

Tenant Engagement Policy for Procurement

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1. Introduction

This policy sets out how Gravesham Borough Council will embed meaningful, consistent, and measurable tenant engagement throughout all procurement activity relating to housing services, including repairs and maintenance, planned works, estate services, building safety and compliance, digital tools, and service contracts.

It aligns with:

- Good practice guidance from the Tpas/ Echelon Tenant Engagement Procurement Toolkit
- Procurement Act 2023 (transparency, social value, competitive flexible procurement.
- Gravesham Borough Council Procurement Strategy (add in)
- Gravesham Borough Council's commitments to tenant voice, service improvement and accountability under the Consumer Standards Framework.

2. Policy Scope and Objectives

To ensure every procurement decision reflects the lived experience, priorities, and needs of Gravesham tenants, the council will embed tenant insight at every stage of the process (where possible), from early scoping and options appraisal through to evaluation, contractor selection and ongoing contract management. Tenants' first-hand experiences of repairs, communication, accessibility, and service quality provide essential intelligence that data alone cannot capture, helping to highlight gaps, inefficiencies, and unmet needs.

By placing tenants at the centre of service design, question development, evaluation panels and post-award scrutiny, the council ensures that new contracts are shaped around what matters most to them, leading to services that are more responsive, equitable, and aligned to real-life expectations.

The objectives of the policy:

- Embed the tenant voice in all procurement stages—design, scoping, evaluation, and contract management.
- Improve service outcomes by ensuring contracts are genuinely shaped around tenant need.
- Build trust, transparency, and accountability between GBC, contractors, and tenants.
- Deliver better value for money, informed by real-world insight into service performance.
- Ensure inclusive participation, removing barriers for underrepresented or digitally excluded tenants.

While GBC is committed to embedding tenant engagement throughout the procurement process, there will be occasions where full involvement in every stage is not feasible. This may be due to statutory timescales, emergency procurement requirements, the specialist or highly technical nature of certain contracts, or situations where tenant participation could compromise confidentiality, commercial sensitivity, or the integrity of the procurement process. In such circumstances, GBC will clearly document the reasons engagement cannot take place, ensure that the decision is proportionate, and seek alternative ways of incorporating tenant insight such as drawing on existing feedback, complaints data, or previous engagement findings to maintain alignment with tenant priorities wherever possible.

However, these exceptions will remain limited and carefully managed. The council will continue to apply the principles of transparency, inclusivity, and accountability by involving tenants at all

other appropriate stages of the process and by communicating openly about any steps that cannot be fully followed. Where full engagement cannot be delivered, GBC will explain what adaptations have been made, how tenant views have still been considered, and what opportunities will be available for tenants to contribute during later stages, such as contract mobilisation, monitoring, or scrutiny. This approach ensures that the spirit and intent of the strategy are upheld, even when practical constraints prevent complete adherence to every engagement step.

3. Principles of Engagement

Gravesham Borough Council is committed to embedding meaningful, consistent, and accessible tenant involvement across all housing-related procurement activity. To achieve this, the council will adopt the core engagement principles set out within the Tpas/Echelon Effective Tenant Engagement Procurement Toolkit.

Early involvement

GBC will involve tenants at the earliest possible stage, before procurement formally begins, so their lived experience directly informs the options appraisal, service review, and development of procurement requirements. Early engagement workshops, such as “visions and values” sessions recommended in the toolkit, enable tenants to identify what works well, highlight current frustrations, and set aspirations for future services, ensuring tenant priorities shape the foundations of each procurement exercise.

Accessibility and inclusivity

The council will use multiple engagement approaches to ensure that all tenants, regardless of age, background, capability, language, or digital access can participate meaningfully. The toolkit emphasises using a blend of methods including surveys, digital platforms, existing engagement groups, ad-hoc community events, and face-to-face or virtual workshops, with additional support such as large-print materials, transport to meetings, and sessions at varied times to maximise participation. This ensures a diverse and representative range of voices shapes procurement decisions.

