

## **IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION**

**Date and Time :-** Tuesday 21 March 2023 at 1.30 p.m.

**Venue:-** Town Hall, Moorgate Street, Rotherham.

**Membership:-** Councillors Wyatt (Chair), Tinsley (Vice-Chair), Aveyard, Bennett-Sylvester, Browne, C Carter, Castledine-Dack, T Collingham, Cowen, Ellis, Havard, Jones, Khan, McNeely, Monk, Reynolds, Taylor.

**Co-opted Members:-** Mrs. K. Bacon, Mrs. M. Jacques.

This meeting will be webcast live and will be available to view [via the Council's website](#). The items which will be discussed are described on the agenda below and there are reports attached which give more details.

Rotherham Council advocates openness and transparency as part of its democratic processes. Anyone wishing to record (film or audio) the public parts of the meeting should inform the Chair or Governance Advisor of their intentions prior to the meeting.

### **AGENDA**

#### **1. Apologies for Absence**

To receive the apologies of any Member who is unable to attend the meeting.

#### **2. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 7 February 2023 (Pages 3 - 7)**

To consider and approve the minutes of the previous meeting held on 7 February 2023 as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

#### **3. Declarations of Interest**

To receive declarations of interest from Members in respect of items listed on the agenda.

#### **4. Questions from members of the public and the press**

To receive questions relating to items of business on the agenda from members of the public or press who are present at the meeting.

#### **5. Exclusion of the Press and Public**

To consider whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during consideration of any part of the agenda.

**6. Tenants Scrutiny Review Panel - Improving Communication with Tenants (Pages 9 - 85)**

To consider a report presenting a summary of the findings of the review and the associated action plan.

**7. Housing Strategy 2022-25 Progress Report Q2/Q3 (Pages 87 - 108)**

To consider for information a report providing an update on progress over the period July to December 2022 (Q2/Q3).

**8. Work Programme (Pages 109 - 115)**

To consider and approve an updated outline schedule of proposed scrutiny work.

**9. Urgent Business**

To consider any item which the Chair is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency.

**10. Date and time of the next meeting**

The next meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission will take place on 9 May 2023, commencing at 1.30 pm in Rotherham Town Hall.

**IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION**  
**Tuesday 7 February 2023**

Present:- Councillor Wyatt (in the Chair); Councillors Aveyard, Bennett-Sylvester, Browne, C Carter, T. Collingham, Cowen, Ellis, Havard, Jones, McNeely, Monk, Reynolds, Taylor and Tinsley, and co-opted members Mrs. K. Bacon and Mrs. M. Jacques.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Castledine-Dack and Khan.

The webcast of the Council Meeting can be viewed at:-

<https://rotherham.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

**49. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 13 DECEMBER 2022**

The Chair noted that, pursuant to minute no. 42, recommendation 3, the Members Session had been scheduled for 15 February 2023.

**Resolved:-**

1. That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 13 December 2023 be approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

**50. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Cllr Havard declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda Item 7 as a Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust participant.

**51. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS**

The Chair confirmed that no questions had been submitted.

**52. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

The Chair advised that there was no reason to exclude members of the press or public from observing discussion of any items on the agenda.

**53. FLY TIPPING UPDATE**

Consideration was given to an update report in respect of fly-tipping and enforcement activity in Rotherham. The report included an overview of the national and local position in relation to fly-tipping. The report was presented by the Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment and the Assistant Director Community Safety and Street Scene. The direction of travel was highlighted in reference to the prosecutions, and it was noted that, in Yorkshire and Humber, Rotherham is third highest of fifteen authorities for fixed penalty notices for fly-tipping. The Cabinet Member emphasised focus of the Service on ensuring Rotherham was the

cleanest borough possible and ensuring that people who fly tip are held to account. The Assistant Director Community Safety and Street Scene highlighted the slight reduction in fly-tipping numbers from last year alongside a two-percent increase nationally. This was felt to be a positive sign that numbers were reducing. Rotherham fly tipping was proactively reported by officers. CCTV enforcement had been expanded to seven days a week. Consultation with Members had been undertaken in the development of the Enviro-Crime Plan, in accordance with a prior recommendation from scrutiny. The Service had also expanded its collaborations with local people to help unblock barriers and drive engagement.

In discussion, Members sought more information regarding the possibility of household waste recycling centres (HWRCs) accepting vans. The response from officers noted limitations associated with the permit type. To remain compliant with the permit for household waste, commercial waste could not be routinely brought to the site. However, following the Cabinet decision in January, the Council was embarking on a new pathway regarding household waste recycling which would give the local authority more control over what could be accepted. Challenges and limits from the sites themselves were also described. It was noted that larger vans take longer to unload, which can create long queues blocking traffic.

Members also sought further information regarding the potential impact of providing each ward with two skips. It was noted that the impact on community wasted could be cost effective. Some councillors currently contribute out of their Community Leadership Funds for wards to pay for community skips because of the impact these make.

The response from officers noted that many communities already benefit from skip days, which the service had not found to have an impact on fly-tipping. It was clarified that there was not flexibility to remobilise budget currently in place for enforcement, detection or clearance of fly tips because this would have an impact on cleanliness and safety for borough residents. Officers offered to produce a business case for skip days.

To promote wider compliance with “right thing, right bin,” Members requested that consideration be given to more accessible messaging, such as putting pictures on the bins of the kinds of things that are designated for the bin. The response from officers noted that the Service work hard to communicate “right thing right bin,” but further consideration could be given. It was noted that the calendar and app were now available, with around 15,000 people having downloaded the app.

Clarification was requested regarding the use of fines and recouped costs. The response noted that the service find the fines to be paltry, but where there are court proceedings costs are always requested. The response noted the effectiveness of officers at collecting evidence and prosecuting fly tipping. The fines went to the treasury, and the recouped costs went back to the Council.

Members emphasised the importance of informing residents regarding “right thing, right bin.” The response from officers affirmed the importance of this and noted that nationally, it had been recognised that this system was complex. One part of the Environment Act 2021 was about recycling, acknowledging the need to standardise, for example, the types of plastics accepted. How this would be backed up by national campaigning would have an impact.

Members pointed out that people entitled to extra bins often do not know about this option. It had observed that this option was not noted in the calendars or literature. The response from officers acknowledged that additional actions could be done to publicise the option of extra bins for those who need them.

Members requested more information around how the Service signposts people to reputable waste carriers. The response from officers noted that the Service actively signpost people to the DEFRA list of licensed waste carriers. The Service caution against seeking a waste carrier via social media. This was because fly tipping was more likely to be connected with social media. Duty of Care was emphasised by the Service.

Members requested further details regarding moneys invested in the service in view of the comparatively small amounts recouped through prosecution and fixed penalty notices. Officers provided a summary of the Council's budget investment in overt and covert deterrents, as well as the cost of clearance and disposal. It was noted that this was an investment in the health and wellbeing of the natural environment and of citizens and the potential risks associated with the impact of not delivering this service would be significant.

Further details were requested regarding whether tips had a consistent approach to operations from site to site, leading to fly-tipping of waste that would not be accepted. The Cabinet Member responded that 99% of people want to dispose of waste in the easiest legal way possible. It was noted that the behaviour of the people who fly tip shows that they will not follow the rules no matter what. Therefore, it was the goal of the service to do more to engage the people who were on the margins and who just need extra help to dispose of waste in a responsible way. The front end of the Service was being brought in-house to be delivered by the Council and its employees directly, with plans to modernise infrastructure of this Service. As part of this, the Service would be considering whether it can accept more types of waste. The key was in the name - household waste. If there was more that could be done with the commercial side, this would be explored. The Strategic Director commented that whilst the delivery of the customer experience was currently contracted out, Members were requested to send any information regarding a negative customer experience to the Service. More compliments than complaints were received regarding customer experience. The key to note was that HWRCs will take the majority of things that were fly tipped.

Regarding the bin app, Members requested to know more about any extensions planned where resources and materials could be added. The response from officers noted that “right thing, right bin” information was on the app, but the Service were keen to expand the use and usefulness of the app and invited any suggestions of information that would be useful to add to the app.

Regarding the transformation of household waste recycling centres, Members requested to know if there would be a public consultation, and if so, how this would work. The response from officers noted that in partnership with other local authorities in the region, a consultation had been conducted which had resulted in positive feedback regarding the HWRCs. The Service conducts a public consultation to get feedback before embarking on significant changes. At any point in the next three years where there would be significant changes, the public would be consulted.

Members requested to know if there had been any further consideration of plastics schemes. Officers noted that the Environment Act 2021 will have a deposit return scheme.

Members emphasised the need to prioritise prevention, designing out crime, and education as these intersect with nature recovery and climate change. The Cabinet member noted that the “Love Where You Live Coordinator” was a post created as a result of a scrutiny recommendation from this Commission. This officer had been coordinating the litter picking activities in the wards and was to be commended for this work. It was acknowledged that there was more that could be done to celebrate the work of litter picking teams across the borough to thank them for their contributions.

Members emphasised the value of litter picking teams as exemplars of citizen empowerment within communities. For example, litter picking teams often check gullies, which increases community resilience and pride in cascading ways.

**Resolved:-**

1. That the report be noted.
2. That consideration be given to accepting vans at household waste recycling sites.
3. That the Service prepare a business case for the use and impact of community skips.
4. That consideration be given to using pictures on bins to indicate the right contents.

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5. That clear messaging be supplied to residents regarding the options for extra bins.
6. That the fantastic work by the litter-picking teams be acknowledged.
7. That applied learning from the outcome of the pilot scheme be included in the next update.

**54. WORK PROGRAMME**

Consideration was given to an updated outline programme of scrutiny work for 2023/24. It was noted that the Environment Bill would be considered at the 9 May 2023 meeting. It was further noted that the Tenant Scrutiny Review on Communications with the associated action plan response would be submitted to the next meeting on 21 March 2023. The outcomes of the review of Selective Licensing would also be submitted to the 21 March 2023 meeting.

Consideration was given to initial scoping of a review of biodiversity planned for spring 2023. Objectives of the review were noted, including the need for clear focus within a far-ranging topic, and the need to add value by supporting the Council to meet its legal duties concerning Biodiversity Net Gain. Timescales associated with steps for the review process were noted, including a further scoping exercise in March followed by agreement of final scope at the 21 March 2023 meeting. Review meetings would be scheduled for April 2023 with outcomes to be submitted to the June 2023 meeting.

1. That the updated schedule of work be noted.
2. That authority be delegated to the Governance Advisor to make changes to the work programme between meetings in consultation with the Chair and Vice-chair, reporting any changes to the next meeting.
3. That the preliminary scoping activities and timescales for the review of biodiversity be noted.

**55. URGENT BUSINESS**

The Chair advised that there were no urgent items of business requiring consideration at the meeting.

**56. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING**

**Resolved:-**

1. That the next meeting of Improving Places Select Commission will take place on 21 March, 2023, commencing at 1.30 pm in Rotherham Town Hall.

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Public Report  
Improving Places Select Commission

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**Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting**

Improving Places Select Commission – 21 March 2023

**Report Title**

Tenants Scrutiny Panel Review - Improving Communication with Tenants

**Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?**

No

**Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report**

Ian Spicer, Strategic Director of Adult Care, Housing and Public Health

**Report Author(s)**

Lynsey Skidmore, Housing Operations Manager, Adult Care, Housing and Public Health. 01709 334950

**Ward(s) Affected**

Borough-Wide

**Report Summary**

The Tenant Scrutiny Panel is a key component of the Council's Tenant Engagement Framework, enabling tenants to scrutinise landlord services and standards with the aim of improving performance, value for money and tenant satisfaction.

The Panel is facilitated by Rotherfед on behalf of the Council and consists of tenant and resident representatives from across the Borough.

The Panel has completed a review of how the Council communicates with tenants, with reference to the requirements within the Social Housing White Paper. The report detailing the Panel's findings is attached as Appendix 1.

Following completion of the Tenant Scrutiny Review, the report and recommendations were discussed with the Housing Service and other relevant council services and an action plan agreed to support delivery of the recommendations.

This report provides the Improving Places Select Commission with a summary of the findings of the review and the associated action plan.

## **Recommendations**

1. That Improving Places Select Commission note the outcome of the Tenant Scrutiny Review, the actions proposed to deal with each recommendation and progress to date.
2. That a further report detailing progress is presented to Improving Places Select Commission in 12 months time.

## **List of Appendices Included**

**Appendix 1** Tenants Scrutiny Panel Review - Investigation into how Rotherham Council could improve its communications with tenants.

**Appendix 2** Tenants Scrutiny Review Action Plan.

**Appendix 3** Initial Equality Screening (Part A).

**Appendix 4** Equality Analysis Form (Part B).

**Appendix 5** Carbon Impact Assessment.

## **Background Papers**

None.

## **Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel**

None.

## **Council Approval Required**

No

## **Exempt from the Press and Public**

No

## 1. Background

- 1.1 Since its inception in 2016, the Tenant Scrutiny Panel has undertaken several tenant scrutiny reviews of various aspects of the Council's Housing Services. The reviews have subsequently been reported to the Improving Places Select Commission.
- 1.2 Tenant Scrutiny Panel reviews have provided an ongoing opportunity for customers to work pro-actively with the Council, to look at various aspects of landlord service delivery, from a customer perspective and to develop recommendations and actions for service improvement.
- 1.3 The Panel has most recently completed a review of how the Council communicates with tenants, with particular reference to the requirements within the Social Housing White Paper. The Social Housing White Paper published in 2020 sets out the actions the Government will take to ensure that residents in social housing are safe, are listened to, live in good quality homes, and have access to redress when things go wrong.
- 1.4 In undertaking the review, the Panel focussed particularly on the following Chapters within the White Paper:
  - 1.4.1 Chapter 2: To know how your landlord is performing – the Regulator to introduce a set of tenant satisfaction measures for all landlords to know how they are performing. Satisfaction will be measured on the things that matter most to tenants, including tenant satisfaction that their landlord listens to their views and takes notice of them and tenant satisfaction with landlord's engagement with tenants.
  - 1.4.2 Chapter 5: To have your voice heard by your landlord – to provide new opportunities and an empowerment programme for social housing residents to support more effective engagement between landlords and residents. Also, to give tools for tenants to influence their landlords and hold them to account.
- 1.5 The Panel have undertaken a review of various methods of communication used across the Housing Service except for:
  - Social media, as some Panel members had limited experience.
  - Leaflets, as they were too wide-ranging for the investigation.
- 1.6 The review included:
  - A survey where individual Panel members scored each method of communication.
  - A survey of other housing providers; providers were asked for any learning points from their own communications approaches and if there were any examples of innovative practice.

- Interviews with Council officers representing Housing, Customer Services, Learning and Development, and Communications and Marketing.
- A 'Website Challenge' to assess the content of the Council website against six other housing providers.
- A review of the newsletters used by six other housing providers to assess against the Council's Home Matters magazine.
- Panel meetings to discuss the information and to agree the recommendations.

## **2. Key Issues**

2.1 The Panel identified the following strengths with the current approach to communications.

2.1.1 A training matrix has been developed with a training passport for each job role and employee. This includes a training module on communication.

2.1.2 Improvements to the telephony system including a new menu of options to direct calls to the correct service and the introduction of a call back system.

2.1.3 Digital inclusion survey undertaken to understand barriers to accessing information online.

2.1.4 Standards are being drafted for all Council services on principles to follow for writing letters.

2.1.5 Use of Ward e-newsletters.

2.2 The Panel developed nine recommendations and four suggestions to improve communications as listed below and detailed in the report attached as Appendix 1.

2.3 Recommendations

2.3.1 Letters- review letters to make sure that they are understandable and written in plain language for all residents. Have a mechanism in place to review letter templates with customers.

2.3.2 Strategy- Provide an over-arching strategy on how the Council communicates with people living in Rotherham. Inform tenants how Council officers will communicate/ consult with them.

2.3.3 Complaints and Compliments- Provide a link tile on the web page to allow people to find information on how to make a complaint/ comment or pay a compliment. Include reassurance on the linked page that it is useful to receive feedback and that there will not be repercussions from making a complaint.

- 2.3.4 Website - Consider the accessibility of the website by having links at the top of the home page to allow people to adjust the settings to their needs. Check and change text on the website that uses acronyms or jargon
- 2.3.5 Newsletter accessibility- Improve the accessibility of the newsletter for all customers by offering the newsletter in other formats e.g. easy read, other languages
- 2.3.6 Telephone calls - Review the new telephone system and make sure that the target of six minutes to speak to a real person is being met. Ensure that robust measurement is in place to monitor this target and respond to shortfalls going forward
- 2.3.7 Complaints and Compliments- Consider running an 'It's OK to complain' campaign to encourage more feedback from tenants.
- 2.3.8 Newsletter circulation- Improve the publicity and access to the ward e-newsletters. Conduct a consultation exercise to find out if tenants still like to receive their newsletter by post or if they would prefer it by email. Possibly design a hybrid model to meet customer needs.
- 2.3.9 Staff training - Work closely with Rotherham Federation representatives to develop training courses on communications/ customer care (This could include videos of tenant feedback/ tenant representative attendance/ listening to customer call recordings). Improve the handling of bereavement conversations by incorporating into training courses/ providing staff guidance
- 2.4 Further Suggestions:
  - 2.4.1 Tenant Communications Working Group – once the website development has commenced and customer advice/ testing is required, it may be useful to set up a temporary working group involving officers and tenant representatives.
  - 2.4.2 Tenant editorial board – consider resurrecting the Home Matters editorial board and looking to increase publication of tenants' voice/stories.
  - 2.4.3 Home Matters look – consider making the front page less cluttered
  - 2.4.4 Surveys – consider the use of more online and telephone surveys to consult and communicate with tenants.
- 2.5 Most of the recommendations developed are not housing specific and require the involvement of other services within the Council. A series of meetings have taken place with relevant services to discuss the recommendations and develop the actions within the plan.

- 2.6 The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has recently published a consultation 'implementing the new consumer regulatory regime: directions to the Social Housing Regulator on mutual exchange and tenant involvement' which proposes a strengthened requirement for Registered Providers of social housing to offer tenants a wide range of opportunities to get involved, ensure that tenants' views are considered when making decisions relating to their housing management and places a greater emphasis on transparency. The work of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel and the recommendations and actions detailed within this report, will continue to ensure that the Council meets regulatory requirements.

### **3. Options considered and recommended proposal**

- 3.1 The Tenant Scrutiny Panel have developed nine recommendations and four suggestions. The response to each of the recommendations is detailed in the action plan attached as Appendix 2. The plan also provides an update on progress to date.

