

Get involved

How to

have your say

2015



Tending
District Council



Introduction

Welcome to the 2015 edition of our newsletter that tells you how you can have your say and make a difference to the housing services we provide.

We are committed to offering you a variety of ways of being involved in our decision making processes and by working together we aim to improve the services we provide.

Our thanks, as always, go to members of our Tenants Panel who have helped us with the production of this newsletter and who continue to help us to develop and improve our services.

You can find out more about joining our Tenants Panel or any of the other opportunities that exist for your involvement by emailing tenant.involvement@tendringdc.gov.uk or by phoning 01255 686490



This newsletter is also available in large print, braille and translations into other languages. Please contact us on 01255 686490 or by emailing tenant.involvement@tendringdc.gov.uk to request a copy.

What is tenant involvement?

Tenant involvement is about us working together and encouraging you to have a greater say and influence in how your homes are managed and our services are delivered.

It's your right to be involved

As your landlord, we have to consult you on matters that affect your home and the services you receive. This includes things like changes to your tenancy agreement and any alterations or improvements to our services.

All housing providers, like us, are also subject to a common set of standards that place a focus on the things that matter most to tenants to make sure that you have the opportunity to be involved, agree standards and monitor our performance. These standards cover tenant involvement, repairs and maintenance, rents, quality of accommodation, complaints and anti social behaviour. You can find out how well we perform against each of these in the annual report that send out each autumn.

However, we want to go beyond what's required of us to make sure that you have a range of opportunities to get involved in all areas and aspects of our housing services.

But why should you?

We believe that all our tenants should have the opportunity to have their say and to influence how their homes are managed and services delivered. As our tenant, you have ideas about what needs to be done to improve your home, estate and the services you receive. By listening to you and working together, we can make sure that our services improve in line with your needs and expectations.

As well as the way that our services improve through your involvement, there are also a number of ways that you can benefit as an individual. These include:

- Helping improve levels of tenant satisfaction with their homes and neighbourhoods
- Getting better services that are tailored to what you and other tenants want
- Making your community a better place to live
- Knowing your contribution changes, shapes and improves our services for all
- Being able to scrutinise and challenge the services we deliver
- Making new friends
- Opportunity to develop new skills, knowledge and confidence that can help in other areas of your life
- Gaining confidence
- Building mutual trust, respect and understanding
- Helping us to become aware of each other's perspectives and any organisational or financial limitations

There are lots of good reasons to get involved but we know that everyone will have different priorities and that some people will have more time to get involved than others. That is why we provide a range of ways for you to get involved. We are also able to help you with travel costs or can arrange transport for you to attend meetings or other events with us if you don't have a car.

What's in it for us?

By asking you for your views and involving you, we can identify any areas of our services that need improving. If we want to provide good quality housing and services, we know that we have to listen to and respond to your feedback.

Through your involvement we can:

- Get valuable information to help us understand what tenants want
- Understand the problems that tenants are facing
- Provide better, more efficient services and improved value for money
- Achieve continuous improvement in the delivery of our services
- Have informed and knowledgeable tenants who have the skills and confidence to influence decisions
- Build mutual trust, respect and understanding
- Work with tenants to improve neighbourhoods leading to increased levels of satisfaction
- Tackle problems such as anti social behaviour

What's stopping you?

We hear lots of reasons from our tenants why they don't get involved. Do any of these sound familiar to you?

“ I'm happy with the service I get. I'd consider going to a meeting about something that affected me or my home but I won't waste time getting involved with things that don't concern me. ”

Even if you're happy with the services you're receiving there's always room for improvement. By getting involved you will learn about new services and get the opportunity to influence how they are developed.

“ I've got a young family. I haven't got time to go to meetings. ”

Getting involved isn't just about going to meetings. There are lots of other ways to have your say – for example by completing a postal or on line survey.

“ I don't know anything about tenant involvement. I wouldn't know what to expect. ”

It's easy to leave involvement to other people but, if you do that, how do you know your views are being represented. Some tenants are happy to criticise the service they receive but are reluctant to do anything about it. If you do have an opinion on something, try and find the time to let us know.

