

Brighton & Hove City Council

Strategy, Finance & City Regeneration Committee

Agenda Item 33

Subject: Housing Area Panel Review
Date of meeting: 15th March 2023
Report of: Executive Director of Housing, Neighbourhoods & Communities
Contact Officer: Name: Sam Warren
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Email: sam.warren@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Ward(s) affected: All

1 Purpose of the report and policy context:

- 1.1 This report seeks approval for a new terms of reference for Housing Area Panels. This incorporates clarifying the remit of Area Panels, chairing arrangements, and recommendations to expand the range of involvement opportunities including making the best use of digital technology to engage tenants and leaseholders.
- 1.2 The Social Housing Regulation Bill has a strong emphasis on hearing tenant voices and effective engagement and influence, for tenants to be able to hold their landlord to account where necessary. BHCC (Brighton & Hove City Council) has a long-standing commitment to working with tenants and leaseholders to create an environment where we can work in genuine partnership.
- 1.3 The approach to widen and strengthen engagement in Housing Area Panels sits with the aims of the Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy, which sets out the need to provide different engagement opportunities to reach more diverse and a greater number of tenants and leaseholders.

2 Recommendations:

That Housing Committee:

- 2.1 Approves the revised Terms of Reference for Housing Area Panels in Appendix 1.
- 2.2 Recommends to Policy & Resources Committee
 - i) that it agrees the revised Terms of Reference as set out in Appendix 1
 - ii) that the revised Terms of Reference come into force on 25th May (Annual Council).

iii) that the Monitoring Officer be authorised to amend and re-publish the Council's constitutional documents to incorporate the revised Terms of Reference.

That Policy & Resources Committee:-

- 2.1 Agree the revised Terms of Reference as set out in Appendix 1
- 2.2 Agree that the revised Terms of Reference come into force on 25th May (Annual Council).
- 2.3 Agree that the Monitoring Officer be authorised to amend and re-publish the Council's constitutional documents to incorporate the revised Terms of Reference.

3 Context / Background information

- 3.6 BHCC's Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy aims to provide a variety of ways for tenants and leaseholders to work with the council on the issues that important to them and to be involved in shaping housing services.
- 3.2 Housing Area Panels have been in place since 1997. They are strategic housing engagement forums with a remit to *'receive and provide comment, feedback, recommendations, and actions on reports relating to the council's role and performance as a housing service.'*
- 3.3 There are currently 4 Area Housing Panels. They each meet 4 times a year with senior Housing Staff and are chaired by a councillor who is a member of the council's Housing Committee. They are supported by the council's Democratic Services and its Community Engagement team as well as by the Resource Centre which is funded by the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) to provide secretarial support to the four tenant only pre-meetings. The function of the resident only meetings is to: consider reports from Housing in its role as landlord, particularly around performance and repairs and maintenance; give tenants an opportunity to raise questions regarding the council in its landlord capacity; and consider and vote on Estate Development Budget main bids.
- 3.4 The Area Panels are referenced in the council's constitution as formal reference groups to Housing Committee.
- 3.5 The development of the Housing Area Panels and new terms of reference is part of reaffirming our commitment to involving our tenants and leaseholders in the decisions which affect their homes and local communities.

3.6 Purpose of the review

- 3.6.1 The Social Housing Regulation Bill states that every social housing provider should provide 'opportunities and empowerment programme for social housing residents, to support more effective engagement between landlords and residents, and to give resident's tools to influence their landlords and hold

them to account'. Housing Area Panels are one of the ways we meet these duties.