Training and Support

Recognising that procurement can be complex and technical, GBC will provide structured training for all tenants involved in procurement activity. The toolkit highlights the need for equipping tenants with knowledge of the procurement process, scoring criteria, contractor expectations, and how to evaluate evidence objectively. Ongoing support such as plain-English explanations, jargon-free documentation, and refresher sessions will ensure tenants feel confident and empowered to contribute fully.

Transparency

GBC will maintain open and honest communication throughout each procurement exercise, explaining how tenant feedback has shaped service scopes, specifications, evaluation questions, and contractor selection. The toolkit stresses the importance of transparency in building trust and demonstrating that tenant contributions lead to tangible outcomes, supported through methods such as “You said, we did” updates and clear reporting of how tenant views influenced key decisions.

Ongoing engagement

Tenant involvement will not end at contract award. In line with toolkit recommendations, GBC will maintain ongoing engagement through tenant-led scrutiny panels, performance review meetings, forums, and mystery shopping programmes to ensure contractors continue to deliver services that meet tenant expectations throughout the life of the contract. This continuous loop

of feedback, monitoring, and improvement ensures the tenant voice remains central to service delivery, performance management, and future procurement cycles.

4. Stage 1: Engagement Model Across the Procurement Lifecycle

The first stage of the procurement cycle focuses on building a clear, evidence-based understanding of what tenants need, expect, and experience from current services. In line with the Tpas/Echelon Tenant Engagement Procurement Toolkit, Gravesham Borough Council will ensure that tenants are actively involved before any formal procurement process begins, enabling their insight to shape the direction, scope, and priorities of the new contract from the outset.

This early involvement ensures that decisions are grounded in lived experience rather than assumptions, and it allows the council to identify service gaps and improvement opportunities at the earliest stage.

Visions & Values Workshops

GBC will hold structured “visions and values” workshops with tenants, a method recommended within the toolkit, to explore the realities of the current service and gather insights across three key themes:

- What works well now – capturing strengths, good experiences, and areas that should be protected and carried forward.
- What isn't working – identifying recurring frustrations, unmet needs, inefficiencies, or failures seen in day-to-day service delivery.
- Aspirations for the new contract – exploring tenant expectations for improvement, service standards, communication, and customer experience in a future service model.

These sessions will be inclusive and accessible, allowing tenants to contribute through group discussions, facilitated activities, and evidence-sharing. Outputs from these workshops will directly shape the initial procurement strategy and service design.

Additional Inputs and Evidence Sources

- To build a well-rounded, data-rich picture of service performance, tenant involvement will be supported by multiple evidence sources. These reflect toolkit recommendations to incorporate a broad range of engagement channels and real-world insights:
- Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs): Offering quantitative insight into performance trends and satisfaction levels.
- Complaints and Compliments: Providing real examples of both positive outcomes and recurring service failures.
- Mystery Shopping Exercises: Allowing tenants to test real service pathways, such as repairs reporting and communications, and highlight gaps between policy and practice.
- Existing Tenant Groups and Estate-Based Forums: Ensuring the voices of engaged tenants and local communities are incorporated into the early service review.
- Together, these inputs ensure that early market engagement is grounded in tenant experience, robust service intelligence, and a wide cross-section of community perspectives.

Outputs of Stage 1

The insights gathered at this stage form the foundation for developing a future-proofed, tenant-centred procurement approach. Expected outputs include:

- Tenant-defined priorities: Clear statements of what matters most to tenants, such as communication, reliability, first-time fixes, or respect for the home.

- Service gaps identified: Evidence-based understanding of weaknesses in current service delivery, enabling targeted improvements.
- Baseline expectations for the new specification: Early agreement on the essential standards, behaviours, performance expectations, and customer experience requirements that the new contract must deliver.

These outputs will be formally documented and used to shape the service specification, procurement route, evaluation framework, and overall design of the new contract, ensuring that tenant voice is embedded from the very beginning.

5. Stage 2: Scoping the Service

Following the options appraisal and early engagement activities, Stage 2 focuses on translating tenant insight into a clear and deliverable service scope.