### **4. Consultation on proposal**

- 4.1 The Tenants Scrutiny Review has been discussed at the Housing Involvement Panel.
- 4.2 The action plan, associated with this report (see Appendix 2), will be monitored at monthly Tenant Scrutiny Panel meetings, which are attended by Council officers, Rotherfed and tenant representatives.

### **5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision**

- 5.1 The Council's Housing Service along with the nominated lead officers in the action plan have responsibility for implementing the findings of the review and delivering the associated action plan within the designated timescales.
- 5.2 The Tenant Scrutiny Panel will receive regular updates on progress against the recommendations and actions.
- 5.3 A further report will be presented to the Improving Places Select Commission in 12 months' time, detailing progress on delivering the action plan.

### **6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications**

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications as the Action Plan will be delivered within existing resources and budgets.

- 6.2 There are no direct procurement implications arising from the recommendations detailed in the report. However, any identified need to procure goods, services or works in relation to delivering any of the actions will be procured in line with the Council's own Financial and Procurement Procedure Rules and the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (as amended) as well as ensuring social value commitments are secured.

**7. Legal Advice and Implications**

- 7.1 There are no substantive legal issues arising from the content of this report.
- 7.2 The Scrutiny Review will support the Council in meeting statutory and regulatory requirements arising from the current Regulatory Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard and Social Housing Regulator customer standards.

**8. Human Resources Advice and Implications**

- 8.1 There are no human resource implications arising from this report.

**9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults**

- 9.1 Improved accessibility for services will positively benefit engagement with children, young people and vulnerable adults.

**10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications**

- 10.1 Please see attached Equality Analysis.
- 10.2 We will actively engage under-represented groups and use our customer data to ensure services and communications are accessible and meet the diverse needs of our tenants and neighbourhoods by contributing to the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy 2022-25 through the following:
- 10.2.1 Understanding, listening, and engaging across all communities.
- 10.2.2 Delivering fair, inclusive, and accessible services.
- 10.2.3 Empowering people to engage and challenge discrimination and to promote good community relations.

**11. Implications for CO<sub>2</sub> Emissions and Climate Change**

- 11.1 Please see attached Carbon Impact Assessment Report.
- 11.2 Through the Tenant Engagement Framework, we will contribute towards reducing carbon footprint and emissions through a flexible menu of options including hybrid working and accessing services online and being able to self-serve. This will help reduce the need for transport and waste.

## 12. Implications for Partners

- 12.1 The Council has a contract in place with Rother Fed (local Tenant Federation provider) to support the delivery of the work undertaken by the Tenant Scrutiny Panel, as part of the Council's Tenant Engagement Framework.
- 12.2 The Council will continue to seek out best practice and consider how to continually improve scrutiny and engagement with tenants through its Exemplar Accreditation and membership of national tenant participation advisory service, TPAS.

## 13. Risks and Mitigation

- 13.1 The key risk is the failure to engage with the Tenant Scrutiny Panel and inability to deliver against the recommendations in the action plan. This will be addressed through monitoring and reviewing progress detailed within the Action Plan. This will be further mitigated through ongoing monitoring and review by the Tenant Scrutiny Panel and Improving Places Select Commission.

### Accountable Officer(s)

James Clark, Assistant Director of Housing  
 Paul Walsh, Head of Housing Operational Services  
 Lynsey Skidmore, Housing Operations Manager

Approvals obtained on behalf of:

	Name	Date
Chief Executive		Click here to enter a date.
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services (S.151 Officer)	Jemma Sykes	01/03/23
Assistant Director of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Michelle Scales	27/02/23
Assistant Director of Human Resources (if appropriate)	Not applicable- No HR issues	Click here to enter a date.
Head of Human Resources (if appropriate)	Not applicable- No HR issues	Click here to enter a date.
The Strategic Director with responsibility for this report	Ian Spicer, Strategic Director of Adult Care, Housing and Public Health	21/02/23
Consultation undertaken with the relevant Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Housing - Councillor Brookes	10/03/23



*Report Author: Lynsey Skidmore, Housing Operations Manager, Housing and Estate Services. 01709 334950 or [lynsey.skidmore@rotherham.gov.uk](mailto:lynsey.skidmore@rotherham.gov.uk)*

This report is published on the Council's [website](#).

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## ROTHERHAM FEDERATION TENANT SCRUTINY



**Rotherham  
Tenant Scrutiny**

### Investigation into how Rotherham Council could improve its communications with tenants



**Report June/July 2022**

**Rotherham Federation**



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## 1. Background

**Rotherham Federation Tenant Scrutiny** was formed in April 2016. The Tenant Scrutiny panel provides an opportunity for tenants to scrutinise and challenge service delivery, identifying areas of concern and opportunities for improvement. This process strengthens the involvement of Rotherham tenants and provides links with Rotherham Council governance.

Tenant Scrutiny creates opportunities to:

- ✓ Build an effective partnership between Rotherham Council and its tenants and residents in the spirit of co-production, resulting in a joint-win for all.
- ✓ Provide a means of challenging landlords' services, standards and performance in a professional, constructive and collaborative manner.
- ✓ Help Rotherham Council to improve performance, value for money and tenant satisfaction.
- ✓ Represent the views of Rotherham Council's residents and make a positive difference on their behalf.

Tenant Scrutiny activity works to the five TPAS Scrutiny key principles:

- Independent
- Inclusive
- Positive
- Constructive
- Purposeful

This is the sixth investigation by the Rotherham Federation Tenant Scrutiny panel. Previous reports have been submitted on the following topics:

1. Engaging Young Tenants in Rotherham (March 2017)
2. Responsive Repairs: Appointments, Communication Process and Customer Journey (February 2018)
3. Process of Dealing with Anti-social behaviour complaints (January 2019)
4. Home Aids and Adaptations for Tenants (November 2020)
5. Improving Tenant Satisfaction with the Repairs and Maintenance Service (June 2021)

## Choice of topic

The Tenant Scrutiny panel was approached in October 2021, following Council discussions in relation to the [Social Housing White Paper \(2020\)](#). In particular:

*Chapter 2: To know how your landlord is performing* – the regulator to introduce a set of tenant satisfaction measures for all landlords to know how they are performing.

Satisfaction will be measured on the things that matter most to tenants, including:

- Tenant satisfaction that their landlord listens to their views and takes notice of them; and
- Tenant satisfaction with landlord's engagement with tenants

*Chapter 5: To have your voice heard by your landlord* – to provide new opportunities and an empowerment programme for social housing residents to support more effective engagement between landlords and residents. Also to give tools for tenants to influence their landlords and hold them to account.

## Measurement of success

With the Charter for Social Housing Residents (White Paper) in mind, the [Rotherham Council plan 2022-2025](#) includes outcomes under the 'One Council' theme that include:

- Effective customer services – residents know we mean what we say, are kept informed and can access the services they need in the way that suits them
- Engaged, diverse and skilled workforce who feel empowered to adopt new ways of working to meet the needs of all customers

Key performance indicators measuring improvement against these outcomes are:

- The proportion of residents who feel that the Council keeps them informed (Target 22/23 – greater than 50%)
- To what extent the Council acts on the concerns of local residents (Target 22/23 – greater than 48%); and
- The average customer wait time for the corporate contact centre (Target 22/23 – 6 minutes).

Measurement of the first two indicators is via the annual residents' satisfaction survey conducted in June each year.

It is the intention of the Tenant Scrutiny panel to make recommendations and suggestions that would help to improve the survey scores.

## 2. The panel and officers

The **panel** was made up of tenant and resident representatives from across Rotherham:

David Ramsden (Chair)	Julie Sharp	Wendy Birch
Mary Jacques	Sam Sharp	David Silman
Winnie Billups	Jo Workman	Jean Whitmarsh
Ann Hitchens	Keith Stringer	Mohammed Ramzan

Thank you to these representatives for their time and commitment and also to the digital champions who kindly participated in the website challenge and the newsletter survey.

**Officer support** was provided by:

Asim Munir, RMBC Tenant Involvement Coordinator  
 Jessica Sarracco, RMBC tenant Involvement Officer  
 Phil Hayes, Rotherham Federation Chief Executive Officer  
 Laura Swift, Rotherham Federation Administrative Officer  
 Sarah Fletcher, Rotherham Federation, Office Manager  
 Kathryn Wild, Rotherham Federation, Project Manager  
 Nicola Evans, Rotherham Federation, Volunteers Co-ordinator  
 Rebecca Morrison, Project Solutions

Valuable **subject matter expertise** was provided by five representatives of the Council:

Sue Shelley, Business Development Manager, Housing Service  
 Helen Barker, Head of Customer Services  
 Nigel Mitchell, Learning and Development Manager  
 Phil Rushton, Corporate Contact Centre Manager  
 Aidan Melville, Communications and Marketing Manager

### 3. Terms of Reference

**Aim: To investigate how Rotherham Council could improve its communications with tenants**

#### Objectives:

##### To:

- Consider whether current Council communications meet the needs of all tenants
- Benchmark against other housing providers in terms of how well they communicate with tenants and any examples of good practice
- Agree how communications could be improved across the Council
- Explore how any suggestions made by the panel could contribute to the Social Housing White Paper action plan as regards the information that is available to tenants and how well this is communicated.

#### Scope

Prior to the investigation commencing, the panel originally agreed that it would not consider elements of Rotherham Council communications that were already thought to be fully satisfactory. However, the original request from council officers was to consider the Home Matters newsletter and the website.

After further discussion and scoring it was decided that all means of communication would be within scope apart from:

- ☒ the social media elements; as some panel members would have limited experience of using these, and
- ☒ leaflets; as these were not in use at present and were too wide-ranging for this investigation

Due to difficulties with ongoing Covid restrictions it was agreed that the panel would avoid the use of general surveys and instead use panel member views only to assess confidence and satisfaction with existing Council communications.



## Measures of Success

- ✓ Improvements are made to the website, magazine and other forms of communication to meet the needs of all tenants
- ✓ Increased confidence amongst tenants that they are receiving communication that is relevant, clear and is being conveyed via the most suitable medium for them
- ✓ Council tenants are more aware of the Council services that are relevant to them
- ✓ An improved take-up of services
- ✓ An increase in confidence for some tenants to move to digital services
- ✓ A significant evidence-based contribution to the Social Housing White Paper action plan

## Benefits

### For tenants:

- ☑ Communications that are clear, relevant and accessible to all tenants
- ☑ Increased awareness of how to access information that is important to them
- ☑ Improved/increased tenant involvement opportunities
- ☑ Increased confidence in Council communications

### For the Council:

- ☑ Assistance with compliance with the requirements of the Social Housing White Paper as regards tenant satisfaction with communication and information, and treating tenants with respect.
- ☑ Improved communications with all tenants to raise their confidence level in the Council
- ☑ Potential to learn from good practice from other Housing Providers and improve the Council's communication model

## Risks

The panel acknowledged the following risks when embarking on this investigation. That:

- Staff may be unable to attend/take part in tenant scrutiny meetings to share information
- Other Councils may not be forthcoming with information on their communications with tenants
- Rotherham Council team capacity may mean that the recommendations made cannot be applied consistently
- Further COVID restrictions may cause delays to the investigation and prevent any required face-to-face communication

## 4. Methodology

The investigation consisted of:

### 4.1 WhichComms? survey

To prioritise the scope of the investigation, an exercise 'Which comms?' was carried out at the December 2021 meeting. Average scores from the participants were as follows:

Letters	<b>6.5</b> (range 5 to 9)
Website	<b>5.4</b> (range 3 to 7)
Home Matters newsletter	<b>7.6</b> (range 7 to 9)
Leaflets	<b>5.5</b> (range 5 to 6)
Formal meetings	<b>6.8</b> (range 5 to 9)
Social media	Not applicable
Verbal (with Council officers)	<b>4.5</b> (range 1 to 8)

### 4.2 Survey of other housing providers

Early in the investigation, questions were prepared for other housing providers to find out if there were any learning points from their own communications approaches and if there were any examples of innovative practice. The questions asked can be found in Appendix A.

These were emailed out to the contact officers in eleven areas and a request was also made on the TPAS Tenant Scrutiny forum. Responses were received from seven providers:

- ✓ Sheffield
- ✓ Kirklees
- ✓ Hull
- ✓ Berneslai
- ✓ St Leger
- ✓ Nottingham
- ✓ Greatwell (partial response)

### 4.3 Interviewing officers

Senior officers were invited to attend the Tenant Scrutiny meeting on 14 March 2022 to answer questions on the various communication channels, communications strategy and training, management and supervision aspects of the investigation.

Following the meeting, further questions were agreed and sent on to officers to answer by email, which was completed by May 2022.

#### 4.4 Website Challenge

Three tenant scrutiny panel members, two digital champions and one member of Rotherham Federation staff took part in the Website Challenge.

Each participant scored the websites of Kirklees, Nottingham, Sheffield, Warrington, Wigan, Wolverhampton, and Rotherham for:

- ☐ Accessibility
- ☐ Content
- ☐ Navigation
- ☐ Readability
- ☐ Look

They also searched on each website and commented on the ease of finding useful information about:

- ? How to make a complaint/ comment/ compliment
- ? How to get more involved
- ? How to book a repair
- ? How to report littering
- ? How to report Anti-social behaviour
- ? How to apply for a council house

#### 4.6 Newsletter Survey

Feedback on six newsletters from various housing providers was received from two panel members and two digital champions. Participants were asked to score and comment on the newsletters in terms of:

- ? Accessibility
- ? Content
- ? Length
- ? Readability
- ? Look

A range of printed newsletters and e-newsletters were considered from Leeds, Hull, Nottingham, St Leger, Sheffield and compared against the Rotherham Housing newsletter 'Home Matters'.

#### 4.7 Meetings

Meetings took place between November 2021 and June 2022 to consider, analyse and discuss the information received from the various exercises above. The early meetings were held online, with face-to-face meetings being re-introduced from April 2022.

## 5. Summary of Evidence

### 5.1 Communications Strategy



#### Questions to Officers

##### Communications Strategy

- *What principles are followed when communicating with Tenants?*
- *Are these documented somewhere?*
- *Do you have a communications strategy that guides the way in which tenants/residents are communicated with?*
- *Are there any groups that are external to the council who are involved in the production of council documents?*

There is currently no communications strategy for Rotherham Council nor specifically for Adult Care, Housing and Public Health services. Communications plans are however available for different specific projects e.g. for the production of the Home Matters magazine.

Council officers stated that there are a number of principles that all Council communications should follow, such as being people-focused and community-led. This means that any publications and communications should include information that:

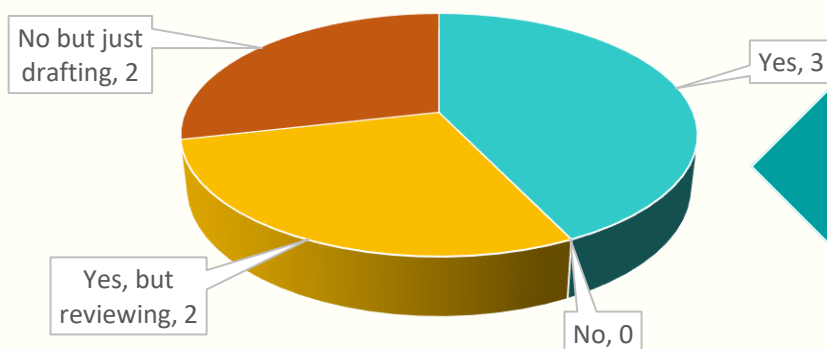
- ✓ Involves people,
- ✓ Is relevant,
- ✓ Is responsive,
- ✓ Is up-to-date, and
- ✓ Reflects the needs and wants of customers

This relates to all areas of the Council and aims to enable and encourage residents and visitors to respond and engage. However, these principles are not yet documented in one place. At the time of meeting with officers, there was a plan to publish these principles for Council staff and to develop a communications strategy.

Whilst the Council engages with external stakeholder groups on a case-by-case basis e.g. for targeted cohorts, this approach is not documented.

### Other Housing Providers

#### Do you have a Communications Strategy?



Only three other housing providers had up-to-date Communications Strategies, with four working on drafting or reviewing their strategies

#### PANEL VIEWS:

- ✍ It was disappointing that Rotherham Council did not have a current Communications Strategy in place.
- ✍ However, panel members agreed with the five principles being worked towards by officers.
- ✍ The panel was keen for a Communications Strategy and supporting documentation, similar to other housing providers, to be made available. This would help to ensure that all staff and the public understand the principles for engagement and communication.

#### Recommendation

##### Strategy

Provide an over-arching strategy on how the Council communicates with people living in Rotherham. Inform tenants how Council officers will communicate/ consult with them.

## 5.2 Verbal communications/ staff training and supervision



### Training



#### Questions to Officers

##### Training/Officer Approach

- *Is there any training given to housing officers to ensure that they speak to tenants clearly and in a respectful manner?*
- *If so, what is the content of the training, what range of colleagues take part in the training and how frequently does re-training take place?*

Officers agreed that all Council staff, at whatever level, need to be aware of how to speak to people in a caring and understanding way, this includes active listening and empathy. This approach also applies to contract partners and their staff i.e. Mears and Equans.

Panel members raised the issue of some staff needing to improve their sensitivities around bereavement, particularly during telephone conversations. Members of the panel had previously experienced quite insensitive behaviour when reporting bereavements to the Council.

### Current training

Officers reported that a training programme was developed in 2018, which included 'Equalities, Complaints, and Customer Care' training. This programme was a result of the previous tenant scrutiny investigation into how young tenants are engaged with in Rotherham.

There are three key parts to the training:

- Equalities – understanding sub-conscious bias and discrimination
- Complaints – relating to equalities and customer care
- Customer Care – working well with people

This training will be mandatory for all staff going forward.

### Upcoming training

Another new training course is soon to be introduced that focuses on 'Communication'. This will focus on the two-way process of communication i.e. asking questions and listening, as well as speaking.

Work is also ongoing to introduce a new Learning and Development model. This will include a '*training matrix*' with four elements:

- o identifying needs,
- o planning,
- o delivery, and
- o evaluation

'*Training passports*' will be used for each job role, listing:

- o mandatory training which is a requirement of the organisation,
- o statutory training required by law, and
- o developmental training where there is an agreed need identified.

There will be agreed intervals for refresher training.

