff and contractors of Wokingham Borough Council. Together we achieve so much and want to recognise their tireless work within the Borough. Since the beginning of the first lockdown in March 2020, they have

volunteered 3,503 hours, which is the equivalent to nearly 2 full time staff members in the same period, highlighting their dedication in volunteering and assisting the service.