The Tpas/Echelon toolkit emphasises that tenants, as the daily users of housing services, play a critical role in identifying operational realities, gaps between policy and practice, and practical improvements that can be built into the new service model.

Gravesham Borough Council will therefore place tenants at the centre of the scoping stage to ensure the resulting service design genuinely reflects their needs, expectations, and lived experience.

Using Tenant Insight to Shape the Scope

During this stage, GBC will bring together all the evidence gathered from workshops, tenant forums, TSM data, complaints, and mystery shopping to inform a structured review of the current service. Tenants' real-world experiences are especially valuable because they highlight issues not always visible through performance dashboards, such as communication failures, operatives' behaviour, or barriers faced by vulnerable residents.

Theme-Based Scoping Workshops

To support co-design at this stage, GBC will run scoping workshops where tenants work alongside officers to identify key priorities and define what the new service must deliver. These sessions may include:

- Mapping the current customer journey and identifying pain points.
- Defining what “a good service” looks like from the tenant perspective.
- Reviewing complaints trends and recurring issues to inform performance standards.
- Identifying improvements to communication, accessibility and vulnerability support.

These activities ensure the scope is shaped around tenant expectations and real service performance, rather than solely contractual or technical considerations.

Developing Scope Principles Based on Tenant Outcomes

Rather than starting with technical processes, GBC will begin with tenant-driven outcomes, such as:

- timely, reliable repairs
- effective communication
- respectful and safe interactions
- accessible services
- consistent, high-quality workmanship

Once outcomes are agreed, the scope will then be developed backwards to define the operational requirements, performance measures, and contractor responsibilities needed to achieve them, as recommended in the toolkit's approach to outcome-based design.

Outputs of Stage 2

By the end of this stage, GBC will have:

- A tenant-informed service scope that sets out what the new contract must deliver.
- A clear understanding of service priorities and standards, grounded in lived experience.
- A list of tenant-identified improvements, feeding directly into the specification.
- A foundation for drafting the procurement specifications, quality questions, and KPI framework.

6. Stage 3- Specification Review

The specification is one of the most critical elements of any procurement process, as it defines exactly what the council expects contractors to deliver.

According to the Tpas/Echelon Tenant Engagement Procurement Toolkit, tenant involvement at this stage is essential to ensure the specification is realistic, aligned with lived experience, and focused on outcomes that genuinely matter to residents.

Gravesham Borough Council (GBC) will therefore involve tenants in reviewing and shaping the draft specification to ensure it is accessible, comprehensive, and grounded in day-to-day service realities.

Ensuring the Specification is Accessible and Understandable

Specifications particularly for repairs, maintenance, and compliance services are often highly technical and lengthy.

To support this, GBC will:

- Create tenant-friendly summaries of each section.
- Remove unnecessary jargon and replace technical terms with clear explanations.
- Use visual aids such as process maps or customer journeys where helpful.
- Provide officers or facilitators to guide tenants through content and answer questions.

Tenants will take part in focused review sessions either in small groups or as a wider workshop to identify what is clear, what needs improvement, and where additional expectations should be included. Feedback will draw on evidence already gathered, such as complaints trends, TSM results, and mystery shopping findings, ensuring the specification aligns with real-world service issues and priorities.

During this process, tenants will help define what "good service" looks like, including expectations around communication, appointment handling, operative behaviour, and support for vulnerable residents. These insights will be used to refine performance standards, KPIs, and customer service commitments within the final specification.

Agreeing Quality Questions

The workshop format allows tenants to talk through examples, clarify what a "good answer" looks like, and agree on the themes that should carry the most weight. Officers will then convert the group's ideas into clear, formally structured questions that can be scored consistently by both the tenant panel and council staff.

Outputs of Stage 3

At the conclusion of the Specification Review stage, GBC will have:

- A tenant-informed specification written in clear and accessible language.
- Specific tenant-driven amendments and improvements embedded.
- Performance standards are directly shaped by tenant outcomes and lived experience.
- A well-evidenced audit trail showing how tenants influenced scope and expectations.
- A more robust and realistic specification that sets strong foundations for the evaluation and contract award stages.