### Other Housing Providers

Different types of training for staff that was available across other Councils and was relevant to communications included:

- Induction training (including values and behaviours) x 2
- Good Conversations
- How to communicate (in a friendly and conversational style)
- Motivational Interviewing
- Phone coaching
- Equality and Diversity x 2 (one refreshed every three years)
- Telephone skills
- Dealing with complaints
- Customer services x 2
- Mental Health Awareness
- Tenant's Charter
- Tenant videos giving feedback on services circulated to staff
- Journey to Service Excellence' staff newsletter
- Professional standards document

## Supervision



### Questions to Officers

#### Management/Supervision

- *How are the ways in which officers communicate monitored?*
- *How are communications standards maintained?*
- *Do you receive any complaints/ compliments about the way in which officers have communicated with tenants? If so, what do you do as a result of such feedback?*
- *How do you monitor team communications? Do managers ever listen to any recorded 'phone calls? Are these used as part of staff training and supervision? If not, are any spot checks carried out with customers on how they have been communicated with?*

It was reported that concerns about staff communications with Rotherham residents are usually raised through different channels, such as complaints. When received, the concerns are delegated to the relevant service to investigate. If the concern is justified, investigators/ managers will introduce a coaching plan for the member of staff to help them to develop their skills and increase their understanding of how things could have been handled better.

If the attitude of the member of staff remains unacceptable, or similar complaints are received, further supervisory discussions would need to take place.

Call monitoring is undertaken routinely as part of the Contact Centre's quality assessment process. Any learning can then be used to improve skills and future service delivery. These recordings are however not used in any of the formal training courses.

Officers stated that the Council encourages everyone to give feedback about situations so that action can be taken. However panel members informed officers that many people would not want to raise issues or make complaints as they are worried about being treated negatively as a result of this.

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### PANEL VIEWS:

- ✎ Panel members were happy with the new developments around training and the idea of a training matrix for individual job roles.
- ✎ The panel was keen that bereavement training should be included in the Council's training programme to help officers to understand how best to conduct these conversations in a sensitive manner.



- ✍ There was an appetite for Rotherham Federation and Tenant Representatives to be involved in the planning of training courses, in particular including some feedback from tenants either in video, in person or in writing.
- ✍ Panel members felt it would be useful to share the learning from the call monitoring exercises more widely with council officers
- ✍ The panel was keen for officers to find ways of reassuring people that it is OK to complain, confirming that feedback is useful for the Council and that there will be no repercussions for them.

## Recommendations

### Staff training

- Work closely with Rotherham Federation representatives to develop training courses on communications/ customer care (This could include videos of tenant feedback/ tenant representative attendance/ listening to customer call recordings).
- Improve the handling of bereavement conversations by incorporating into training courses/ providing staff guidance.

## 5.3 Handling telephone calls



### Questions to Officers

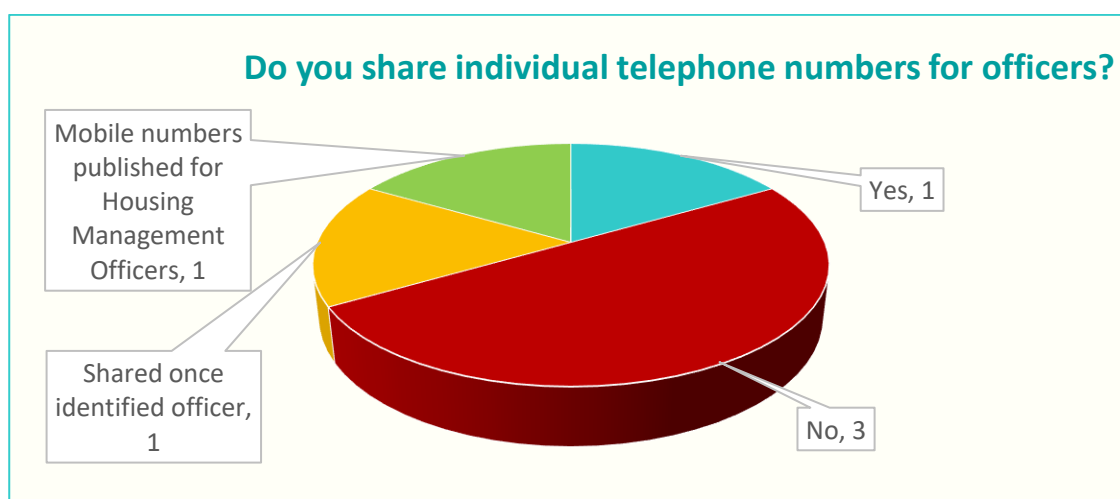
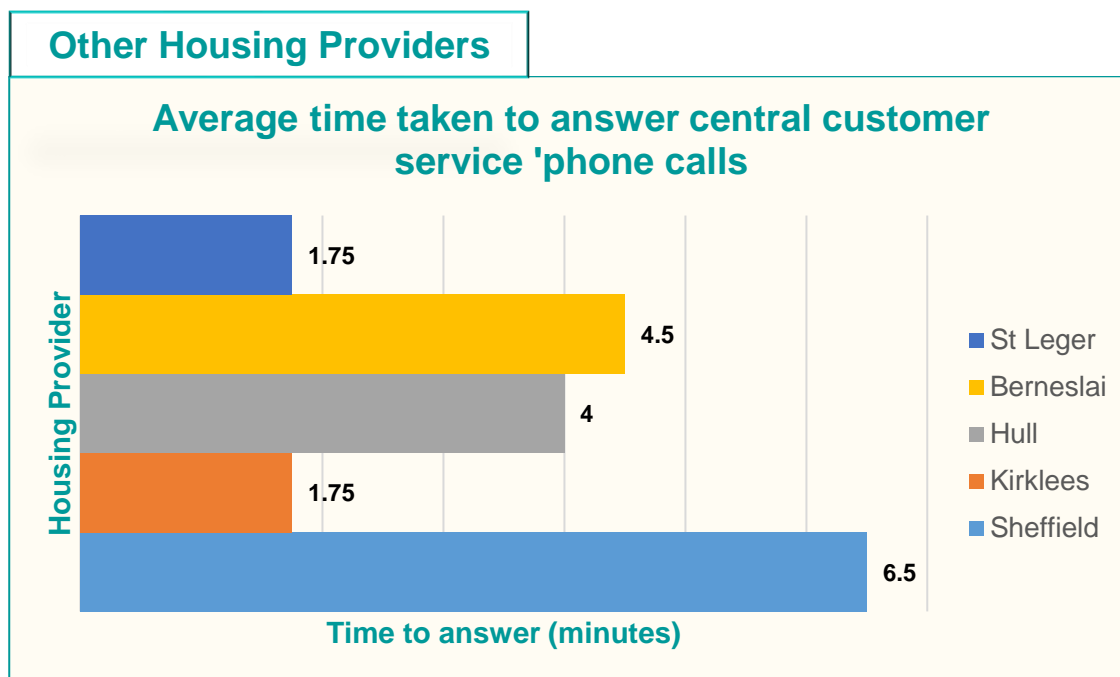
#### Telephone Calls

- *What is the average and range of time taken for calls to be answered through the customer service point?*
- *How are messages forwarded from the customer service centre to the appropriate officer? How do messages go astray (we have received reports that housing officers are saying that they did not receive messages)?*

There have been long queues on the telephone lines over the Covid peak periods and continuing into this year; this has mainly been due to volume and complexity of calls. More people are engaging online, but it is important for the information they need to be available on the website, otherwise they will then 'phone the Council instead.





The Council's 'Year Ahead' plan is to reduce the waiting time on the Council telephone lines to **below six mins** as an average. A new menu option has also been introduced to get people to their destination quicker. A call back system is being trialled for Housing enquiries and repairs where the person's place in the queue is saved and they receive a call back at that time.

Responses from other housing providers gave average times for answering telephone lines as below:



Officers confirmed that some forms completed online do seem to get lost in the system and some messages get lost from the customer service centre. The Council needs to be aware of these incidents as it shouldn't happen; there is a need to track where enquiries are going and where failings are happening.

**PANEL VIEWS:**

-  The panel was reassured by the new innovations being made to the telephone system, particularly the call-back system.
-  It was good to hear that a six-minute target was being introduced for answering calls. Panel members hoped that the target could be achieved and maybe improved in future years in line with other housing providers.
-  Similar to the majority of other housing providers, the panel agreed that it wasn't appropriate for direct lines to be made available to callers in the first instance.
-  It was agreed that more work is needed on tracking messages that are forwarded to officers; perhaps with confirmation messages being sent to customers when their message has been received by the appropriate team/ officer.

**Recommendations****Telephone calls**

Review the new telephone system and make sure that the target of six minutes to speak to a real person is being met. Ensure that robust measurements are in place to monitor this target and respond to shortfalls going forward.

**5.4 Website****Questions to Officers****Website**

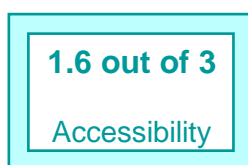
- *How do you make sure that the website is accessible to as many people as possible?*
- *How often do you ask for feedback on the website and what do you do with this information once you have received it?*
- *Webforms – could the time for completion be extended (some time out after 10 minutes) or could there be a save facility?*



## Accessibility

1.5 million people visit the Rotherham Council website each month and accessibility is critical. The bottom of each webpage has accessibility information; showing various links to be able to improve access. Officers were asked about whether Easy-Read pictures were available for the Council to use; however it was confirmed that the Council does not have any current arrangements in place for this specific resource. The principle of using Easy-Read in Council communications was being explored by officers at the time of this investigation.

From the [Website Challenge](#), accessibility was poor across most of the websites except Wolverhampton, Berneslai and Nottingham. Wolverhampton's website accessibility was particularly good as it offered a listen button to have the website read to you; a tool bar to be able to change font size and contrast; a dictionary; and the ability to change languages. These features were all available on the homepage, both at the top and side. The accessibility score for the Rotherham website was:



Accessibility was judged by the availability of different languages and access tools for people with learning disabilities, sight loss or hearing loss. It was noted that the Rotherham website offered different languages, but the links did not work.

Officers have circulated a digital inclusion survey asking people to comment on how they access Council information and what barriers they face such as skills, connectivity and cost. Meetings are also taking place with Sight and Sound groups to explore improving accessibility of the website. Officers were keen to receive ideas to improve access and perhaps examples of how different websites had improved the customer experience.

## Content

Officers reported that there is a facility on the website to share feedback on emails, letters, complaints processes, verbal conversations and the website. In particular, the website option includes what other things website users would like adding to the content.

They also commented that they would like to improve two-way engagement and receive more feedback on the website.

From the [Website Challenge](#), the content score for different housing providers ranged from 1.0 to 2.75 and content was the second worst score for most websites. Berneslai, Nottingham and Dudley scored highest. The content score for the Rotherham website was one of its best scores:



To assess content, participants considered whether the website had all the information they would need as a housing tenant.

### Navigation/Search facility

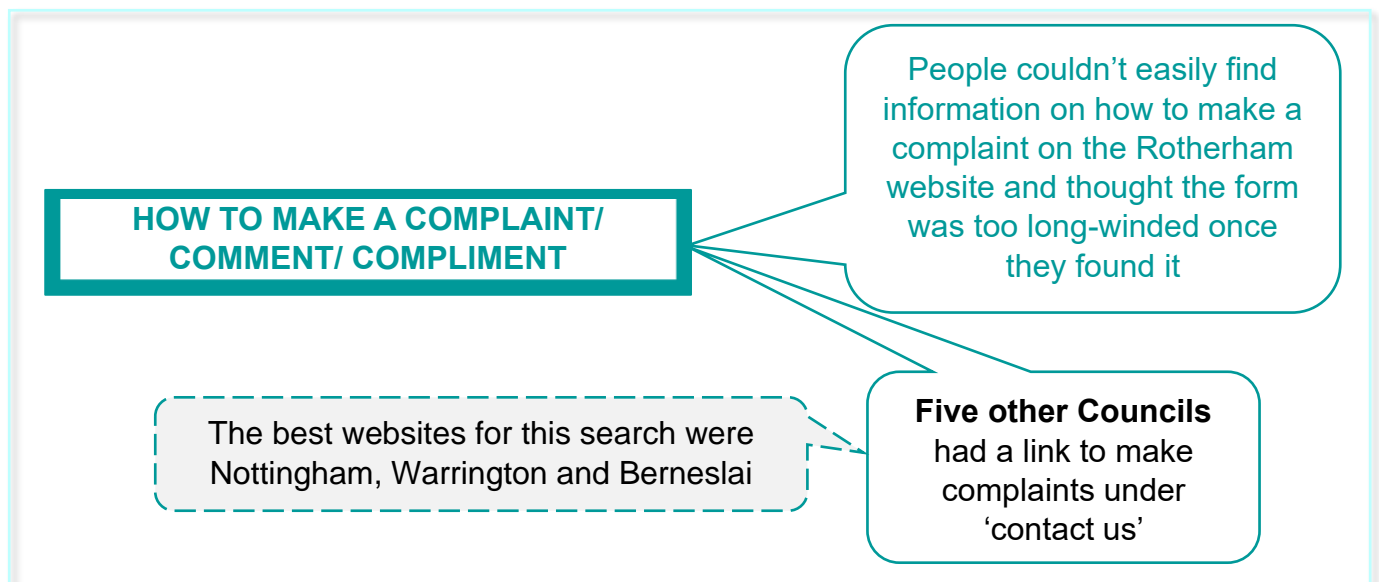
The search facility on the website was reported to have a 98% success rate. Officers were monitoring this and looking at the remaining 2% to find out what people were searching for that couldn't be found e.g. travel plans.

Participants of the *Website Challenge* were asked to search all the listed websites to find out information on:

- ? How to make a complaint/ comment / compliment
- ? How to get more involved
- ? How to book a repair
- ? How to report littering
- ? How to report Anti-social behaviour
- ? How to apply for a council home

The Rotherham website left some people with no answer on all of these searches apart from how to book a repair. This was by far the best part of the website; as it was for other housing providers.

A further breakdown of these searches is summarised below:



One participant commented about how to make a complaint on the Rotherham site:

I couldn't find it anywhere  
 – it was not on main page and not under housing  
 - I gave up in the end!

Three out of five tenants looking for this information on the Rotherham website thought it was hard to find and had to use the search facility

**Two other Councils** made it easy to find information on getting involved by having links from their main page

### HOW TO GET MORE INVOLVED

The best websites for this search were Berneslai and Nottingham

### HOW TO BOOK A REPAIR

All respondents found this easy on the Rotherham site after following the Housing link.

The best websites for this search were Berneslai, Dudley, Hull, and Kirklees

**Two other Councils** had a link from their main page

This resulted in a lot of searching on the Rotherham website and one person could only find information on litter picks and over-flowing bins.

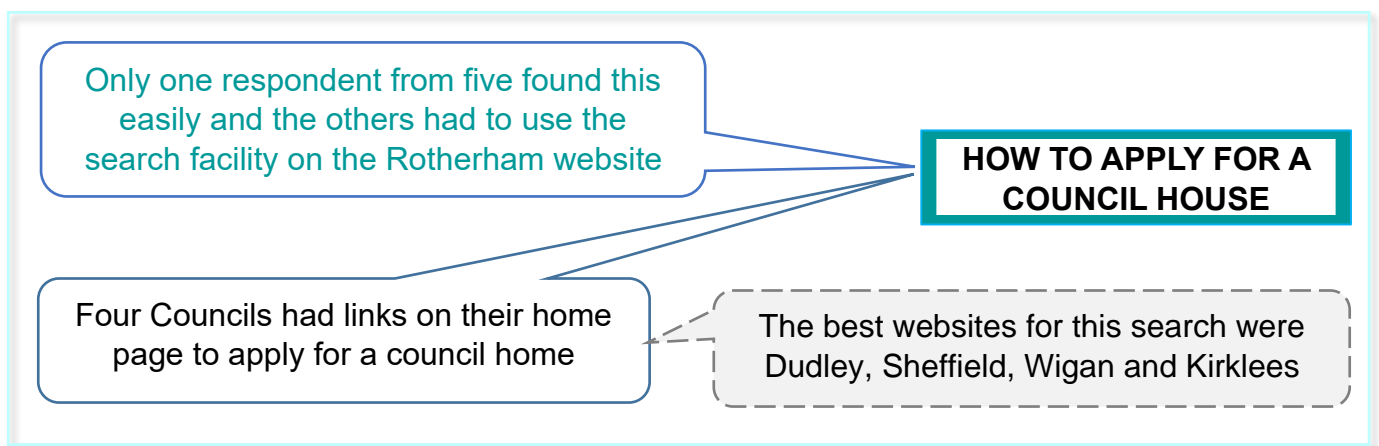
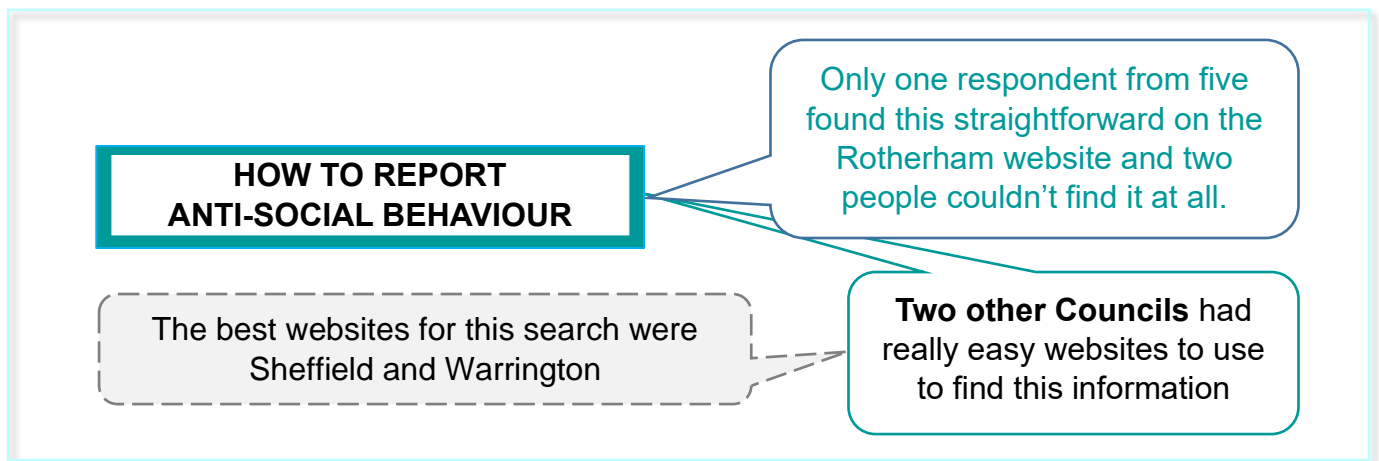
Most websites were poor for reporting litter, **apart from three**

### HOW TO REPORT LITTERING

The best websites for this search were Warrington, Wigan and Sheffield

Another person talked about trying to find information on reporting littering:

There was nothing on the home page and nothing under environment nor waste nor street care and cleaning.  
I finally found a form to report issues.



In terms of navigation, the *Website Challenge* had scores ranging from 2.2 (Rotherham) to 2.8 for Sheffield and 3 for Berneslai.

