



South Cambridgeshire District Council

RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY

2016 - 2018



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1. Introduction

The purpose of the Council's Resident Involvement Strategy is to set out the Council's determination to provide opportunities for those residents living in Council homes to fully participate in the development and improvement of the housing service. The aim is to deliver a high quality, responsive, accessible, value for money service and this strategy will set out how we will work together with residents to achieve our joint objectives. The strategy will compliment the objectives set out in the Council's Community Engagement Strategy and Action Plan.

This strategy sets out how we currently work with residents and our future priorities for improvement and further engagement which will be monitored by reviewing and updating an action plan (appendix 1).

This document will provide a strategic overview that will inform the housing service plan and other housing strategies, documents and procedures and also wider corporate strategies.

1.1 History and context

Over the past few years there has been a movement away from external audit and inspection of services to self-regulation. In terms of resident involvement the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) started this trend in 2010 and in 2012 the Homes and Communities Agency took over this role setting out expected performance standards in their publication 'Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard' - see point 2.1 of this strategy for further details.

The wide geographical spread of Council homes in South Cambridgeshire presents special challenges that will need to be addressed. These challenges include reaching residents in remote rural locations, choosing appropriate meeting locations and engaging with groups across almost a 100 locations throughout the District. As a result, a range of opportunities need to be offered for residents so that their different views and needs can be captured.

Resident involvement is intrinsically linked to excellent customer service and will be an integral outcome for the Council in its drive towards the government's Customer Service Excellence standard. The strategy will also be driven by the Council's overall Visions, Aims and Values (see section 2).

1.2 Tenant Participation Advisory Service (Tpas)

South Cambridgeshire District Council are members of Tpas (England's leading tenant engagement experts) and in the past have commissioned health checks into the Council's resident involvement service. We continue to work with Tpas to help make service improvements including supporting tenant representatives to complete tenant led self-regulation projects. As recommended, we have also set up and run mystery shopping reviews and made more use of tenant inspectors.

1.3 Existing groups and activities

The Council has successfully supported and worked with our Tenant Participation Group (TPG) for a number of years. TPG meets monthly and is our main consultative forum. It feeds into the Council's wider democratic processes by ensuring that all reports on relevant housing services issued to the Housing Portfolio Holder and Cabinet will include the outcome of consultation with TPG and their recommendations. The Chair and Vice Chair of TPG attend Housing Portfolio Holder meetings.

Membership of our TPG is made up of 15 democratically elected members with re-elections taking place every five years (next due in 2019). Other resident led forums such as the Leaseholder Forum and Sheltered Housing Forum nominate representatives on to TPG.

2. Our Vision and Values

Our Vision for Housing –

To be the best housing service by providing good quality housing across all tenures that is accessible to all – that enhances residents' quality of life and their health and wellbeing. Our aim is also to support economic growth and social opportunities, alongside improved energy security and the reduction of our carbon footprint.

By promoting resident involvement we will be helping to ensure that the views of our customers are embedded in our vision for the housing service in the future.

The development of the strategy and its related action plan seek to deliver against our Corporate aims of:

- **Living Well** - Support our Communities to remain in good health whilst protecting the natural and built environment
- **Homes for our future** - Secure the delivery of a wide range of housing to meet the needs of existing and future communities
- **Connected Communities** – Work with partners to ensure new transport and digital infrastructure supports and strengthens communities and that our approach to growth sustains prosperity
- **An Innovative and Dynamic Organisation** – adopting a more commercial and business-like approach to ensure we can continue to deliver the best possible services at the lowest possible cost

3. Home and Communities Agency (HCA) – the regulator

3.1 HCA and regulation requirements

Regulatory standards contain the outcomes that providers are expected to achieve and the specific expectations of the HCA as regulator. The standards are classified as either 'economic' or 'consumer'.

Economic standards apply to all registered providers **except local authorities** and cover Governance and Financial viability, Value for Money and Rent.

Consumer Standards apply to all registered providers including local authorities. The HCA set consumer standards so that tenants, landlords and stakeholders know the outcomes that are expected. This is crucial if tenants are to be able to hold landlords to account effectively. These standards therefore support co-regulation and where necessary reflect directions issued to the Regulator by the Government.

The Localism Act 2011 specifies the regulator's role in, and approach to, regulating the consumer standards. Providers' boards and councillors are responsible for ensuring their organisation meets the consumer standards. The HCA's role is limited to setting the consumer standards and intervening only where failure of the standard could lead to risk of serious harm to tenants (the serious detriment test) as described in chapter five of the Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England from April 2012.