7. Stage 4- Evaluation

During the evaluation phase, tenants play a key role in assessing how well bidders' proposals meet the needs and priorities identified earlier in the process.

GBC will establish a trained Tenant Evaluation Panel (TEP) that works alongside officers to review and score bidders' written responses. Before evaluation begins, tenants receive clear training on the scoring system, what constitutes a strong response, and how to assess answers objectively. Tenants will use plain-English scoring templates, adapted from the toolkit, to record scores and comments consistently.

Not all tenants need to score all questions; they may focus on those most relevant to their experience particularly those they helped design. The evaluation process will be fully supported with accessible materials and officer guidance to ensure tenants feel confident and supported throughout.

By including tenants at this stage, GBC strengthens the credibility and fairness of the evaluation process and ensures the chosen contractor can truly deliver the level of service that tenants expect.

8. Final Decision-Making and Managing Disagreement

Final Decision on Contract Award

While GBC is committed to embedding meaningful tenant involvement throughout the procurement process, the formal decision to award a contract rests with the Council, in line with its Constitution, Procurement Strategy, and statutory responsibilities.

- Final award decisions are made by the appropriate authorised officers or committee, based on:
- the full evaluation outcome (including quality, price and compliance);
- moderation and assurance processes;
- legal, financial and procurement advice; and
- governance and approval requirements set out in council policy.

Tenant scores, comments and recommendations will be fully documented and considered as part of the evaluation and moderation process and will form part of the procurement audit trail.

Where a tenant disagrees with the outcome

GBC recognises that, on occasion, a tenant involved in the procurement process may disagree with the final outcome or recommendation.

Where this occurs:

- Tenants will be given a clear explanation of how the final decision was reached, including how tenant feedback and scores were considered alongside other evaluation factors.
- Officers will provide feedback in an open and respectful way, ensuring tenants understand the wider procurement, legal and governance context influencing the decision.
- The disagreement will be formally recorded as part of the procurement documentation to maintain transparency and accountability.

Disagreement with the final outcome does not invalidate the procurement process, provided it has been conducted fairly, transparently and in accordance with procurement rules and this policy.

Tenants will not be expected to publicly endorse or promote a decision they do not agree with, and disagreement will not affect their future involvement in engagement or scrutiny activities.

Learning and Continuous Improvement

Where tenant disagreement highlights concern about process, clarity, or communication, these will be reviewed as part of post-procurement learning. This may inform:

- improvements to future tenant training or briefing materials;
- clearer explanations of decision-making roles and limitations; and
- refinements to engagement methods in future procurement exercises.

This approach ensures that tenant involvement remains meaningful and respected, while preserving the council's statutory responsibility to make lawful, accountable procurement decisions.

9. Stage 5 Post Contract Award

Tenant engagement continues after the contract is awarded to ensure the new service is delivered as promised and remains responsive to tenant needs.

Tenants may also contribute to strategic contract review meetings, offering a "tenant lens" on reports and helping identify trends that may not be visible through data alone. In addition, GBC will run mystery shopping exercises and tenant forums to gather ongoing feedback on specific service areas such as communication, booking processes, or customer care. These tools allow tenants to test the service directly and share insights that complement formal performance measures.

By maintaining tenant involvement throughout the lifetime of the contract, GBC ensures services remain accountable, transparent, and continuously aligned with tenant expectations, strengthening service quality and reinforcing trust long after the procurement process ends.

10. Social value

GBC will ensure that tenants play an active role in shaping and monitoring the social value commitments within each procurement exercise.

Tenants will be invited to contribute to defining the types of social value that matter most to the local community such as employment opportunities, apprenticeships, community investment, environmental initiatives, or support for vulnerable residents so that contractors are held to account for delivering outcomes that reflect tenant priorities.

Through involvement in scoping, evaluation, and post-award monitoring, tenants will help assess whether contractors' social value proposals are meaningful, achievable, and aligned with local needs, and will support GBC in tracking delivery throughout the life of the contract to ensure promised benefits are realised in practice.

