

Tendring
District Council



TENANT INVOLVEMENT POLICY
April 2024



Tenant Involvement Policy

Introduction

We believe that Council tenants are the experts on living in council homes and, as a landlord, we must listen, understand and work in partnership with our tenants to make sure our services are continually improving and that we provide decent homes in thriving communities.

We want our tenants to feel empowered to hold us to account and to have opportunities to become actively involved in shaping the housing service. Effective tenant engagement can bring benefits not only to our tenants but also to the Council by ensuring we develop policies and services that meet the needs and aspirations of our tenants, creating genuine opportunities for them to influence decisions, and increase levels of satisfaction.

Purpose of this policy

- Set out our commitment to tenant involvement including the reasons why we involve tenants
- Make sure that the needs of tenants are at the centre of what the housing service delivers
- To build respectful and trusting relationships between tenants and staff
- Set out our priorities in relation to tenant involvement
- Set out the ways in which we will involve tenants and ensure that they are part of our decision making and service improvement processes
- Set out how our performance will be monitored, reviewed and published
- To comply with the statutory requirements, legislation and good practice relating to tenant involvement.
- To improve our tenants understanding and satisfaction with the housing services we deliver

Aims and objectives

- To promote existing, and develop new opportunities for, tenant involvement.

We want to use our everyday interactions and tenant involvement delivery methods to ensure that all tenants and prospective tenants are aware of how they can be involved in shaping our housing services

- To improve the way we communicate with and interact with our tenants

We want to capture a range of views and make it easy for our tenants and customers to speak to us. To help us do this, we also want to improve our understanding and knowledge of the needs of individual residents to make sure that everyone is heard, listened and responded to.

- To increase the opportunities for residents to influence the service in a real and meaningful way

We want to involve and integrate tenants across the service at all levels but particularly where decisions are being made. We will also provide feedback to demonstrate how tenants have been involved in decisions making.

- To provide transparent, open and accessible information about our performance

We want to make sure that all our tenants and prospective tenants know how our housing service is performing and how they can challenge us when things are not working as they should.

Scope of Policy

This policy applies to both Tendring District Council tenants, prospective tenants and leaseholders. Any reference to tenants includes leaseholders.

Legal and regulatory context

- Housing Act 1985

This provided secure tenants of local authorities in England with a wide range of legal rights in respect of tenant involvement including the right to be consulted on matters of housing management and a right to information about housing tenancies and the allocation of homes.

- The Housing (Right to Manage) (England) Regulations 2012

The Right to Manage, first introduced in 1994, offers tenants the option to form a Tenant Management Organisation (TMO) and take over responsibility for managing housing services, such as repairs, caretaking, and rent collection from their landlord.

- Charter for Social Housing Tenants

The Government's 2020 white paper 'The Charter for Social Housing Tenants' built on the lessons learnt from the Grenfell Tower fire and this contains seven commitments that social housing tenants should expect from their landlord. These are:

- To be safe in their homes
- To know how their landlord is performing
- To have complaints dealt with fairly and promptly
- To be treated with respect
- To have their voice heard by their landlord
- To have a good quality home and neighbourhood
- To be supported to take the first steps into home ownership

➤ Social Housing Regulation Act 2023

This legislation builds upon the existing regulatory framework for housing and introduces revised standards that come into force on 1 April 2024. These standards contain specific expectations registered providers of social housing must comply with and detail the outcomes that providers are expected to achieve.

The standards and the areas they relate to are:

Safety and quality	• Stock Quality; Decency; Health and Safety; Repairs, Maintenance and Planned Improvements; Adaptations
Tenancy	• Allocations and Lettings; Tenancy sustainment and evictions; Tenure; Mutual Exchange
Neighbourhood and community	• Safety of shared spaces; Local co-operation; Anti-social behaviour and hate incidents; Domestic abuse
Transparency, Influence and Accountability	• Fairness and respect; Diverse needs; Engagement with tenants; Information about landlord services; Performance information; Complaints

This legislation also gave the regulator new powers that mean it will move from a reactive approach to consumer regulation, where it could only investigate issues when there was 'a serious detriment' to tenants for example a serious health and safety breach, to a proactive approach. This will be led by a regular programme of landlord inspections.

