CWAG Tenant Engagement Good Practice Toolkit

June 2020

1. STRATEGIC OVERSIGHT

Councils with ALMOs need to be assured that:

Their ALMO meets the Regulator for Social Housing's (RSH) Regulatory Economic (where appropriate) and Consumer Standards.

These are:

Economic Standards – (Where the ALMO has Registered Provider Status):

- Governance and Viability Standard
- Value for Money Standard
- Rent Standard

Note: Regulation on the Rent Standard is coming for all councils from April 2020 and will cover the rent charged on properties managed by the ALMO on behalf of the Council.

Consumer Standards:

- Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard
- Homes Standard
- Tenancy Standard Neighbourhood and Community Standard

➲ ACTIONS: Link to regulatory recommendations and relationships

☐ ALMOs should complete an evidence-based self-assessment against all RSH Regulatory Standards and report to its Council on an annual basis

☐ Tenants should be involved and have oversight of the self-assessment

☐ The self- assessments should highlight any areas for improvement and actions to be taken to meet the standard with target dates for completion.

☐ Councils should scrutinise and present the self-assessments to their Senior Leadership Team and to Elected Members

☐ Councils should consider the use of the Council's Internal Audit service to audit the self-assessments

☐ Peer reviews could be applied to gain assurance

☐ Councils should ensure that there is sufficient focus on meeting the requirements of the regulator in their Management Agreements with their ALMOs

2. GOVERNANCE AND DECISION-MAKING AT BOARD LEVEL

Councils should ensure that tenants' views influence decisions and that tenant engagement is at the core of everything their ALMOs does.

The ALMO Board is responsible for ensuring that there is a robust governance framework in place and provides both strategic and operational oversight of the business.

➲ ACTIONS: Link to governance and decision making at Board level

Council's should ensure:

☐ There is a robust governance code in place within their ALMO and adherence to this is reported to both the Board and the Council via evidenced self-assessment.

☐ That either tenants are represented on the Board or that their views are taken into account when making Board decisions.

☐ That the Board and the Executive are accessible to tenants through established mechanisms for tenants to raise issues directly with the Board.

☐ Mechanisms in place for tenants to raise issues directly with the Council, where appropriate,

☐ That Board reports evidence how tenants have influenced recommendations.

☐ That Management Agreements are reviewed to ensure there are robust requirements on their ALMO in relation to tenant engagement, which can be monitored and measured.

3. TENANT ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

➲ **ACTIONS: link to tenant engagement strategies and upskilling and training recommendations**

Councils need to be assured that their ALMO has:

☐ A robust Tenant Engagement Strategy (TES) in place which offers tenants a range of options/levels in which they can be involved.

☐ The TES should
- ensure that tenants/leaseholders and communities can influence the outcomes of engagement activities and that their views are acted upon.
- set out the LA's/ALMOs commitment, purpose and reasons for tenant engagement.
- outline how tenants are: involved in decision making, involved in shaping services, involved in monitoring and scrutinising service delivery and policy, and, involved in the complaints process.
- set out how the strategy will be resourced and the Council/ALMO should ensure that sufficient resources are available to deliver the strategy
- link directly to both the Councils corporate plan/business plan and the ALMOs own Business Plan/Delivery Plan.
- be reviewed at least every 3 years and the action plan should be reviewed and updated on a yearly basis.

☐ Councils should ensure that their ALMOs make certain that all outcomes from tenant engagement activities are monitored, measured and reported consistently and regularly.

☐ Achievements in tenant engagement should be celebrated and publicised.

4. CUSTOMER INSIGHT

Customer insight enables landlords to tailor their services to their tenants. This is of particular importance in relation to keeping tenants safe in their homes.

The Council/ALMO should ensure that they know who lives in their homes.

➲ **ACTIONS: link to tenant audits and customer insight and tenant engagement within high-rise homes recommendations**

Councils should ensure that:

☐ Up to date tenancy audits or customer insight surveys are carried out by their ALMO, with a particular focus on vulnerable tenants who may pose a risk to themselves/to others

☐ Risk assessments are in place for all vulnerable customers especially those living in high/low rise flats or complexes with communal space

☐ Insight data is used intelligently to enable communication with tenants in the format of their choice, i.e. written, by post, by email or other digital mechanisms

☐ Agreements are in place to share essential data in relation to building/fire safety

☐ Councils should work with their ALMOs to ensure that the recently published fire safety recommendations from the Grenfell Inquiry are implemented without delay

6. COMPLAINTS

For many tenants, the complaints system is the only way in which they come into contact with the ALMO. Although, there are some differences in relation to detail, all ALMOs operate a Complaints Policy which is in line with best practice.

➲ **ACTIONS: Link to complaints and tenants understanding of the ALMO recommendations**

Councils should ensure that:

☐ The complaints policy outlines how tenants can complain direct to the Council where appropriate. i.e. the complaint process has been exhausted and the tenant remains dissatisfied.

☐ The complaints policy is accessible and well publicised. i.e. on-line, in person and during all interactions with employees and other representatives of the company, including Council representatives, both Members and employees.

☐ The policy has undergone robust tenant consultation and has been agreed with tenants.

☐ Ideally, tenants should be involved in the complaints process e.g. a well-trained and resourced Tenants Complaints Panel is included in the process.

☐ Complaints are answered within agreed timescales and the tenant has a named contact throughout the process.

☐ Complaints are monitored for satisfaction with the process/outcomes, trend analysis and any areas of concern are researched and remedied within the ALMOs monitoring process.

☐ An annual report in relation to complaints, which outlines performance, trends and how outcomes have led to service improvements, is presented to tenants, the ALMO board and the Council.