- 3.6.2 Tenants and Residents Association (TRA) have declined in number over many years, and this has limited the amount of people participating in Area Panels and representing approximately 11,700 tenant and 2,900 leaseholder households. The review looked at how we could improve opportunities for more tenants and leaseholders to attend in terms of number and diversity.
- 3.6.3 Residents told us they did not understand the role of Housing Area Panels, so the review focused on clarifying the remit and looking at how tenants could work with elected members to manage and chair the panels.
- 3.6.4 It was recognized that Covid increased the need to engage using digital technologies engagement and the review sought to explore the appeal from tenants and leaseholders to engage with Housing Area Panels digitally. This was looked at as one of many ways to be involved and not as an alternative to face-to-face participation.
- 3.6.5 The review highlighted the need to acknowledge that tenants and leaseholders are two distinct groups that have different and shared priorities that sometimes need to be addressed separately. This is responded to in the new Terms of Reference where there are matters that are tenant only decisions. In parallel to the work on Housing Area Panels the Community Engagement Team will also be working closely with the Leaseholder Action Group to ensure there are clear opportunities to raise leaseholder specific issues.

3.7 Area Panel Review Findings

- 3.7.1 The findings were reported back to Area Panel in October 2022 to ensure residents and staff had the opportunities to comment and process the results.
- 3.7.2 In total the Community Engagement team spoke to or heard from 517 tenants and leaseholders, although there is a small amount of double counting here as some Area Panel representatives also completed the survey.
- 3.7.3 Around 71% of the tenants and leaseholders were not engaged in a TRA and had not previously talked to the council, except for reporting repairs. 84% of people completing the survey were council tenants, 10% leaseholders and 6% other tenure.
- 3.7.4 The survey asked how residents would like to communicate with the council. Many said they would like to share their views at meetings, but also in other ways such as surveys, social media, text, focus groups and through a resident association.
- 3.7.5 When asked about receiving information 75% of respondents preferred email, however, many people also wanted newsletters, the council website, local noticeboards as well as face-to-face contact. Almost as many people wished

to attend meetings online and in person, and for them to vary across daytime and evening.

3.7.6 Residents wanted to attend meeting but equally raise issues using a range of methods including online, using text messaging, focus groups, and the phone.

3.7.7 This includes digital participation, membership, residents' questions, accessibility, and inclusion, reporting to Housing Committee and the role of tenant representatives.

3.7.8 The review reached a wide range of residents. Over a quarter of the participants did not identify as white British. The gender split was even, with a small number of trans or non-binary people taking part and over two thirds of participants identified as disabled. We were not able to reach residents under 35 and had the greatest input from the 51-65years group but still reasonable engagement from over 35s. For full details of the findings please see Appendix 2.

3.8 Remit

3.8.1 There was agreement that the Housing Area Panel remit remain as 'an advisory group, reviewing housing performance, policy and practice that has local and city-wide collective benefits'. Housing Area Panels are one way of meeting the legal and regulatory requirements upon a housing authority to engage and consult council tenants and residents. It will continue to feed into Housing Committee through the elected members and the community engagement section within committee reports.

3.8.2 Housing Area Panels provide an opportunity for senior staff and local ward members to hear from tenants and leaseholders, where they can share their lived experience and work in partnership with the council and councillors to develop housing policy and improve performance. The 'Resident Questions' is a process that enables tenants and leaseholders to raise local and strategic issues and when necessary to challenge and hold the council to account. The questions are put forward through a Resident Only meeting that is supported by the Resource Centre independently of the council. These meetings are held ahead of each Area Panel meeting. Tenants elected from Tenant and Resident Associations and leaseholders elected from the Leaseholder Action Group attend although it is open and welcoming to any tenant or resident leaseholder.

3.8.3 The results of the Area Panel Review survey showed that the three most critical issues for tenants and leaseholders were housing conditions, housing costs and anti-social behavior. In addition, residents also wanted to discuss green spaces, community centres and rooms and community activities.

3.9 Chairing

3.9.1 The current Chairing arrangements for Area Panels are one Councillor Chair nominated by the administration with a resident Vice Chair who is elected by

the tenant representatives on the Area Panel at the beginning of each financial year.

- 3.9.2 The review findings showed that a tenant and Councillor working together to plan and chair meetings would be valued. There was clear consensus that a partnership approach between council and tenant was the best way to acknowledge and share the priority setting for the Housing Area Panels. The workshops suggested that a co-chairing arrangement would be beneficial to building an equal standing between tenants and councillors. The arrangement is detailed in the terms of reference in Appendix 1.

