

## **BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**This matter is NOT a Key Decision within the council's definition and has NOT been included in the relevant Forward Plan.**

### **Report of the Executive Director of PLACE**

#### **STRENGTHENING THE TENANT VOICE**

##### **A NEW ENGAGEMENT MODEL FOR TENANTS**

#### **1. Purpose of report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present a new model for co-regulation and tenant scrutiny. The proposals, developed by a working group of tenants, staff and a Berneslai Homes Board Member, aim to increase accountability to tenants and strengthen the tenant voice in line with the regulatory requirements as set by the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH).
- 1.2 The report also gives a general update on progress against the other actions arising from the external review of the tenant engagement model commissioned by Berneslai Homes (on behalf of the Council) during 2018/19.

#### **2. Recommendations**

**It is recommended that the portfolio Holder for PLACE:**

- 2.1 Approves proposals from Berneslai Homes for the new co-regulation and scrutiny model, including recruitment to the panels.
- 2.2 Notes the intention to review the effectiveness and impact of the co-regulation and scrutiny model after 12 months.
- 2.3 Notes progress made on other actions arising from the review.

#### **3. Introduction**

- 3.1 The Regulator of Social Housing (RHS) 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. The duty to involve tenants in the management of its homes is called **co-regulation**. Co-regulation is about landlords and tenants working together to monitor our performance and promote transparency. Our proposed model will help us to look at how our services are performing and how we can improve them
- 3.2 The Customer Involvement Agreement 2018-2021 (produced by Berneslai Homes under delegation but signed by the Council, ALMO and Tenant Federation) was endorsed by the Council in July 2018. This agreement sets out the current model of co-regulation; Challenge Berneslai (a longstanding relationship with Barnsley Federation of Tenants and Residents).

- 3.3 In March 2019, following an external review of the tenant engagement service by The Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS), a range of recommendations were made to refresh and modernise our approach to engagement to ensure that as a landlord (and management agent - ALMO) we are effectively held to account by our tenants and that the tenant voice in Barnsley is representative, strong and responded to.
- 3.4 The recommendations (as endorsed by the Council and Berneslai Homes Board) are detailed below:
- To end recognition of the Federation as the main consultative body
  - **To set up new arrangements to involve tenants in regulation and scrutiny of our services**
  - **To continue to support the Tenants and Residents Associations**
  - **To improve social media activity to reach out to a wider audience**
  - **To expand the Service Excellence Assessment Programme**
  - **To support and improve the Customer Panel**
  - **To review local engagement arrangements**

#### **4. Current Situation**

An update against the recommendations is provided below:

##### **4.1 To set up a new arrangement to involve tenants in co-regulation and scrutiny of our service**

4.1.1 This was a priority action due to regulatory requirements.

In April 2019 a task and finish working group was set up with a specific focus on co-regulation and tenant scrutiny. The working group was made up of staff, a board member and tenants and residents from Berneslai Homes' Service Excellence Assessor pool, TARAs, and former members of the Federation.

4.1.2 The working group met on four occasions and developed a proposed model for ensuring effective co-regulation and tenant scrutiny. A diagram of the model can be seen at Appendix 1.

4.1.3 It is to be noted that the model builds upon the positive and effective aspects of the previous 'Federation' managed Challenge Berneslai model. However, it removes the responsibility and time commitments on tenants to self- manage the process (highlighted as issues in the TPAS review). It also enhances the opportunity to attract a more diverse range of volunteers, and with clear terms of reference and role requirements, supported by a training and development programme, it should result in a more proactive and challenging model. The time limited positions also seeks to keep the panel fresh and effective, but the terms are long enough to develop skills and good working relationship.

4.1.4 In summary, there will be a two panel approach to co-regulation and scrutiny.

## **Tenant Voice Panel**

The main panel is the Tenant Voice Panel (working title) who will fulfil the co-regulatory function. Appendix 2 sets out the role, remit and practicalities of the proposed Tenant Voice Panel. The Panel will consist of 8 members (7 tenants and up to 1 leaseholder) plus a tenant board member. The tenant board member and staff supporting the panel will have an advisory role only. The panel will meet **monthly**.

## **Tenant Voice Scrutiny Panel**

Working under the direction of the Tenant Voice Panel there will be a task and finish Tenant Voice Scrutiny Panel. This is a working title and will be discussed and developed further once members have been recruited to the Tenant Voice Panel.

This is a panel who will meet on a task and finish basis to undertake detailed scrutiny as directed by the Tenant Voice Panel (either as a direct request from Berneslai Homes or as a result of the Tenant Voice Panel's co-regulation activities). Members for the task and finish scrutiny exercise will be selected from a pool of tenants who have expressed an interest in scrutiny and who have taken part in the scrutiny training programme. Two members from the Tenant Voice Panel can be part of the scrutiny panel. The terms of reference can be found in appendix 3.

