



Somerset Council

Tenants' Strategic Group – 24/07/2023

HRA Communication Plan

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Member for Communities.

Report Authors: Craig Rossiter

1. Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

The report is to update the Tenants' Strategic Group on work being undertaken as part of the communications plan agree with the assistance of the Tenants' Low Carbon Working Group.

2. Recommendations

The Tenants' Strategic Group is asked to note this report and are invited to ask questions.

3. Background and Full details of the Report

Communication from the service to tenants and staff has been highlighted consistently over the past eighteen months. The service supported a Tenants' Communication Group in the development of this Communication Plan. The service has begun to implement a proactive communications plan that will elevate the quality of our outward communication to Somerset Council residents. The purpose of this

plan is to provide a better service to our tenants by presenting key information in a digestible, eye-catching, and logical format. In addition to improving communication with customers and colleagues the implementation of the plan will help meet our legal obligations from the social housing white paper. The plan also seeks to enable the smooth running of our capital works programmes through the use of high-quality communications throughout the entire lifecycle of contracts. Thereby increasing the satisfaction of our residents and allowing us greater access to complete works.

The plan has a number of core components:

A New Team

To implement this plan, it is necessary to create a new communications team within the Landlord Service. This will bring us into line with comparable organisations, such as Homes in Sedgemoor, which already have similar operations. The exact make up of this team is still to be decided pending the reorganisation of Somerset Council.

The new team will be responsible for implementing and developing the communications plan and working with the various teams within the service to plan and deliver proactive communications campaigns. This will include the production of modern communications materials such as posters and videos. The team will also be responsible for driving and promoting a digital first approach to communicating.

Capital Works

Improving the communications of the various Capital Works Programmes will be a priority for the new team.

Adopting a multimedia approach to sell the advantages of the upgrades we offer will go a long way to reducing our refusal rate. This will be done through the creation of striking posters and flyers, along with relevant videos for social media and newsletters. We will also support and promote in person events where residents can meet contractors.

We are committed to collaborating closely with both our team and contractors to ensure our communications are not only timely and accurate but also effectively convey desired information.

New property packs will be created for tenants that shows the customer journey, contact details, and provides a contractor's code of conduct that will give our residents confidence in receiving a professional experience.

The Capital works team will populate Open Housing with as much information as possible, including appointment history, so Housing Officers and Customer Services can answer questions.

Communication Champions & Publications Panel

The new team will run a Communications Champions programme that will ensure that the new ways of working are embedded across the business. These champions will also serve as a conduit for news and information to reach the Comms team. The champions will also staff the publications panel.

A publications panel will be created in recognition of the fact that high quality communications are created through collaboration. This will ensure that any errors are picked up, readability is finetuned, and layout is reviewed by a collective.

All major communications, letters, posters, emails, and others will have to be approved by the publications panel.

The panel will include staff and customers and seeks lived experience of neurodiversity.

The panel will check for spelling and grammar, understanding, consistency, and tone.

This will ensure our messaging will land well, reduce complaints, and presents a professional image.

Social Media

We aim to have a dedicated social media presence for Somerset Council tenants by April 2024. The initial phase of this workstream will focus on Facebook and Instagram profiles before looking at further platforms in the future.

We can use social media to get our messages to residents instantly for free. Through social media we can quickly promote changes like new phone numbers or processes for important priorities like Damp & Mould Reporting. We can post videos explaining how to do certain tasks like install battery doorbells or we can report on our performance.

Website

The website will be overhauled to ensure it has all the information our residents need and that its layout is intuitive and presents information well. The tenant's handbook will be available entirely online in webpages and will serve as the authoritative up to date source of information.

This process will be completed in conjunction with tenant's representatives to ensure it is fit for the needs of its users.

We will also be looking to bring online new features such as a news feed.

Newsletters

Newsletters are changing. Tenants will get timely and eye-catching updates in their email inbox every month. Crucially, we will get data to understand its impact.

Every 6 months these stories will be used to complete a printed newsletter that will be posted to sheltered/extra care/large print customers and tenants who opt in to receive it.

Tenant's Portal

Our ambition is to get a high-quality tenant's portal where residents can report and book repairs jobs, update their contact details, and communicate with staff.

4. Risk Assessment (if appropriate)

A risk assessment is not required to accompany this report.

5. Are there any **Finance / Resource, Legal implications directly to do with this report?**

The financial implications are not presently settled due to the make up of the communications team not being finalised and the procurement process for the tenant's portal not yet having begun.

6: Are there any Equality and Diversity Implications?

The plan commits to having paper, telephone and in person methods of communication continuing for those who want it. It also commits to digital productions at least meeting legal requirements of accessibility.

7. Are there any Data Protection Implications?

There are no equality implications directly to do with this report

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