Housing Services

Tenant Involvement Strategy
Gravesham Borough Council
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Tenant Involvement Strategy

Why
We recognise that the best way to deliver a service that tenants and leaseholders want is to work with and listen to our tenants. To show our continued commitment to this goal and facilitate more opportunities for this to happen, we have updated our Tenant Involvement Strategy.

Who
Gravesham Borough Council are a stock-holding public authority and our tenants are those people holding a tenancy for one of our accommodation units. Our leaseholders are people who own property which has previously been purchased from the council and is often found alongside, or in the same block as, our tenanted property. For the purposes of this strategy, the leaseholders are considered as equally as we do our tenants.

What
Tenant involvement occurs when a social landlord and other relevant bodies, share ideas and decision making with tenants on areas such as how their homes and local environment are managed, what services and improvements are needed, what priorities should be afforded and how we work together to achieve these.

When
At every interaction with tenants and leaseholders, we show a staff wide commitment to involving tenants and leaseholders and ensure that involvement is part of everyone’s job. We do this through staff job descriptions, the induction process for new staff and through team briefings, discussions at staff one to one meetings and appraisal interviews.

Every member of staff has training in tenant and leaseholder involvement and they are signed up to this strategy. Staff are encouraged to be creative and imaginative in the ways that they involve tenants and leaseholders and are regularly updated on tenant and leaseholder involvement successes.
**How**

We value the contribution of tenants in helping improve services so we provide opportunities, support and training for tenants to be involved in as many ways as possible and in the most suitable manner they choose to be involved. Whether that be through the formal engagement activities, informal activities or direct approach, we will listen, advise and support wherever possible, the ideas and development of positive community engagement;

We operate a dedicated tenants and leaseholders involvement team, which oversees the delivery of this strategy and our approach to involvement;

We spread good news stories about successful involvement, which in turn will encourage others to want to become involved;

We offer tenants and leaseholders genuine opportunities to scrutinise and challenge our performance against standards; and

We evaluate the impact of tenants and leaseholders involvement, both to the business and to tenants and leaseholders, in terms of value for money and other benefits.

We provide a dedicated annual budget for involvement, spent on the following :-

- Grants to tenants, leaseholders and residents groups;
- Training for tenants and leaseholders;
- Attendance for tenants and leaseholders at conferences;
- Publicity;
- Travel for staff, tenants and leaseholders to attend meetings, conferences and training; and where appropriate,
- Childcare costs to enable for tenants and leaseholders attendance at involvement activities.

We operate a process entitled ‘The Peoples’ Bank’, through which tenants and leaseholders can choose how much and by which methods they want to be involved. From this directory of tenants and leaseholders, we can invite tenants to contribute to specific processes, such as individual housing policies, operationally specific or process specific focus groups and wider consultation processes;

We annually publish a Local Offers booklet and an Annual Report to Tenants, both of which have been agreed with tenants representatives in order to show our accountability;

We publish at least two tenants’ newsletters per year and we welcome articles and photographs from tenants which we can include in the newsletters and through our publications, we aim to spread good news stories about successful involvement, which in turn will encourage others to get involved;

We hold an annual Tenants Conference to which all tenants and leaseholders are invited;
We carry out an Annual Review of how we have worked with tenants and leaseholders in order to see what, if and where we could do better; We endeavour to communicate effectively with tenants and leaseholders, through the internet, in print, using social media and at quarterly forums; We provide resources to support the above and to receive communications in many formats from our tenants and leaseholders in order that their opinions and suggestions can be considered.

We anticipate that the outcome of this approach is for us to better understand and meet tenant and leaseholder needs at an individual and a local level. We will be better able to raise standards, improve our stock and our services and deliver high levels of customer satisfaction through listening to tenants and leaseholders' views. We work together to create safe and secure neighbourhoods where people want to live and where people respect each other. We encourage tenants and leaseholders to work with their neighbours to develop communities which they can be proud of.

We ensure tenants and leaseholders have a wide range of opportunities to be involved;
We encourage tenants and leaseholders to become involved with the decision making processes;
We invite tenants and leaseholders to scrutinise our policies, standards, delivery and complaints;
We support tenants and leaseholders to enable them to carry out these roles.

Communications

**Estate Inspections**

Our Housing Management staff are assigned specific areas of the borough. We produce a programme of estate inspection visits and at which we invite tenants and leaseholders to accompany the officers and other staff around their estate, identifying problems and monitoring the service. We also support tenants and leaseholders to carry out their own inspections and will act on problems they identify that need following up.