## **4.2 Governance links**

4.2.1 For co-regulation to be effective there needs to be strong but independent links to Berneslai Homes' company governance arrangements. It also ensures the tenants on the panel feel valued and listened to, and the model can effectively challenge the organisation and hold it to account. The proposals below highlight the governance links between the Tenant Voice Panel and the Berneslai Homes Board.

- The involvement of a board member on the Tenant Voice Panel offers an opportunity to develop these links.
- Co-regulation reports will be shared with Customer Services Committee on a six monthly basis or sooner if the need arises with an annual report being shared with Board. The reports will be presented by a member of the Tenant Voice Panel.
- Individual scrutiny reports will be presented to Customer Services Committee who, dependent upon the report, may decide to share with

Board. The reports will be presented by a member of the Tenant Voice Panel and a member the Tenant Voice Scrutiny Panel.

- Two members from the Co-regulation panel will be selected to represent tenants at the quarterly Berneslai Homes and BMBC Liaison meeting. This ensures that tenants can have a direct dialogue with the landlord, board members and Berneslai Homes Executive, and so strengthen the tenant voice and increase accountability.

### **4.3 Ensuring wider accountability**

It is essential that this model offers assurance to the wider tenant population that tenants are truly holding us to account. The following actions are proposed to increase awareness and assurance:

- All reports from the co-regulation panel will be summarised in an easy to read and engaging style and shared with tenants on our website and by social media. Summaries will also be issued to the local media and shared with TARAs and other involved tenants.
- Bespoke tenant voice section on our website.
- Regular articles outlining the work of the panel published to social media and website.
- Media releases to reach out to tenants not on line
- Promotion of the Tenant Voice model on van livery.
- Wider and more regular promotion of our “Your Comments Count” process to encourage tenants who have issues to contact us.
- A bespoke tenant voice e-mail address will be set up along with a published phone number ([tenantvoice@berneslaihomes.co.uk](mailto:tenantvoice@berneslaihomes.co.uk)). Whilst referrals to these contacts will be received by staff, they will be shared with the panel (subject to data privacy) and agreement made about the most appropriate way to handle enquiries to get the best outcome for tenants.

### **4.4 New Model Implementation Plan**

The following is proposed (subject to BMBC consultation)

- To commence recruitment to the Tenant Voice Panel in August 2019.
- To select members by September 2019. A board member and staff member will complete the recruitment.
- To induct and train members in October 2019
- To commence recruitment for the scrutiny panel in October 2019
- To induct and train scrutiny members in November 2019
- It is anticipated that the first Tenant Voice Panel meetings will start in October 2019 with the first scrutiny referrals being made in November 2019.
- It is proposed to independently review the effectiveness of the new model 12 months after the go-live date. TPAS have indicated their willingness to undertake this review.

## **4.5 General update on improvement actions**

Whilst the focus of actions since April 2019 has been around developing the co-regulatory model, the following is an update on progress against other actions arising from the review. Once these actions have been completed, the Customer Involvement Agreement (involvement strategy) can be refreshed. It is anticipated that this will be refreshed and presented for approval by March 2020.

### **4.5.1 To continue to support the Tenants and Residents Associations**

On behalf of the Council, Berneslai Homes will continue to work with TARAs and, over coming months, will be working with them to review their constitution and funding arrangements. Berneslai Homes are also developing an involved tenant and tenant group e-bulletin and plan to have quarterly bulletins in place from October 2019.

### **4.5.2 To improve social media activity to reach out to a wider audience**

Berneslai Homes are working with the Housing Management Teams to develop local social media presence.

Berneslai Homes has set up some shared learning with BMBC who now use Instagram as an engagement tool and staff from the community engagement team will be undertaking shadowing to develop skill and knowledge.

Berneslai Homes are researching the most effective way to set up closed groups or virtual panels which they can use to engage with people without the need for them to attend meetings.

The Tenant Voice Panel will widen their reach by having a social media presence.

### **4.5.3 To expand the Service Excellence Assessment Programme (SEAP)**

The programme has a continuous recruitment process which has seen the number of assessors increase in the last few months. Plans are in place to develop the diversity and range of assessors by the use of social media. It is envisaged that the programme will be extended over coming months as the new Tenant Voice Panel or the scrutiny panel can commission bespoke research from the programme.

### **4.5.4 To support and improve the Customer Panel**

The Customer Panel continues to be a popular model for engagement. The review is in very early stages.

Berneslai Homes would like to see the development of a virtual panel that can mirror topics discussed at the Customer Panel and/or which can feed into the Tenant Voice Panel.