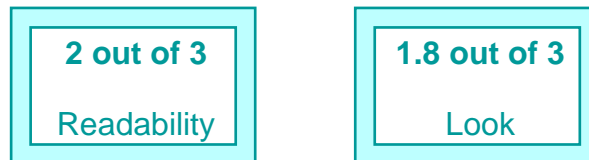
**2.2 out of 3**  
Navigation

Navigation was scored by assessing:

- ? If you reach most of the information you need within 3-5 clicks?
- ? Whether it is clear which buttons and links to use?
- ? Whether it is clear what page you are on at each click?
- ? If the search button is obvious and finds what you are looking for?

### Readability and Look

The *Website Challenge* found that Rotherham again scored fairly low on readability and look. The ranges of scores across other websites were from 2 to 3 for readability, and 1.8 to 3 for look. Rotherham scored the lowest in both categories:



Best scorers for both readability and look were Nottingham and Berneslai.

Readability was judged by how easy the language was to understand on the website and whether there was logical flow. The look of the website was assessed by considering whether it looked attractive and inviting, and if there was consistency across pages.






### Webforms

Tenant Scrutiny members reported a problem with some parts of the website, where webforms were in use. They found that the webform was 'timing out' prior to them being able to complete the form and submit it. They also found that once a webform was submitted, there was little communication from the Council on where the form had been forwarded to, nor progress with the report.

Officers confirmed that there is a security arrangement on webforms which means that they time out after 10 minutes. To avoid this happening, users needed to create an account; allowing them to then save and return to the form as often as needed to complete it. They also informed the panel that automatic updates should be received on progress with webform reports e.g. for bulky waste an automatic reminder is sent on the collection day and confirmation is also sent after collection.

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### PANEL VIEWS:

-  The panel was keen for the accessibility on the Rotherham website to be improved, similar to Wolverhampton, with accessibility features available for all website users. In particular, these options should be made available at the top of the home page to avoid people abandoning their use of the website due to accessibility.
-  It was pleasing to hear that incorporating more Easy-Read into Council communications was being explored.
-  It was also encouraging to hear about the digital inclusion work that is underway.
-  Participants in the website challenge were on the whole pleased with the Rotherham website for its content, once they had managed to navigate to it.
-  The Rotherham Council website was the only website to not score a '3 out of 3' for its readability. This was due to the use of some acronyms and jargon.



- Panel members were confident that the look and readability of the website could be improved.
- Although the search button was said to find 98% of requests, website challenge participants struggled to navigate through the website logically without it and used multiple clicks to get to the right information, if at all.
- Panel members were surprised to hear that they needed to sign up for an account before being able to complete webforms at their leisure. Nobody reported having ever been prompted to open an account for this purpose and all members had never seen a communication from the Council making it clear about this arrangement.
- The panel agreed that it would be an improvement to the website if there were messages on webform submissions that confirmed the department that was dealing with the matter, an estimated timescale, and regular updates on progress.
- The panel was keen to raise with officers that not everyone has the confidence to complain or raise issues and that ways to make this easier and more positive for tenants is desirable.

## Recommendations

### Complaints and Compliments

Provide a link tile on the web page to allow people to find information on how to make a complaint/ comment or pay a compliment. Include reassurance on the linked page that it is useful to receive feedback and that there will not be repercussions from making a complaint.

### Website accessibility

- Consider the accessibility of the website by having links at the top of the home page to allow people to adjust the settings to their needs (perhaps similar to Berneslai and Wolverhampton)
- Check and change text on the website that uses acronyms or jargon.

## Suggestion

**Tenant Communications Working Group** – once the website development has commenced and customer advice/ testing is required; it may be useful to set up a temporary working group involving officers and tenant representatives.

## 5.5 Letters



## Questions to Officers

Letters

- *How do you ensure that the letters you send are understandable for all recipients including people with specific accessibility needs and other vulnerable tenants?*
- *How is this also checked for Council-related letters e.g. those from contractors working for the Council?*

There are thousands of different letters going out to residents from different council services each year and many of them were first drafted a number of years ago. Council officers acknowledged that there is a need for a lot of work to be carried out to improve the letters currently sent. Officers would like all staff to follow three principles:

- ✓ Easy to read
- ✓ Clear (about what it wants to say and what the recipient needs to know), and
- ✓ Understandable

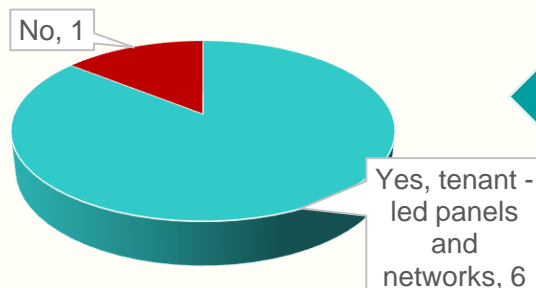
Standards are being drafted for all council services on how to write letters that follow these principles. These will also include how people can get help if they don't understand the letter. A new style guide is also being developed to help to make language 'plain' and to standardise terminology across services.

Communications feature in the 'Council's Year Ahead Delivery Plan', working towards the 'One Council' theme. There is a planned outcome to have '*Effective customer services, where residents know we mean what we say, are kept informed, and can access the services they need in the way that suits them*'. Work is planned between April 2022 and December 2023 to meet this outcome.

During the course of the investigation, a letter was sent out to all tenants concerning rent increases. The letter was discussed by the panel and it was agreed that the content and layout was poor and confusing. There was a lot of information in the letter that was complicated and not of interest to a lot of people (perhaps headings for the different sections would have improved the layout and helped people to know which parts of the letter were relevant to them).

### Other Housing Providers

Are letter drafts checked by tenant representatives for plain language/accessibility?



Six of the other housing providers had set up tenant-led groups to check letters and other publications

### PANEL VIEWS:

- ✍ The panel was pleased to hear that work is ongoing to improve letters and that this is one of the Delivery Plan 2022 outcomes
- ✍ More improvements are needed to the content and layout of letters, as was evident in the recent letter about rent increases.
- ✍ It was agreed that the letter-writing standards used by the Council also needed to be rolled-out to contract partners.
- ✍ The panel was keen for officers to consider if tenant representative groups could help to proof-read letters or if other arrangements could be found.

### Recommendations

#### Letters

Continue to work through Council letters to make sure that they are understandable and written in plain language for all residents. Have a mechanism in place to review the letter templates with customers.

## 5.6 Newsletter



### Questions to Officers

#### Newsletter

- *Is the Home Matters publication (and other documents) checked by tenant representatives prior to being published?*
- *How do you ensure that the newsletter is understandable for all recipients?*
- *Have we assessed recently how much Home Matters costs to produce? Have we asked recently how people want to receive it?*

Corporate officers were unsure as to the previous involvement of reference panels in the production of the Home Matters newsletter. It was confirmed though that if the newsletter included an item about a specific tenant, they would be consulted on the draft prior to publication. Tenant Involvement officers informed the panel that Rotherham Federation have previously been consulted on the content and language used in Home Matters, and that this arrangement worked well in the past.

All Council publications are proof-read by officers to make sure that:

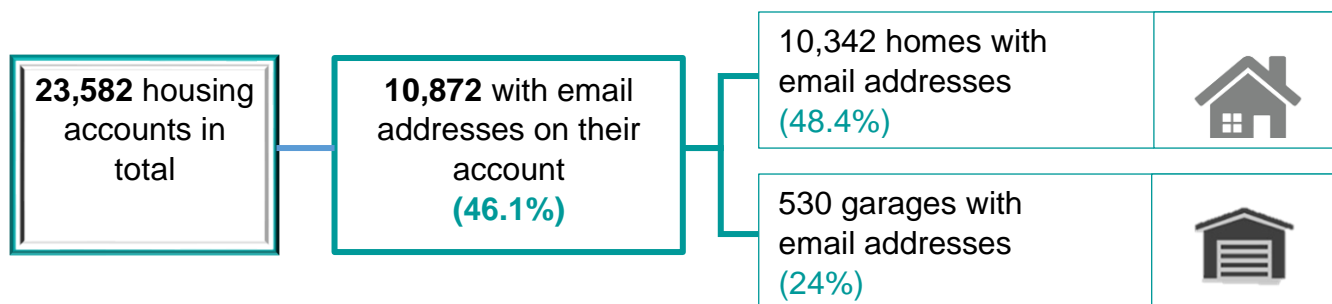
- ✓ The messages are clear
- ✓ There is no jargon, and
- ✓ All abbreviations and acronyms are explained.

#### Cost of production/ use of E-newsletters

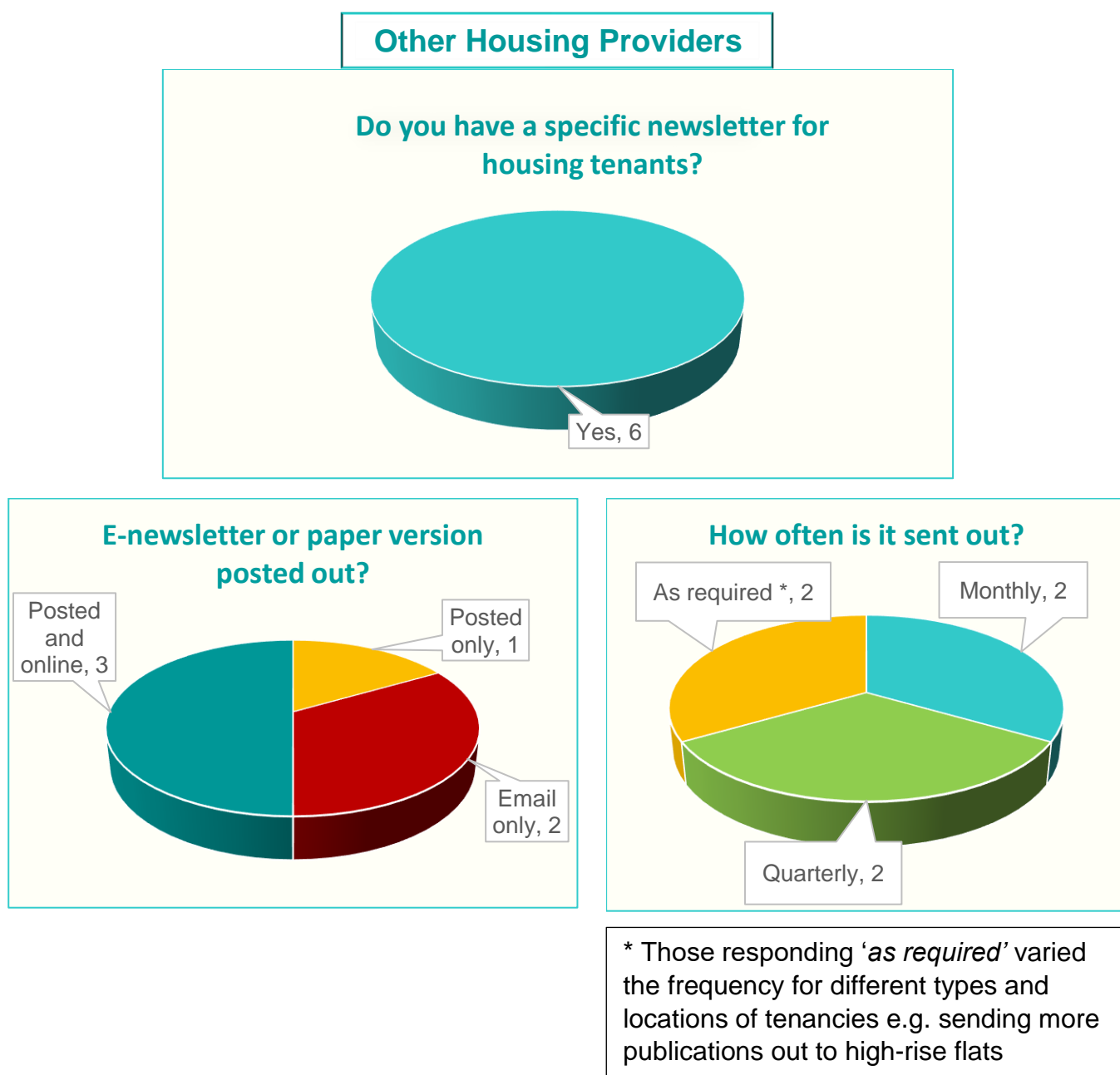
The cost of producing Home Matters has not been reviewed in recent years and tenants have not been asked previously whether they would prefer to receive the newsletter by email rather than a paper version.

Production of a monthly e-newsletter for all twenty-five wards of Rotherham is progressing well. The total number of subscribers for the whole area is 8,206 with some people signing up to more than one area. Percentages of households receiving the e-newsletters ranges from 2.1% in Rotherham East and Rotherham West to 6.2% in Wickersley North. See Appendix B for full breakdown of wards.

As part of the investigation, an exercise was carried out to find out how many households receiving newsletters and other publications have email addresses already set-up for their housing account. It was found that there are:



Comparison to other housing providers:



The newsletter survey resulted in the following scores:

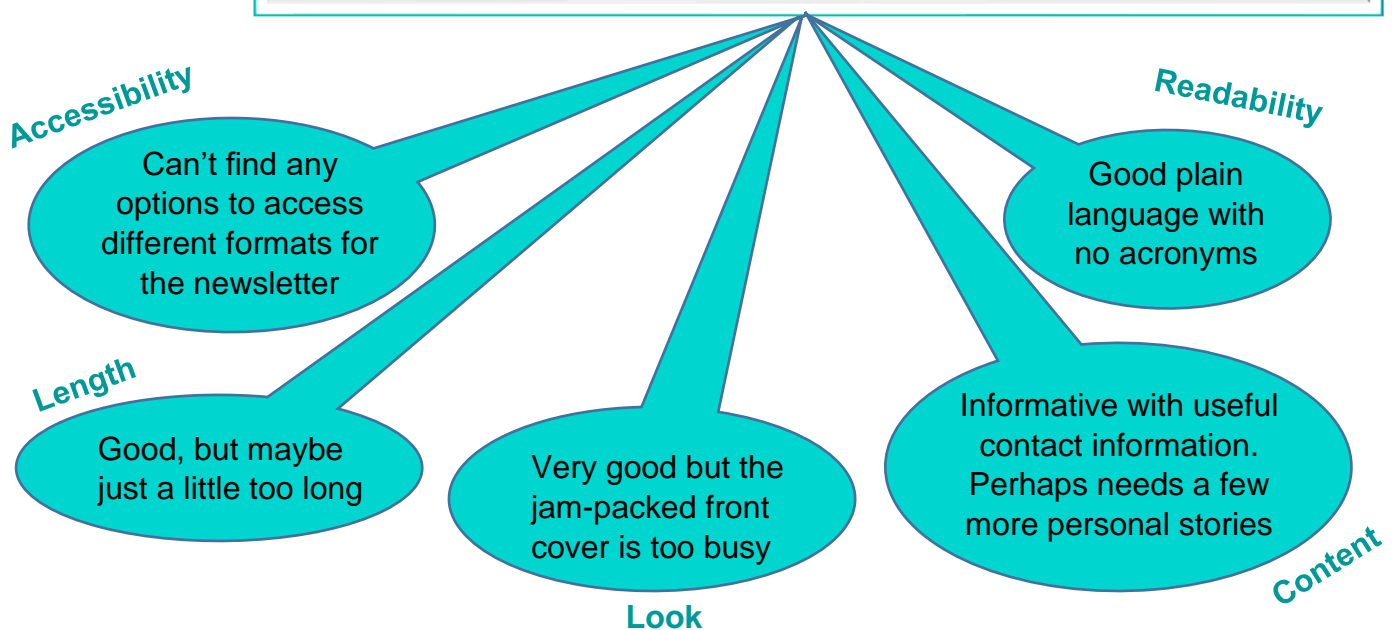
Housing Provider	Percentage scores					
	Accessibility	Readability	Content	Length	Look	Total
Hull	56	89	78 *	67	100 *	<b>78</b>
St Leger	78 *	67	78 *	78	89	<b>78</b>
Rotherham	17 -	92 *	83 *	92 *	83	<b>73</b>
Nottingham	25	58	71	50	92	<b>59</b>
Sheffield	17	58	67	83	25 -	<b>50</b>
Leeds	33	67	42	50	33 -	<b>45</b>

#### Highlights

- E-newsletters were not popular, scoring lowest of all (Sheffield and Leeds)
- Only the St Leger newsletter was good for accessibility
- Rotherham, St Leger, and Hull were best for content; those scoring low on content did not include any tenant stories
- The best-looking newsletter by far was Hull's

#### ROTHERHAM HOME MATTERS Score 73%

- Very poor for *accessibility*
- Very good for *content* and *length*
- Better by far than the others for *readability*, apart from Hull
- People liked the *look* apart from the jam-packed front cover



A full breakdown of responses from other housing providers can be found in Appendix C.

**PANEL VIEWS:**

- ✍ The panel was keen to resurrect the arrangement of tenant representatives being involved in production of the Home Matters newsletter.
- ✍ It was encouraging that Rotherham residents were signing up to the ward e-newsletters. Despite numbers being low currently, it is hoped that these will grow in popularity over time.
- ✍ Some panel members reported that e-newsletters were not always compatible with the devices that they had. This was reflected in the low scores for the e-newsletters in other areas in the newsletter survey.
- ✍ However, the panel felt that providing an option of an e-newsletter for Home Matters would be useful, cost-saving and had the potential for more up-to-date information being circulated. This was particularly reaffirmed by email addresses being available for almost half of all tenants.
- ✍ Panel members were pleased that Home Matters scored so highly compared to the newsletters circulated by other housing providers.
- ✍ The St Leger and Hull newsletters scored highest for accessibility, both offering large print, audio and braille. Hull also offered their newsletter in different languages.
- ✍ It was felt that the issues of accessibility and look could be easily rectified to make Home Matters even better when compared to others.

**Recommendations****Newsletter**

- Improve the accessibility of the newsletter for all customers by offering the newsletter in other formats e.g. easy read, other languages
- Improve the publicity and access to the ward e-newsletters
- Conduct a consultation exercise to find out if tenants still like to receive their newsletter by post or if they would prefer it by email. Possibly design a hybrid model to meet all customer needs.

**Suggestions**

**Tenant editorial board** – consider resurrecting the Home Matters editorial board and looking to increase publication of tenants' voice/stories.

**Home Matters look** – consider making the front page less cluttered.

## 5.7 Presentations



### Questions to Officers

#### Presentations

- *Do you have any arrangements in place to be able to sense-check any information/presentations before delivering to tenants? If so, please could you describe these?*

Officers reported that for all presentations there should be a 'dummy run-through' and preparation of a list of questions that were likely to be asked. It is important that every opportunity is given for customers to ask questions.

