

**Tendring**  
District Council



## **TENANT INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY 2016-2019**

**FOREWORD**

We are pleased to introduce Tendring District Council’s Tenant Involvement Strategy covering the period 2016-2019.

This strategy sets out the Council’s commitment to involving its tenants in its housing services and aims to make sure that tenants know how they can get involved, when they can get involved and the difference that their involvement can make.

Signed.....

Housing Portfolio Holder

Signed.....

Corporate Director of Life Opportunities

Signed.....

Chair of the Tenants Panel.

# TENANT INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY 2016-2019

## Our vision

Our vision is to ensure that tenants have a wide range of opportunities to be involved at a level they choose and that their involvement is an integral part of our business which makes a difference and improves services.

## Aims of this strategy

The aims of this strategy are to:

- Set out our approach to tenant involvement including the reasons why we involve tenants
- Set out the ways in which we will involve tenants and ensure that they are part of the service improvement process
- Set out our objectives in relation to tenant involvement
- Identify the actions required to meet these objectives
- Set out how our performance will be monitored and reviewed
- Ensure that we meet all statutory and regulatory requirements

## Our objectives

OBJECTIVES
Promote and raise awareness of tenant involvement as a means of encouraging more residents to get involved
Ensure that we communicate effectively with tenants, providing good quality, timely and jargon free information
Ensure that we are fully inclusive by providing a range of ways for tenants to get involved at a level and pace that suits them
Make effective use of tenant feedback and involvement to improve service delivery
Improve quality of life through effective tenant involvement

Measure the impact of tenant involvement to make sure that it delivers effective outcomes for tenants and communicate this

Provide sufficient resources and, support and training to make resident involvement effective

## What is tenant involvement?

Tenant involvement is about us giving residents who use council housing services the opportunity to influence, challenge and scrutinise the services they receive.

The Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) defines tenant involvement as a 'two way process involving sharing of information and ideas, where tenants are able to influence decisions and take part in what is happening.'

## Why involve tenants?

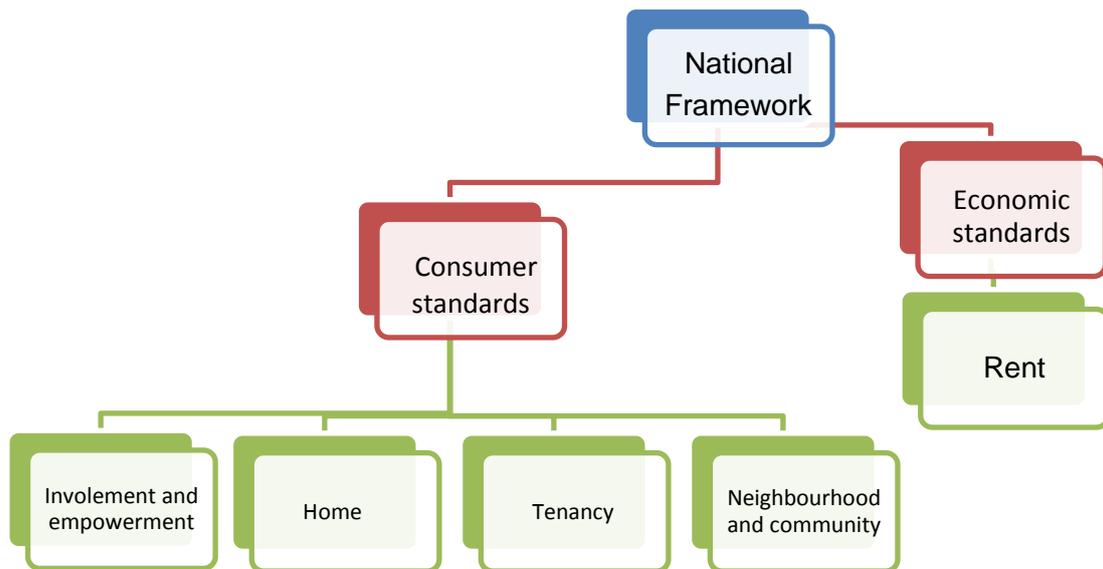
Tenants are central to the housing services we provide and are best placed to tell us what works well and what could work better. By involving tenants, we can ensure that their needs, priorities and aspirations form the basis of any service development.

