Tenant and Leaseholder Review Panel - First Topic Review

Committee: Housing Board

Date of Meeting: 28 January 2026

Report of: Assistant Housing Services Manager and Resident Engagement and Insight Officer

Portfolio: Housing

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 To update the Housing Board on the Tenant and Leaseholder Review Panel (TLRP) and their first review, into the Housing Services web pages and the recommendations arising.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That the Housing Board note the update on the TLRP and the outcomes from the first review.

Reasons for Recommendations

2.2 Housing Board have oversight of the activities of the TLRP and are shown evidence of the tenant voice being listened to and acted upon, in accordance with the Regulator of Social Housing's Consumer Standards.

3. Key Issues

3.1 The TLRP selected a review of the Housing Services webpages as the first topic. This was selected in order to introduce the panel to the method of tenant scrutiny and ease themselves into the process.

3.2 The TLRP undertook their review starting in late July 2025 and produced their recommendations for Housing Board oversight in January 2026. The minutes of each meeting are included in Appendix 2.

3.3 Further to the agreed minutes, the TLRP produced three documents at Appendix 3, evidencing their recommendations which are summarised as follows:

    i.   To introduce a search bar on the main Housing homepage.

ii. To introduce prompt 'buttons' for repairs, allocations, rents, leaseholders, ASB and resident engagement going underneath the search bar, as the main key items that tenants would want to know about.

iii. To condense wordy and repeated text throughout all pages and combine pages where possible, to reduce total number of pages.

iv. To include a photograph on the homepage (something housing-related), and more general use of photographs throughout where possible.

v. To explore the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the search and the use of an automated chat function.

vi. To remove the left-hand side menu of all listed pages just on the main Housing homepage, to improve clarity.

3.4 The Head of Housing and Corporate Assets will subsequently consider and issue approval, subject to any recommendations requiring any further approval outside their delegated authority.

4. Relationship to Corporate Priorities

4.1 The TLRP is a key part of our Resident Involvement Strategy 2024-2027 which contributes directly to Corporate Priority 3:

(ii) Priority 3 - The Community:

The provision of good quality housing in the public sector is a priority for the Council and there is a commitment to achieve this by managing our Council homes efficiently and effectively.

Keeping our residents engaged, informed and at the centre of everything we do is the aim of the strategy and through our engagement framework this is contributing towards improving the housing offer across the District and supporting and building strong connections within our local communities.

5. Report Detail

Tenant and Leaseholder Review Panel background

5.1 The TLRP has been formed as part of Housing Services' engagement framework included in the Resident Involvement Strategy 2024-2027. The panel contributes towards the engagement offer in order to take tenants' views into account in decision-making about how landlord services are delivered and communicate how tenants' views have been considered, as per the Regulator of Social Housing's Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard.

5.2 A recruitment exercise was carried out in June and July 2025, including advertising on the website, social media, hard copy tenant newsletter, posters and also through staff engagement. A limited number of interested tenants and leaseholders came forward and each met with the Resident Engagement and Insight Officer to discuss the engagement option of tenant scrutiny. A panel was then put together of the interested tenants (4) and leaseholders (1).

5.3 An initial meeting was held on 23rd July 2025 to serve as an information meeting for the tenants and leaseholders where aims and objectives (including terms of reference and code of conduct, Appendix 1 for information) for the panel were discussed and agreed, as well as the initial topic of review.

5.4 It was agreed by the panel in the initial meeting that the topic for review would be the Housing Services webpages on the Cannock Chase Council website. It was also proposed and agreed in the initial meeting that the panel's first review would be a walk-through process, designed to give assistance to the panel members in discussions and the process. This was welcomed by the panel members as most of them had not got any previous experience.

5.5 The panel had access to the website within meetings and this often helped focus discussions, as well as the panel completing research independently outside of meetings. In addition, Darren Edwards, the Council's Information Manager in Governance and Corporate, who is responsible for the corporate website, attended meetings on two occasions to help give insight to the panel on some of their ideas, this helped refine some of the panel's recommendations. The TLRP meeting minutes are provided at Appendix 2.

Review Findings

5.6 Following the review the TLRP has produced the documents at Appendix 3, which further evidenced their thoughts on the recommendations that are summarised as follows:

      i. To introduce a search bar on the main Housing homepage.

      ii. To introduce prompt 'buttons' for repairs, allocations, rents, leaseholders, ASB and resident engagement going underneath the search bar, as the main key items that tenants would want to know about.

      iii. To condense wordy and repeated text throughout all pages and combine pages where possible, to reduce total number of pages.

      iv. To include a photograph on the homepage (something housing-related), and more general use of photographs throughout where possible.

     v.   To explore the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the search and the use of an automated chat function.

    vi.   To remove the left-hand side menu of all listed pages just on the main Housing homepage, to improve clarity.

5.7   The first recommendation of introducing a search bar on the main housing homepage was derived from many of the panel members admitting they find the webpages confusing and difficult to navigate. The panel members often discussed within meetings that even on other websites they use, the option of a search bar is a preferred way to navigate around as it takes less time.

5.8   Whilst there is already a search bar at the top of the wider website page, the Panel wanted a dedicated search bar just for Housing related information as there is so much information there. They wanted this much bigger and central to the page. This recommendation, they believe, will significantly reduce the need for customers to call or email in as housing related information will be easier and quicker to find.

5.9   The second recommendation is to introduce prompt buttons for the key areas of repairs, allocations, rents, leaseholders, ASB and resident engagement going underneath the search bar. This came about as most of the panel members did not know what sort of information was available on our webpages. Whilst the existing Housing Services webpages already split down the key areas/departments, the Panel did not like how this was done and found it confusing.