“ I haven't done anything like this before. ”

Don't worry, we are interested in hearing your views and will provide support and training. There is always someone on hand.

“ I don't feel confident about speaking up in situations like that. ”

You can go along to meetings simply to listen and learn if that's what you prefer – you don't have to join in the discussions unless you want to. Only take on as much responsibility as you feel comfortable with. Talk to us if you're unsure about what's expected of you. We also provide training to make sure that you are fully informed.

“ If there was a lot of paperwork to read before or during a meeting, it would put me off. ”

If you don't enjoy reading paperwork, consider taking part in a different form of involvement where you'll only have to give feedback verbally. The key is to choose an involvement option that suits you.

“ Getting involved won't make any difference. ”

Unless you get involved, you'll never be able to influence the housing services you receive. If you've had a bad experience of involvement in the past, talk to us about this so that we can put this right. You can make sure that we report back to tenants on how their involvement has impacted on the service.

“ It's mostly older people. No one is interested in listening to my side of things. ”

It's true that the majority of people engaged in our tenant involvement activities are older people as they represent the majority of our tenants. But, if you're a younger tenant, don't you also want to get the best from the services we provide? So why not find an activity that suits you and get your views heard.

Not all of you will want the same level of involvement in all areas of the housing services we provide. The level of involvement that you are interested in may simply mean being kept informed or providing us feedback about specific housing issues, which can take as little as five minutes, or you may want to take a more active role by joining our Tenants Panel and get involved in policy making decisions.

Because we believe that your views are important we offer a variety of ways for you to get involved and each of them can make a real difference.

As an individual

Complete any surveys or questionnaire that we send to you

When we have provided you with a service, for example, completed a repair, we will give you a questionnaire so that you can tell us how satisfied you were with what we did. The feedback that we get from these is then used to monitor our performance and identify any areas for improvement.

We also carry out a comprehensive satisfaction survey amongst all our tenants once every two years and this information is used to measure satisfaction with our services and track this over time and also to identify any improvements that are needed to our services.



A few minutes...occasionally

Home visits or office interviews

If you want to discuss a matter with us on a one-to-one basis we can arrange to visit you at home or see you at the Town Hall



On request

Read our newsletters

Our tenants newsletter, Tendring Reports is usually produced three times each year to provide you with up to date and relevant information about things that affect you as a tenant. We also produce an annual performance report as well as this dedicated tenant involvement newsletter and one focussing on anti social behaviour.

All of our publications are produced with the help of members of our Tenants Panel.



Up to one hour six times a year

Visit our website

Our website – www.tendringdc.gov.uk – includes a wide range of information about the services we provide and provides an additional 24 hour way for you to contact us



A few minutes

Letters or home visits

We will write to you or visit you about any issues that affect you or your tenancy, for example if your home is going to be included in one of our planned improvement programmes.



A few minutes

Customer suggestion scheme

You can use this scheme to make a suggestion anything that you feel would help us to improve our services. We consider all suggestions that we receive and will let you know if you are able to implement it or explain to you why we are unable to put your idea into practice.



A few minutes

Reality checks

Some of our customers ‘test’ our services from a customers viewpoint and give us feedback that we are able to use to improve services. For example, they may visit our office, or make enquiries by telephone or physically inspect the services we provide.



A few minutes up to an hour

Customer involvement register

By joining our Customer Involvement Register you are able to state what service areas you are interested in giving us your view on and how you want to do this.



A few minutes up to an hour

As part of a group

Focus groups

A focus group normally brings together a few people to discuss specific issues, such as repairs or consultation. It aims to gather views about a particular subject that we can use alongside opinions we get from other methods. Focus group meetings are normally one-offs or held over a short period of time.



Normally one off meetings

Public meetings

Public meetings are normally held to discuss specific issues and they will be open to all residents who have an interest in or will be affected by a particular plan or policy. They provide an opportunity to share information with a wide range of people and get their views.