### a) The legal and regulatory context

The Housing Acts 1980 and 1985 gave tenants a right in law to be informed about matters of housing management, such as changes to their terms and conditions of their tenancy. These legal rights were built upon in 1998 with the introduction of Tenant Participation Compacts, which were locally negotiated agreements between councils and their tenants. These were formalised by the introduction of the National Framework for Tenant Participation Compacts in 1999 and, although not a statutory requirement, the implementation of these was subject to Audit Commission inspection.

From April 2012, the Homes and Communities Agency has been the housing regulator. They expect tenants to play a key role in assessing their landlord's performance and to hold them to account for any weaknesses. Landlords are required to make sure that tenants can and do play a role in improving performance and services.

The expectations of the Homes and Community Agency are set out in the Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England and this sets out the national standards that all social landlords must comply with as set out on the following page:



The economic standards apply to all registered providers except local authorities and the regulator has a proactive approach in relation to these. The consumer standards are applicable to all registered providers but the regulator's role is limited to intervention only where failure of the standard could lead to risk of 'serious detriment' to tenants. This is based upon the degree of harm or potential harm that could be caused by a breach of the standards, for example a health and safety risk.

Each of the consumer standards covers the following:

Involvement and empowerment

- Customer service, choice and complaints
- Involvement and empowerment
- Understanding diverse needs

Home

- Quality of accommodation
- Repairs and maintenance

Tenancy

- Allocations
- Tenure – tenancies and terms of occupation

Neighbourhood and community

- Neighbourhoods
- Local area co-operation
- Anti social behaviour

In respect of the consumer standards, landlords are required to make sure that tenants are given a wide range of opportunities to be involved in the:

- development of housing policies and priorities;
- delivery of housing services, including the setting of service standards;
- scrutinising performance;
- identifying areas for improvement;
- management of properties, including their repair and maintenance; and
- agreement of local offers.

**b) The benefits of tenant involvement**

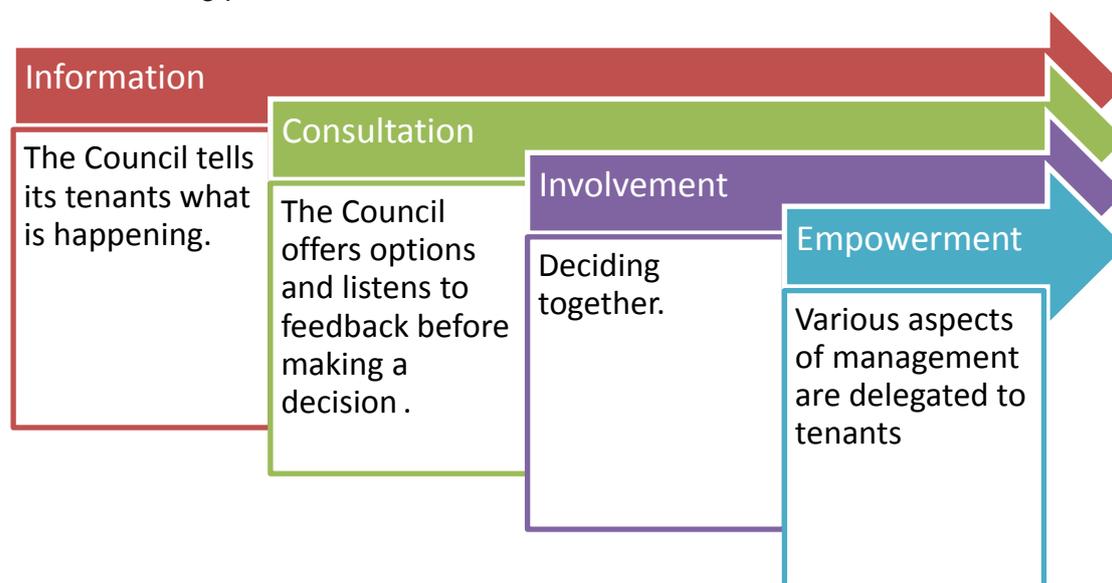
However, in addition to the legal and regulatory context, there is a strong business case for involving tenants. 'Successful businesses in all sectors have a common theme – they know, understand and respond to their current and future customers. They do this by developing approaches and mechanisms to engage with service users.' (New Approaches to Tenant Scrutiny, Chartered Institute of Housing).