The Tenant Engagement team have been following these principles for a while and ensure that all presentations are easy to read and understand with no jargon. All materials to be used are checked against feedback from Rotherham Federation and tenants prior to all Housing Involvement panel meetings.

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### PANEL VIEWS:



The panel was happy with the approach of checking all presentations to make sure that they are jargon-free, clear, easy to understand, and offer an opportunity for questions.

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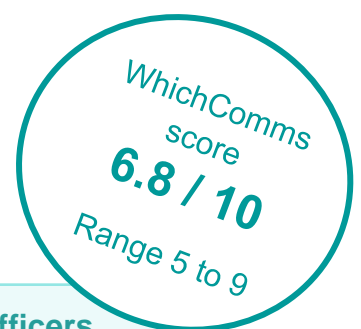
## 5.8 Tenant Representation



### Questions to Officers

#### Formal Meetings

- *Do officers consider the convenience of time and place of meetings when inviting tenant representatives?*

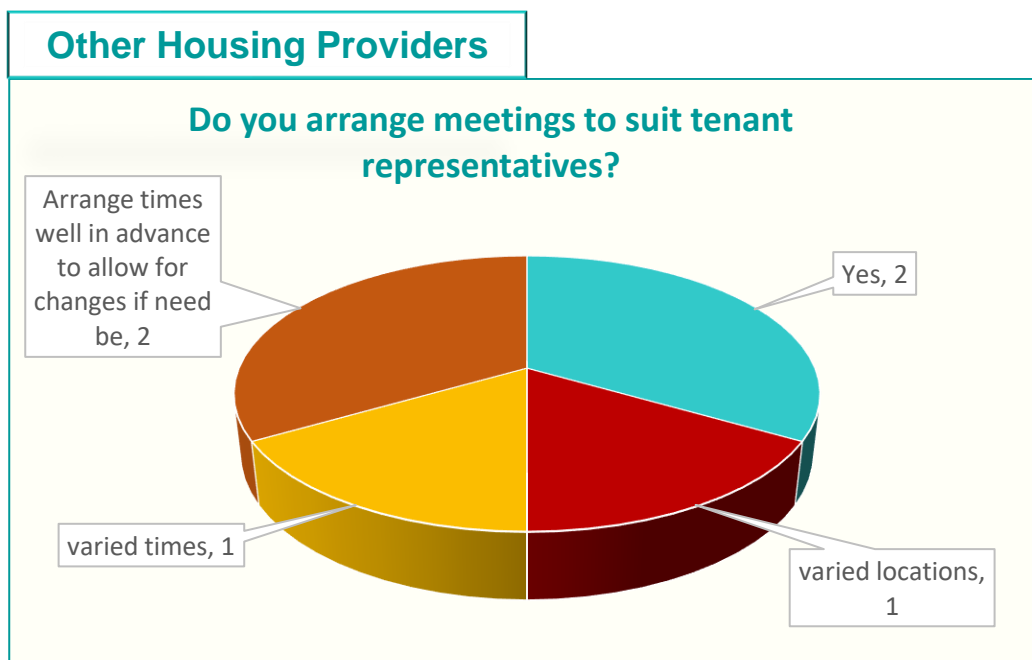






Officers reported that this is important for all services and teams, when meeting with tenant representatives.

During the peak of the Covid pandemic, virtual open days were used to communicate with as many tenants as possible and these were recorded so that people could watch them in their own time if the live feed was inconvenient.

However panel members reported that there are still some meetings that are run on a weekday, 9am – 5pm, which would not suit working tenants.



## PANEL VIEWS:

-  Panel members were happy with the range of meetings that tenant representatives and Rotherham Federation were invited to contribute to.
-  The panel felt that it was important to arrange meetings for tenant representatives at times and places that were more convenient i.e. outside office hours, or to vary arrangements to allow for more representatives to attend

## 5.9 Innovative communications



### Questions to Officers

#### Sharing innovative practice

- *How is innovative practice in communications and engagement shared across housing teams?*

It was not clear how innovative practices are shared across Council teams, but there are some fresh innovative ideas being used e.g. the garden competition was run digitally during the Covid pandemic, with photographs of gardens being judged.

Ideas from other housing providers were:

#### Other Housing Providers

Most housing providers had some new ideas; examples are:

- 'It's OK to complain' campaign (Berneslai)
- Online and telephone surveys to support consultation (Sheffield)
- STAR survey newsletter (Kirklees)
- Use of televisions for Council news in high-rise blocks/ Electronic noticeboards in Independent Living Schemes (Greatwell)
- Proud Tenant campaign (Berneslai)
- 'More than just a landlord' campaign (Berneslai)
- In our community' magazine – written by tenants for tenants (St Leger)

### PANEL VIEWS:



The panel particularly liked the idea of having an 'It's OK to complain' campaign and also the use of more online and telephone surveys to consult better with residents.

#### Recommendation

#### **Complaints and Compliments**

Consider running an 'It's OK to complain' campaign to encourage more feedback from tenants.

#### Suggestion

**Surveys** – consider the use of more online and telephone surveys to consult and communicate with tenants.

6. Recommendations		
Recommendations (in order of priority):		
Priority ranking	Recommendation	Page Number
<b>A</b>	<b>Letters</b> Continue to work through Council letters to make sure that they are understandable and written in plain language for all residents. Have a mechanism in place to review the letter templates with customers.	25
<b>B</b>	<b>Strategy</b> Provide an over-arching strategy on how the Council communicates with people living in Rotherham. Inform tenants how Council officers will communicate/ consult with them.	11
<b>C</b>	<b>Complaints and Compliments</b> Provide a link tile on the web page to allow people to find information on how to make a complaint/ comment or pay a compliment. Include reassurance on the linked page that it is useful to receive feedback and that there will not be repercussions from making a complaint.	23
<b>D</b>	<b>Website</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider the accessibility of the website by having links at the top of the home page to allow people to adjust the settings to their needs (perhaps similar to Berneslai and Wolverhampton).</li> <li>Check and change text on the website that uses acronyms or jargon</li> </ul>	23
<b>E</b>	<b>Newsletter accessibility</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve the accessibility of the newsletter for all customers by offering the newsletter in other formats e.g. easy read, other languages.</li> </ul>	29

<b>F</b>	<b>Telephone calls</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review the new telephone system and make sure that the target of six minutes to speak to a real person is being met. Ensure that robust measurement is in place to monitor this target and respond to shortfalls going forward.</li> </ul>	17
<b>G</b>	<b>Complaints and Compliments</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider running an 'It's OK to complain' campaign to encourage more feedback from tenants.</li> </ul>	32
<b>H</b>	<b>Newsletter circulation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve the publicity and access to the ward e-newsletters.</li> <li>Conduct a consultation exercise to find out if tenants still like to receive their newsletter by post or if they would prefer it by email. Possibly design a hybrid model to meet customer needs.</li> </ul>	29
<b>I</b>	<b>Staff training</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work closely with Rotherham Federation representatives to develop training courses on communications/ customer care (This could include videos of tenant feedback/ tenant representative attendance/ listening to customer call recordings)</li> <li>Improve the handling of bereavement conversations by incorporating into training courses/ providing staff guidance.</li> </ul>	15
<b>Suggestions</b>		
1.	<b>Tenant Communications Working Group</b> – once the website development has commenced and customer advice/ testing is required, it may be useful to set up a temporary working group involving officers and tenant representatives.	
2.	<b>Tenant editorial board</b> – consider resurrecting the Home Matters editorial board and looking to increase publication of tenants' voice/stories.	
3.	<b>Home Matters look</b> – consider making the front page less cluttered.	
4.	<b>Surveys</b> – consider the use of more online and telephone surveys to consult and communicate with tenants.	

## 7. Appendices

- A** – Questions regarding communications for Council Tenants for other housing providers
- B** - Subscribers to Ward E-Newsletter
- C** - Full newsletter feedback from other housing providers

**Questions regarding Communications for Council Tenants for other housing providers:****Communications strategy**

1. Do you have a communications strategy that guides the way in which tenants/ residents are communicated with?

**Letters**

2. How do you ensure that the letters you send are understandable for all recipients including people with specific accessibility needs and other vulnerable tenants?

**Newsletter/ magazine**

3. Do you have a specific newsletter for housing tenants?
4. If so, is this available to be posted out to tenants or is it just available online?
5. How often are publications circulated to housing tenants?

**Verbal communication**

6. Is there any training given to housing officers to ensure that they speak to tenants clearly and in a respectful manner? Please send details of the training if available, including frequency of re-training and range of colleagues attending the training.
7. Are the direct telephone numbers for officers given to tenants or do all calls come through a central point?
8. If a central point is used, what is the average and range of time taken for calls to be answered?
9. Do you have any arrangements in place to be able to sense-check any information/ presentations before delivering to tenants? If so, please could you describe these?

**Tenant representation at formal meetings**

10. Do tenant representatives attend some of your formal Council/ Housing Association meetings?
11. If so, are meetings arranged at a time and place to suit tenant representatives?

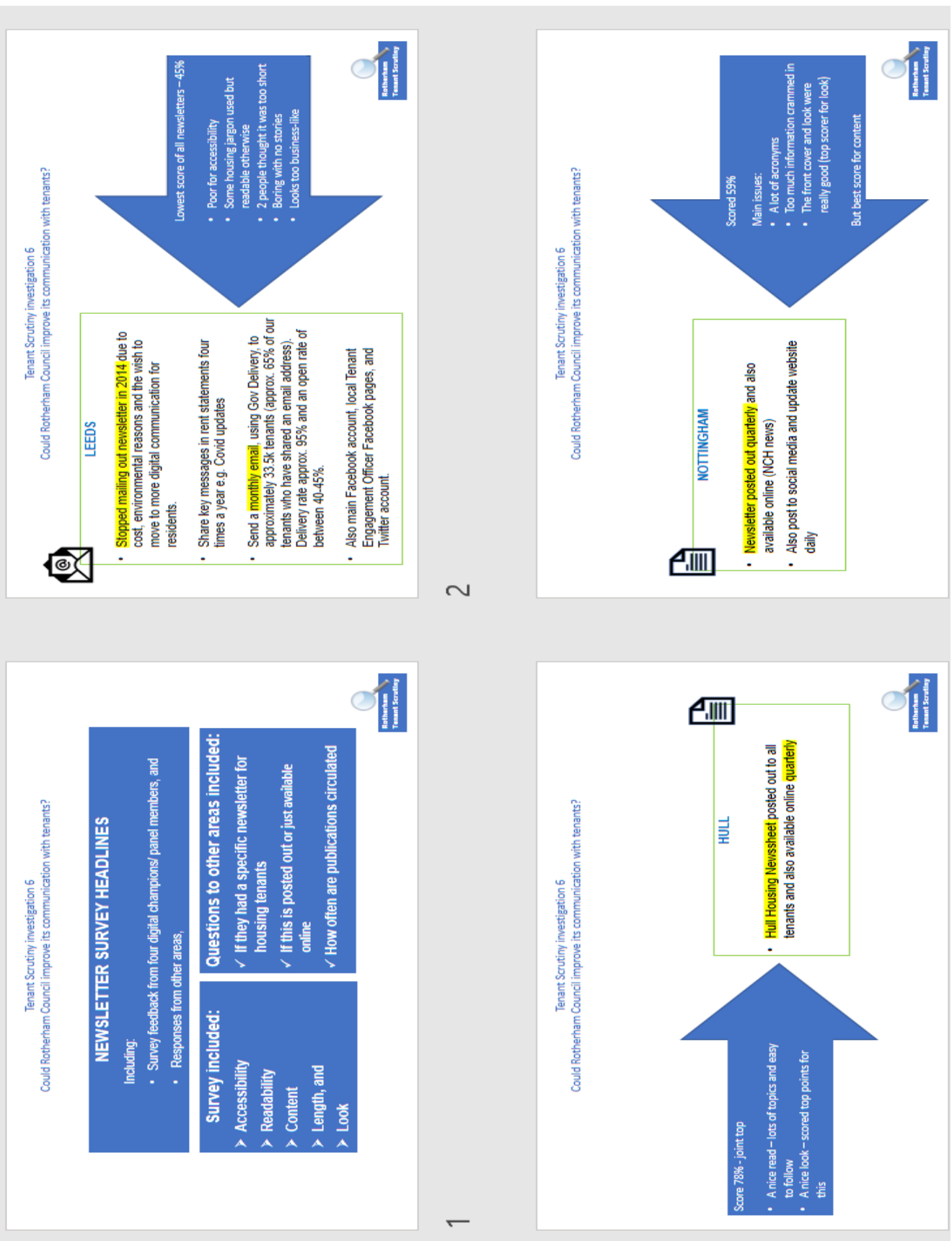
**General**

12. Do you have any examples of innovative practice as regards communications with housing tenants that you could share?
13. Are any of your publications/ letters checked by tenant representatives for plain language/ accessibility?

**PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE AGED 16+ RECEIVING WARD NEWSLETTER****TOTAL OF 8206 SUBSCRIBERS = 3.84% OF ROTHERHAM POPULATION**

<b>WARD</b>	<b>NUMBER RECEIVING</b>	<b>WARD POPULATION (age 16+)</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION</b>
Anston And Woodsetts	324	9208	3.5
Aston and Todwick	286	7633	3.8
Aughton and Swallownest	269	5122	5.3
Boston Castle	483	13433	3.6
Bramley and Ravenfield	383	7908	4.8
Brinsworth	283	7158	4.0
Dalton and Thrybergh	303	6968	4.4
Dinnington	358	10687	3.4
Greasbrough	266	6772	3.9
Hellaby and Maltby West	393	6965	5.6
Hoober	300	10170	3
Keppel	358	11388	3.1
Kilnhurst and Swinton East	297	5975	5
Maltby East	276	7357	3.8
Rawmarsh East	317	6996	4.5
Rawmarsh West	317	7753	4.1
Rother Vale	303	7206	4.2
Rotherham East	272	13015	2.1
Rotherham West	248	11930	2.1
Sitwell	358	10879	3.3
Swinton Rockingham	303	6888	4.4
Thurcroft and Wickersley South	428	8428	5.1
Wales	248	7913	3.1
Wath	317	7887	4
Wickersley North	503	8179	6.2
Other	13		
Total	8206		

# Full newsletter feedback from other housing providers





Tenant Scrutiny Investigation 6

Could Rotherham Council improve its communication with tenants?

**ST LEGER**

- Quarterly magazine – HouseProud sent out via post. Also online.
- Available in large print and audio formats
- Also produced monthly newsletter during lockdown

**Score 78% - joint top**

- Best score for accessibility – different formats available
- An enjoyable read
- Most people thought the length was good
- Second best for layout and look

Rotherham Tenant Scrutiny

5

Tenant Scrutiny Investigation 6

Could Rotherham Council improve its communication with tenants?

**SHEFFIELD**

- Monthly newsletter circulated electronically (copy available as part of the survey)

**Score 50% (second worst)**

- Not enough stories
- Some things weren't very clear and some jargon was used
- Good for length
- Very bland look

Rotherham Tenant Scrutiny

6

Tenant Scrutiny Investigation 6

Could Rotherham Council improve its communication with tenants?

**ROTHERHAM**  
Home Matters

**Score 73%**

- Very poor for accessibility
- Very good for content and length
- Better than the others for readability apart from Hull
- People liked the look apart from the jam-packed front cover

Rotherham Tenant Scrutiny

Tenant Scrutiny Investigation 6

Could Rotherham Council improve its communication with tenants?

**SOUTH YORKSHIRE HOUSING ASSOCIATION (SYHA)**

- After consultation with customers, explaining production and postage costs, agreed to stop producing a newsletter
- Now rely heavily on social media like Facebook
- Also bespoke communications with individual neighbourhoods on specific issues/ direct e mail and texts for some campaigns etc.

**KIRKLEES**

Just increasing their newsletters to:

- Four separate newsletters for the four areas to include general information, performance information and items that are specific to that area (no copy currently available)
- High-rise blocks receive a newsletter every two months
- Six storey blocks receive a newsletter every six months
- All newsletters are posted out – very little website/social media traffic

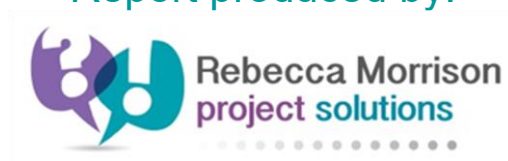
**BERNESLAI**

- E-newsletter each month to tenants with email addresses (7000 customers from 18,500 households – 38%)
- Only available online

No newsletter for Panel Members to consider.

Rotherham Tenant Scrutiny

Report produced by:



[rebecca.morrisonps@gmail.com](mailto:rebecca.morrisonps@gmail.com)

07931 471131

On behalf of:



**Rotherham Federation**

## Tenant Scrutiny Review- Improving Communication with Tenants

This review and action plan supports service delivery against the following **Regulator of Social Housing – Tenant Satisfaction Measures:**

<b>TP01</b>	Overall satisfaction
<b>TP06</b>	Satisfaction that the landlord listens to tenants' views and acts upon them.
<b>TP07</b>	Satisfaction that the landlord keeps tenants informed about things that matter to them.
<b>TP08</b>	Agreement that the landlord treats tenants fairly and with respect.

This review and action plan also support service delivery against the following **Tenant Engagement Framework 2022-25** outcomes:

<b>Outcome 1</b>	Putting our customers at the heart of everything we do.
<b>Outcome 2</b>	Delivering a range of options to give all our tenants an opportunity to get involved.
<b>Outcome 4</b>	Enable tenants to scrutinise and challenge our performance by providing open, transparent, and accessible information.

Recommendation (in priority order)	Lead Officers	Actions	Target Date	Update
<b>Recommendation A: Letters</b>  Continue to work through Council letters to make sure that they are understandable and written in plain language for all residents.  Have a mechanism in place to review the letter templates with customers.  <u>Anticipated Outcomes:</u>	Tenant Involvement Coordinator  Housing Heads of Service  Head of Customer Services  Rotherfed	Establish a Tenant Communications Group.  Develop a forward work programme to review letters, documents and Home Matters.  All letters will be reviewed to ensure they are understandable, relevant,	June 2023  June 2023  July 2023	Housing Services letters were last reviewed in September 2021 prior to implementation of the NEC system.