4 Conclusions

- 4.1 The new terms of reference propose co-chairing between a tenant and a councillor. The co-chairs will share the chairing of meetings. The councillor chair will as far as possible always be a member of the Housing Committee to ensure a direct link between Area Panel and Housing Committee.
- 4.2 The resident co-chair will be a representative of a TRA elected at the beginning of each financial year. Only residents from TRAs will be able to elect the tenant co-chair.
- 4.3 The Community Engagement Team will be developing outreach work to specifically engage minoritized communities and ensuring their voices are heard at Area Panel.
- 4.4 It is proposed that all items that come to Area Panel are about issues that relate to services that are funded through the Housing Revenue Account and / or on which we would consult with council tenants and residents, for example the council's Allocation Policy, the overarching Housing Strategy. Often this includes green spaces, community space and some community activities, especially those funded through the Estate Development Budget. Other issues will be referred to relevant forums, a TRA, or passed on to another council service.
- 4.5 It is proposed to have a housing surgery prior to each meeting to ensure that people have the opportunity to ask questions about their own personal circumstances/issues to housing officers and housing management team, which would be inappropriate to ask and answer in an open forum.

4 Community Engagement

- 4.1 The review was conducted between March to October 2022 and used a range of methods to gather views and information. The scope of the review was agreed upon consultation with each Area Panel and co-chairs of Housing Committee.
- 4.2 The current participation was reviewed, and the data showed that there are some clear issues of under-engagement, particularly from tenants under 40 and from all minoritised communities, except for disabled people and older people. It highlighted that, whilst hugely valued, the current tenant and leaseholder membership was not a full reflection of the tenant and leaseholder population.
- 4.3 An online survey was published on the council consultation portal. 281 people completed the online survey and 159 said they would like to continue receiving information from the Community Engagement Team.
- 4.4 Ten workshops were held. Four with tenants and leaseholders from marginalised groups, two parent workshops, two tenant only workshops, and two leaseholders only workshops. Some of these were better attended than others, in total 75 people attended the workshops – see Appendix 2 for more detail.
- 4.5 In addition, the Community Engagement Team facilitated Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) sessions with councillors', staff and the senior housing leadership team and sessions with all Housing Area Panels– in total there were 161 residents, and 37 staff members attend.
- 4.6 Thanks to those tenants who worked with staff through the range of Area Panel Review workshops, completed the survey and to the current tenant and leaseholder representatives on Housing Area Panels who have shaped these recommendations and the new draft Terms of Reference.

5 Financial & Other Implications:

Financial Implications:

- 6.1 The cost of area panels and the Estates Development Budget (EDB) referred to in appendix 1 to the main report already makes up part of the 2023/24 HRA Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy. The proposed update to the Terms of Reference for the Area Panels meetings will not impact on these budgets. These are monitored as part of the councils Targeted Budget Monitoring process.
- 6.2 There are no other financial implications to comment on as a result of this report.

Finance Officer consulted: Craig Garoghan
02/03/2023

Date:

Legal Implications:

- 6.1 The Housing Act 1985 requires a landlord to maintain such arrangements as it considers appropriate to enable those of its secure tenants who are likely to be substantially affected by a matter of housing management to be informed of the proposals and to make their views known. Area Panels assist the council in discharging that duty.
- 6.2 The existing terms of reference for the Panels date back to 1997. A revision is therefore appropriate. The council's constitution provides that the Panels' Terms of Reference are subject to review by the Policy and Resources Committee.

Legal Officer consulted: Liz Woodley
02/02/2023

Date:

Equalities implications

- 7.1 The Community Engagement Team will be working on proactively seeking the voice of underrepresented groups and the Terms of Reference support the Public Sector Equality Duties placed on the council to advance the equality of opportunity, to foster good relations and eliminate discrimination for marginalised communities. It is clear from the current equality monitoring of participation, that there is under representation from minoritized communities, except for older people, disabled people.

