



Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy

Document control

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Foreword

Gravesham Borough Council is the largest social housing landlord in the Borough, with almost 6,000 tenants.

For each and every one of those, where they live is their home; it's where they are raising their families, working, and relaxing.

It is important to me personally and to the council's housing team that those homes are places that are loved and cared for, both by those who live there and by ourselves as landlords.

To achieve that, we need to understand what our tenants think about where they live and their ideas for the future of their homes and the community in which they are living. We strive to be open and transparent in our dealing with our tenants and to open ourselves up to scrutiny, as only through examination and reflection can we grow and improve our service.

This Tenant Engagement Strategy sets out how we will ensure those who live in our council-owned homes will have their voices heard, and sets that into the context of the regulations we are required to follow as a social landlord.

As this strategy makes clear, that process has already begun and has helped shaped this document, emphasising that the views of our tenants are at the heart of everything we do. We are a listening council.

We are one of the very few remaining local authorities to manage its council-owned homes in-house, rather than working with a public sector social housing partner. This gives us direct control over the future of our homes and a personal link with each and every tenant.

This strategy will guide all our future communications and engagement with our residents and ensure that together we can work to deliver a Gravesham to be proud of.

With all good wishes

Councillor Jenny Wallace, Housing Portfolio Holder

Introduction

Gravesham Housing Services

Gravesham Borough Council provide homes for approximately 5670 tenants and leaseholders within the borough. As a social housing landlord, we are committed to provide a service that works closely with our tenants and leaseholders at all times, delivering housing improvements and creatively working to meet local housing needs, particularly for those in most vulnerable need.

Vision and Values

We recognise that at the heart of every local community are its people; therefore, at the heart of our corporate plan is a commitment to deliver the type, scale and quality of services our tenants and leaseholders need and deserve, with a key commitment to putting people first. As part of this we will develop a programme of engagement activities designed to provide quality and effective frontline services accessible to all.

This three-year strategy has been developed to identify future expectations of the Council as a result of tenant consultation, requirements from the Regulator of Social Housing and a desire to put tenants and leaseholders at the heart of everything we do.

Whilst the details within this policy relate specifically to the Housing Services Team responsibilities to its tenants and leaseholder, we acknowledge that effective tenant and leaseholder engagement will also involve engaging with private residents, residents with other tenures and the wider community.

Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement

Tenant and leaseholder engagement means *‘involving tenants and leaseholders who live in social rented housing in the services they receive from their council landlord.’* In practice, this means that we want tenants and leaseholders to contribute to how our services are delivered. We want to do this by offering a range of options for engagement at a variety of levels, both formal and informal.

To ensure we are putting out tenants and leaseholders first and are effectively engaging with tenants and leaseholders, we have adopted the Tpas (Tenant Participation Advisory Service) ‘National Tenant Engagement Standards’ to help us ensure that we have the right behaviours and attitudes running through the organisation in order for positive engagement to take place. Tpas have developed a framework of seven key elements for effective engagement, these are:

1. Governance
2. Scrutiny

3. Business and strategy
4. Complaints
5. Information and communication
6. Resources for engagement
7. Community and wider engagement

By adopting the culture and principles above we aim to improve the way in which we engage with tenants and leaseholders to deliver effective, output-based engagement.

What have Tenants and Leaseholders told us about engagement?

In the spring of 2021, tenants and leaseholders were invited to take part in consultation to help the Council develop a tenant engagement strategy and action plan in order to improve tenant and leaseholder engagement. Tenants and leaseholders have told us that:

1. 56% of people asked said they did not know what tenant and leaseholder engagement was
2. 82% were not aware of what engagement activities are provided by the Council?

The type of engagement activities that tenants and leaseholders stated they were aware of are:

- Gravesham Court Tenant's Association
- Housing services abc shaping communities
- Leaflets and letters giving information
- Sheltered Housing
- Site visits by council managers
- Tenant engagement surveys
- Tenant calls and door visits
- Newsletters

82% did not think the Council engages enough with tenants and leaseholders. The main reasons provided for a lack of engagement were:

- Newsletter and leaflets were not sufficient
- Lack of feedback when comments and suggestions were given

Tenant and Leaseholder key priorities

As part of the consultation tenants and leaseholders informed the Council of the type of engagement activities desired, the topics that they would like to be engaged about, the preferred methods of engagement and the frequency of engagement.

Activities that tenant and leaseholders have told us they want:

- Tenant Meetings
- Community Fun Days
- Tenant Forums
- Community Projects
- Tenant Forums
- Tenant Training
- Community safety & help
- Private meetings/visits

- Replying to emails quicker and regular updates on issues
- Tenants being respected
- I don't think the council need to do anymore

Topics that tenants and leaseholders would like covered under the umbrella of tenant engagement:

- Anti-Social Behaviour (72)
- Repairs (64)
- Maintaining your home (49)
- Estate Management (44)
- Complaints (43)
- Local activities in your area (38)
- Gardening (30)
- Building Safety (26)
- Tenancy Management (24)
- Council Meetings (16)
- Employment (15)
- Volunteering (13)
- Other (1)

Tenants and leaseholders preferred method of engagement:

- Email
- Letter
- Meetings
- Magazine
- In person
- Social media
- Council website
- Telephone

Tenants and leaseholders preferred frequency of engagement. Where tenants indicated multiple frequencies for their preferred engagement frequencies, the highest frequency they indicated was monthly:

- Monthly
- Bi-monthly
- Quarterly
- Weekly
- Six-monthly
- Annually

Improving Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement

Whilst nearly half of the respondents knew what engagement was, only 18% of those were aware of the tenant and leaseholder engagement provided by the Council. The consultation evidenced that there were four key methods in which tenants and leaseholders would like us to engage with them, which is via tenant meetings, community fun days and projects and tenant forums. Whilst there was a significant range of topics that respondents wanted the council to engage with them about, there were two stand out areas which were anti-social

behaviour and repairs and maintenance. Again with methods and frequency of engagement, there was a significant range of preferences, however there was a clear indicator that email was the preferred method of communication with a preference for this to be monthly.