We will publish details through the formal structure of tenant representation, as well as upon individual request, and aim to feed back on the outcomes of inspections in a way that suits the tenants in that area. Estate Inspections are an important tool in ensuring estates are well maintained, in identifying improvements tenants and leaseholders want to see and to give an opportunity for tenants and leaseholders to interact with Housing Officers to discuss potential problems and the most suitable ways to overcome these.
**Information processes**

The council has many forms and frequencies of media which it uses to circulate information to tenants and leaseholders;
Annual Tenants Conference – held at the Civic Centre;
At least 2 newsletters per year;
Local Offers and Annual Report produced annually;
Website continually updated;
Quarterly reports at AHSF, Leaseholders Forum and Sheltered Housing Forum;
Facebook and Twitter feeds;
Attendance at Community Involvement days.

**Encouragement**

**Community groups**

We support local groups, Tenants and Residents Associations, Area and Street representatives, who all help to bring the community together.
We will promote this through helping and supporting the set up and running of Tenants and Residents Associations and we encourage them to represent the views of their communities and make a difference in their areas. We will offer support and advice for community events, whether facilitated by the council or by the community itself.
Block and Street Representatives also represent the views of tenants and leaseholders living in small defined areas. We will help and support this process if tenants, leaseholders and residents prefer this to the more formal and constituted Resident Association route of involvement.

**Communities of interest – for example Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups, Sheltered Housing Forum**

We recognise that different groups and communities may wish to become involved in different ways and we are committed to developing imaginative and wide-ranging involvement opportunities that encourage under-represented groups to work with us.

**Specific service groups – for example The Leaseholder Forum**

We are committed to shaping service improvements based on the experience of our tenants and leaseholders. Where other groups would be interested in coming together to discuss aspects of service provision, such as repairs or estate management, we are also open to encouraging dialogue with tenants and leaseholders who have a common interest.
Equal Opportunities

- All of our guidance documentation, strategies, policies and public information documents, will be subject to our Equalities Impact Assessment process in order that no customer will be discriminated against, harassed or receive less favourable treatment on the grounds of age, gender reassignment, disability, marital status, pregnancy and maternity, race, religious or political beliefs, sex or sexual orientation.

Diversity

- We are committed to ensuring that no individual or group faces barriers to becoming involved or discriminated against.
- We recognise that some tenants and leaseholders will choose not to get involved, which we accept and respect, providing that we have afforded them the opportunity to be involved if they were to so choose.
- We know that some groups are under-represented and we will continue to look for new and appropriate ways of encouraging their involvement.
- We will use the feedback provided to us to ensure that the information and guidance that we produce will be made available in different formats, in different media, in different languages and from as many sources as is practical for the subject.

Involvement Opportunities

- We will continue to look for new and different involvement opportunities, whether at low, medium or high involvement level.
- Low level opportunities to be encouraged include surveys, Mystery Shopping exercises, Housing Officer estate inspections, Resident Involvement events and Community Involvement events, including the annual Tenants Conference. The People’s Bank can be included in this group depending upon the level of involvement that an individual has offered.
- Medium level opportunities to be involved can include Local Project Groups, Resident Associations, Focus Groups, Estate Champions, Block and/or Street Representatives and The People’s Bank
- High level opportunities to be involved are mainly through the Area Housing Forum, The Leaseholder Forum and the Sheltered Housing Forum.
- We encourage the involvement of anyone representing the interests of their community to attend the Area Housing Forum as non-voting member. Similarly, local ward councillors and other social housing providers will be encouraged to attend the meetings.
Development

- We will support residents’ groups and individuals to apply for grants that are available for community activities and projects, increasing the range and scale of improvements they are able to make in their communities.
- Applying for grants can be complicated and time consuming but we are committed to developing skills of our staff, tenants and leaseholders to make the most of the opportunities available.

Review

- All of the involvement activities will continue to be reviewed ‘in process’ and where appropriate, changes and alternatives will be effected at the most relevant time. An annual overview will be given to provide a summary of the activities and achievements of the tenant involvement process during the previous 12 months.
- Where possible, we will regularly monitor and benchmark our services against other housing providers, both locally and nationally.
- Our key goal is for the involvement processes to be effective and as a tool to measure this, we will research from a representative sample of all of our tenants and leaseholders.