8. Supporting Information

Appendix 1 – Area Panel Terms of Reference
Appendix 2 – Area Panel Review findings

Appendix 1

Brighton & Hove City Council Housing Area Panels

Terms of Reference 2023

Purpose

Area based panel consisting of ward councillors, tenants, and leaseholders of the city council to engage and consult tenants on strategic city wide and area-based housing issues and improvements on council land, funded by the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

Panels will cover the following boundaries:

- East
 - West
 - Central
 - North.
-
- Panels will not consider individual tenants' and leaseholders' issues. Tenants and leaseholders will be directed to other appropriate channels.
 - Panels will not consider individual leaseholders fees and charges related to planned and major works. Leaseholders will be directed to other appropriate channels.

1. Areas of responsibility

- a) To receive and provide comment, feedback and recommended actions on reports relating to the council's role and performance as a housing service.
- b) Issues for consideration will include the performance of housing services provided directly by the council and by contractors.
- c) Non housing issues will be referred to the appropriate council service, other agency, community forum or committee for consideration.
- d) Area Panel(s) may request time limited task and finish groups on persistent and/or key strategic city-wide or area-based issues, subject to available resources and competing priorities.

2. Budgets

- a) An annual Estates Development Budget (EDB) will be devolved to each Area Panel.
- b) There will be at least one specific Area Panel meeting each year for decisions on main EDB bids.
- c) Voting on main EDB bids is by tenants only ¹ and consultation of leaseholders where applicable.
- d) All EDB quick bids up to £1000 will be decided upon by the citywide resident EDB panel. This panel is made up of tenant representatives from each area who are elected through the Improvement and Empowerment Service Improvement Group.

3. Membership and participation

Membership and participation of each area panel is open to:

- a) All ward councillors whose constituency falls within the boundaries of the Area Panel.
- b) A representative from any tenants' and residents' association within the boundaries of the Area Panel.
- c) All council housing tenants who live within the boundaries of the Area Panel.
- d) All resident leaseholders of the council that live within the boundaries of the Area Panel.
- e) A Leaseholders Action Group representative that lives within the boundaries of the Area Panel.
- f) All tenants or leaseholders can submit a question to an Area Panel meeting. (See section 7 below for process).

4. Chairing

- a) All Area Panels will be co-chaired by a councillor and a representative of a Tenants and Residents Association.
- b) The councillor co-chair will be a sitting councillor on the council's Housing Committee, unless no Member of the Panel is a member of the Housing Committee.
- c) Area Panel will elect the Councillor Co-Chair annually, consideration will always be given to appointing a co-chair from Housing Committee. The election to take place at the first Area Panel after Annual Council.
- d) The resident co-chair will be elected annually by the tenant association representatives.
- e) Co-chairs will chair meetings alternately unless otherwise mutually agreed between the co-chairs.
- f) Co-chairs will set the agenda for each meeting together.

5. Format of meetings

- a) All meetings will be hybrid.
- b) Council's Democratic Services will provide the secretariat for the meetings including but not exclusively the circulation of meeting invitations, agendas and associated papers including meeting any accessibility needs, creating and maintaining action logs and taking minutes of the meeting.
- c) The agenda, minutes and action log will be sent ten working days before the meeting.
- d) The agendas and minutes of the Panel (unless confidential) will be public documents published on the council's website.
- e) Agendas, minutes, and actions of Area Panel meetings will be provided to the co-chairs, all ward councillors, and the nominated representative of all tenants' associations in the area panel boundary.
- f) All reports and papers will be produced in an accessible format.

6. Frequency of meetings

- a) There will be four meetings of each panel per year.
- b) Special Area Panel meetings may be called by the co-chairs, the chair of Housing Committee or the Executive Director for Housing, Neighbourhoods and Communities, if needed but only for exceptional and urgent business.
- c) Days and times of meetings will vary to maximise opportunities for participants attendance.

7. Submission of Residents Questions

- a) All tenants and leaseholders can submit a question for an Area Panel meeting providing it is in line with the purpose of an Area Panel.
- b) All submitted questions will be submitted, considered and prioritised at the Resident Only meeting.
- c) Any members of a Tenants and Residents Association or any council tenants and leaseholders can attend the resident only meetings.