Normally one off meetings

Tenants Panel

Our Tenants Panel is the main district wide involvement structure. Its members aim to represent and promote tenant opinion and make sure this is central to the delivery of all services. They meet on a regular basis and provide direction on housing policy, management and maintenance, and they act as both a consultative and decision-making body.



Six meetings a year

Tenants Panel Elected Representatives

The Tenants Panel also has a number of members who have been elected to have detailed involvement in specific areas of our service, for example developing and monitoring our anti social behaviour strategy. They have also set up a group that looks at our performance in detail and how we provide services to make sure that we are accountable to tenants.



Each sub group normally meets four times a year.

Sheltered Housing Panel

Our Sheltered Housing Panel is made up of representatives from each of our sheltered housing schemes and they meet with us to discuss topics that are specifically relevant to tenants in this type of accommodation.

Four to six meetings a year



Request a scrutiny review

Groups of tenants can request that members of our Tenants Performance and Scrutiny Panel carry out a detailed review of one of our services. This request can relate to any housing service provided by the Council but the Panel will focus on things that matter most to tenants and on outcomes that will make a difference to the wider council tenant population.



As part of your community

Residents associations

Residents associations are groups of people who live in the same area who get together to voice their opinion collectively. They might meet informally on an occasional basis or they could be elected, have a written constitution and meet regularly. Similarly, how much each group wants to get involved could vary from simply being kept informed to taking an active part in the decision-making process



Depends on each group

Street, area or block representative

This is someone who represents the views of their street, area or block to us, as their landlord. We will also consult with these individuals about issues that affect their local area and they can also feedback to us about the service provided in their area.



Depends on each group

Sheltered housing residents meetings

At each of our sheltered housing schemes, we hold regular meetings to give residents an opportunity to discuss issues about their homes and our services, and to consult them on new ideas.



One a month

Improvement Panel

In areas that are not represented by a residents association, we give residents the opportunity to form an Improvement Panel to work with us in designing and implementing major planned environmental improvement schemes to make sure that these reflect what tenants in the local community want. These groups meet with us on a regular basis whilst these schemes are carried out.



Monthly during the course of any improvement scheme

Estate walkabouts

This gives an opportunity for local residents to join our staff on regular walkabouts to comment on issues affecting the local area, for example grass cutting or street sweeping.



Once or twice a year

Good neighbour agreements

These are informal and voluntary arrangements that aim to encourage residents in an area to work together to improve the quality of local life. The principle is for individuals to respect each other and behave in a tolerant and neighbourly way



Varies

Community Events

These involve getting together with other residents to organise local events, such as community clear ups, social or sports events. All of these activities are designed to bring communities together and to build good neighbour relationships.



As and when you choose

Community Initiative Grant

We are able to support tenant and resident groups to fund projects or events in their area that benefit the community. These projects can be anything which a group of tenants would like to see in their area – for example, physical improvements, such as works to a communal garden, or a community event.



Varies

New ideas for involvement

If you've got a really good idea for getting involved that isn't listed above, you can submit this to us via our Suggestion Scheme as we are always looking for new ways to involve people.

Interested?

Find out more by emailing tenant.involvement@tendringdc.gov.uk or by telephoning 01255 686490.

Respecting everyone, valuing differences

We want to make sure that all our tenants can be involved fully and equally and that no individual receives different treatment because of their age, disability, faith, sexuality or gender. To help us do this, we have put measure in place to remove any barriers that may prevent people from getting involved. These include making sure that any meetings we organise are held in venues that are accessible for people with disabilities, providing information in alternative formats, such as large print or translations and helping with travel expenses or providing transport for those attending meetings with us.

We also check our policies to make sure that they do not have a negative impact on any groups in the community and that they are accessible to all and this is reviewed on a regular basis.

What support do we provide?