In relation to the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard, the required outcomes relevant to tenant involvement are that registered providers must:

- Treat tenants and prospective tenants with fairness and respect.
- Take action to deliver fair and equitable outcomes for tenants and, where relevant, prospective tenants.
- Take tenants' views into account in their decision-making about how landlord services are delivered and communicate how tenants' views have been considered.
- Communicate with tenants and provide information so tenants can use landlord services, understand what to expect from their landlord, and hold their landlord to account.
- Collect and provide information to support effective scrutiny by tenants of their landlord's performance in delivering landlord services.

➤ Housing Ombudsman

The Complaint Handling Code, first introduced by the Housing Ombudsman in 2020, becomes statutory from 1st April 2024 and provides a single, robust set of standards for complaints procedures to be accessible, fair and efficient.

In addition, a legal duty is placed on the Ombudsman to monitor compliance with the Code, regardless of whether it receives individual complaints from residents about a landlord. This means that landlords will be required to submit their self-assessment to the Housing Ombudsman each year.

What is tenant involvement?

Tenant involvement is a term used to cover many different activities within a housing service through which tenants can contribute to how the service is delivered.

Tenant involvement is about tenants taking part in the decision making process and influencing choices which affect the services, homes and communities in which they live. It is an evolving two way process of communication between tenants and their landlord.

We want to ensure that tenants are provided with a wide range of options for involvement and engagement at different levels, including both formal and informal settings in person and on line.

Benefits of tenant engagement

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

- Tenants are given an understanding of what a housing provider must consider when delivering a service
- 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

Supporting a tenant involvement culture

Tenant involvement can only be effective where landlords are committed to and have a culture of involving tenants in their decision making process and where these principles are adopted throughout the housing service.

Tenant involvement comes from and promotes a culture of mutual trust, respect and partnership between tenants and the landlord. It exists when these interests work together towards a common goal of better housing conditions and housing services.

Tenant involvement is not the responsibility of one member of staff or team, but is an expectation of all members of staff involved in the delivery of housing services.

The key elements of a successful tenant engagement culture are that:

- Tenant engagement should be a continuous process where participants share information and ideas, working towards a common understanding of problems and agreeing solutions
- Tenant involvement should be easy and accessible allowing tenants to choose their own level and type of involvement
- All participants need to have all the information available to consider issues properly and this needs to be clear, timely and accessible
- Tenants should have enough time to consider issues properly.
- The purpose and benefit of involvement is made clear to all staff involved in the delivery of housing services
- Decision-making processes should be open, clear and accountable
- Feedback should be provided to demonstrate how views have been taken into account.

Barriers to engagement

We recognise there can be barriers that prevent tenants from getting involved and it is important that we identify these barriers and consider how they can be overcome. These barriers include but are not limited to:

- Lack of skills, training and/or the confidence needed or perceived to be needed
- Understanding published information

- Time, work, family and caring constraints
- Transport, travel and other expenses

To help address these, we want to offer solutions and opportunities so that tenants find it as easy as possible to get involved. The solutions we offer include, but are not limited to:

- Providing training and support for tenants who would like to engage in any way
- Providing information in a range of formats to make sure it can be understood by all
- Making sure information is provided in a timely way, allowing tenants a reasonable and appropriate period to understand the information before commenting or giving feedback
- Arranging transport and / or covering the financial costs incurred by tenants and leaseholders in carrying out their roles
- Offering a wide range of engagement methods to suit all lifestyles
- Arranging meetings and events at times and locations, or online, which are accessible and safe for tenants
- Providing practical support for established tenants groups and other involved tenants

Options for tenant involvement

We accept that not all tenants will want the same level of involvement in all areas of the housing services we provide. 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 table below:

Informed	• Tenants are told what is happening but have no real influence. A one way flow of information.
Consulted	• Tenants are asked for their feedback on ideas and asked for their suggestions. However, the final decision remains with the Council.
Involved	• Tenants are asked to make suggestions and influence outcomes.
Influencing	• Tenants views are heard across the service and they have some influence over decision making.
Tenant led	• Tenants inform key decision making and help set priorities. At this level, tenant involvement is consistently applied throughout the service.