8. Agenda Planning

Area Panel meeting agendas will follow a set format including covering the following areas:

- a) Reports on housing policy and performance of Housing.
- b) Reports from city-wide housing management groups, e.g., Senior Housing Action Group.
- c) Residents Questions identified at the Resident Only meetings that precede Area Panel meetings; with a maximum of five 3-Star questions per meeting.

- d) Presentations and reports from other services/groups funded by Housing Revenue Account.

9. **Conduct**

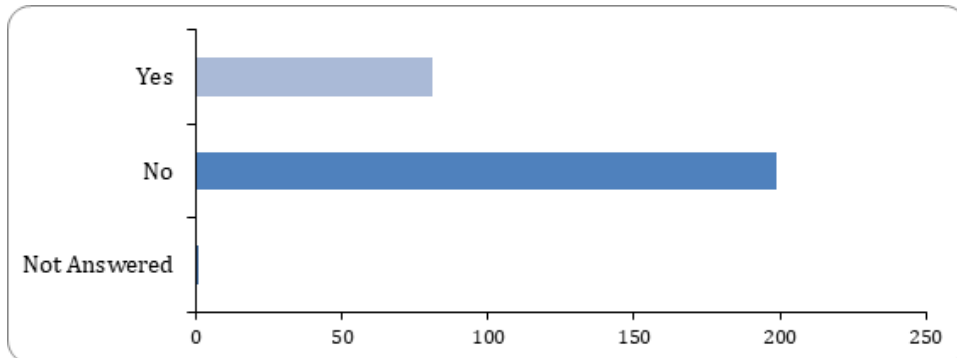
- a) All participants should share their views respectfully and treat all other participants with respect.
- b) All participants should recognise there are differing views and opinions expressed at the Area Panel and will look for a compromise and shared solutions.
- c) If behaviour is repeatedly not following the above, then individuals may be asked to leave a meeting by the co-chairs.

Appendix 2 – Survey Results

Residents working with council housing - Responses to this survey: 281

1 : Are you part of a tenant or leaseholder group or organisation?

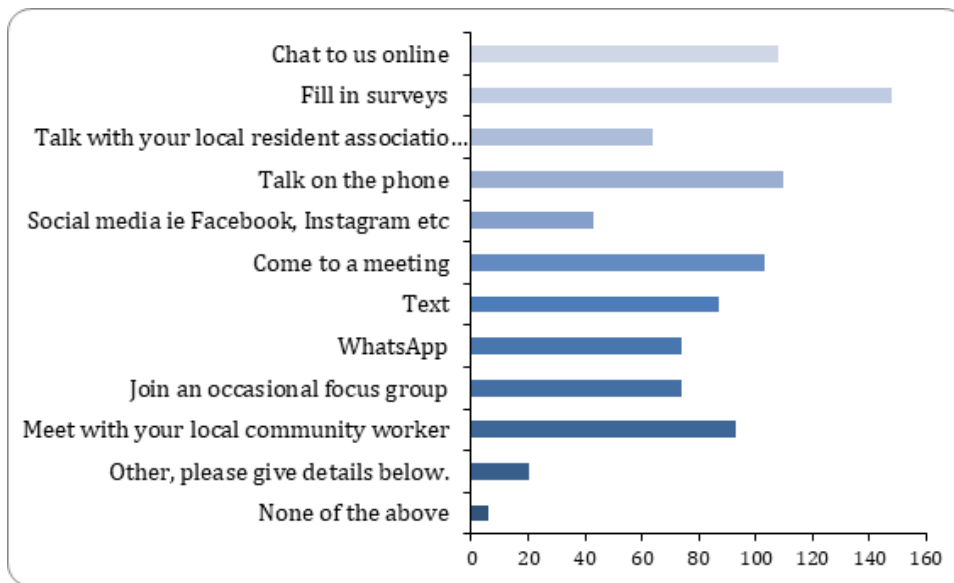
There were 280 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
Yes	81	28.83%
No	199	70.82%
Not Answered	1	0.36%

