

Draft Resident Engagement Strategy 2024-2027

Introduction

We are pleased to introduce our Resident Engagement Strategy which signifies Stevenage Borough Councils (SBC) ambition to extend beyond our successful Co-operative Neighbourhoods model and transform the way we work in partnership with our residents of social housing. We are determined to ensure that 'tenant voice' is embedded across our landlord service, that we can be held to account on our housing performance and that we keep our residents informed on what matters to them.

'More social and affordable good quality homes' is one of the five priorities in the Councils Corporate Plan **'Making Stevenage Even Better'**. We recognise that this can be better achieved by working with those who are best placed to tell us what works well for them and how we can improve.

Our Resident Engagement Strategy will evolve over time as we listen to feedback and identify emerging opportunities for residents to influence and shape our housing service. It will be brought to life by a framework of engagement that we will continue to develop in partnership with our residents by ensuring we provide a range of opportunities to interact with us in a way that suits both their time commitments and their preferences.

Jackie Hollywell, Portfolio Holder for Housing

When we refer to residents within this strategy, it represents tenants and leaseholders who live in properties owned by Stevenage Borough Council.

National Context

The publication in November 2020 of the **Social Housing White Paper - The Charter for Social Housing Residents** - set out key measures intended to deliver transformational change for residents and implement a robust regulatory framework to ensure social housing landlords could be held to account. This was in response to the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower in 2017 and other high-profile events.

The **Social Housing Regulation Act 2023** has introduced updated Regulatory Consumer Standards that came into effect on the 1st April 2024. The standards most pertinent to this strategy is the **Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard** and the **Tenant Satisfaction Measures Standard**, the required outcomes of which requires us as a landlord to;

- Treat our residents with fairness and respect.

- Consider the diverse needs of our residents and take action to deliver fair and equitable outcomes in relation to the housing and landlord services we provide.
- Engage with our residents, taking their views into account when making decisions about how landlord services are delivered.
- Communicate and provide information on what to expect from us as a landlord and how to hold us to account.
- Collect and provide performance information to support effective scrutiny.
- Ensure complaints are addressed fairly, effectively and promptly.

Some of the principles of the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard as outlined in the **Consumer Standards Code of Practice** are to;

*Give genuine consideration of tenant's views and take steps to ensure that all tenants have an equitable opportunity to be involved in influencing and scrutinising strategies, policies and services **and** to foster a strong organisational culture of fairness, courtesy and respect where tenants are listened to and that they trust their landlord.*

Local Context

As a Co-operative Council we are committed to expanding the ways in which we push boundaries to involve our residents in what matters to them. In June 2021, following a review of housing resident involvement, a report was approved by the Executive that proposed new arrangements for ensuring that tenants & residents had a range of opportunities to participate in the management of their homes and neighbourhoods.

The approach to resident engagement has been one of holistic integration with wider projects, plans and initiatives, with these being developed with community or neighbourhood engagement and the Co-operative Neighbourhoods model became the mechanism for delivering meaningful engagement opportunities and establishing better relationships with residents.

Housing or landlord related engagement and scrutiny has taken place within this wider co-operative approach often on a case-by-case basis with an emphasis on **'engaging, listening and acting'**. We did this by;

- Traditional face to face engagement.
- Pop up consultations within wards.
- Attending events to engage with Stevenage residents and find out what is important to them.
- Providing an online engagement platform.

- Utilising community projects to engage with the residents within specific wards of Stevenage.
- Co-operative Neighbourhood teams working across Stevenage wards.

Some of the key successes from this approach were;

Completed a 'Big Knock' exercise where we visited every resident's household to capture feedback on their home and neighbourhood and what matters to them. This exercise will be repeated in the Autumn of 2024.