11. Selection of Tenants for Procurement Involvement

GBC is committed to ensuring that tenant involvement in procurement activity is fair, inclusive, transparent and proportionate. Tenants will be selected using a clear approach that balances lived experience, diversity of perspectives, and the practical requirements of each procurement exercise.

The method of selection may vary depending on the nature, scale and focus of the contract. Where a procurement relates to a specific estate, geographical area, or type of work, tenant involvement may be targeted to ensure that participants have relevant and meaningful experience of the service being procured. Opportunities for involvement will be promoted openly through appropriate channels, which may include existing tenant groups, newsletters, digital platforms, estate-based engagement, or targeted outreach where specific insight or local knowledge is required.

Selection Criteria

- Tenants may be invited to take part based on one or more of the following:
- their lived experience of the service, estate, or type of work being procured (for example repairs, compliance services, or estate-based works);
- an interest in service improvement and a willingness to participate constructively;
- the ability to engage respectfully and objectively with others;
- availability to commit to the relevant stages of the procurement process; and
- The need to achieve a balanced and representative mix of tenants, reflecting different property types, locations, household circumstances and protected characteristics where possible.

Selection will not be based on length of tenancy, level of satisfaction with services, or whether a tenant holds critical or positive views of current service delivery.

12. Training and Support for Tenants

GBC will ensure tenants are fully supported to take part confidently and effectively in procurement activities by providing comprehensive training and ongoing guidance. This will include an introduction to how procurement works, support in reading and understanding specifications, and clear guidance on scoring responses fairly and objectively.

Tenants will also receive training on interpreting KPIs and performance dashboards, undertaking mystery shopping, and understanding expectations around confidentiality and conduct. In addition, practical support will be offered to help tenants use digital tools required for online meetings, evaluations, and document reviews.

13. Conflict of Interest

GBC recognises the importance of protecting the integrity, fairness, and transparency of all procurement activity involving tenants. All tenants participating in procurement-related activities, including scoping, specification review, evaluation, or contract monitoring, will be required to declare any actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest. This includes, but is not limited to, personal, financial, employment, or family connections with bidders, contractors, or supply

chain organisations. Declarations will be reviewed by officers and recorded as part of the procurement audit trail.

Where a conflict of interest is identified, appropriate mitigating action will be taken. This may include restricting a tenant's involvement in specific stages of the process, removing them from evaluation activity, or reallocating participation to ensure fairness and impartiality are maintained.

All tenants involved in procurement will also receive guidance on confidentiality requirements and expected standards of conduct and will be required to adhere to these throughout the process.

14. Governance, Reporting and Evidence

To ensure strong governance and transparency, GBC will maintain clear and consistent records of all tenant engagement activity throughout the procurement process. This will include keeping engagement logs, attendance records, and summary notes from every tenant session, as well as documenting any changes made to the procurement approach or specifications as a direct result of tenant input. Scoring sheets, moderation reports, and formal recommendations from tenant panels will be retained as part of the audit trail, providing assurance that decisions were informed and accountable.

An annual "Impact of Tenant Engagement on Procurement" report will be produced to demonstrate outcomes, improvements, and the ongoing value of tenant involvement and presented to Housing Cabinet Committee.

15. Measuring Success

To evaluate the effectiveness of this policy, GBC will monitor a range of outcomes that demonstrate both service improvement and strengthened tenant confidence. Success will be reflected in higher tenant satisfaction levels across the service areas procured, as tenants begin to see their feedback directly shaping how services are delivered. A reduction in complaints, particularly in recurring themes such as communication, delays, and contractor behaviour, will indicate that the new contracts are better aligned with tenant expectations.

Improvements in KPI performance, such as response times, first-time-fix rates, and customer service standards, will offer measurable evidence that tenant-led priorities are resulting in stronger operational delivery. Increased contractor accountability will be demonstrated through more transparent performance monitoring, regular reporting, and clear follow-up actions informed by tenant panels and scrutiny activity. Ultimately, this strategy aims to build greater trust between tenants and GBC, with tenants feeling confident that their voices influence decisions and lead to meaningful improvements in the services they rely on.