The four consumer standards are:

- Tenant Involvement and Empowerment
- Home
- Tenancy
- Neighbourhood and Community

These standards are set out in detail in The regulatory framework for social housing in England April 2012.

3.2 Tenant and Involvement and Empowerment Standard

3.2.1 Required Outcomes: Customer service, choice and complaints

Registered providers shall:

- Provide choices, information and communication that is appropriate to the diverse needs of their tenants in the delivery of all standards
- Have an approach to complaints that is clear, simple and accessible that ensures that complaints are resolved promptly, politely and fairly.

Involvement and empowerment

Registered providers shall ensure that the tenants are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in:

- The formulation of their landlord's housing related policies and strategic priorities
- The making of decisions about how housing related services are delivered, including the setting of service standards
- The scrutiny of their landlord's performance and the making of recommendations to their landlord about how performance might be improved
- The management of their homes , where applicable
- The management of repair and maintenance services, such as commissioning and undertaking a range of repair tasks, as agreed with landlords, and the sharing in savings made, and
- Agreeing local offers for service delivery.

Understanding and responding to the diverse needs of tenants

Registered providers shall:

- Treat all tenants with fairness and respect
- Demonstrate that they understand the different needs of their tenants, including in relation to the equality strands and tenants with additional support needs.

3.2.2 Specific expectations

Customer service, choice and complaints

Registered providers shall provide tenants with accessible, relevant and timely information about:

- How tenants can access services
- The standard of housing services their tenants can expect
- How they are performing against those standards
- The service choices available to tenants, including any additional costs that are relevant to specific choices
- Progress of any repairs work
- How tenants can communicate with them and provide feedback
- The responsibilities of the tenant and provider
- Arrangements for tenant involvement and scrutiny.

Providers shall offer a range of ways for tenants to express a complaint and set out clear service standards for responding to complaints, including complaints about performance against the standards and details of what to do if they are unhappy with the outcome of a complaint. Providers shall inform tenants how they use complaints to improve their services. Registered providers shall publish information about complaints each year, including their number and nature and the outcome of the complaint. Providers shall accept complaints made by advocates authorised to act on a tenants' behalf.

Involvement and empowerment

- Registered providers shall support their tenants to develop and implement opportunities for involvement and empowerment, including by:
 - Supporting their tenants to exercise the Right to Manage or otherwise exercise housing management functions, where appropriate
 - Supporting the formation and activities of tenant panels or equivalent groups and responding in a constructive and timely manner to them
 - The provision of timely and relevant performance information to support effective scrutiny by tenants of their landlord's performance in a form which registered providers seek to agree with their tenants. Such provision must include the publication of an annual report which should include information on repair and maintenance budgets, and
 - Providing support to tenants to build their capacity to be more effectively involved.

- Registered providers shall consult with tenants on the scope of local offers for service delivery. This shall include how performance will be monitored, reported to and scrutinised by tenants and arrangements for reviewing these on a periodic basis.
- Registered providers shall consult with tenants, setting out clearly the costs and benefits of relevant options, if they are proposing to change their landlord or when proposing a significant change in their management arrangements.
- Registered providers shall consult tenants at least once every three years on the best way of involving tenants in the governance and scrutiny of the organisation's housing management service.

Understanding and responding to diverse needs

- Registered providers shall demonstrate how they respond to tenants' needs in the way they provide services and communicate with tenants.

3.3 Objectives. The overarching objectives of this strategy are to:

- Reach a wider resident profile
- Ensure that resident involvement activities have clear service improvements objectives
- Measure the impact of resident involvement
- Evaluate and improve value for money of all resident involvement activities.
- Improve satisfaction rates specifically those measuring where tenants views are taken into account, and also the opportunities to be involved

3.4 Commitments. Key Resident Involvement commitments are:

- To offer a wider range of opportunities for residents to get involved, and identify ways for these activities to take place at a local/village level.
- To ensure that all teams in Affordable Homes providing core landlord services will develop plans for involving residents in developing and improving their services e.g. housing and income management, maintenance and asset management.
- That teams will demonstrate how resident feedback has been used to improve their services.
- To ensure that there is an open and transparent process for accessing opportunities for getting involved.
- To provide support and training to improve access and take-up of opportunities.
- To develop flexibility across areas and services, as a 'one size fits all' approach will not meet the needs of all our residents. The approach will vary for different residents e.g. general needs, supported housing, and leaseholders.

3.5 Promotion of opportunities. We will provide a comprehensive and varied range of opportunities to get involved and where needed will target specific groups, especially those underrepresented areas.