To help you get involved, we provide both practical and financial help and this includes:

- Dedicated budget and staff to lead on and support tenant involvement
- grants to help residents associations meet their setting up and operating expenses
- budgets for recognised residents associations and other groups to fund works for their area that will be of benefit to their local community
- administrative support such as help with photocopying, printing and the provision of stationery

- practical support and advice, including our attendance at residents meetings.
- payment for transport and other out of pocket expenses when attending meetings with us
- access to training to make sure that you can be fully involved

Providing information

We want you to have the information that you need to give fully informed views on the service that you receive. For you to become more involved in the housing service, it is essential that we provide you with relevant information that is tailored to meet your needs.

We will make sure that the information we provide about the housing service is:

- readily available
- clear and easy to understand
- available in large print, braille or other format where required
- in a minimum size 11 font size to make sure that the text can be read by most people
- free of jargon and any biased language. Where it is not possible to avoid the use of jargon, we will make sure that this is fully explained.
- reviewed on a regular basis to make sure that this meets your needs and priorities

We also have a number of members of our Tenants Panel who work with us in the production of newsletters and other publications to make sure that they are clear and easy to understand and are designed in an attractive way. Whenever you see this logo, which was designed by members of our Panel, this shows that the publication it is on has been approved by the Communication Group.



Asking for your views and giving feedback

It is important that when we ask you for your views we do this before issues have been decided. We will also make sure that you are given enough time for you to make your views known to us.

When we have asked you for your views, it is important that you know what happens next. We will make sure that we give you feedback so that you know the outcome of any consultation you have taken part in. This feedback will be given in a variety of ways, including the 'You said...we did' articles in our newsletter.

Arranging meetings

Meetings are just one of the ways that we can share information and work with you in the decision making process.

When it has been agreed that a meeting is the best way of consulting with you we will make sure that:

- the venue chosen is accessible
- the time chosen will suit as many of those that are to be invited as possible.
- technical assistance, such as translators or signers is arranged where necessary
- the meeting is well publicised
- we provide an agenda
- it is properly run to make sure that everyone who wants to has the opportunity to speak
- minutes or notes are taken and that all participants are provided with relevant feedback

We would also expect this standard to be met by all of our recognised residents groups when they arrange a meeting with their members.

What if I don't want to get involved?

That's fine. We will always keep you informed through letters, leaflets and newsletters. We will also consult you personally about things that will directly affect you. However, if you do have a view or opinion on something, try to find the time to let us know your views.

Checking how well we perform?

We need to check how well we are performing in relation to tenant involvement and measure our performance against the targets and standards we have set. This is carried out each year by representatives from our Tenants Panel, and they also agree our new targets for developing our tenant involvement activities each year.

Dealing with complaints

By monitoring our performance on an ongoing basis we hope to make sure that any complaints or targets that we are not going to meet are identified at an early stage so that we can take appropriate action to resolve this.

However, there may still be situations where a separate investigation is necessary. These will be dealt with as a specific category within the Council's Customer Complaints procedure.

About our performance

Each year we agree, with representatives from our Tenants Panel, how we will develop the opportunities for you to get involved in our services. Details about how well we did against the targets we set last year are given below:

			
Not started	Started but not completed	Completed	Ongoing

We said we would.....review and update our tenancy agreement

What we did...

Our Introductory and Secure Tenancy Agreement has now been reviewed and rewritten. This will be discussed with members of our Anti Social Behaviour Sub Group and, subject to their agreement, all tenants will be consulted about the proposed changes.



We said we would... carry out a comprehensive tenant satisfaction survey

What we did...

This survey was sent out to all tenants last summer and over 50% of you completed and returned this. Overall, 89% of you said that you were very or fairly satisfied with the service we provide as a landlord.



We said we would...compare our performance and cost with that of other housing providers

What we did...

We compared our performance figures with other housing providers but have yet to carry out a cost comparison. However, we hope to do this during this year.



We said we would...produce a Sheltered Housing Handbook

What we did...

This handbook has been produced and, subject to the approval of of our Sheltered Housing Panel will now be printed.



We said we would...produce a Sheltered Housing Charter

What we did...

This charter has been produced and will be implemented shortly.



We said we would...carry out a survey to find out how our customers prefer to contact us

What we did...

This survey was carried out last year and showed that the majority of our customers still prefer to contact us by telephone there has been an increase in the numbers using electronic methods of contact.