The main benefits of tenant involvement are:

- Improved levels of tenant satisfaction with their homes and neighbourhoods
- Learning from the experiences of tenants to inform the continuous improvement of housing services
- By understanding what tenants want and the problems they are facing, services can be tailored appropriately
- Identification of neighbourhood issues that need resolution
- Tenants are able to scrutinise and challenge the services we offer
- Services are delivered in a more efficient and cost effective manner
- Mutual trust, respect and understanding is developed
- The Council and its tenants become aware of each other's perspectives and any organisational or financial limitations
- Having informed and knowledgeable tenants who have the skills and confidence to influence decision.
- Tenants have the opportunities to develop new skills, knowledge and confidence that can help in other areas of their life

## Options for tenant involvement

It is recognised that not all tenants will want the same level of involvement in all areas of the housing services provided. The level of involvement that tenants are interested in may simply mean being kept informed or providing feedback about specific housing issues or they may want to have a more detailed involvement in the decision making process, as illustrated in the model below:



## Our service standard for tenant involvement

### We will...

- ◆ Publish and regularly update information on our services
- ◆ Publish an annual report detailing our performance over the previous year and a further three editions of our newsletter, Tending Reports, each year
- ◆ Consult residents on issues that affect their home, the area they live in and the services they receive and take their views into account when we make any decisions
- ◆ Carry out surveys to obtain your views on different aspects of our service and act on the results we get to drive improvements
- ◆ Make sure that equal and genuine opportunities are provided for you to become involved in the planning, delivery and monitoring of our housing services at a level and pace that suits your needs
- ◆ Provide feedback about the difference that tenant involvement has made
- ◆ Provide involved residents with relevant training to build their skills and knowledge and out of pocket expenses to support their involvement

## Current opportunities for tenant involvement

The Council currently offers a range of involvement methods so that tenants can choose to get involved at a level and pace that suits their needs and circumstances. These are illustrated below:



Further details regarding the options illustrated above can be found in Appendix B

## **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 or other reasons.

To help us do this, we have put measures 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 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.

## **Resources for tenant Involvement**

The current staffing resources available to implement this Tenant Involvement Strategy are in the Tenant Relations section of the Customer Support Team. This consists of the Customer and Support Manager, Part Time Tenant Relations Officer, Part Time Consultation and Sales Officer and Communication and Performance Assistant.

However, this function is supplemented by other staff within Life Opportunities, for example and primarily Tenancy Management Officers and Building and Maintenance Surveyors and staff within the broader Customer and Support team.

With a relatively small staffing resource, the aim of this strategy is to make the best and most efficient use of the staff resources.

To support the involvement of tenants, we provide both practical and financial help and this includes:

- dedicated budget and staff to lead on 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; and
- payment for transport and other out of pocket expenses when attending meetings with us
- access to training to make sure that tenants can be fully involved.

## Providing information

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

In view of this, 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. The logo illustrated left which was designed by members of our Panel, shows that the publication it is on has been approved by the Communication Group.

## Asking for tenants views and giving feedback

It is important that when we ask tenants for their views we do this before issues have been decided. We also need to make sure that tenants are given sufficient time to make their views known to us.

When we have asked tenants for their views, it is important that they are informed about the outcome of any consultations they have taken part in.

## Arranging meetings

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

When it has been agreed that a meeting is the best way of consulting tenants 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

## **Monitoring, evaluation and review**

We are committing to involving tenants in setting measurable targets and in monitoring and reviewing our performance against these and against this strategy as a whole. We will also ensure that our performance is published in a variety of different ways.

Performance against the key actions supporting the objectives of this strategy will be submitted for twice yearly review by members of the Tenants Panel Tenant Involvement Sub Group and annually by the Tenants Panel. Details will also be provided in the dedicated tenant involvement newsletter that is produced each year.

The Tenants Performance and Scrutiny Sub Group will be responsible for setting and local performance indicators across the whole range of housing services and for reviewing performance against these. This quantitative performance information will also be supplemented by qualitative performance information, for example through reality checks and tenant led inspections.