We will:

- Offer a menu of opportunities, based on a ladder of involvement
- Develop a database of residents interested in involvement

Menu of Opportunities currently in Use:

- Tenant Participation Group (TPG)
- Leaseholder forum
- Sheltered Housing forum
- Village Voices
- Tenant Inspectors including Estate Inspections
- Mystery Shopping
- Resident Training opportunities
- Resident led scrutiny reviews
- Conferences and seminars
- Satisfaction surveys
- Focus groups
- Housing portfolio holder meetings
- Heads of Service with TPG Officer meetings
- Tenant and Leaseholder News editorial panel
- Representation at Repairs and Grounds Maintenance contract review meetings
- Annual report to tenants
- Open days
- Housing management and benefits local surgeries
- Website/social media/Email TPG members
- Capital works priority input
- Complaints, compliments, suggestions

Ladder of Involvement: As well as offering a variety of ways in which customers can get involved, we will offer a variety of levels of involvement because we understand that different customers can commit different amounts of time. So by referring to the menu residents can chose an option or a combination of options according to what best suits their needs.

By offering a wide range of opportunities and ensuring that residents are provided with appropriate levels of support we are increasing the degree of control that residents have to influence our services.

Our organisational goal is to operate and maintain substantial levels of participation as shown in David Wilcox ladder of Involvement (see below)



4. Future priorities

4.1 Successful delivery of the Resident Involvement Strategy

Our approach to involving residents is informed by resident feedback, research, best practice in the sector and government policy.

We will continuously review our action plan ensuring that we provide an excellent service that is focused on making a difference and adding value for our customers.

In line with current government thinking and devolution proposals, we will be working more closely with neighboring housing providers to help ensure we are providing best value for our services in partnership with our residents.

4.2 Evaluating the impact of resident involvement

To ensure that resident involvement activities are making a difference and the Council responds in terms of service development and enhancements, it will be necessary to evaluate the impact; therefore we will review involvement activities for:

- Effectiveness: has the activity achieved the objectives set by residents and the Council?
- Popularity: were residents attracted by the activity? Were there specific groups of residents that engaged or did not engage in the opportunity?
- Access and Diversity: was it easy to get to? Did it reach the people it needed to reach? Did we get a good cross-section of people getting involved?
- Value for money: was the output, such as suggested improvements, savings or reprioritised spending, worth the input, including funding, residents' time, staffing and other resources?

To assist in measuring the impact we will:

- Engage residents in collecting information about the impact of their involvement.
- Survey residents on satisfaction with their involvement and also on their satisfaction with the services we provide.
- Benchmark our performance against other landlords.
- The Tenant Participation Group (TPG) to act as a scrutiny body to help us evaluate what works well and identify weaknesses.
- The TPG will also monitor the progress of this strategy and the associated action plan.
- Use the resident feedback to continuously improve services and to achieve consistently high levels of customer satisfaction.
- Use resident feedback to help us shape and tailor services so that they are efficient and effective and help us achieve upper quartile performance in all service areas.
- Aim to continuously improve service standards so that residents receive an excellent service and involve residents in setting challenging targets for improvement.

5. Consultation and monitoring performance

5.1 How we consulted

We held a focus group meeting comprising TPG members and staff to consider priorities to be included in this strategy. A draft strategy was then considered by TPG members prior to being put forward to the Council for adoption.

5.2 How we will monitor performance

The Council will deliver the strategy by carrying out the actions and activities set out in the action plan at appendix 1 which will be monitored by the Tenant Participation Group and Housing Portfolio Holder.

5.3 RI vision to have:

- Clear aims and objectives – All involvement activities will have clear aims, objectives and outcomes to ensure that residents feel empowered in an honest and open environment.
- A wide range of resident centred activities are available creating opportunities for meaningful engagement.
- Provide regular feedback to residents informing them how their influence has changed and improved services.
- An action plan that is robust and challenging and evolves to take into account new initiatives and good practice.

5.4 How we will resource the Resident Involvement Strategy

The Council supports a small team of RI staff namely:

- Resident Involvement Team Leader (full time permanent post) – covering policy and strategy and ensuring compliance with HCA standards
- Resident Involvement Officer (full time permanent post) – covering day to day RI work such as supporting TPG, forums, training, village voices, tenant inspectors, scrutiny project support and promoting RI across the organisation.
- Resident Involvement Project Support Officer (full time temporary contract) - covering project work such as digital role out and newsletters/promotional events.

6. Contacts

If you require any further information about the Resident Involvement Strategy please contact the Housing Strategic Team on 01954 713037 or email peter.moston@scambs.gov.uk