Performance Development Review Panel

- Some social landlords use a Performance Development Review Panel which consists of a panel of members from all involved groups including Officers and Councillors, which is set up to review, develop and monitor involvement. The panel may also be responsible for monitoring performance and setting local targets, including the annual Local Offers document, for monitoring day to day management and be involved in mystery shopping exercises and inspections.
- Gravesham doesn’t currently have a group with this focus on performance, however, our minds are not closed to the possibility of setting up such a group and processes, with explicit Terms of Reference for the areas of performance that will be reviewed.
Resources

- The Tenant Participation Team consists of two full time Tenant Participation Officers (TPO), who work closely with tenants and leaseholders. They also communicate in a cross cutting manner with other Housing Services sections, both to enable involvement and to provide and signpost support and advice available to tenants and leaseholders. The role is mostly proactive and as such, requires working within the community to be effective.

- The TPOs are supported by a full time Tenant Participation Support Assistant (TPSA), who provides administrative services, including fielding telephone calls and managing post. The generation of the content for paper or electronic communications (such as surveys and questionnaires) will primarily be the responsibility of the TPOs, the TPSA will develop these processes and carry out the administration necessary to distribute, respond to enquiries upon and collate the process on behalf of the TPOs. The TPSA will also administer the Living + Learning tenant training programme.

- The TPSA is responsible for the administration of the computerised Tenant Involvement system, both in updating the system and generating the outputs required by the TPOs and also for the collation of statistical information, either for internal processes, Government agencies or for benchmarking processes.

- The Tenant Participation Team works closely with the Service Improvement Team, sharing the assistant resource as necessary in order that cover is provided during absences, which necessitates a multi-functional approach to the fulfilment of the post.
Structure

Assistant Director – Housing and Regeneration

Service Improvement & Tenant Involvement Manager

TP Officer  TP Officer  Administrative Officer

TP Support Assistant (F/T)
Tenant Participation Process

Gravesham Borough Council tenants and leaseholders

**Formal involvement**

- Borough Executive Forum (elected) meeting quarterly
- Area Housing Services Forum (elected) meeting quarterly
- Specialist group forums such as Leaseholder and Sheltered Housing forums
- Resident Associations meetings at a minimum of quarterly for elected members
- Consultation Process initiated by GBC
- Living + Learning tenants and leaseholders training program
- Annual Tenants Conference facilitated by GBC

**Informal involvement**

- Performance Development Review Panel: Potential sub-group made up from members of all groups and responsible for monitoring performance and setting local targets
- Local Project Groups
- Block/Street representatives
- Local fun days/community events
- Focus Groups

**Key To Symbols**

- Outputs from council generated events
- Inputs to council generated events
- Community generated inputs
- Relationship not yet established
Tenant Participation Performance Indicators

In order to monitor both the progress and the effectiveness of GBC’s Tenant Participation processes, the establishment of performance indicators has been necessary. In line with other landlords within the social housing sector, the following monitoring criteria will be collated quarterly.

They will be reported, along with other performance indicators at the Area Housing Services Meetings, within the Housing Services publications and on the council’s website.

They will also be shared with the other providers for benchmarking purposes, which affords a comparison with other providers as to how effective GBC processes are in involving tenants and leaseholders.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator Reference</th>
<th>Description of Indicator</th>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MI 06 (NI160)</td>
<td>Percentage of tenants satisfied with the landlord's services overall</td>
<td>How many tenants &amp; leaseholders questioned are satisfied with the council’s services as a landlord</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>quarterly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP 01</td>
<td>To increase the number of tenants &amp; leaseholders who acknowledge that their views are being taken into account</td>
<td>How many tenants &amp; leaseholders are satisfied that their views are being taken into account</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>quarterly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP 02</td>
<td>To identify how many tenants &amp; leaseholders are happy that the council is providing sufficient methods and opportunities for them to be involved, even if they choose not to be</td>
<td>How many tenants &amp; leaseholders are satisfied with the opportunities for involvement</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>quarterly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP 03</td>
<td>To increase the number of tenants &amp; leaseholders engaging with Housing Services</td>
<td>How many tenants &amp; leaseholders have been engaged in some form of involvement</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>quarterly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP 04</td>
<td>To identify how many tenants &amp; leaseholders are happy that the council is providing sufficient training and support for them to be involved</td>
<td>How many tenants &amp; leaseholders are satisfied with the training and support available to them to become involved</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>quarterly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP 05</td>
<td>To ensure that tenants &amp; leaseholders feel that the council is distributing appropriate and timely information on involvement activities</td>
<td>How many tenants &amp; leaseholders are satisfied that they are kept informed on involvement activities in time to be involved themselves</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>annually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP 06</td>
<td>To identify tenants and leaseholders who are involved with community processes that interact with the council’s Housing Service outside of the formal structures that we offer</td>
<td>How many tenants &amp; leaseholders are involved through representative groups that are not registered as a formal group (e.g. Resident Association)</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>annually</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>