

7 November 2018

Children, Education and Communities Policy & Scrutiny Committee

Report of the Assistant Director of Legal and Governance

Joint Review: Resident Involvement Feasibility Report Summary

1. This report informs Members of a topic request submitted by Cllr Ann Reid to look into tenant involvement, including the York Residents' Federation which has recently failed to appoint a committee and is thus no longer operational.
2. The submission asks the Committee to undertake a scrutiny review to help identify where the council can increase its support for tenant engagement, both in wards and across the city, and also help establish new residents' associations in wards that are not covered by an active association.
3. It is suggested that if Members decide to undertake a review into this topic, the remit should include looking at the Council's role to represent tenant and residents' association across the city.

Background

4. Residents' associations play an important role in building local communities, contributing to council policies and shaping the delivery of services to tenants and residents in York. City of York Council's Housing Engagement Strategy (Annex 1) sets its vision as:

“Residents will be empowered and supported to develop their own solutions to local issues when and how they want to...there are opportunities for all residents to participate in local decisions and shape how services are delivered”.

5. The Council is also committed to removing barriers to involvement, acknowledging that some residents may not find it as easy to get involved as others. Ensuring front line staff has an understanding of the

purpose and approach of engagement so they can be effective is also a key aim.

6. Residents' Associations focus on housing concerns, the local environment and local issues.
7. The purpose of the York Residents' Federation is set out in full within its constitution (Annex 2). It aims to cover the whole of the City of York, with the following key objectives:
 - to represent the interests of residents, to provide assistance and support to associations who are members of the Federation and to encourage the establishment of new associations
 - to meet, liaise and consult with the City of York Council, promote and exercise the rights of residents to be involved in developing policies on housing and other issues and be a sounding board for service improvement across all departments.
 - to encourage initiatives relating to the prevention of crime, vandalism and anti social behaviour within the community
 - to identify training needs among members of the federation and to work with the relevant agencies to provide appropriate levels of education and training to meet those needs.
 - to promote equal opportunities, oppose discrimination and to be non-party political in its activities.
8. 22 Residents Associations are named (Annex 3) on the council's website, however, the Communities and Equalities team advise that there are currently only a dozen active, fully functioning associations in the city.
9. As from the 1st April 2017, responsibility for tenant engagement was transferred from the Communities and Equalities team with the responsible member of staff and budget being moved to the Housing Team.
10. The change has resulted in confusion about responsibility for tenant engagement, particularly around expectations around servicing tenants association. There appears to be uncertainty over whether housing officers or communities officers should facilitate the Annual General Meetings of Associations or whether this responsibility falls on the association to organise its own independent facilitator.

11. In October 2017 The York Federation received training from CVS York which resulted in an Action Plan with objectives to invigorate and encourage more participation in the Federation.
12. In September The York Federation failed to appoint a committee to operate the Federation and meet its aims and objectives.
13. Capacity turnover of officers in the last year and personal commitments have been identified as some of the main reasons for the Federation not being able to appoint a committee. Interest in the York Federation also appears to have diminished with resident associations unclear what value the Federation brings to their associations and the wider community.
14. Challenges around initiating change and diversification, for example using new technologies and different platforms to communicate with members also proved a challenge for the Federation

Consultation

15. This report has been produced following consultation meetings with officers from the Housing and Communities and Equalities team

Analysis

16. Any Scrutiny Review would be timely. The Green Paper on Social Housing (published Aug 2008) includes elements on empowering residents. The Grenfell Inquiry appointed an assessor to focus on community engagement and is likely to make recommendations in this area.
17. In the aftermath of the Grenfell Fire, the Tenants Participation Advisory Service (TPAS), who promote tenants taking more operational control of their activities, has posed three questions which maybe useful for any Scrutiny Review:
 - i. How does the council genuinely ensure that tenants are an integral part of improving and monitoring services they receive?
 - ii. How do the council Members and senior staff really know what tenants are thinking about services the council provides?
 - iii. What more could the council be doing to enable more tenant involvement, not less?

18. The assessment of officers is that a review into how tenant involvement can be improved, associations supported and encouraged to set up would be apt and timely.

Options

19. Members can:
- i. Agree to undertake a scrutiny review on the issues outlined in the submission, appoint a Task Group to carry out this work on the Committee's behalf and agree a suitable remit for review;
 - ii. Agree to recommend that this work is picked up by the new Committee at the start of the next Municipal Year; or
 - iii. Decide against undertaking a scrutiny review around this topic area at this time.

Council Plan

20. This issue is linked to A Council That Listens to Residents priority in the Council Plan and A Focus on Front Line Services

Implications

21. There are no financial, human resources, equalities, Legal, crime and disorder, property or other implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Risk Management

22. There are no risks attached to the recommendations in this report, however not taking any action may result in more associations failing and reduce opportunities for tenants to get involved in tenants structures and structural engagement with the council.

Conclusions

22. Members need to be mindful that tenant engagement resource seems to be directed at the establishment and support of Residents' Associations and the Federation of Residents' Associations. Listening to tenant's voices is far wider than this and there is a need for candour about whether tenants in the 21st century want to run formal associations in their present structure.

23. Identifying how new technologies and platforms can be employed to reach a techno savvy, faster moving society appears essential.
24. Members need to be aware that tenants and residents in the same community have different tenures, even on a traditional council estate, not all residents are tenants, and many are now home owners. Residents therefore have different concerns relating to their tenures, but will also have common concerns around external issues such as community safety.
25. Whether Members opt to review this topic or not, sufficient issues have been raised and identified for relevant Officers to be required to look into what's happening and how the current issues can be resolved, at the very least
26. Any proposal to review support to the York Residents' Federation would naturally seek to improve the Council's engagement with communities, and potentially have a positive impact on the Council's housing policies in terms of matching them to resident's priorities/needs.
27. Considering that the review requires consultation with the community on a City wide basis, the remaining time in this council year is too short to conduct a thorough review. Recommending a future committee to undertake this review in the new municipal year will allow the new committee to maximise engagement without time constraints which can undermine the quality of a review.

Recommendations

28. That Members consider whether to undertake a review in relation to the proposed topic area, or not, and if agreed, to set an appropriate remit and timescale

Reason: To comply with Scrutiny protocols and procedures.

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Report Approved Date 26/10/2018

Wards Affected: *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Further reading

The Green Paper on Social Housing (published Aug 2018)
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/social-housing-green-paper-a-new-deal-for-social-housing>

Annexes

Annex 1 City of York Council's Housing Engagement Strategy
Annex 2 Constitution of The York Residents' Federation
Annex 3 List of residents Associations CYC Website

Abbreviations

CVS- Centre for Voluntary Services
TPAS-Tenants Participation Advisory Service (TPAS)