Secured funding from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to support innovative methods of engagement which targeted over 3500 households, 24% of whom were Council tenants. Residents provided feedback on the area in which they lived and included how we tackle graffiti, enhancement of community facilities and walkway maintenance. This helped to shape neighbourhood priorities and targeted activities and residents have been kept updated through digital neighbourhood newsletters.

Housing or landlord related engagement and scrutiny has also taken place within this wider co-operative approach often on a case-by-case basis, with recent work including the development of the new Allocation Policy, Build a Better Bedwell Community Project and the Housing Repairs Improvement Project. With engagement and involvement also influencing and framing our approach to improving safety in high rise and sheltered blocks, block improvements and garden improvements in Sheltered Housing Schemes.

Given the important shifts nationally, this strategy proposes that we commit greater focus and resource to evolve and strengthen specific engagement with residents who live within our social housing to ensure their influence can be demonstrated and measured, whilst working in synergy with our Co-operative Neighbourhood model to bring communities and neighbourhoods together.

Vision

It is important to us that we build trust by sharing information, tackling the stigma of social housing and putting it right when things go wrong. Our vision for this strategy is to:



Build upon our Co-operative Neighbourhood's engagement model but at a deeper level specific to our social housing residents. This is to provide a high-quality housing service that meets the aspirations and changing needs of our residents and our wider communities.



Engage with more of our residents by knowing who they are, removing barriers and creating opportunities to feedback to us in ways that suit their needs and preferences.



Offer a wider framework of meaningful opportunities to scrutinise and influence the delivery of our housing policies and services.



Meet the Regulatory Standards and key legislation on engaging and listening to residents to provide exemplary services and safe homes and neighbourhoods.



Improve the way we communicate and interact with residents by adopting a clear communications plan and developing digital platforms that make us more accessible and responsive.

Resident Priorities

Throughout 2023/24 we conducted Tenant Satisfaction Measure (TSM) Surveys, consulted on some of the services we currently provide and took feedback from complaints and transactional surveys.

Through these mediums we have been able to identify three key themes that tell us about the experiences of our tenants and how satisfied they are with us as a landlord.

Repairs Service

Feedback from complaints and surveys suggested that our residents thought we could enhance our service by improving our communication, reducing call waiting times and improving how quickly we delivered repairs. Our work continues under our Housing Transformation Programme to deliver service review workstreams for repairs, damp and mould and voids.

What we have done...

Engaged early with residents to help shape our delivery model and a new policy for our Repairs Service.	Expanded and upskilled the Customer Service Centre to significantly reduce call waiting times.
Listened to complaints feedback and procured new contractors to deliver a fencing and roofing programme.	Developed an on-line 'booking-hub' which will be available in Summer 2024 to improve accessibility.
Engaged residents in the development of our High-Rise Building Safety Resident Engagement Strategy, to be adopted summer 2024.	Reduced complaints into the repairs service by changing how we work to improve first time fix rates, productivity and tenant satisfaction.

Complaints Handling

Residents have told us that they want us to improve how we handle complaints with quicker resolution. It is difficult to measure through TSM surveys alone whether residents are dissatisfied with the resolution or the way in which their complaints are managed so we have looked at this area in-depth to see how we can enhance our services prevent dissatisfaction in the first instance.

What we have done...

New Complaints Policy has been introduced to ensure that we are compliant with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.	Introduced a satisfaction survey to be undertaken at the time of the complaint to provide real-time feedback with how we have handled the complaint.
Introduced a Complaints Clinic to monitor our performance and identify common themes early, we have been able to introduce numerous service improvements	Procurement of a new Complaints Handling system to help us track and monitor our complaints more closely
Improved our response times to complaints and focussed on early and local resolution.	Reduced the number of complaints we are receiving due to early learning and intervention.

