

## **Tenant Voice Forum – Planning meeting Tuesday 8 April 2025 1pm**

### **Attendance**

**Tenants: Barbara Rickards, Lesley Peplow, Gary Bridge, Chris Hesketh, Adrian Van Toren, Andy Davis, Kim McBride, Phil Smith, Chris Hach, David Thomas**

**Staff: Sarah Thompson (Tenant Involvement Manager), Lucy Tyne (Tenant Involvement Officer), Carol Reynolds (Tenant Participation Officer, Selby), Annette Mullaney (Tenant Involvement Officer)**

### **1. Welcome and apologies**

- 1.1 Sarah welcomed all to the meeting and ran through introductions.
- 1.2 Members of the meeting were given a printout of slides correlating to the agenda.

### **2. Where are we – tenant involvement strategy and our ambitions for the future**

- 2.1 Sarah began by explaining how last April the Regulator of social housing published new standards that local authorities need to adhere to. One of these standards is called the Transparency, Influence and Accountability standard, this encompasses tenant involvement, it talks about how tenants should be treated with fairness and respect. How they should be empowered to influence change in the housing service they receive.
- 2.2 This change in regulatory standards has allowed the council to rethink tenant involvement. NYC want tenant involvement to be worthwhile, people who chose to be involved need to be adequately rewarded and be able to see the changes they have influenced.
- 2.3 Sarah explained that the tenant involvement team want to ensure tenant voice is heard every step of the way, there will be different opportunities for people to get involved, depending on their

**Action:**



preference of time and commitment. Sarah also wanted to make it clear that although these changes are partly as a result of regulatory changes, the council should also have a commitment to changing culture and ways of working for the benefit of tenants.

2.4 Sarah shared that North Yorkshire Council had self-referred to regulator some time ago, they have issued us with a judgement of C3.

2.4.1 Chris Hach asked if there was a grade lower than C3?

2.4.2 Sarah explained that there is – C4. A C4 grading would recognise serious failings with no commitment to make changes and improve. North Yorkshire Council were issued a C3 – there are serious failings, but the council are working with the regulator and are committed to improving.

2.4.3 Chris Hach stated that the grading was given without any tenant input – he believes the grading is generous.

2.4.4 Gary asked that now the council have been given a C3 grading – if money runs out when making improvement, will central government help? Sarah explained that this isn't the case - the council need to manage their own budget and see where savings can be made.

2.5 Chris Hach mentioned the loss of rent through the large number of empty properties the Tadcaster and Selby area.

2.6 Sarah went on to discuss the creation of the new tenant involvement strategy. She spoke about how the strategy was co-created with tenants and it offered a wide range of involvement activities. There is an emphasis around ensuring all tenants can be involved. Sarah explained that the team want to ensure underrepresented groups are represented within involvement – it was acknowledged that the first step to this, is the council improving customer insights and knowing who their tenants are.

2.7 Sarah explained that the tenant involvement team are here to facilitate involvement – they will work with other service areas to ensure that tenants are considered. She explained that involvement ideally should be tenant led and that's why this planning meeting is being held today – to ask the group what they want to see at these meetings and who they want to hear from.

2.8 Sarah gave some context around the council governance. She explained that our council is an executive led council. There is a member scrutiny group for Housing and Leisure. At their meeting they are presented with performance against KPI's, the service improvement plan and the complaints report. The tenant involvement



team would like these same documents to be discussed by this group and the tenants voice taken to the member scrutiny meetings.

**3. Service improvement, policy framework and complaints – Imogen Downie (Housing Strategy and Policy officer)**

3.1 Imogen began by discussing policy work that is ongoing. She explained that there is a library of different policies that the council are working on. Currently, her team are prioritising them and breaking them up into work packages. The priority is based on legal requirement and service need. She explained that the team would like tenant input throughout this, the aim is to produce the policy with tenants. At the moment, the policies the team are working on are – ground maintenance, the lettable standard and compensation and disrepair. Imogen explained although tenants will be involved in each policy, the ones that are heavily based in legislation will not call for as much tenant input as the ones that aren't.

3.2 She also mentioned that the team are interested using customer journey maps and suggested this could be something that would be good to use for the compensation policy. To reach out to tenants who have experience with this and map out their journey.

3.3 Sarah also discussed the service improvement plan for housing. Tenants have seen this before, but an updated copy can be shared.

**Lucy**

3.4 Lucy explained that the council also carry out quarterly surveys that make up the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (this is something also required by the regulator). The council use a company called Acuity to carry out these surveys, they are done via telephone. Lucy explained that Acuity sends through 'alerts' - these include the details of the telephone call and will often mention issues around damp and mould or anti-social behaviour. At the moment, the tenant involvement team are collating these alerts and ensuring the relevant teams are aware of the issues raised. The team will get in touch with the tenant to ensure they are able to report issues. The tracker can then inform the team and keep everyone up to date with resolution of issues.

3.5 Chris Hesketh explained that where he lives where he lives a lot of people have an issue with damp and mould. He explained that it is present in his flat, but he can keep on top of it. He shared a concern for people who aren't able to do this – leading to it becoming an issue. He suggested that the council should employ people who are able to visit these people and keep on top of their damp and mould, by cleaning it and treating it, to ensure it doesn't become a problem.

**Sarah**



3.6 Barbara shared that she thinks access needs to be looked at more. Tenants need to let the council into their house to do works to solve the issue. Sarah acknowledged that this works both ways. Barbara suggested something about this could go in the newsletter.

