
REPORT TO: Cabinet Member (Housing)

DATE: 16 June 2009

DEPARTMENT: Community Services

REPORTING OFFICER: Tenant Involvement Officer
(Mrs Amy Brown)

SUBJECT: **TENANT LED INSPECTIONS OF THE HOUSING SERVICE**

WARDS AFFECTED: All

FORWARD PLAN REF: N/A

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To consider whether to undertake a tenant led inspection of one aspect of the Housing Service.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That a tenant led inspection of one area of the Housing Service is carried out during Autumn 2009, following consultation with tenants.

2.2 That an evaluation of the inspection is carried out following its completion.

3.0 RECOMMENDED REASONS FOR DECISIONS

3.1 The Government is now focusing on a move towards self regulation. This has been reinforced by the establishment of the Tenant Services Authority. The Tenant Services Authority has become the independent regulator for homes owned by Housing Associations, and will take on this role for homes owned by local authorities from Spring 2010.

3.2 Tenant led inspections of specific areas of the Housing Service can be an effective way of monitoring satisfaction with a service area and demonstrate if the relevant service standards are being maintained.

3.3 Tenant led inspections can be seen as part of the Council's corporate transformation agenda, as they could help achieve efficiency savings and

service improvements through partnership working and customer involvement.

- 3.4 An initial tenant led inspection of one area of our work will help us evaluate the possible effectiveness of this approach in Harrogate.

4.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND RECOMMENDED FOR REJECTION

- 4.1 Not to carry out tenant led inspections. Tenant led inspections could be a valuable way for the Council to demonstrate that it is meeting the Housing service standards and that it has a good understanding of customer perceptions and needs. Tenant inspections are central to the approach of the Tenant Services Authority (TSA).
- 4.2 To carry out mystery shopping as a stand alone tenant involvement option. This option is not favoured, as the benefits of doing this would be limited. Mystery shopping is not an appropriate tool to use for all service areas, it would not give a full overview of service performance that an inspection could provide and the mystery shoppers would not be identifying service improvements as part of this process which could mean that opportunities for efficiency savings are missed.

5.0 TENANT LED INSPECTION PROCESS

- 5.1 To have an effective tenant led inspection, sufficient resources would need to be put into advertising, recruitment and training of tenant inspectors prior to an inspection of a service area taking place. However, as this is a one off inspection, existing members of tenant groups and those attending the Area Panel meetings to be held in July will be asked if they wish to participate.
- 5.2 A service area to be inspected will need to be chosen. This will be done by asking tenants at Area Panel meetings in July and existing tenant groups, to select one service area from a shortlist of six. The service areas that will be considered for inspection are:
- Customer Care
 - Allocations
 - Repairs
 - New Tenants
 - Estate Management
 - Anti Social Behaviour/Nuisance
- 5.3 Training would then need to be carried out with the tenant inspectors. For the first inspection, this could be done through a 1 day intensive training session by an external trainer with experience of tenant inspections. If the project is to continue on an ongoing basis, regular training will be needed on specific skills such as report writing and observation skills.
- 5.4 Prior to the inspection taking place, an information session for the tenant inspectors would need to be carried out by a member of staff from the area being inspected. The service area would then be inspected through a

variety of methods, which may include mystery shopping, observation, interviews with staff or tenants, site visits and desk top research. The methods used would depend on the service area being inspected.

- 5.5 Once all the information has been gathered as part of the inspection, the tenant inspectors would meet to put together a simple report outlining what they looked at, how they did this, what they found out and any recommendations for service improvements. These recommendations would then be fed back to the senior managers and to the Central Forum for their comments. An action plan would then be finalised with details of which recommendations could be implemented, responsible officer and a timescale. It should be noted, that any major changes to services would need Cabinet Member (Housing) approval before the action plan could be finalised.
- 5.6 A more detailed project plan of how this process could work, along with estimated timescales is attached as Appendix One.