Resident Engagement

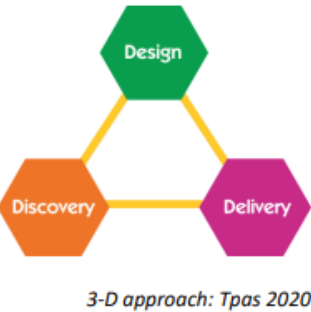
The majority of our residents feel that we treat them fairly and with respect but told us that they would like to be kept better informed in ways that suit them and that they wanted us to demonstrate that we listened and acted on what they said.

What we have done...

Engaged TPAS, the tenant engagement experts to re-view and help us re-engineer our engagement framework with residents through a process of discovery, design and delivery.	Development of a communications plan that will be consulted on by residents to keep them updated, informed and engaged.
Undertaken a review of resources to help us deliver our new Resident Engagement Strategy and implement a successful framework.	We commit to providing residents with an Annual Report and resident friendly Housing Strategy that sets out service improvement priorities based on what our

	residents have asked us to do and how we will meet regulatory requirements.
Delivered garden improvements in three sheltered schemes that were co-designed by residents.	Introduced transaction surveys for repairs, ASB, domestic abuse and complaint handling to provide real feedback at point of contact that can directly impact how we deliver services more quickly.

To expand on our engagement with TPAS, we are reviewing our existing engagement activities with both involved and non-involved tenants as well as key members of staff and Members. Our aim is to co-design a framework and delivery plan that will allow us to build on our existing capacity to deliver robust involvement opportunities that demonstrate the influence and outcomes of successful resident engagement. We would like to take this opportunity to thank both residents and colleagues who committed their time to the discovery, design and delivery of this work and for the valuable insight we have gained.



Our commitment through this strategy is to adequately resource this important area of work and in doing so, improve the perception and satisfaction of our housing service to foster a culture where residents are actively encouraged to participate and are empowered and confident to do so.

Our Commitments

Enhancing the value of resident engagement

- Create a culture where residents are actively encouraged to be involved in scrutinising and influencing the shape of services to increase satisfaction.
- Identify which groups of residents are not currently sharing their ideas and experiences with us and identify how we can encourage them to become involved.
- Provide a menu of opportunities for residents to engage with us and influence what we do and how we do it.

- Provide skills, training and resources that residents may need to get the most from engaging with us and to deliver maximum impact.
- Consult at least once every three years on the best way to involve residents in the scrutiny and governance of our housing service.
- Tell our residents what happens or changes because of their feedback, input and influence. 'You said, we did'.

More Effective Scrutiny

- Commit to formalising resident scrutiny arrangements by seeking to adopt a Scrutiny Panel.
- Train and develop residents to undertake effective scrutiny and use TPAS as an independent friend of the Scrutiny Panel to help them form their approach.
- Put in place arrangements to co-ordinate scrutiny functions between Member scrutiny and that which is resident led.
- Provide wider opportunities for 'boot camp' style scrutiny on an ad-hoc basis to develop services more quickly where we have feedback that our approach to service delivery needs residents input.
- Develop a forward plan of scrutiny that is agreed on an annual basis, and which reflects service review delivery and housing transformation workstreams.

Understanding more about our residents

- Build a clearer picture of who lives in our homes and what their needs and aspirations are for our housing service.
- Find out how our residents prefer to be contacted and the easiest ways for them to get in touch and be kept informed and use these.
- Use data capture, complaints, compliments, transactional surveys and consultation to help us better understand and use the information from tenant feedback to improve and enhance services.
- Promote equality and equal relationships within our housing service to remove barriers where they exist.
- Move beyond the mechanics of engagement to focus on the outcomes of influence and what the positive impacts of change has meant to our residents.

Improved communication

- Enhance communication to keep our tenants up to date on what matters to them, using a range of approaches tailored to tenant preferences.
- Make better use of social media and on-line methods to make it easier for residents to have their say.