☐ Service improvements and learning from complaints is regularly reported to tenants in tenant publications, via social media, the website and annual reports.

7. TENANT SCRUTINY

ALMOs should have a robust tenant-led scrutiny process in place which compliments the democratic scrutiny process within Councils. Good quality and well-resourced tenant-led scrutiny can act as a vital business improvement tool and independent driver to change.

➲ **ACTIONS: Link to tenant scrutiny recommendations**

Councils should ensure that:
- ☐ Their ALMOs have robust and well-resourced tenant-led scrutiny processes in place.
- ☐ They can influence what scrutiny reviews are carried out.
- ☐ Scrutiny offers a robust and effective mechanism for positive challenge, influence and ideally includes an independent mediation process.
- ☐ The tenant voice as a critical friend is heard.
- ☐ Scrutiny drives change increases efficiency and tenant satisfaction.
- ☐ Scrutiny provides evidence-based outcome focused recommendations which are adopted, delivered and monitored by the ALMO and reported back to the Council, preferably by tenant representatives.
- ☐ Scrutiny provides opportunities to work in partnership with tenants to ensure the delivery of excellent service.

8. ENGAGING EVERYONE

Councils should ensure that their ALMOs are investing in a range of initiatives which support wide engagement.

➲ **ACTIONS: link to Engaging Everyone recommendations**

Councils should ensure that tenant engagement reaches all within communities, including:
- ☐ Older and younger people
- ☐ BAME communities
- ☐ LGBTI people
- ☐ People with disabilities

Most organisations across the sector are embracing digital engagement and channel shift as alternative ways to engage and communicate with tenants. Councils and ALMOs should ensure they understand the benefits and limitations of a digital approach to tenant engagement by ensuring they know their neighbourhoods and tenants' preferences and access capability.

9. DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT

➲ **ACTIONS: Link to Engaging Everyone recommendations**

Councils should ensure that:

☐ Effective digital engagement processes are in place, including online forums, surveys, virtual groups, email communications and appropriate use of social media

☐ Their ALMO offers digital engagement as part of a wider suite of engagement tools and not a replacement for more traditional mechanisms

☐ Their ALMO is aware of tenants' preferred communication/engagement channels

☐ Digital engagement mechanisms are designed from the customer perspective

☐ They monitor their ALMOs social media traffic and responses via random sampling.

☐ The effectiveness of all channels is monitored and measured

Since the tragic events of the Grenfell fire, questions continue to be raised about whether social housing tenants are adequately involved in decisions regarding their homes, with particular regard to high-rise homes.

➲ **ACTIONS: Link to Engaging Everyone and when can tenants go direct to the council recommendations**

Councils should ensure:

☐ That robust engagement processes are in place in all high-rise homes for tenants to be truly heard

☐ Such processes need to be resourced by Councils via their Management Agreements

☐ Capital/revenue funding is in place, so homes are safe and comply to Fire Safety regulations

☐ Partnerships in place between the council, the ALMO, the fire service and residents.

☐ Up to date and independent Fire Risk Assessments are in place; are published and recommendations completed in a timely manner and this process is robustly monitored

☐ That information on building and fire safety is fully accessible to all residents.

☐ That risk assessments are in place for all vulnerable residents and those with mobility issues in a form that can be shared immediately with services in case of an emergency.

☐ That evacuation plans are in place for high- and low-rise blocks

☐ Processes are in place to ensure all tenants are involved in the safety of their homes and that their views are taken into account

☐ That standards are regularly reviewed, and tenants are involved in the review process

10. MEASURING, TARGETING AND IMPACT OF ENGAGEMENT

This in an area reported by many Councils as an area of real challenge, particularly around an effective way to capture outcomes and report on these. Outcomes of tenant engagement should be included in the strategic plans and objectives of the Council and their ALMOs and a robust suite of metrics should be in place.

➲ **ACTIONS: Link to measuring outcomes and impact of engagement and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) recommendations**

Councils should ensure:

☐ That all strategic plans are outcome focused, developed in partnership with tenants; and, are monitored, delivered in a timely manner and reported to Councils

☐ A robust suite of metrics is in place which covers all aspects of the service delivery of the ALMO. Metrics should be mutually agreed between the council, the ALMO and tenants

☐ That tenant engagement metrics include service improvements and changes to quality of service, Value for Money and effectiveness; satisfaction levels; increased social value/impact

☐ That tenant engagement activities are tracked, and outcomes are evaluated and publicised transparently

☐ Impact assessments are carried out in relation to all tenant and community engagement/involvement initiatives

☐ Tenant engagement activities result in positive change for all stakeholders, with a particular focus on tenants

☐ Tenant engagement mechanisms are regularly reviewed and assessed for relevance, effectiveness and are outcome focused

☐ Tenant engagement mechanisms enable a learning and continuous improvement culture, which links to Value for Money and improvements in service delivery

☐ That benchmarking and learning from others is included in processes

11. INDEPENDENT ASSURANCE

Councils should seek independent assurance across the breadth of their ALMOs operations.

➲ **ACTIONS: Link to relationships; housing condition and tenant satisfaction; regulation; measuring outcomes and impact of engagement; and governance and decision making at Board level recommendations**

Examples of Assurance Mechanisms:
- ☐ Internal/External Audit reports
- ☐ Annual Accounts/Management Letter
- ☐ Benchmarking
- ☐ Accreditations e.g. Tpas, Investors in People, Investors in Excellence, Diversity in Business.
- ☐ Councils should also ensure that their ALMOs undertake independent reviews of all Fire and Health and Safety Compliance systems and data