## Tenant Scrutiny Review- Improving Communication with Tenants

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved communication with tenants.</li> <li>Digitalisation of services.</li> <li>Improved customer satisfaction.</li> <li>Enhanced engagement with tenants.</li> <li>Customer easy read and input.</li> </ul>	Communications and Marketing Manager	thoughtful with an appropriate and suitable tone.		
<p><b>Recommendation B: Strategy</b></p> <p>Provide an over-arching strategy on how the Council communicates with people living in Rotherham.</p> <p>Inform tenants how Council officers will communicate/ consult with them.</p> <p><u>Anticipated Outcomes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved communication with tenants.</li> <li>Digitalisation of services.</li> <li>Improved customer satisfaction.</li> </ul> <p><b>Recommendation B: Strategy cont.</b></p>	<p>Communications and Marketing Manager</p> <p>Tenant Involvement Coordinator</p>	<p>Provide information detailing how the Council will communicate, engage, and consult with tenants.</p> <p>Ensure that tenant communication and engagement principles are embedded within all staff across the Housing Service.</p> <p>Develop a forward communication plan to be regularly reviewed by the proposed Tenant Communications Group and Housing Involvement Panel.</p>	<p>December 2022</p> <p>June-December 2023</p> <p>June 2023</p>	<p>The Tenant Engagement Framework provides details of how the Council will communicate, engage, and consult with tenants.</p> <p>Customer Access Strategy and Digital Strategy in place which set out how customers can access council services and what information is available to customers in a digital format.</p> <p>Consultation and Engagement Framework sets out guidelines for Council staff to follow when undertaking any type of public consultation and engagement activity.</p> <p>Housing training programme is being developed for roll out from June 2023.</p>
<b>Recommendation C: Complaints and Compliments</b>	Customer Services Manager	Provide a direct link from the housing webpage to the Complaints contact us	March 2023	The current web page can be navigated by selecting 'contact us' at the bottom of the webpage which

## Tenant Scrutiny Review- Improving Communication with Tenants

<p>Provide a link tile on the web page to allow people to find information on how to make a complaint/ comment or pay a compliment.</p> <p>Include reassurance on the linked page that it is useful to receive feedback and that there will not be repercussions from making a complaint.</p> <p><u>Anticipated Outcomes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased feedback from customers to improve and shape services to meet customer needs.</li> <li>Improved communication with tenants.</li> <li>Improved website.</li> </ul>	<p>Complaints Manager</p>	<p>page.</p> <p>The following sentence is to be added to the complaint webpage 'please be assured that making a formal complaint will not affect the services you are entitled to, that are the subject of your complaint'.</p>	<p>March 2023</p>	<p>then provides a list of contact options including 'make a complaint, comment or suggestion'</p> <p>A housing specific contact tile on the housing web page will be developed which links directly to the contact us page.</p> <p>Reassurance about making a complaint is included on complaint acknowledgement letters.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation D: Website</b></p> <p>Consider the accessibility of the website by having links at the top of the home page to allow people to adjust the settings to their needs (perhaps similar to Berneslai and Wolverhampton).</p> <p>Check and change text on the website that uses acronyms or jargon</p> <p><u>Anticipated Outcomes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved communication with tenants.</li> <li>Improved website.</li> <li>Website is more accessible for customers</li> <li>Customer easy read and input.</li> </ul>	<p>Head of Customer Services</p> <p>Housing Heads of Service</p> <p>Communications and Marketing Manager</p>	<p>Review the content of the housing webpages with the Tenant Communications Group, to ensure language is clear and understandable including removing any acronyms.</p>	<p>September 2023</p>	<p>The bar at the bottom of the webpage has an accessibility link. The accessibility statement advises customers of what they can expect on the website, how they can make use of supportive technology to improve their own experience, and signpost people to other support formats if needed. This includes an option to change colours, language translation, zoom in to 300%, navigate using a keyboard or speech recognition software and listen using a screen reader.</p> <p>Before information is published online it goes through a number of accessibility checks and is</p>

## Tenant Scrutiny Review- Improving Communication with Tenants

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Digitalisation of services</li> </ul>				<p>assessed against our agreed website style and standards.</p> <p>A review of the housing webpages will be undertaken to check languages and acronyms and amend accordingly.</p> <p>15125 customers are signed up to housing online to self-serve.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation E: Newsletter accessibility</b></p> <p>Improve the accessibility of the newsletter (Home Matters) for all customers by offering the newsletter in other formats e.g. easy read, other languages.</p> <p><u>Anticipated Outcomes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved accessibility</li> <li>Ensuring communications available to all tenants</li> </ul>	<p>Tenant Involvement Coordinator</p> <p>Communications and Marketing Manager</p>	<p>Establish a Tenant Communications Group.</p> <p>Housing Senior Management Team and Communications to review the content and purpose of the Home Matters magazine.</p> <p>Review the existing Home Matters with the Tenant Communications Group.</p> <p>Agree a programme of work with the Group, to enable the Group to shape and influence content in future editions.</p> <p>Ensure that the Home Matters magazine is available in other formats including other languages, large font, speech</p>	<p>June 2023</p> <p>February 2023</p> <p>July 2023</p> <p>July 2023</p> <p>July 2023</p>	<p>Meeting with Communications and Housing Senior Management Team on 10<sup>th</sup> February for an initial discussion and to agree a review of the content for the magazine.</p> <p>The written content of the magazine can be extracted in HTML format for publishing on the website. The website then enables translation into other languages and formats through the accessibility function on the website.</p>

## Tenant Scrutiny Review- Improving Communication with Tenants

		recognition etc.		
<p><b>Recommendation F: Telephone calls</b></p> <p>Review the new telephone system and make sure that the target of six minutes to speak to a real person is being met. Ensure that robust measurement is in place to monitor this target and respond to shortfalls going forward.</p> <p><u>Anticipated Outcomes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved customer satisfaction</li> <li>Improved access to services.</li> <li>Digitalisation of services</li> <li>Efficiencies and use of resources.</li> </ul>	Customer Services Manager	<p>Review the telephone system and response times.</p> <p>Promote and embed customer service standards.</p> <p>Promote self-serve capabilities through Housing Online, to provide choice of service access routes.</p> <p>Provide periodic performance data to the Housing Involvement Panel.</p>	<p>March 2024</p> <p>March 2024</p> <p>September 2023</p> <p>June 2023</p>	<p>This is a Council Key performance indicator – progress against the target is monitored and reported on each quarter.</p> <p>Various improvements implemented such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Numbers of staff able to deal with Housing enquiries through ongoing recruitment and training has increased</li> <li>Customer call back facility during periods of high call demand now offered and exploring other technical solutions to improve call waiting times</li> </ul> <p>Action plan in place to ensure progress against the target and resultant improvements are delivered.</p> <p>Customer Experience Programme Board is overseeing a programme of work to improve customer services which includes developing customer standards.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation G: Complaints and Compliments</b></p> <p>Consider running an 'It's OK to complain'</p>	Complaints Manager	Provide a direct link from the housing webpage to the Complaints page.	March 2023.	Information provided in all editions of Home Matters about how to complain / pay a compliment.

## Tenant Scrutiny Review- Improving Communication with Tenants

<p>campaign to encourage more feedback from tenants</p> <p><u>Anticipated Outcomes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Customers know when to use the complaints procedure and the benefits for doing so.</li> <li>Improved services shaped to meet customer needs.</li> <li>Improved customer experience and journey</li> </ul>				<p>Quarterly attendance by the Complaints Manager at Housing Involvement Panel meetings to talk about complaints received and also Learning from Complaints.</p> <p>Housing Senior Management Team have established a periodic meeting to discuss learning from complaints and associated service improvements.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation H: Newsletter circulation</b></p> <p>Improve the publicity and access to the ward e-newsletters. Conduct a consultation exercise to find out if tenants still like to receive their newsletter (Home Matters) by post or if they would prefer it by email.</p> <p>Possibly design a hybrid model to meet customer needs</p> <p><u>Anticipated Outcomes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Efficient model &amp; Distribution plan developed based on results of consultation.</li> </ul>	<p>Tenant Involvement Coordinator</p> <p>Communications and Marketing Manager</p> <p>Senior Communications Officer</p>	<p>Review the integration between the Tenant Involvement webpages and Ward e-newsletters.</p> <p>Review tenant communications requirements and ensure that information is being sent to tenants in a format that they require.</p>	<p>June 2023</p> <p>July 2023</p>	<p>Ward e-newsletter publicised via social media and sign up to the council website.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation I: Staff training</b></p> <p>Work closely with Rotherham Federation representatives to develop training courses on communications/ customer care (This could include videos of tenant feedback/ tenant</p>	<p>Learning and Development Manager</p> <p>Tenant Involvement</p>	<p>Training course on customer service to be developed which includes case studies/soundbites from tenants.</p>	<p>June 2023</p>	<p>The Learning and Development Officer is producing a 3-hour Train the Trainer Communications Skills Course which supports a 1.5-2 hour Communication Skills Course</p>



## Tenant Scrutiny Review- Improving Communication with Tenants

<p>representative attendance/ listening to customer call recordings)</p> <p>Improve the handling of bereavement conversations by incorporating into training courses/ providing staff guidance.</p> <p><u>Anticipated Outcomes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff are skilled in holding conversations where customers are experiencing grief and loss.</li> <li>• Reduction in related complaints</li> <li>• Enhanced customer service and understanding of customer needs</li> </ul>	<p>Coordinator</p> <p>Rotherfed</p>	<p>Comprehensive housing training programme to be delivered which includes customer service and bereavement conversations.</p> <p>The following sentence is to be added to the complaint webpage 'please be assured that making a formal complaint will not affect the services you are entitled to, that are the subject of your complaint'.</p>	<p>June 2023- March 2024</p>	<p>for delivery to front line Housing Services officers by team managers. Training planning discussions have been held with Rotherham Federation representatives to include tenants.</p> <p>Housing Services have carried out a full-scale Learning Needs Analysis Activity leading to the production of a training plan. Bereavement support is embedded within this plan.</p>
<p><b>Tenant Communications Working Group</b></p> <p>Once the website development has commenced and customer advice/ testing is required, it may be useful to set up a temporary working group involving officers and tenant representatives.</p> <p><u>Anticipated Outcomes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tenants voice in communications</li> <li>• Communications shaped to meet customer needs</li> <li>• Enhanced customer services</li> </ul>	<p>Tenant Involvement Coordinator</p> <p>Rotherfed</p>	<p>Establish a Terms of Reference detailing the purpose of the group and format of the meetings.</p> <p>Stimulate interest from tenant representatives.</p> <p>Establish a Tenants Communications Group.</p>	<p>April 2023</p> <p>April 2023</p> <p>June 2023</p>	<p>Initial discussion at Housing Involvement Panel in January 2023.</p>
<p><b>Tenants Home Matters Editorial board</b></p> <p>Consider resurrecting the Home Matters Editorial Board and looking to increase</p>	<p>Tenant Involvement Coordinator</p>	<p>Home Matters Editorial Board to be embedded within the Tenant Communications Working</p>	<p>June 2023</p>	<p>This links to the above action, the editorial board should be included</p>

## Tenant Scrutiny Review- Improving Communication with Tenants

<p>publication of tenants' voice/stories.</p> <p><u>Anticipated Outcomes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tenants voice in communications</li> <li>• Communications shaped to meet customer needs</li> <li>• Enhanced customer services</li> </ul>	Rotherfed	<p>Group.</p> <p>Review the content of the Home Matters magazine to include more tenants case studies/soundbites.</p>	July 2023	in the Tenant Communications Working Group.
<p><b>Home Matters look</b></p> <p>Consider making the front page less cluttered.</p> <p><u>Anticipated Outcomes:</u></p> <p>Improved home matters magazine to meet customer needs</p>	Communications and Marketing Manager	Review design of the Home Matters magazine.	July 2023	Home Matters is due for a general review around format, frequency and content and the design element will be considered at that point – aiming for early 2023 subject to approval from the Housing Senior Management Team and the cabinet member
<p><b>Surveys</b></p> <p>Consider the use of more online and telephone surveys to consult and communicate with tenants.</p> <p><u>Anticipated Outcomes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased engagement and customer feedback</li> <li>• Services shaped to meet customer needs</li> <li>• Improved customer journey and satisfaction</li> <li>• Tenants voice representative of borough wide demographics</li> <li>• Meeting the requirements of the Social</li> </ul>	Tenant Involvement Coordinator	<p>Implement Tenant Engagement Framework action plan.</p> <p>Tender Tenant Perception Survey</p> <p>Undertake Tenant Perception Survey.</p>	<p>November 2022- May 2024</p> <p>March 2023</p> <p>July 2023</p>	<p>As part of the new Tenant Engagement Framework, an Online Survey tool will be developed for tenants who cannot attend meetings to feedback on services and policies.</p> <p>For the new Tenants Perception Survey, we will be considering telephone and online options as part of the methodology.</p>

Tenant Scrutiny Review- Improving Communication with Tenants

Housing White Paper.				
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#### User guidance:

- The first section of this form guides users through considering major areas where emissions are likely to occur. If emissions are impacted in a way not covered by these categories, please identify this at the bottom of the section
- The first section should be filled as such:
  - **Impact:** identify, in relation to each area, whether the decision of the proposal does the following: *reduces emissions*, *increases emissions*, or has *no impact on emissions*. If it is uncertain this section can be labelled *impact unknown*
  - If **no impact on emissions** is identified: no further detail is needed for this area, but can be added if relevant (e.g. if efforts have been made to mitigate emissions in this area.)
  - **Describe impacts or potential impacts on emissions:** two sections deal respectively with emissions from the Council (including those of contractors), and emissions across Rotherham as a whole. In both sections please explain any factors that are likely to reduce or increase emissions. If **impact unknown** has been selected, then identify the area of uncertainty and outline known variables that may affect impacts.
  - In most cases there is no need to quantify the emission impact of an area after outlining the factors that may reduce or increase emissions. In some cases, however, this may be desirable if factors can be reduced to a small number of known variables (e.g. if an emission impact is attached to a known or estimated quantity of fuel consumed).
  - **Describe any measures to mitigate emission impact:** regardless of the emission impact, in many cases steps should be taken in order to reduce mitigate all emissions associated with each area as far as possible; these steps can be outlined here (For example: if a proposal is likely to increase emissions but practices or materials have been adopted in order to reduce this overall impact, this would be described here).
  - **Outline any monitoring of emission impacts that will be carried out:** in this section outline any steps taken to monitor emission levels, or steps taken to monitor the factors that are expected to increase or reduce emission levels (for example, if waste or transport levels are being monitored this would be described here)
- A **summary paragraph** outlining the likely overall impacts of the proposal/decision on emissions should then be completed - this is not required if the proposal/decision has no impact across all areas.
- The supporting information section should be filled as followed:
  - Author/completing officer
  - **Research, data, or information** may refer to datasets, background documents, literature, consultations, or other data-gathering exercise. These should also be added to the **supporting documents** section of the cabinet report

- 
- Carbon Impact Assessments are to be appended to the associated cabinet reports
  - Prior to publishing reports, Carbon Impact Assessments should be sent to [climate@rotherham.gov.uk](mailto:climate@rotherham.gov.uk) for feedback
  - Report authors may also use the above email address to direct any further queries or to access further support regarding completing the assessment

Will the decision/proposal impact...	Impact	If an impact or potential impacts are identified			
		Describe impacts or potential impacts on emissions from the Council and its contractors.	Describe impact or potential impacts on emissions across Rotherham as a whole.	Describe any measures to mitigate emission impacts	Outline any monitoring of emission impacts that will be carried out
Emissions from non-domestic buildings?	No Impact	Depending on method for the consultation of residents there may be slight increased use of community buildings to host in person consultation.		Make use of existing facilities such as Riverside House for internal consultations or Attend community groups pre-existing sessions to host consultations as well as offering the option to consult online.	
Emissions from transport?	Reduce Emissions	<p>More accessible online / telephone services will reduce need to hard copy delivery / in person appointments.</p> <p>Understanding the demand for paper copies ensures hard copies are only delivered to those which have requested it, therefore reducing transport emissions in delivery.</p>	<p><b>Recommendation I: Staff training and Further Improvements : Tenants Home Matters Editorial board &amp; Tenant Communications Working Group</b></p> <p>If training &amp; working groups are carried out in person there may be increased use of transport where attendees may usually not travel</p>	Encourage staff and board members to use active travel, public transport or car sharing when attending.	

Emissions from waste, or the quantity of waste itself?	Reduce Emissions	<p>Decreased printing and paper waste by Council officers and contractors as a result of circulating and receiving required information online or by phone. A small number of paper transactions may still be in use where required for accessibility.</p> <p>Outcomes of effective consultation with residents will reduce waste as paper copies will only be used where demand exists</p> <p><b>Recommendation G: Complaints and Compliments</b> Depending on method for the delivery of this campaign there may be use of materials such as flyers</p>		<p>Officers and tenants are encouraged to go online to view and submit information.</p> <p><b>Recommendation G: Complaints and Compliments</b> Create online campaign, include in existing publishing to reduce additional printing.</p>	
Emissions from housing and domestic buildings?	No Impact				
Emissions from construction and/or development?	No Impact				

Carbon capture (e.g. through trees)?	No Impact				
Identify any emission impacts associated with this decision that have not been covered by the above fields:					
N/A					

<p>Please provide a summary of all impacts and mitigation/monitoring measures:</p> <p>The recommendations from this report primarily focus on the delivery of information to tenants. The proposed recommendations are likely to have a positive impact in terms of emissions as services become more efficient and accessible, therefore reducing production and transport emissions. Relating to: <b>Recommendation H: Newsletter circulation &amp; Further Improvement : Surveys</b></p> <p>The majority of the work will be carried out in day to day action by officers in their usual working environment, therefore the specific actions are likely to cause no change in emissions. Relating to: <b>Recommendation A: Letters, Recommendation B: Strategy, Recommendation C: Complaints and Compliments, Recommendation D: Website, Recommendation E: Newsletter accessibility, Recommendation F: Telephone calls &amp; Further Improvement : Home Matters look</b></p> <p>Recommendations which may result in a slight increase of emissions include: <b>Recommendation G: Complaints and Compliments, Recommendation I: Staff training and Further Improvements : Tenants Home Matters Editorial board &amp; Tenant Communications Working Group.</b> This will be dependent on methodology used to carry out campaign, consultation and survey. Likely impacts include but are not limited to; use of external buildings, transport to and from sessions and any materials needed.</p>
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Supporting information:	
Completed by: (Name, title, and service area/directorate).	Lynsey Skidmore, Housing Operations Manager, Housing and Estate Services, Adult Care, Housing & Public Health.
Please outline any research, data, or information used to complete this [form].	N/A



If quantities of emissions are relevant to and have been used in this form please identify which conversion factors have been used to quantify impacts.	N/A
Tracking [to be completed by Policy Support / Climate Champions]	

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## PART A - Initial Equality Screening Assessment

As a public authority we need to ensure that all our strategies, policies, service and functions, both current and proposed have given proper consideration to equality and diversity.