- Recognise that whilst online methods will be a preference for some residents that in many cases a phone call, meeting or face to face discussion will be more helpful and appropriate.
- Publish clear information on the roles and responsibilities of senior staff, including named people who are responsible for ensuring legal and regulatory standards are met.
- Provide fair and easy access to our services and keep residents up to date on their enquiries.
- Publish clear service standards, policies and tenant information and what to do if residents do not agree with decisions.
- Engage with residents to produce to an annual report which will give details on the impact of resident engagement, how income has been spent, resident satisfaction and performance.
- Share performance data and how we are doing as a landlord, including Tenant Satisfaction Measure results and what we are doing to improve, as well as how we learn from complaints.

Celebrate our neighbourhoods

- Provide local engagement opportunities with officers to speak with tenants in their homes and neighbourhoods through tenancy and community visits and co-operative neighbourhood events.
- Work in partnership with residents, the wider community, our Councillors and other partners and community groups to set priorities for our neighbourhoods that improve and shape the areas that we live in.
- Maximise funding opportunities to deliver neighbourhood improvements and address social, economic and health inequalities, such as our 'Build a Better Bedwell' initiative.
- Create opportunities for Neighbourhood Champions, Resident Forums and Scrutiny Groups to come together to co-design services and implement tenant-led activities.
- Provide drop-in sessions at local venues for residents to meet their Co-operative Neighbourhood team on a regular basis.

'The neighbourhoods of Stevenage are places where residents are proud to live in, feel safe and well and prosper, and where communities, SBC and other organisations work together (co-operatively) to make things better.'

How will we know we have been successful?

How far we meet the expectations of the Regulatory requirements and deliver this strategy effectively will partly be measured through the new suite of Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM's).

Three of the twelve satisfaction measures relate specifically to resident engagement and include perception on whether landlords are **listening and acting** on tenants' views, **keeping tenants informed** and **treating tenants fairly and with respect**. These measures will be included within our enhanced set of housing Key Performance Indicator's (KPI's) and additional insight will be overlaid to give deeper insight on how we may improve.

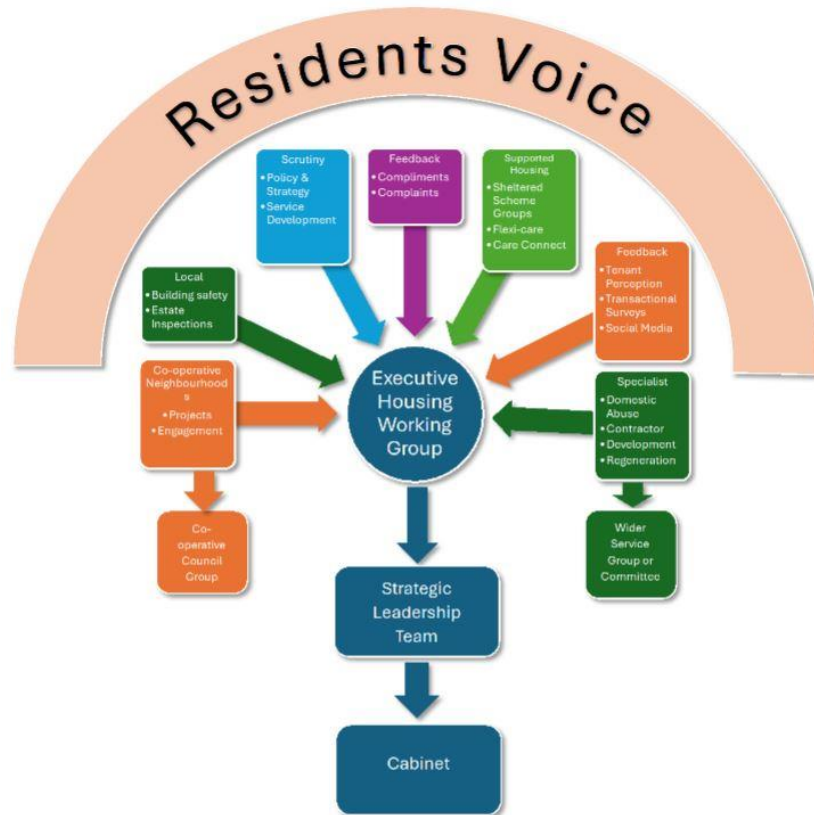
We will also measure success by tracking progress on the delivery of the specific commitments within this strategy and tracking the experience and outcomes of those involved in both formal and informal engagement mechanisms and producing an Annual Summary within our Annual Report.