6.0 POSSIBLE COSTS OF TENANT LED INSPECTIONS

- 6.1 The initial costs of having tenant led inspections would mainly be on training. If a one off inspection is to be carried out, an external trainer who specialises in tenant training would need to be contracted to carry out a 1 day training course on tenant inspectors. The estimated cost of this would be £695.
- 6.2 During an inspection, expenses that could be incurred would be primarily on mileage and phone use. However, it should be noted that during an inspection of a service area officer time would be required to support the tenant inspectors on areas such as providing policies and any relevant written documents, giving an overview of a service area, attending a site visit with a tenant, being interviewed as part of the inspection process and assistance with IT for research purposes and putting together the final report.
- 6.3 Although, there are costs associated with tenant led inspections these are able to be met as part of the existing tenant involvement budget. It should also be noted that one of the main benefits of tenant led inspections is that they could identify cheap, quick service improvements. The efficiency savings made as a result of service improvements made could be used to fund future training and support for an ongoing tenant led inspection process. A more detailed breakdown of possible costs is attached as Appendix Two.

7.0 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 That an inspection of one area of the Housing Service is carried out by tenants. The service area to be inspected will be selected by tenants from a list of possible service areas that could be looked at.
- 7.2 The findings from the inspection will be reported back to the Cabinet Member (Housing) in January 2010.

SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT/CRIME AND DISORDER

		Implications are		
		Positive	Neutral	Negative
A	Economy		✓	
B	Environment	✓		
C	Social Equity			
i)	General	✓		
ii)	Customer Care/People with Disabilities	✓		
iii)	Health Implications	✓		
D	Crime and Disorder	✓		

If all comments lie within the shaded areas, the proposal is sustainable

Appendix One – Project Plan

When	What	Who
Wks of 22/6/9 – 6/7/9	Put together necessary written information for a tenant inspector project – flyer/role of an inspector/ info for staff	Tenancy Services Team (KW/AB/EW)
Wks of 6/7/9 – 3/8/9	Let staff know about tenant inspector project	Tenancy Services Team (AB)
Wks of 6/7/9 – 14/8/9	Advertise to tenants at Area Panel meetings & to existing Tenant Groups & ask about what service area to look at. Speak to all interested & recruit.	Tenancy Services Team (AB)
Wk of 21/9/9	Training Session on being Tenant Inspector – Full Day	External Trainer (such as TPAS)
Wk of 12/10/9	Hold information session on service area for inspectors	Officer from service area looking at
Wks of 12/10/9 – 2/11/09	Develop scenarios for mystery shopping for that area & Get together relevant paperwork for that service area	Tenancy Services Team & Officers from service area looking at
Wks of 2/11/9 – 16/11/9	Inspection to take place	Tenant Inspectors
Wks of 23/11/9 – 7/12/09	Pull findings together. Do report & action plan & send to managers for comments on recommendations.	Tenant Inspectors/ Tenancy Services Team (AB/EW)
Wks of 4/01/10	Action plan with managers comments on to return to tenant inspectors & final meeting to evaluate how inspection went	Tenant Inspectors/ Tenancy Services Team
January 2010	To report back to Cabinet Member (Housing) meeting on how inspection went & future use	Tenancy Services Team (AB)

Appendix Two – Estimated Costs

What	Estimated Cost
1 Day Training Course by External Trainers	£695
Mileage/Travel	£75
Phone	£20

TOTAL = £790

Officer Involvement	How Much?
Do standard papers needed (e.g. role of an inspector, code of conduct etc)	2 Days
Recruitment /talking to those who are interested – Tenancy Services	1 Day
Tell staff in Service area what tenant inspections are	½ Day
Training Course – Tenancy Services	1 Day
2 Hour Information Session on Service Area – Officers from service being inspected	½ Day (2 Officers)
Do service specific paperwork – Tenancy Services & Service being Inspected	2 Days
Assist tenant inspectors with accessing any information they need – Tenancy Services	2 Days
Assist tenant inspectors in using PC to put report together – Tenancy Services	2 Days
Evaluate project in full – Tenancy Services	2 Days

TOTAL = 13 Days