We said we would...carry out an exercise to monitor the type and volume of customer contact that we receive in a set period

What we did...

This exercise was carried out over a fortnight period last summer and we are using the results to help us plan our services and resources in the future.



We said we would...involve tenants in the recruitment of key staff

What we did...

A process has now been agreed to involve tenants and we will follow this as and when suitable jobs become vacant



We said we would...review the content and accessibility of our website

What we did...

This was completed last year. However, we are always looking at ways to improve our website, so please let us know if you have any suggestions.



We said we would...organise or contribute to events / activities to promote tenant involvement

What we did...

We contributed to a community event in Clacton and will continue to use suitable events to promote tenant involvement



We said we would...relaunch our Community Initiative Grant Scheme

What we did...

This has now been relaunched and publicised through our website and in Tendring Reports



We said we would...review the support that we provide for tenant involvement activities

What we did...

We have been able to maintain the level of support that we provide for tenant involvement and will continue do so this year.



We said we would...relaunch our Customer Involvement Register

What we did...

This register was re launched and we will continue to find ways to promote this with both new and existing tenants.



We said we would...investigate the use of social media as an additional way of involving tenants

What we did...

We have looked at the way that other housing providers use social media and will be looking to use this more in future.



What do we want to achieve this year?

We agreed these actions with members of our Tenants Panel to further develop the opportunities for you to get involved in our services

Develop a Tenant Involvement Strategy

Although we set targets for developing tenant involvement each year, we do not have a current strategy in place. By having a strategy, we will demonstrate our commitment to tenant involvement and set out our plans over a longer period of time.

Increase the number of involved tenants, particularly from those groups that are currently under represented

This will help us to obtain a broader range of views and to tailor our services to meet all tenants' needs.

Involve tenant representatives in the production and implementation of our new Housing Anti Social Behaviour Strategy

This will make sure that our strategy is tailored to meet tenants needs and priorities in relation to anti social behaviour.

Assess our performance against the Chartered Institute of Housing's Equality and Diversity Charter and Income Management Charter

This will make sure that we follow best practice and identify any areas where we need to improve.

Publish a programme of neighbourhood inspections

This will provide an opportunity for more tenants to be involved in these.

Introduce service diaries, quality assessments and tenant inspectors as additional means of involvement

These will enable more tenants to get involved in a way that best suits them – from just recording details of their contact with us to inspecting our properties before they are relet

Review the information that we provide for tenants and leaseholders whose homes are being included in any planned programmes of maintenance or improvement works.

This will make sure that the information we provide is easy to understand and relevant in its content.

Develop links with other social landlords in the area to share good practice in tenant involvement

This will help us to identify good practice as well as any areas where we need to improve.

Produce an annual report on customer complaints, compliments and other forms of feedback.

This will outline the various forms of feedback that we receive and identify where we have learnt from this and made changes to our services or procedures.

Carry out an annual Tenant Involvement Impact Assessment

This will help us to review the effectiveness of our tenant involvement activities and the outcomes across the services we provide.

Carry out a training needs review with involved tenants and design a training programme to meet these needs.

This will make sure that those who are involved have the right knowledge, skills and confidence to be effectively involved.

Organise a Keep In Touch event

This will provide an opportunity for our staff and tenants to speak with tenants in the wider population to identify their priorities and any concerns.

Carry out a survey to assess satisfaction with the content, format and frequency of Tendring Reports and our other publications.

This will make sure that the publications that we produce are easy to read and understand and tailored to what tenants need.

Review and republish our Repairs Handbook.

This will make sure that the most relevant information is provided to tenants to help them accurately report the repairs that are needed to their home. We will also review our on line repairs reporting system.



Interested in finding out more?

If you are interested in finding out more about how you can have an involvement in our services please contact us by:



telephoning **01255 686490** or **01255 686491**



emailing **tenant.involvement@tendringdc.gov.uk**



visiting our website **www.tendringdc.gov.uk**



writing to **Tendring District Council
Town Hall
Station Road
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Tendring
District Council