A **screening** process can help judge relevance and provide a record of both the process and decision. Screening should be a short, sharp exercise that determines relevance for all new and revised strategies, policies, services and functions.

Completed at the earliest opportunity it will help to determine:

- the relevance of proposals and decisions to equality and diversity
- whether or not equality and diversity is being/has already been considered, and
- whether or not it is necessary to carry out an Equality Analysis (Part B).

Further information is available in the Equality Screening and Analysis Guidance – see page 9.

### 1. Title

**Title:** Tenant Scrutiny Report

**Directorate:** Adult Care, Housing & Public Health

**Service area:** Housing & Estate Services

**Lead person:** Lynsey Skidmore

**Contact:** 01709 334950

[lynsey.skidmore@rotherham.gov.uk](mailto:lynsey.skidmore@rotherham.gov.uk)

Is this a:

☐

**Strategy / Policy**

☐

**Service / Function**

☒

**Other**

**If other, please specify Report**

### 2. Please provide a brief description of what you are screening

Tenants Scrutiny Panel Review- Investigation into how Rotherham Council could improve its communications with tenants

### 3. Relevance to equality and diversity

All the Council's strategies/policies, services/functions affect service users, employees or the wider community – borough wide or more local. These will also have a greater/lesser relevance to equality and diversity.

The following questions will help you to identify how relevant your proposals are.

When considering these questions think about age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, civil partnerships and marriage, pregnancy and maternity and other socio-economic groups e.g. parents, single parents and guardians, carers, looked after children, unemployed and people on low incomes, ex-offenders, victims of domestic violence, homeless people etc.

Questions	Yes	No
Could the proposal have implications regarding the accessibility of services to the whole or wider community? <i>(Be mindful that this is not just about numbers. A potential to affect a small number of people in a significant way is as important)</i>	x	
Could the proposal affect service users? <i>(Be mindful that this is not just about numbers. A potential to affect a small number of people in a significant way is as important)</i>	x	
Has there been or is there likely to be an impact on an individual or group with protected characteristics? <i>(Consider potential discrimination, harassment or victimisation of individuals with protected characteristics)</i>	x	
Have there been or likely to be any public concerns regarding the proposal? <i>(It is important that the Council is transparent and consultation is carried out with members of the public to help mitigate future challenge)</i>		x
Could the proposal affect how the Council's services, commissioning or procurement activities are organised, provided, located and by whom? <i>(If the answer is yes you may wish to seek advice from commissioning or procurement)</i>	x	
Could the proposal affect the Council's workforce or employment practices? <i>(If the answer is yes you may wish to seek advice from your HR business partner)</i>	x	
If you have answered no to all the questions above, please explain the reason		
The recommendations will improve communications and therefore there will be no adverse public concerns relating to the proposals.		

If you have answered **no** to **all** the questions above please complete **sections 5 and 6**.

If you have answered **yes** to any of the above please complete **section 4**.

#### 4. Considering the impact on equality and diversity

If you have not already done so, the impact on equality and diversity should be considered within your proposals before decisions are made.

Considering equality and diversity will help to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and take active steps to create a discrimination free society by meeting a group or individual's needs and encouraging participation.

Please provide specific details for all three areas below using the prompts for guidance and complete an Equality Analysis (Part B).

- **How have you considered equality and diversity?**

Impact on communications and staff training.

- **Key findings**

See Part B

- **Actions**

See Part B

Date to scope and plan your Equality Analysis:	23.02.23
--	----------

Date to complete your Equality Analysis:	23.02.23
--	----------

Lead person for your Equality Analysis (Include name and job title):	Lynsey Skidmore, Housing Operations Manager
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## 5. Governance, ownership and approval

Please state here who has approved the actions and outcomes of the screening:

Name	Job title	Date
Paul Walsh	Head of Housing Operational Services	
Lynsey Skidmore	Housing Operations Manager	23.02.2023

## 6. Publishing

This screening document will act as evidence that due regard to equality and diversity has been given.

If this screening relates to a **Cabinet, key delegated officer decision, Council, other committee or a significant operational decision** a copy of the completed document should be attached as an appendix and published alongside the relevant report.

A copy of **all** screenings should also be sent to [equality@rotherham.gov.uk](mailto:equality@rotherham.gov.uk) For record

keeping purposes it will be kept on file and also published on the Council's Equality and Diversity Internet page.	
<b>Date screening completed</b>	23.02.23
<b>Report title and date</b>	Tenants Scrutiny Panel Review- Improving Communication with Tenants
<b>If relates to a Cabinet, key delegated officer decision, Council, other committee or a significant operational decision – report date and date sent for publication</b>	Improving Places Select Commission
<b>Date screening sent to Performance, Intelligence and Improvement</b> <a href="mailto:equality@rotherham.gov.uk">equality@rotherham.gov.uk</a>	<b>23.02.2023</b>

## PART B – Equality Analysis Form

As a public authority we need to ensure that all our strategies, policies, service and functions, both current and proposed have given proper consideration to equality and diversity.

This form:

- Can be used to prompt discussions, ensure that due regard has been given and remove or minimise disadvantage for an individual or group with a protected characteristic
- Involves looking at what steps can be taken to advance and maximise equality as well as eliminate discrimination and negative consequences
- Should be completed before decisions are made, this will remove the need for remedial actions.

Note – An Initial Equality Screening Assessment (Part A) should be completed prior to this form.

When completing this form consider the Equality Act 2010 protected characteristics Age, Disability, Sex, Gender Reassignment, Race, Religion or Belief, Sexual Orientation, Civil Partnerships and Marriage, Pregnancy and Maternity and other socio-economic groups e.g. parents, single parents and guardians, carers, looked after children, unemployed and people on low incomes, ex-offenders, victims of domestic violence, homeless people etc. – see page 11 of Equality Screening and Analysis Guidance.

1. Title	
<b>Equality Analysis title:</b> Tenants Scrutiny Panel Review- Improving communications with tenants	
<b>Date of Equality Analysis (EA):</b> 23 <sup>rd</sup> February 2023	
<b>Directorate:</b> Adult Care, Housing & Public Health	<b>Service area:</b> Housing and Estates
<b>Lead Manager:</b> Lynsey Skidmore	<b>Contact number:</b> 34950
<b>Is this a:</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Strategy / Policy</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Service / Function</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Other</b>	
<b>If other, please specify</b> Report	

--

**2. Names of those involved in the Equality Analysis (Should include minimum of three people) - see page 7 of Equality Screening and Analysis Guidance**

Name	Organisation	Role (eg service user, managers, service specialist)
Lynsey Skidmore	RMBC	Housing Operations Manager
Paul Walsh	RMBC	Head of Housing Operational Services

**3. What is already known? - see page 10 of Equality Screening and Analysis Guidance**
**Aim/Scope (who the Policy/Service affects and intended outcomes if known)**

This may include a group/s identified by a protected characteristic, others groups or stakeholder/s e.g. service users, employees, partners, members, suppliers etc.)

Aim: To investigate how Rotherham Council could improve its communications with tenants

Objectives:

To:

- Consider whether current Council communications meet the needs of all tenants
- Benchmark against other housing providers in terms of how well they communicate with tenants and any examples of good practice
- Agree how communications could be improved across the Council
- Explore how any suggestions made by the panel could contribute to the Social Housing White Paper action plan as regards the information that is available to tenants and how well this is communicated.

**What equality information is available? (Include any engagement undertaken)**

The Tenants Scrutiny Review has been developed through the RotherFed's working with tenants and relevant council officers.

The investigation included:

- A Which Comms? Survey to score the types of communications used currently
- A survey of eleven other housing providers
- Interviewing Council officers representing Business Development, Customer Services, Learning and Development, the Corporate Contact Centre, and Communications and Marketing
- Conducting a 'Website Challenge' with three tenant scrutiny panel members, two digital champions and one member of Rotherham Federation staff
- Conducting a survey of the newsletters used by six other housing providers, through two panel members and two digital champions



- Panel meetings to discuss the information received and to agree the recommendations to be made.

A summary of findings can be found here [Summary report Final.pdf](#)

**Are there any gaps in the information that you are aware of?**

None.

**What monitoring arrangements have you made to monitor the impact of the policy or service on communities/groups according to their protected characteristics?**

The Scrutiny Review Action Plan will be monitored and reviewed by the Tenant Involvement Coordinator, Tenant Scrutiny Panel and the Improving Places Select Commission.

**Engagement undertaken with customers. (date and group(s) consulted and key findings)**

The Tenants Scrutiny Review has been developed through the Panel working with tenants and relevant council officers between October 2021 and July 2022.

The Tenants Scrutiny Review recommendations were presented and discussed with the Housing Involvement Panel in January 2023.

**Engagement undertaken with staff (date and group(s) consulted and key findings)**

The Tenants Scrutiny Review and action plan were presented and discussed with Housing SMT and DLT in February 2023.

Improving Places Select Commission (March 2023)

**4. The Analysis - of the actual or likely effect of the Policy or Service (Identify by protected characteristics)**

**How does the Policy/Service meet the needs of different communities and groups?** (Protected characteristics of Age, Disability, Sex, Gender Reassignment, Race, Religion or Belief, Sexual Orientation, Civil Partnerships and Marriage, Pregnancy and Maternity) - see glossary on page 14 of the Equality Screening and Analysis Guidance)

It is intended that the Scrutiny Review will ensure the following benefits for tenants and residents:

- Communications that are clear, relevant and accessible to all tenants
- Increased awareness of how to access information that is important to them
- Improved/increased tenant involvement opportunities
- Increased confidence in Council communications

**Does your Policy/Service present any problems or barriers to communities or Groups?**

By implementing the recommendations in the Scrutiny Review, the Council will be removing barriers to tenants and communities through ensuring communications is accessible and tenant reader friendly.

We will be providing staff training to ensure any barriers to communities can be removed.

**Does the Service/Policy provide any positive impact/s including improvements or remove barriers?**

- Communications that are clear, relevant and accessible to all tenants
- Increased awareness of how to access information that is important to them
- Improved/increased tenant involvement opportunities
- Increased confidence in Council communications

**What affect will the Policy/Service have on community relations?** (may also need to consider activity which may be perceived as benefiting one group at the expense of another)

We want to reach out and listen to our under-represented groups and use our customer data to ensure communications are accessible and meeting the diverse needs of our tenants and neighbourhoods by contributing to the following:

1. Understanding, listening, and engaging across all communities
2. Delivering fair, inclusive, and accessible services
3. Empowering people to engage and challenge discrimination and to promote good community relations

Please list any **actions and targets** that need to be taken as a consequence of this assessment on the action plan below and ensure that they are added into your

service plan for monitoring purposes – see page 12 of the Equality Screening and Analysis Guidance.

## **5. Summary of findings and Equality Analysis Action Plan**

If the analysis is done at the right time, i.e. early before decisions are made, changes should be built in before the policy or change is signed off. This will remove the need for remedial actions. Where this is achieved, the only action required will be to monitor the impact of the policy/service/change on communities or groups according to their protected characteristic - See page 11 of the Equality Screening and Analysis guidance

<b>Title of analysis:</b> Tenant Scrutiny Report
<b>Directorate and service area:</b> Adult Care, Housing & Public Health
<b>Lead Manager:</b> Lynsey Skidmore
<b>Summary of findings:</b>
No negative impacts have been identified/are anticipated.

Action/Target	State Protected Characteristics as listed below	Target date (MM/YY)

**\*A = Age, D= Disability, S = Sex, GR Gender Reassignment, RE= Race/ Ethnicity, RoB= Religion or Belief, SO= Sexual Orientation, PM= Pregnancy/Maternity, CPM = Civil Partnership or Marriage. C= Carers, O= other groups**

## 6. Governance, ownership and approval

Please state those that have approved the Equality Analysis. Approval should be obtained by the Director and approval sought from DLT and the relevant Cabinet Member.

Name	Job title	Date
James Clark	Assistant Director for Housing	
Cllr Amy Brookes	Cabinet Member for Housing	

## 7. Publishing

The Equality Analysis will act as evidence that due regard to equality and diversity has been given.

If this Equality Analysis relates to a **Cabinet, key delegated officer decision, Council, other committee or a significant operational decision** a copy of the completed document should be attached as an appendix and published alongside the relevant report.

A copy should also be sent to [equality@rotherham.gov.uk](mailto:equality@rotherham.gov.uk) For record keeping purposes it will be kept on file and also published on the Council's Equality and Diversity Internet page.

<b>Date Equality Analysis completed</b>	23.02.23
<b>Report title and date</b>	Tenants Scrutiny Panel Review- Improving communications with tenants
<b>Date report sent for publication</b>	
<b>Date Equality Analysis sent to Performance, Intelligence and Improvement</b> <a href="mailto:equality@rotherham.gov.uk">equality@rotherham.gov.uk</a>	23.02.23

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Public Report  
Improving Places Select Commission

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**Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting**

Improving Places Select Commission – 21 March 2023

**Report Title**

Housing Strategy 2022-25 Progress Report Q2/Q3

**Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?**

No

**Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report**

Ian Spicer, Strategic Director of Adult Care, Housing and Public Health

**Report Author(s)**

James Clark, Assistant Director of Housing

[james.clark@rotherham.gov.uk](mailto:james.clark@rotherham.gov.uk)

Sarah Watts, Strategic Housing Manager

[sarah.watts@rotherham.gov.uk](mailto:sarah.watts@rotherham.gov.uk)

**Ward(s) Affected**

Borough-Wide

**Report Summary**

The Housing Strategy 2022-25 was approved by Cabinet in June 2022 and published in July 2022.

The Strategy recognises the key issues affecting housing in Rotherham and the impact these have on residents and sets out how the Council will work in partnership to address the issues identified.

The report is presented for information and provides an update on progress over the period July to December 2022 (Q2/Q3).

**Recommendations**

1. That progress against the Housing Strategy priorities is noted.
2. That the next progress update will be presented to Improving Places select Commission in 12 months' time (March 2024).

**List of Appendices Included**

None

**Background Papers**

Rotherham Housing Strategy 2022-25

**Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel**

No

**Council Approval Required**

No

**Exempt from the Press and Public**

No



## Housing Strategy 2022-25 Progress Report Q2/Q3

### 1. Background

- 1.1 The Housing Strategy 2022-25 was approved by Cabinet in June 2022 and published in July 2022.
- 1.2 The Strategy recognises the key issues affecting housing in Rotherham and the impact these have on residents and sets out how the Council will work in partnership to address the issues identified.

The six priorities of the new Housing Strategy are:

- High quality new homes
- Affordable homes to meet local need
- Investment in existing homes
- Bringing empty homes back into use
- Supporting people to live independently
- Strengthening communities

### 2. Key Issues

#### 2.1 Housing Market

- 2.1.1 The overall average house price in Rotherham was £183,176 at December 2022. This was an increase of 13.5% since December 2021. National figures for the same period were at 10%. Governments budget announcements towards the end of 2022 resulted in some major changes in the financial sector, particularly in relation to borrowing and mortgage availability. House price data is published three months behind, and lower levels of house price growth are expected to follow this year.

Average House Price

	December 21	December 22
Rotherham	£161,361	£183,176

- 2.1.2 As changes in the housing market take hold and it becomes increasingly difficult for people to access mortgages and get on the property ladder, more people turn to private rent. As demand for private rented accommodation outstrips supply, rental costs begin to rise.

Average Private Rent V's Local Housing Allowance

Cost p/w	Jan 22	Jan 23	Increase	LHA* rate
1 bed	£101	£109	8%	£86
2 bed	£122	£138	13%	£98
3 bed	£150	£167	11%	£110
4 bed	£230	£253	10%	£158

\*Local Housing Allowance

The average increase in private rent locally over the last year was between 8-11%, and in many cases is higher than Local Housing Allowance,

meaning people on low incomes or those who are reliant on benefits to assist with housing costs may be unable to find suitable accommodation in the private sector.

This in turn creates pressure on the Council housing service as people look for more affordable housing options.

## 2.2 Challenges

- 2.2.1 The housing market and general economic climate will remain one of the key challenges but there are other issues that may impact on the Councils ability to achieve the priorities of the Housing Strategy and it is important to recognise these. The Housing Service will monitor and continue to mitigate against these over the life of the strategy.
- 2.2.2 Cost of living crisis continues to impact on the lives of tenants and residents, and as a result there will be an increased demand for Council support and services.
- 2.2.3 There will be increasing regulation and compliance, across both the social and private rented housing sectors, including a focus on damp and mould.
- 2.2.4 Council housing stock is ageing and as investment programmes continue there needs to be consideration around improving efficiency.

## 2.3 Performance

- 2.3.1 The Housing Strategy will deliver against the Council Plan, to increase the number of new homes built or enabled and help assist more people access affordable housing.

Current target is 225 with 147 homes delivered up to the end of Q3. On track to meet target by year end.

The number of new homes built or enabled also supports the Councils ambition to deliver 1000 new homes by 2026.

## 2.4 Progress

Progress is reported against the six priorities of the Housing Strategy.

### 2.4.1 High quality new homes

- A total of 147 high quality new homes built across the borough, including;
  - 89 council delivery
  - 58 new homes enabled through local providers and developers
- Of the 89 council delivery;
  - 58 were direct build and 31 acquisitions
  - 67 were for rent, 16 shared ownership and 6 for market sale

- Customer feedback is captured and analysed to understand the wider impact of new homes and so customers views can help shape future development activity

#### 2.4.2 Affordable homes to meet local need

- There were 67 new council rented homes completed
- 16 shared ownership homes completed
- Continued promotion of shared ownership to assist first time buyers and people wanting to downsize, with a further 16 new shared ownership homes complete
- 12 new affordable homes were also complete by Great Places at Rawmarsh, and families will be nominated from the Council housing register
- SME *Homebuilder* Initiative launched to encourage and support more small, local developers can get involved in the delivery of new homes.

#### 2.4.3 Investment in existing homes

- Stock investment programme continues.
  - Gas compliance is 99.98%
  - Decently levels remain high at 99.995%
  - Customer satisfaction at 94%
- Secured £1.4m of funding from the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund to improve thermal efficiency in 131 homes in Maltby
- Continued investment in existing stock has brought average EPC rating up from Band D to Band C.
- Proactively attempted 248 mould treatment surveys, resulting in works being undertaken to a third of properties. Focussed on areas identified as mould hot spots.