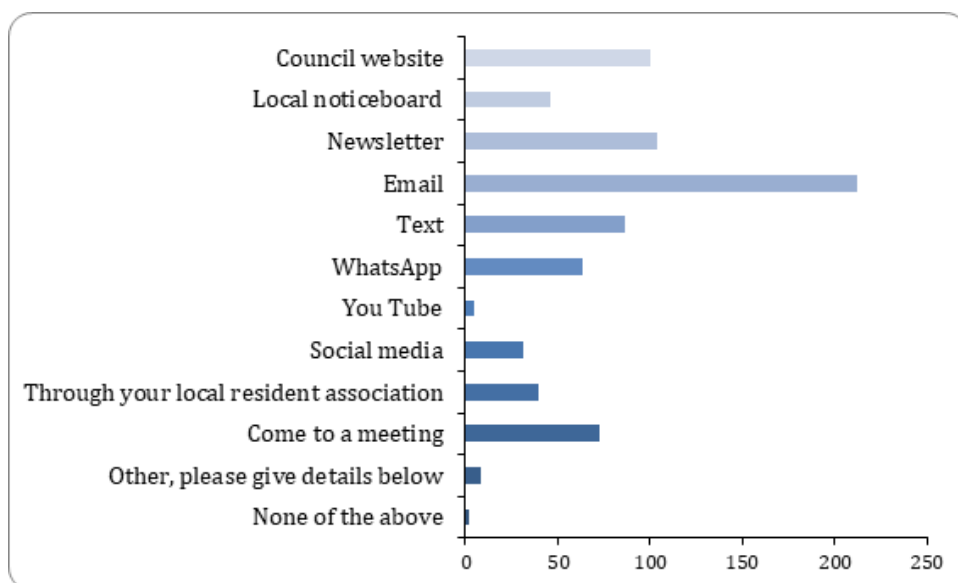
2: How would you like to share your views with the Council Housing team?

There were 281 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
Chat to us online	108	38.43%
Fill in surveys	148	52.67%
Talk with your local resident association	64	22.78%
Talk on the phone	110	39.15%
Social media i.e., Facebook, Instagram etc.	43	15.30%
Come to a meeting	103	36.65%
Text	87	30.96%
WhatsApp	74	26.33%
Join an occasional focus group	74	26.33%
Meet with your local community worker	93	33.10%
Other, please give details below.	20	7.12%
None of the above	6	2.14%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

3: How would you like to get information from council housing? There were 281 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
Council website	100	35.59%
Local noticeboard	46	16.37%
Newsletter	104	37.01%
Email	212	75.44%
Text	86	30.60%
WhatsApp	63	22.42%
You Tube	5	1.78%
Social media	31	11.03%
Through your local resident association	40	14.23%
Come to a meeting	73	25.98%
Other, please give details below	8	2.85%
None of the above	2	0.71%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

4: If you would like to come to a meeting or a focus group, would you prefer.

There were 222 responses to this part of the question.

Option	Total	Percent
In person	129	45.91%
Online	113	40.21%
Evening	111	39.50%
Daytime	66	23.49%
Weekend	41	14.59%
Weekday	69	24.56%
Not Answered	59	21.00%

5: How would you like to raise local issues and put them forward to be discussed at the Area Panel or at other meetings? There were 281 responses to this part of the question.

Option	Total	Percent
Chat to us online	121	43.06%
Text	83	29.54%
WhatsApp	70	24.91%
Talk with your local resident association	68	24.20%
Tell us on the phone	108	38.43%
Come to a meeting	102	36.30%
At an occasional focus group	62	22.06%
Meet your community worker	84	29.89%
Attend a meeting with resident representatives	62	22.06%
Other please give details below	20	7.12%
None of the above	18	6.41%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

6: What would encourage you to become more involved in the housing issues

in your local area? There were 281 responses to this part of the question. 