5.10   Until conducting this review most of our Panel were simply unaware of many of the functions on our website as they said it was too difficult to find and not immediately obvious to them. They are unanimously agreed on their idea of the prompt buttons making it easier for all who visit the webpages by highlighting the housing services that are likely to be most used. Also, this would be useful as a prompt to some customers that may not also be aware we offer a particular service.

5.11   The third recommendation, to condense wordy and repeated text throughout all pages, was something they became set on from very early on in the review. The members are all agreed that our Housing webpages in comparison to other nearby councils has a lot of text that for the most part seems unnecessary or could be condensed. They feel this would not only create a simpler layout but would also encourage more people to use it as it looks less daunting.

5.12   The fourth recommendation to include a photograph on the Housing homepage, and more general use of photos throughout where possible. This comes from when attending meetings within the Council Civic Centre building the tenants noted the pictures that we have around the building and in meeting rooms of Cannock Chase scenery and wildlife. It was commented on by a panel

member which turned into a discussion where they all agreed that they would like to see such images used on the webpages. They would feel a sense of culture and belonging from these images being part of the webpages and suggest they would unwittingly strengthen relationships between organisation and consumer.

5.13 The TLRP's fifth recommendation to explore the use of AI in the search and chat functions was initially spoken about as part of some research the members conducted independently. All of the members that completed the research said that they had used similar functions on other nearby Council's websites and found it useful.

5.14 All panel members suggest that not only would this be a useful tool for reducing customers having longer wait times to be assisted via telephone or in person but that it would also help keep Cannock Chase Council's website features 'up to date' with current technology. It was also suggested that the exploration and implementation of an AI chat function would further improve our communication with our residents as it is a popular choice with many, especially younger generations, to communicate this way.

5.15 During initial discussions with the Information Manager, this chat function could be an option available to Housing and potentially across the whole Council, however it needs to be explored further as to actual implementation and costs with the external website supplier. Officers will liaise with the Information Manager and update the Panel as necessary.

5.16 The sixth and final recommendation that the TLRP have put forward is to remove the left-hand side menu of all pages just on the main Housing homepage. Although only a small change, they feel this would have a positive impact on visitors to the homepage by streamlining its appearance. They feel other important options will stand out more if the left-hand side menu does not feature on this page. The panel members all agree that none of them use the menu from this area of the webpage, and it just serves as a distraction which can lead to frustration when trying to navigate from the homepage.

5.17 The Head of Housing and Corporate Assets will consider these recommendations and an update on the website and in the next edition of the tenant newsletter will be provided to ensure we have communicated to all tenants how the panel's views have been taken into account.

Further findings

5.18 Following the initial review it is considered that the TLRP and the team need some further training and guidance on the tenant scrutiny process. Whilst officers have undertaken training and have some experience from

implementing the previous scrutiny panel, further advice is needed to get the most out of the Panel for tenants/leaseholders and Housing Services. Tpas will therefore be contacted in the near future to assist with the next review. Three of the tenant members (including one new member) are booked on a tenant scrutiny training course in February 2026.

5.19 The first review served as a walk-through for the Panel and the topic of the Housing Services webpages selected as it was thought to be an easy area to look at. In hindsight, the website was not conducive for a scrutiny topic, it needed to be more specific and service related. The website as a whole is a corporate function and Housing Services are limited in the impact it can have on it. The Panel were at times confused and frustrated as to these limitations.

5.20 It is also apparent that further membership of the Panel is needed. The initial number of five members was just about sufficient, but unfortunately two members did not see out the first review and completing the review became slightly more difficult towards the end. Tpas may also be able to assist with this, but we shall increase promotion of the Panel and seek out further ways of identifying interested tenants and leaseholders to increase membership. One new member has subsequently been recruited in January 2026.

6. Implications

6.1 Financial

There aren't any foreseen financial implications for any of the recommendations initially as they can be implemented 'in house' and be met from existing resources. Any changes required by the external supplier to the webpages are believed to be covered within the existing contract arrangements. Further to exploring the use of AI chat functions, which would need to be dealt with by the external supplier, this would most likely subsequently lead to a cost being incurred.

6.2 Legal

None

6.3 Human Resources

None

6.4 Risk Management

If the recommendations are not made then Housing Services run the risk of our tenants and other customers not being able to use the webpages to their full potential. The website is an excellent source of information which can provide

answers to simple queries that tenants and other customers have without taking up staff resources which can be directed to other areas.

Should the recommendations not be given consideration then there is a risk that the tenant voice is deemed to be ignored. Impacting upon the TLRP as they could feel their views are not been listened to and taken on board; and the Council's requirements to meet the Social Housing Regulator's Consumer Standards through the need to take tenants' views into account in our decision-making about how landlord services are delivered and communicate how tenants' views have been considered.

6.5 Equalities and Diversity

If the any of the recommendations were to be implemented, they would have no negative impact on the protected characteristic groups and would improve access to the website for all tenants and other customers.

6.6 Health

None

6.7 Climate Change

Improved access to information on the website could lead to a reduction in visits to the Civic Centre of Housing Bungalow, therefore reducing carbon emissions from motor vehicle usage.

7. Appendices

Appendix 1: TLRP Code of Conduct and Terms of Reference

Appendix 2: TLRP meeting minutes for the review

Appendix 3: TLRP Review of Housing Services Webpages - Recommendations summary

8. Previous Consideration

None.

9. Background Papers

None

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Ward Interest:	N/A
Report Track:	Housing Board 28.01.2026 (Only)

Key Decision: N/A