#### 4.5.5 To review local engagement arrangements

The Berneslai Homes Housing Management Team Leaders are currently working within their localities, arranging local conversations to ensure the opportunities for engagement are meaningful and suit the needs of the area and tenure. The process is still ongoing with some areas continuing with the same, "Your Community Your Say process" and others merging the meeting with the Ward Alliances. Area based teams are planning to increase their use of social media when the mobile IT system is in place.

### 5. **Proposal and justification**

- 5.1 It is proposed that the Portfolio Holder for PLACE supports the recommendations as highlighted in section 4 of this report. This is the recommended option, as it seeks to strengthen the tenant voice and has been developed in partnership with customers.

### 6. **Implications for local people / service users**

- 6.1 The proposals, developed by a working group of tenants, staff and a Berneslai Homes Board Member, aim to increase accountability to tenants and strengthen the tenant voice in line with the regulatory requirements as set by the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH).

### 7. **Financial implications**

- 7.1 The proposals set out in 4.1 offer significantly better value for money than previous arrangements. It is anticipated that Berneslai Homes/the Council will generate higher levels of customer feedback from a wider demographic of tenant using the same level of staffing resource and budget.
- 7.2 The proposed model should make savings for the HRA as the new model will operate with a reduced budget from the previous HRA annual grant of £24,616 which was paid to the Federation. It has been agreed with BMBC to continue with the current budget arrangements until the new model has been established and realistic budget requirements can be produced.
- 7.3 At this stage it is not proposed to amend the current Berneslai Homes budget allocated to Community Engagement, as other aspects of the review are still to be completed. For the 2020/21 financial year the allocated budget will be sufficient to support the development of a new model.

### 8. **Employee implications**

- 8.1 The two staff who supported the Federation are now located in Gateway Plaza and are supporting the development of the new model. Their job profiles are currently being reviewed and it is not anticipated that there will be any negative impact on their current salaries; however, these will be subject to job evaluation.

## **9. Consultations**

- 9.1 Consultation on the new Tenant Voice Panel and the Scrutiny Panel have taken place with a group of former Federation members, involved tenants from the TARAs and Service Excellence Assessment Programme and the working group as outlined in 4.1.
- 9.2 Informal discussions with staff have resulted in positive feedback about the new arrangements.
- 9.3 Consultation has taken place with officers from BMBC (Housing and Communities) to ensure shareholder support of the new co-regulation and scrutiny models. Comments on the draft documents from Communities and the Equalities and Diversity officer have been reflected in the updated appendices.

## **10. Tackling Health Inequalities**

- 10.1 The new Tenant Voice Panel and Tenant Voice Scrutiny Panel offer a more accessible approach to involving tenants in co-regulation. It is noted that there is still a requirement for tenants to attend meetings to fulfil this role and this may exclude some people. This barrier will be reduced by a flexible approach to meeting times and venues, and consideration to other ways to enable people to contribute to the model.

## **12. Climate Change & Sustainable Energy Act 2006**

- 12.1 There are no issues arising from this report.

## **13. Community Strategy and the Council's Performance Management Framework**

- 13.1 Developing a stronger tenant voice fully supports BMBC's priority to develop strong and resilient communities (Town Spirit - Change IT) and deliver excellent customer services.
- 13.2 The proposals to strengthen the tenant voice and develop more effective local engagement supports the outcome of BMBC's service review undertaken in 2017/18.

## **14. Promoting Equality & Diversity and Social Inclusion**

- 14.1 The new Tenant Voice Panel and Tenant Voice Scrutiny Panel will offer a more accessible approach to involving tenants in co-regulation. It is noted that there is still a requirement for tenants to attend meetings to fulfil this role and this may exclude some people. This barrier will be reduced by a flexible approach to meeting times and venues, and consideration to other ways to enable people to contribute to the model.
- 14.2 There will be an increased opportunity for all tenants to be involved by sharing more information about the Tenant Voice Panel in a variety of formats and

developing social media and proposed virtual panel arrangements. Whilst there is a push for more on-line information and virtual portals, it is acknowledged that more traditional contact options are still a preference for a number of tenants. To ensure flexibility, and following discussions with BMBC, the terms of reference have been amended to state that a 'seat' on the panel can be for a period up to 3 years, so as not to exclude people who are unable to commit their time over a longer period.

**15. Appendices**

Appendix A Financial Implications (to follow)

Appendix 1 Tenant Voice proposed Model

Appendix 2 Tenant Voice Panel role and remit

Appendix 3 Tenant Voice Panel Scrutiny Terms of Reference

Officer Contact: Sarah Cartwright [sarahcartwright@barnsley.gov.uk](mailto:sarahcartwright@barnsley.gov.uk)