#### 2.4.4 Bringing empty homes back into use

- Secured further temporary funding for Empty Homes Officer resource, with over 200 enquiries handled to date
- Continue to contact empty property owners to understand their intentions
- Four empty properties brought back into use with Council intervention, 27 to date.
- Case studies have been developed to showcase some examples of homes brought back into use

#### 2.4.5 Supporting people to live independently

- 678 properties let to applicants on the housing register
- Completed 11 new council bungalows at Aston to support tenants as they age
- Elizabeth House council rented apartments complete and let specifically to applicants over the age of 55
- Supported the launched of the Adult Care Market Position Statement
- Assisted 385 households completing major adaptation works

- Aids & Adaptations Provided 3246 minor adaptations, fixings and key safes to facilitate early discharge from hospital and also allow customers to carry out their daily tasks.
- Evictions remain low despite challenges, 6 in total during Q2/Q3
- 18% of tenancy health checks complete
  - 1442 visits in Q2
  - 945 visits in Q3
  - On track for 25% by year end, four year rolling programme

#### 2.4.6 Strengthening communities

- Tenant and resident support teams have;
  - Supported around 1400 tenants per year
  - Helped 468 residents complete accredited training
  - Secured 488 residents into sustainable employment
  - Generated an additional £543,405 in income for tenants and residents so far this year
- Awarded TPAS exemplar status in recognition of the work we do to ensure our tenants are at the heart of everything we do
- The town centre development social value (accumulative);
  - £315,000 in added value (social and community investment)
  - 94% Local labour and 86% of spend is from within 40 miles of the site
  - 95% waste diverted from land fill
  - Hosted over 1000 apprentice weeks
  - Employed 62 local people
- The Energy Crisis Support Scheme has approved payment awards of up to £400 per household for 4,368 applicants

#### 2.5 Key areas of focus – next 6-12 months

- All three town centre developments complete, handed over and occupied
- Complete outcomes report and customer satisfaction surveys for Town Centre developments
- Support partners to complete the final phase of the Chesterhill Whinney Hill Development
- Continue to work with Homes England and the MCA to access funding to deliver more homes
- Responding to and implementing the requirements of the Social Housing White Paper
- Continuing to address the needs of homeless households
- Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy refresh complete
- A review of the Aids and Adapts Policy
- Empty Home Plan refresh
- Mid-point review of the selective licensing scheme
- Hold the annual Developer Summit
- Zero-carbon prototype project at Thrybergh
- Continue our programme of tenant engagement and support

### 3. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 3.1 The report is presented for information

#### **4. Consultation on proposal**

- 4.1 The report is presented for information

#### **5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision**

- 5.1 The report is presented for information

#### **6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications**

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications due to the recommendations detailed in the report. The HRA Business Plan provides a financial assessment over 30 years, taking into account planned actions as part of the Housing Strategy, and its impact on the management and financing of the Council's housing stock.

#### **7. Legal Advice and Implications**

- 7.1 There are no substantive legal issues arising from the content of this report.

#### **8. Human Resources Advice and Implications**

- 8.1 There are no human resource implications specific to this report.

#### **9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults**

- 9.1 The Children and Young Peoples Service, and Adult Care and Public Health have been consulted and have had an input into the Housing Strategy. By ensuring a range of affordable homes are delivered to meet a wide range of different needs, the Housing Strategy will help to provide safe, high-quality homes for children and young people, and vulnerable adults, allowing them to live safely and independently.

#### **10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications**

- 10.1 Having access to good quality and affordable homes is important for all of the borough's diverse communities, and the Housing Strategy seeks to remove barriers people can face in accessing a home to meet their needs. Data and consultation are used to understand Rotherham's communities, and through all the priorities within the Housing Strategy will deliver homes that meet the needs of older people, people with disabilities, larger families, single people and couples. The Council will continue to engage with communities and make sure the homes provided and enabled, meet their changing needs.

#### **11. Implications for CO<sub>2</sub> Emissions and Climate Change**

- 11.1 Climate change poses a significant threat to environments, individuals, communities, and economies on local, national, and international scales. In

recognition of this the Council has aimed to be net carbon neutral as an organisation by 2030, and for Rotherham as a whole to achieve the same position by 2040.

- 11.2 Through its own delivery programme, the Council has the ability to ensure that the new homes are high quality and energy efficient, which will contribute to reducing domestic carbon emissions.

## 12. Implications for Partners

- 12.1 The aims set out in this Strategy will only be achieved by working in partnership with a range of local and regional stakeholders. The Council works strategically with partners through the Rotherham Strategic Housing Forum and with preferred Housing Association partners to help meet the wide range of housing need across the borough. Working with Homes England and the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority to access funding opportunities is vital to make housing delivery schemes viable.
- 12.2 The Housing Strategy has been developed in collaboration with, and will be monitored by, Rotherham's Strategic Housing Forum, which includes representation at a senior level from Adult Care, Children and Young Peoples Services, Planning, Public Health and Policy. Other partner and voluntary sector organisations, social housing providers, landlords and developers are also represented on the Forum.

## 13. Risks and Mitigation

- 13.1 The risk of failing to deliver the commitments set out in the Housing Strategy and action plan will be mitigated by ensuring the correct staff resources and processes are in place, and through regular and robust progress monitoring including an annual report to the Improving Places Select Commission.
- 13.2 The risk of the Housing Strategy becoming out of date due to policy and context changes at the national and local level, is mitigated by refreshing the Housing Strategy every three years

### Accountable Officer(s)

James Clark, Assistant Director of Housing  
 Peter Kandola, Interim Head of Strategic Housing and Development  
 Sarah Watts, Strategic Housing Manager

Approvals obtained on behalf of:

	Name	Date
Chief Executive		<a href="#">Click here to enter a date.</a>
The Strategic Director with responsibility for this report	Ian Spicer, Strategic Director of Adult Care,	07/03/23

	Housing and Public Health	
Consultation undertaken with the relevant Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Housing - Councillor Brookes	Click here to enter a date.

*Report Author:*

*Sarah Watts, Strategic Housing Manager*

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# Improving Places Select Commission

## Housing Strategy 2022-25 Progress Report Jul - Dec 2022 (Q2/Q3)

James Clark

Assistance Director of Housing

# Housing Strategy Progress

- Key priorities
- The Rotherham Picture
- Progress
- Next 6 months



# Housing Strategy Priorities

High quality new homes

Affordable homes to meet local need

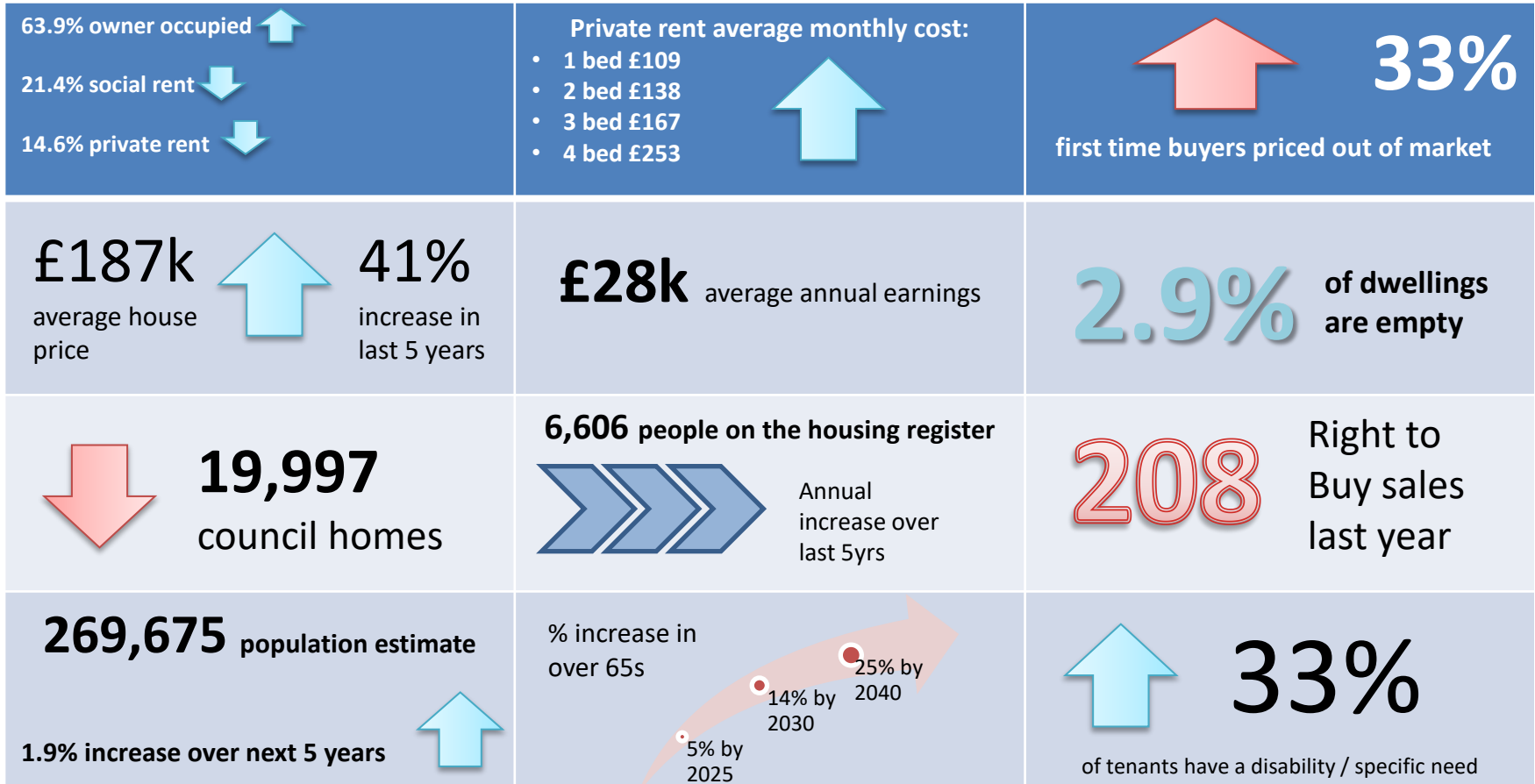
Investment in existing homes

Bringing empty homes back into use

Supporting people to live independently

Strengthening communities

# The Rotherham picture



# High quality new homes



- 147 new homes delivered:
- 89 council delivery
- 58 via local housing providers



# Affordable homes to meet local need

- 67 new council rented homes
- Great Places at Rawmarsh
- Continuing to promote shared ownership to assist first time buyers and people down sizing
- Build and acquisition for Shared Ownership
- SME Homebuilder Initiative launched



## ROTHERHAM SMALL SITE HOMEBUILDER INITIATIVE



Information sessions - register via our website

Swinton Library, Tuesday 7 March, 12.30pm to 5.00pm

Maltby Library, Tuesday 14 March, 9.30am to 2.00pm

Rotherham Town Hall, Tuesday 21 March, 4.00pm to 7.00pm



Ideal for  
SMEs

[www.rotherham.gov.uk/housing](http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/housing)

# Investment in existing homes



- Investment continues
- 99.98% gas compliance
- Decency 99.99%
- Customer satisfaction 94%
- SHDF
- EPC rating C



# Bringing empty homes back into use



- Empty Homes Officer
- Increased enquiries
- Homes brought back into use
- Case studies





# Supporting people to live independently

- 678 homes let
- New bungalows and aged persons apartments
- Launched Adult Care Market Position Statement
- Assisted over 3,500 households with adaptations
- Tenancy health checks on track



# Strengthening communities

- Tenant and resident support increased
  - Training employment support
  - Energy crisis support
- TPAS exemplar status
- Social Value



# Challenges

- Housing Market / Economic
- Cost of living crisis
- Increased demand for support and services
- Regulation and compliance
- Focus on damp and mould
- Ageing stock / stock efficiency
- Staff / skills
- Supply / construction costs

# Next 6 months

- Town Centre complete
- Final phase of Chesterhill / Whinney Hill
- Homes England / SYMCA
- Social Housing White Paper
- Homelessness focus
- Developer engagement
- Zero-carbon prototype project
- Continued tenant and resident support

Public Report  
Improving Places Select Commission

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**Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting**

Improving Places Select Commission – 21 March 2023

**Report Title**

Work Programme

**Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?**

No

**Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report**

Jo Brown, Assistant Chief Executive

**Report Author(s)**

Katherine Harclerode, Governance Advisor  
01709 254532 or [katherine.harclerode@rotherham.gov.uk](mailto:katherine.harclerode@rotherham.gov.uk)

**Ward(s) Affected**

Borough-Wide

**Report Summary**

To provide an updated outline schedule of scrutiny work.

**Recommendations**

1. That the report and proposed schedule of work be noted.
2. That authority be delegated to the Governance Advisor in consultation with the Chair and Vice-chair to make changes to the schedule of work as appropriate between meetings, reporting any changes back to the next meeting for endorsement.

**List of Appendices Included**

Appendix 1 Work Programme – Improving Places Select Commission 2022/23

**Background Papers**

Minutes of Improving Places Select Commission meetings 2021/22

Minutes of Improving Lives Select Commission meetings 2021/22

Minutes of Overview and Scrutiny Management Board meetings 2021/22

**Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel**

None

**Council Approval Required**

No

**Exempt from the Press and Public**  
No

## **IPSC – Work Programme 2022/23**

### **1. Background**

- 1.1 The remit of the Improving Places Select Commission (IPSC) is to undertake scrutiny activity in respect of all matters pertaining to the borough of Rotherham as a place. In broad terms, this remit relates to business and economic development, employment, emergency planning, environment, housing, climate change, leisure, culture and tourism, transport and highways, as well as regulatory services such as trading standards and environmental health. The breadth of functions and services that fall within the Commission's remit is significant.
- 1.2 The way in which the Commission discharges its scrutiny activity is a matter for itself, having regard to the provisions of the Constitution and any direction from the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board. The IPSC has chosen to scrutinise a range of issues through a combination of pre-decision scrutiny items, policy development, performance monitoring, information updates and follow up to previous scrutiny work.
- 1.3 The IPSC has eight scheduled meetings over the course of 2022/23, representing a maximum of 16 hours of scrutiny per year – assuming 2 hours per meeting. Members therefore must be selective in their choice of items for the work programme. The following key principles of effective scrutiny are considered in determining the work programme:
  - Selection – There is a need to prioritise so that high priority issues are scrutinised given the limited number of scheduled meetings and time available. Members should consider what can realistically and properly be reviewed at each meeting, taking into account the time needed to scrutinise each item and what the session is intended to achieve.
  - Value-added – Items had to have the potential to 'add value' to the work of the council and its partners.
  - Ambition – the Programme does not shy away from scrutinising issues that are of greatest concern, whether or not they are the primary responsibility of the council. The Local Government Act 2000 gave local authorities the power to do anything to promote economic, social and environmental wellbeing of local communities. Subsequent Acts have conferred specific powers to scrutinise health services, crime and disorder issues and to hold partner organisations to account.
  - Flexibility – The Work Programme maintains a degree of flexibility as required to respond to unforeseen issues/items for consideration during the year and to accommodate any further work that falls within the remit of this Commission.
  - Timing – The Programme has been designed to ensure that the scrutiny activity is timely and that, where appropriate, its findings and recommendations inform wider corporate developments or policy development cycles at a time when they can have most impact. The Work Programme also helps safeguard against duplication of work undertaken elsewhere.

### **2. Key Issues**

- 2.1 Members are required to review their work programme at each meeting during the 2022/23 municipal year to give focus and structure to scrutiny activity to ensure that it effectively and efficiently supports and challenges the decision-making processes of the Council, and partner organisations, for the benefit of the people of the borough.
- 2.2 An updated draft work programme for Improving Places Select Commission is appended to this report.

### **3. Options considered and recommended proposal**

- 3.1 Members are recommended to discuss potential areas of scrutiny work to be added to the work programme.

### **4. Consultation on proposal**

- 4.1 The work programme is subject to consultation with the Chair and Members of the IPSC. Regular discussions take place with Cabinet Members and officers in respect of the content and timeliness of items set out on the work programme.

### **5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision**

- 5.1 The decision to develop a work programme is a matter reserved to the Commission and will be effective immediately after consideration of this report.
- 5.2 The Statutory Scrutiny Officer (Head of Democratic Services) is accountable for the implementation of any decision in respect of the Commission's work programme. The Governance Advisor supporting the Commission is responsible on a day-to-day basis for the Commission's work programme. Members are recommended to delegate authority to the Governance Advisor to make amendments to the programme between meetings.

### **6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications**

- 6.1 There are no direct financial or procurement implications arising from this report.

### **7. Legal Advice and Implications**

- 7.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.
- 7.2 The authority of the Select Commission to determine its work programme is detailed within the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules and Responsibility for Functions parts of the Constitution. The proposal to review the work programme is consistent with those provisions.

### **8. Human Resources Advice and Implications**

- 8.1 There are no direct human resources implications arising from this report.

### **9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults**

- 9.1 There are no implications for children and young people or vulnerable adults arising from this report.

### **10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications**

- 10.1 Whilst there are no specific equalities implications arising from this report, equalities and diversity are key considerations when developing and reviewing scrutiny work programmes. One of the key principles of scrutiny is to provide a voice for communities, and the work programme for this Commission has been prepared following feedback from Members representing those communities.



## **11. Implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change**

- 11.1 There are no implications for CO2 emissions or climate change directly arising from this report. Members will have regard to the Climate Emergency when selecting potential items for scrutiny and in developing recommendations.

## **12. Implications for Partners**

- 12.1 The membership of the Commission includes co-opted members from RotherFed who contribute to the development and review of the work programme. Where other matters are being considered for inclusion on the work programme, relevant partners or external organisations are consulted on the proposed activity and its timeliness.

## **13. Risks and Mitigation**

- 13.1 There are no risks directly arising from this report.

## **14. Accountable Officer(s)**

Emma Hill, Head of Democratic Services and Statutory Scrutiny Officer

*Report Author: Katherine Harclerode, Governance Advisor  
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**Appendix 1: Improving Places Select Commission – Work Programme 2022-23**

<b>Meeting Date</b>	<b>Agenda Item</b>
07 June 2022	Draft Enviro-Crime Plan Scrutiny Review Recommendations - Markets Engagement and Recovery
19 July 2022	Tenant Scrutiny Review - Housing Repairs and Maintenance Aids and Adaptations Update
20 September 2022	Neighbourhood Working Annual Report Draft Tenant Engagement Framework Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy Update
25 October 2022	Flood Alleviation Update
Autumn 2022 Review	Impact of Selective Licensing
13 December 2022	Bereavement Services Annual Report Town Centre Update Allotments Update Council-owned Life-Saving Equipment
07 February 2023	Fly Tipping
Spring 2023 Review	Nature Recovery
21 March 2023	Housing Strategy and Development Update Tenant Scrutiny Review – Communications
09 May 2023	Tree Programme Update Environment Bill 2021 - Update Scrutiny Review Recommendations - Impact of Selective Licensing

Items to be scheduled:

Planning White Paper

Rent arrears

Anti-social behaviour workshop

Markets update

Improved road safety and Cumwell Lane update

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