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Bolsover District Council

Meeting of the Housing Liaison Board on 27 January 2026

Agenda Item 10: Social Housing Innovation Fund Bid

Classification:	This report is Public
Report By:	Housing Performance Manager

PURPOSE/SUMMARY OF REPORT

To inform the Board of Bolsover District Council's bid for the Social Housing Innovation Fund available from the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government. The bid has been completed with tenants for additional resources to provide a mobile tenant engagement van called "The Engagement Express" to offer meaningful engagement opportunities for tenants.

Background

Bolsover District Council serves a dispersed district where geography and limited public transport constrain day-to-day contact with tenants. Over recent years, traditional methods such as office-based appointments, daytime meetings, and digital-only consultations have not reliably reached older residents, working households, young people, or those facing digital exclusion and language barriers. The Engagement Express has been conceived as a practical, visible and human way to reverse that trend: a mobile, fully branded participation van that meets people where they are, normalising conversation, scrutiny and co-production as part of everyday life.

This proposal is aligned with the government's Social Housing Innovation Fund (SHIF), administered by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. SHIF provides competitive grants to test new or significantly improved approaches that strengthen tenant engagement and ensure residents can influence decisions about their homes. The 2025–26 prospectus explains that up to £2 million is available nationally, with indicative awards of £60,000–£120,000 per project, and it sets clear expectations that projects are co-produced with tenants and capable of being replicated more widely across the sector. The emphasis is on 'test and learn', generating insight that can be shared as best practice across England, and

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particularly amplifying voices that are currently underrepresented in engagement and scrutiny activities.

Within that national framework, The Engagement Express offers a practical local route to change. The van will operate as a roaming engagement hub, bringing face-to-face services to estates, village centres and community events across the district. On board, staff and tenant volunteers will host conversations, gather feedback and help residents use tablets and Wi-Fi to complete consultations, submit repair requests and access online services without the need to travel to an office. Partners such as advice agencies and health and well-being teams will join sessions where appropriate, turning each stop into a single front door for support that is timely, trusted and close to home.

Social Housing Innovation Fund

The project has been co-produced from the outset. Initial questionnaires issued to our tenant participation database surfaced the mobility and confidence barriers that many residents experience. Those findings were explored in two in-person workshops in which presentations of their survey results were discussed, and ultimately tenants prioritised a mobile model over static meetings. Follow-up surveys were used to shape details on how the van should look and feel, the types of sessions it should host, the routes and times most likely to work for working families, older people and younger tenants. Materials were shared with those unable to attend, and feedback was captured through minutes, sign-in sheets and written responses. This ongoing loop gives tenants a line of sight from their idea to implementation.

A steering group of 10 to 15 tenant representatives will now oversee the transition into delivery. Their remit is deliberately broad: reviewing procurement options, advising on internal layout and accessibility, testing the digital journey for repairs reporting and surveys, helping to script the welcome and privacy messages, and acting as ambassadors on the road. Volunteers will support officers during sessions greeting neighbours, signposting what is available, and guiding residents through consultations. The steering group will also review engagement data, satisfaction results and case studies each quarter, recommending route changes, pop-up themes and partner involvement in response to what tenants say and do.

The Engagement Express changes the tone of contact as much as it changes the place of contact. In a familiar spot on the estate or in a rural village car park, informal conversations open that would not happen in a council office. Residents can tell their story, raise a concern, test a policy idea, or participate in a scrutiny activity on the spot. Officers can listen, demonstrate a digital process shoulder-to-shoulder, and act quickly on simple issues. Over time, this builds trust and visibility while normalising engagement as routine rather than exceptional.

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Investment has been carefully profiled to deliver value for money within the SHIF parameters. The requested £117,706.72 covers procurement and retrofit of a durable vehicle with inclusive, accessible fittings; tablets, connectivity and survey tools to capture high-quality data in real time; a part-time engagement officer and essential training; and the operational, marketing and independent evaluation costs required to test, learn and share. The van is a long-lived asset that can be maintained by the in-house fleet team, and the digital tools reduce paper costs while improving the speed and quality of feedback.

Key Milestones and Timescales

- Tenant questionnaire distributed: November 2025
- Initial co-production sessions and idea gathering: November 2025
- Follow-up survey and engagement meeting: December 2025
- Final bid submission: January 2026
- Van procurement and branding: Feb–May 2026
- Staff training and equipment installation: May–June 2026
- Launch of mobile engagement programme: June–July 2026
- Community roadshow and targeted outreach: July–August 2026
- Mid-point review and tenant feedback: October 2026
- Additional engagement activities and refinement: September–December 2026
- Final evaluation and reporting: March 2027

Delivery will be paced and purposeful. A short mobilisation window covers procurement, branding and staff training, with launch targeted for summer. A roadshow of outreach stops will then rotate between estates and rural localities, complemented by targeted evening sessions to reach working households and school-holiday activities to engage younger tenants and families. Partners will be invited in line with local need benefits, as one village may need debt advice, digital inclusion training in another, and wellbeing checks where local data shows isolation. Each interaction is recorded in attendance logs and digital analytics to provide robust evidence for quarterly reviews and the final evaluation.

Success measures blend numbers with narrative. Quantitatively, the programme aims to reach 250–500 tenants in year one, deliver at least two sessions per month, and ensure that at least thirty percent of participants are from rural areas, older age groups or digitally excluded households. It will facilitate at least 200 online survey completions and 100 repair reports using on-board tools. Qualitatively, short post-session reflections, periodic interviews and tenant-authored case studies will track perceptions of accessibility, relevance and influence. The steering group will

use these findings to refine the schedule, the mix of activities and the balance between drop-ins and structured co-production.

Risks are recognised and actively managed. If engagement at a particular stop is lower than expected, routes and times will flex and the van will piggy-back on local events to boost visibility. Procurement dependencies are mitigated by securing multiple quotes and building contingency into the plan. Connectivity gaps in rural blackspots are addressed with high-performance hotspots and offline-capable survey tools. Health and safety obligations are met through risk assessments, safeguarding and staff training. A modest contingency supports responsive adjustments without compromising governance.

What makes this approach innovative is not just the van itself, but the way it reframes relationships and learning. Each stop becomes a micro-laboratory where new engagement techniques can be trialled, where residents help design and scrutinise services in ways that work for them, and where data flows quickly back into decision-making. The format is intentionally replicable, and routes, scripts, layouts, survey flows and partnership models will be documented and shared contributing to the SHIF ambition to spread effective practice across the sector. For Bolsover's tenants, it means decisions are shaped closer to home, voices carry further, and participation feels straightforward, respectful and worthwhile creating meaningful engagement.

MHCLG are expected to let applicants know if they are successful by the end of February 2026.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. There are no formal recommendations of action on the report. Should the bid be successful there may be future reports that require decisions from the Board.

Links to Council Ambition: Customers, Economy, Environment and Housing Unsure of below

Ambition: Customers

Priorities:

- *Continuous improvement to service delivery through innovation, modernisation and listening to customers*
- *Improving the customer experience and removing barriers to accessing information and services*

Ambition: Housing

Priority:

- *Building more, good quality, affordable housing, and being a decent landlord*

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**Links to Council Ambition: Customers, Economy, Environment and Housing
Unsure of below**

Target HOU04: Work towards compliance with the Social Housing Consumer Standards, ensuring tenants' voice is key when developing new council housing policies, procedures, and improvements.

DOCUMENT INFORMATION

Appendix No	Title