3.7 Chris Hach and Phil shared that they never see housing officers around, there was a consensus that communication needs to improve in a lot of areas.

3.8 Phil suggested that there needs to be a bigger social media presence for NYC tenants to promote things such as this meeting. Sarah explained that this is something the team are looking into improving.

3.9 Chris Hach and Phil discussed how they keep hearing that North Yorkshire Council is new, they feel this isn't true, its coming into its 3<sup>rd</sup> year and it should not be used an excuse. Chris shared that he thinks the council has made it harder for tenants to get involved and specifically referred to the Armed Forces Champion. Sarah acknowledged and noted the concerns.

#### **4. Discussion around content for Tenant voice forum going forward.**

##### **4.1 Regular content**

4.1.1 Sarah explained that at these quarterly meeting there will be regular content on the agenda. Things that were mentioned earlier such as performance information, updates on the service improvement plans and the complaints report.

##### **4.2 Tenant requests**

4.2.2 The other portion of the agenda will then be made up with tenant suggestions. The group made lots of suggestions – listed below.

Damp and mould

Veterans support

Information around homelessness

Rent arrears

Update on the housing management team. Information on who is responsible for what.

Issue with the out of hours service – who you need to contact.

More leaseholders need to be involved

Councillor attendance

Health and safety

4.3 There was a discussion around tenant chair and vice chair. Chris shared that is very important the group is tenant led, and the agenda is not controlled by the council. He emphasised that the chair and vice chair need to be elected democratically.

4.4 This view was echoed throughout the group. Sarah explained that the logistics of how a chair will be elected is yet to be decided but reassured the group that it will be tenant led and run by an elected tenant chair and vice chair.

4.5 Lesley explained that in the past, people have put themselves forward and given a short speech on why they feel they are suitable then the group vote in private.

4.6 Chris Hesketh shared a previous term's of reference and shared his view that this would act as great template for this groups ToR. Sarah confirmed that this can be used as a template and an updated version will be circulated to the group

## **5. Wider tenant voice panel plan**

5.1 Sarah shared that the tenant voice panel is made up of 30 –40 tenants so far. This is a bank of people the team will contact with any kind of involvement opportunities. This quarterly forum meeting is just 1 part of the tenant voice panel. Our ambition is to record the meeting and put it online so tenants can watch it in their own time if they cannot attend. There isn't an expectation for people to attend every meeting.

5.1.1 There will be regular focus groups where tenants will be able to deep dive certain topics. NYC want tenants to work in partnership with them and be open to change. Sarah acknowledged that there is a history of negativity and feelings of failure, and the team appreciate this, but involvement needs to be as positive as it can be for everyone involved.

## **6. General code of conduct**

6.1 Sarah shared the code of conduct with everyone. She explained that it is a general draft of a code of conduct for all involvement activities. The group can go away and read through it, if they feel comfortable with it, they can sign it and return to the team.

## **7. Discussion around time and dates**

7.1 Sarah shared at the moment there isn't any involved tenants asking for evening meetings, this is something that would be considered if needed.

7.2 The group agreed they are happy with afternoon meetings and Thursdays seemed to be the best day for people.

7.3 Barbara shared that she doesn't think the meetings work with some people online and some in person. Sarah explained that it can be difficult sometimes but the more we do it the easier and better it will get. She also mentioned that when a chair is elected, their contact details should be shared so that members of the group can contact them regarding the meetings and agenda.

7.4 Phil shared that he thinks all tenants need to be aware that they have the right to form a tenant's association. This was acknowledged and agreed.

7.5 Chris Hesketh discussed that the regulator needs to hold the council to account, and it was discussed again that the C3 grading was given without tenant consultation. Sarah shared that the regulator does want to attend a tenant meeting and speak with tenants. Sarah will speak to the regulator and confirm dates.

7.6 Sarah also shared that Acuity – the company who carry out our TSM survey also want to come and speak to tenants.

7.6.1 Chris Hesketh shared concern that Acuity were also appointed without tenant consultation.

7.6.2 Phil mentioned that he got a call for the TSM survey and Acuity's number was labelled as spam. The team will investigate this.

## **8. Setting the agenda for the next meeting**

8.1 It was agreed that these meetings need to be held in line with the member scrutiny meetings – which means the next time the group will meet is in May time, more details will follow.

8.2 The tenant chair and vice chair may not be in place by then but more discussion around the roles can be had at the next meeting. A draft terms of reference will also be brought to the meeting. The group gave some suggestions on what should be included on the agenda in May. It was explained that not all these suggestions would fit on the agenda, but they can be considered for later meetings.

Decarbonisation projects  
Damp and mould

Root cause analysis  
Budgets  
Retrofit  
Effective crisis management  
Allocations policy  
Void inspections

8.3 Chris Hesketh suggested having a way that people could suggest topics for the agenda online.

8.4 Chris Hach asked if policies are the same for the whole of North Yorkshire – it was confirmed that they are.

8.5 There was then some discussion around the compensation policy and how the council need to acknowledge that paying compensation to a tenant doesn't make the problem go away.

8.6 Chris Hach shared that he feels like NYC only care about certain areas. Sarah shared that the team are wanting to get out into the community more, into rural areas too. They hope to engage with more tenants and get into communities that may feel that there isn't much officer presence.

8.7 After some discussion around negative experiences with Councillors, Chris Hesketh shared that he invited Philip Broadbank to his home, he shared that he was very pleasant and engaging.

**Everyone was thanked for their attendance and the meeting was closed at 3pm.**