We will work with our tenants to develop a structure giving a range of opportunities for them to get involved as much or as little as they want.

Training for tenant engagement

For this policy to be successful it will be important that staff and tenants have the right skills and approach. This will require a comprehensive training programme to help develop the right culture within the housing service and to equip tenants with the necessary understanding of the service.

This will include:

- Induction and regular refresher training for all members of staff involved in the delivery of housing services so that they understand the benefits of tenant involvement and their role in promoting and enabling this
- Ensuring that all staff are aware of this policy and have the skills and knowledge to implement it
- Delivery of relevant courses and training to assist and enhance tenants involvement and to allow them to become more effective in their role

Resources for tenant involvement

To encourage and support tenants and leaseholders to be involved, we will:

- Reimburse reasonable travel expenses and/or provide transport to events or meetings
- Reimburse tenants and leaseholders for child and dependency care costs to enable attendance at meetings or consultation events
- Provide refreshments at meetings and other consultation event;
- Hold prize draws, where considered appropriate, for tenants and leaseholders responding to surveys
- Provide for the translation or interpretation of documents/information at meetings, where needed
- Provide grants to resident's associations that meet our recognition criteria
- Organise events across the district to reach out and engage as many tenants and leaseholders as possible
- Continue to have a designated annual budget for tenant and leaseholder involvement activities
- Provide Locally Determined Environmental Improvement budgets to tenants groups meeting our eligibility criteria

Measuring Quality and Performance

It is important that tenants hold us to account, that we do what we say we will do and our performance against the priorities set out in this policy are visible to tenants, leaseholders and other key stakeholders.

To do this we will:

- Develop an action plan to meet the aims and objectives of this policy
- Develop a set of key performance indicators to measure key aspects of this policy
- Involve tenants in the development and monitoring of our action plan and performance indicators
- Regularly report on our progress to all tenants

As part of the new regulatory regime for housing, providers are also required to collect specified data in relation to their performance known as Tenant Satisfaction Measures. Of the 22 Tenant Satisfaction Measures, 12 are perception measures that are informed by an annual tenant satisfaction survey and the ones most relevant to tenant involvement are:

- Overall satisfaction with the service provided
- Satisfaction that the landlord listens to tenant views and acts upon them
- Satisfaction that the landlord keeps tenant informed about things that matter to them
- Agreement that the landlord treats tenants fairly and with respect

We have to submit this information to the Regulator of Social Housing each year and will also publish our results on our website and in our tenant newsletter.

Complaints Procedure

The Council's Housing Complaints Policy is available to any tenant or prospective tenant who is dissatisfied with any aspect of the housing services we provide.

Further information can be obtained from the Council's Housing Complaints Policy.

Equalities Statement

The Council recognises that it delivers its housing services to communities within which there is a wide social diversity, and is committed to providing equal opportunities and valuing diversity.

We want all our tenants to have the opportunity to be involved, regardless of age, disability, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, marital status or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity status. Discrimination on the basis of any of these grounds is not acceptable.

The Council will tackle inequality, treat people with dignity and respect and continue to work to improve services for all service users

The legal framework for the Council's approach is provided by the Equality Act 2010 and specifically by the Public Sector Equality Duty, under which a public authority must work consciously to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimization and to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people with differing characteristics

Review of policy

The policy will be reviewed every two years in consultation with tenant representatives, staff, other stakeholders, including the Portfolio Holder responsible for Housing, unless there are any reasons, such as legislative or regulatory which necessitate a review prior to this.