

Tenant Engagement Update, Housing Services, Cheltenham Borough Council

February 2025

Tenant Panel:

- In December, Pennington delivered compliance awareness training to the panel, providing an overview of how CBC should demonstrate compliance and outlining the responsibilities of customers.
- In January, the panel approved the final version of the Complaints Scrutiny Review, conducted between October and December 2024. This review is now under consideration and will be brought back to the panel for final approval in the near future.
- The panel also agreed on the focus of their next scrutiny review: **“How can CBC Housing better ensure equality of access to services?”** They will be working closely with the Equality and Diversity lead to assess the accessibility of services and develop a deeper understanding of how people from minoritised groups engage with CBC Housing.

Leaseholder Panel

- In January, the leaseholder panel reviewed the leaseholder handbook to assess whether it meets their needs. However, during the discussion, the panel agreed that their immediate priority is Section 20s, as this is a key concern for all members.
- To support this, Matt Ward, Head of Housing Services, will attend the February meeting to provide leaseholders with information on Section 20s, address their questions, and explore ways to improve the process for leaseholder customers.

Matters arising from last meeting:

Resettled Families

- Following on from concerns raised by our leaseholder rep, Bozena, at the last meeting. Ellen Pollicott, Community Investment Manager, put together the following information.
- In March 2024, The Community Investment Team approached GARAS to enquire whether any communities required additional support. GARAS introduced our officer to a group of resettled Syrian families, and after meeting with them, it became clear that they needed assistance in several areas. The families expressed a desire for support in setting up Arabic classes, men's mental health groups, and IT skill development to improve their employment prospects.
- The officer connected the group with the TES team, who have since organised a variety of tailored courses, including a monthly VISA drop-in session and several employment-related workshops. 90% of the beneficiaries of this are female.
- To further support the community, our officer assisted them in applying for Healthy Communities funding, successfully securing £3,000. She also introduced the group to GRCC, who are helping them draft a formal constitution. The group has now named themselves "Homeward Horizons" and are actively welcoming other newly resettled communities.
- We secured free venue space through the Quaker movement, allowing the group to meet on weekends for Arabic classes and men's mental health sessions, with a plan to start a women's group and a father's with children group.

- The CI Team has prioritised the group's access to children's activities, including the popular HAF holiday programmes.
- To address the community's IT needs, an officer coordinated with Adult Education to deliver IT courses for individuals with English as a second language at Oakley and Hesters Way community centres. These sessions have been running since October 2024 and continue to support the community. She also arranged for two Syrian women, who completed the courses, to receive donated laptops.
- Recognising language barriers as a significant challenge, Bekka simplified the sign-up process for activities, enabling the group to successfully apply for 18 free ice-skating tickets through Move More as part of the HAF programme.
- In addition to IT support, Pauline, a dedicated volunteer at Oakley, delivers a weekly reading group aimed at refugees and asylum seekers to support their English language development. This initiative has recently expanded to Springbank Resource Centre.
- CBC housing is providing venue space at St Paul's hub, allowing Adult Education to run ESOL and "English for Work" courses throughout 2024 and 2025.
- Further collaboration efforts have seen the community investment team establish a relationship with Alliance for Equality, a new organisation supporting individuals from Eastern Europe. They have recently taken over the lease of St Mark's Community Centre.
- We have delivered sessions at Glos College, helping individuals sign up to the portal and easing communication with CBC regarding their housing issues.
- Hanan, a resettled Syrian who is a key figure in the community, sits on our tenant panel.