Option	Total	Percent
Someone to come along with you	34	12.10%
To be able to send comments via text	67	23.84%
To be able to send comments via WhatsApp	65	23.13%
To be able to send comments via email	126	44.84%
To come to an online meeting	72	25.62%
To be able to claim back carer, travel, or childcare costs	21	7.47%
To come to meeting in your neighbourhood	98	34.88%
To hearing how it makes a difference - success stories	52	18.51%
Seeing the neighbourhood/block has improved	101	35.94%
A specific subject I am interested in	46	16.37%
Other please give details below	24	8.54%
None of the above	30	10.68%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

7: What stops you becoming involved in the housing issues that affect your local area? There were 281 responses to this part of the question.

Option	Total	Percent
Don't know how to get involved	70	24.91%
Time of meetings/activities	75	26.69%
Don't have time	52	18.51%
Not confident on a computer or on the internet	29	10.32%
Don't have access to a computer or the internet	12	4.27%
Transport costs	8	2.85%
Too complicated	21	7.47%
Community conflict	39	13.88%
Childcare or caring responsibilities	28	9.96%
Not interested	6	2.14%
Don't think it will make any difference	97	34.52%
Other, please give details below	50	17.79%
None of the above	26	9.25%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

8: What are the main issues or opportunities in your area that you would like to talk to the council about? There were 281 responses to this part of the question.




Option	Total	Percent
Community Activities	64	22.78%
Green Spaces	94	33.45%
Community Centres	43	15.30%
Parking	109	38.79%
Traffic	39	13.88%
Housing conditions	163	58.01%
Council housing costs	48	17.08%
Anti-Social Behavior	117	41.64%
Other, please give details below	49	17.44%
None of the above	23	8.19%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

9: Would you like to hear more from the Community Engagement team about being involved? There were 276 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
Yes	152	54.09%
No	124	44.13%
Not Answered	5	1.78%

10: What type of housing do you have? There were 281 responses to this part of the question. 

Option	Total	Percent
Council Tenant	236	83.99%
Council Leaseholder	29	10.32%
Private rented tenant	2	0.71%
Freehold homeowner	5	1.78%
Private leaseholder	9	3.20%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

11: Do you live on a council housing estate? There were 281 responses to this part of the question. 

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	213	75.80%
No	68	24.20%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

12: How old are you? There were 281 responses to this part of the question.

Option	Total	Percent
Under 18	0	0.00%
18-25	7	2.49%
26-35	16	5.69%
36-50	70	24.91%
51-65	122	43.42%
65+	66	23.49%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

13: What gender are you? There were 280 responses to this part of the question

Option	Total	Percent
Female	154	54.80%
Male	121	43.06%
Other	3	1.07%
Prefer not to say	2	0.71%
Not Answered	1	0.36%

1.1 **14: How would you describe your ethnic origin?** There were 276 responses to this part of the question.

Option	Total	Percent
Asian or Asian British: Bangladeshi	1	0.36%
Asian or Asian British: Indian	3	1.07%
Asian or Asian British: Pakistani	3	1.07%
Asian or Asian British: Chinese	0	0.00%
Asian or Asian British: Any other Asian Background	1	0.36%
Black or Black British: African	9	3.20%
Black or Black British: Caribbean	2	0.71%
Black or Black British: Any other Black background	3	1.07%
Mixed: Asian & White	0	0.00%
Mixed: Black African & White	3	1.07%
Mixed: Black Caribbean & White	6	2.14%
Mixed: Any other mixed background	2	0.71%
White: English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British	197	70.11%
White: Irish	4	1.42%
White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller	2	0.71%

White: Any other White background	18	6.41%
Other ethnic group: Arab	2	0.71%
Other ethnic group, please give details below	6	2.14%
Prefer not to say	14	4.98%
Not Answered	5	1.78%

15: Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months? There were 280 responses to this part of the question.

Option	Total	Percent
Yes, a little	69	24.56%
Yes, a lot	80	28.47%
No	117	41.64%
Prefer not to say	14	4.98%
Not Answered	1	0.36%