Our progress will be monitored by our Executive Housing Working Group, quarterly and annual performance reports to Cabinet as well as resident scrutiny of the KPI dashboard for Housing Services.

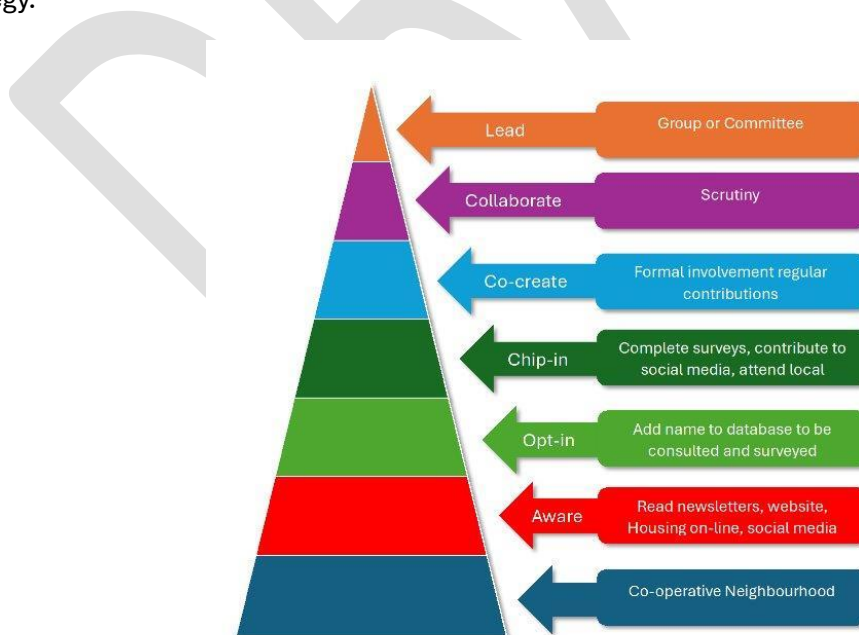
Below is an indicative set of key performance measures that we will implement and track.

Number of residents engaged in involvement activity	% satisfaction that the landlord listens to tenant views and acts upon them
Number of feedback responses received to influence and shape housing services	% satisfaction that the landlord keeps tenants informed about things that matter to them
Number of scrutiny of service reviews completed	% agreement that the landlord treats tenants with fairness and respect
Involved residents are representative of our resident profile	% residents satisfied with the neighbourhood where they live
% of residents satisfied with involvement opportunities and support	% of tenants satisfied with how their complaint was handled at stage one
% residents satisfied with the influence and impact they have been able to have	% of tenants satisfied with how their complaint was handled at stage two

Our Executive Housing Working Group is made up of the Leader, key Portfolio Holders for Housing, Environment and Performance and Resources and Transformation alongside key officers from Housing. We have developed this group to demonstrate co-regulation and to have oversight of the housing service and how it is performing. In time, we hope to include involved residents once we have adopted our framework of engagement and are working more intensively with involved resident groups.



The framework we develop with input from residents will follow the principles below and maximise engagement by providing a range of ways to influence that suit the time, preferences and interests of our residents. The framework will be flexed over time to ensure achieve the aspirations of this strategy.



Linked to Strategy

Corporate Plan – Making Stevenage Even Better 2024-2027

Co-operative Neighbourhoods model

Resident Engagement Action Plan

Framework of engagement and menu of options

Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard

Tenant Satisfaction Measures Standard

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