To improve tenant and leaseholder engagement and meet the requirements outlined above, we have adopted five clear commitments towards effective tenant and leaseholder engagement. These are:

- To be clear on what our engagement offering is.
- To publicise our engagement activities.
- To offer a range of engagement methods but prioritise tenant meetings, forums and community fun days and projects.
- To offer a range of engagement topics, but to place significant focus on ASB, repairs and maintenance.
- To feedback to tenants and leaseholders and to continue consultation ensuring that topics are relevant and the frequency and methods.

A full breakdown of our commitments can be found in Appendix One.

Supporting an engagement culture

As part of our commitment to providing effective engagement we have embraced the Tpas Tenant Engagement Standards. This means that we are committed to:

Governance and Transparency

- Providing a clear, widely publicised route for tenants and leaseholders to hold the council to account.
- Providing an environment of mutual respect between the council and tenants and leaseholders.
- Publicly sharing how the council learn from tenant and leaseholder engagement.
- Providing regular assurance to tenants and leaseholders how the council keeps them safe in their homes and meet regulatory requirements.
- Providing an annual report to tenants and leaseholders.
- Consults a minimum of every three years with tenants and leaseholders regarding the housing management service.
- Publishes information regarding the roles and responsibilities of senior members of staff.

Scrutiny

- Valuing scrutiny as a critical friend from an independent tenant and leaseholder led process.
- Embracing that scrutiny is designed to improve services and increase efficiency.
- Providing scrutiny with the financial and administrative support it needs to carry out its business.
- Providing scrutiny with all relevant performance information so that it can carry out its business.

Business and Strategy

- Tenants and leaseholders are meaningfully engaged in the co-creation, monitoring and review of the council's engagement strategy.
- Tenants and leaseholders are meaningfully engaged in the development, monitoring and review of policy, services, and strategic development.
- Tenants, leaseholders, and council staff are clear on the purpose and outcomes of all engagement activities with timescales provided.
- Providing a clear engagement plan for engaging with tenants and leaseholders regarding health and safety.
- Providing a clear and consistent method for tenants and leaseholders to feedback their views on any engagement activities.

Complaints

- Providing a clear, accessible, and publicised complaints policy.
- Providing information regarding the housing ombudsman.
- Using complaints as an opportunity to listen, learn and influence change and engaging with tenants and leaseholders as part of this continuous learning.
- Ensuring complaints are documented, communicated, and publicised to stakeholders.
- Actively encouraging tenants and leaseholders to be part of the complaint review process.

Information and Communication

- Ensuring all information is provided to tenants and leaseholders in a clear and understandable format.
- Ensuring the council's website is easy to find, use and provides useful information.
- Providing an accessible route for tenants and leaseholders to request information regarding the services provided to them.
- Provide tenants and leaseholders with regular, up to date information.

Resources for Engagement

- For the council to provide sufficient resources for effective engagement.
- Having an appropriate system in place to for recognition and reimbursement for time given to engagement activities.
- Offering relevant training, advice and mentoring for involved tenants and leaseholders.
- Ensuring that all staff can describe the benefits that tenant and leaseholders' engagement can bring to not only those involved, the council and the wider community.

Community and Wider Engagement

- Providing an appropriate range of engagement activities.
- Providing opportunities for tenants and leaseholders to engage in emerging social housing policy.
- Keeping tenants and leaseholders informed about any planned regeneration or improvements.
- Providing a clear approach to promoting and supporting community action.

Regulatory Requirements

As a social housing provider there are regulatory requirements that we must adhere to in relation to tenant and leaseholder engagement, these are set out by the Regulator of Social Housing. There are two key requirements set out by the Regulator, which are the 'Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard 2017' and 'The Charter for Social Housing Tenants 2020.'

Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard 2017

This standard sets out three required outcomes:

- Customer Service, Choice, and Complaints
- Involvement and Empowerment
- Understanding and responding to the diverse needs of tenants

This means that as a social housing landlord, we must:

- provide choices, information and communication that is appropriate to the diverse needs of tenants and leaseholders 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.
- ensure that tenants and leaseholders are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in housing-related policies and strategic priorities, decisions about how housing services are delivered, scrutinise performance and make of recommendations about how performance might be improved, the management of their homes, where applicable, the management of repair and maintenance services and agreeing local offers for service delivery.
- treat all tenants and leaseholders with fairness and respect and demonstrate that we understand the different needs of tenants and leaseholders, including in relation to the equality strands and those with additional support needs

Social Housing White Paper 2020

The Social Housing White Paper sets out what every tenant and leaseholder should expect from their social housing landlord. It requires every social housing landlord to be transparent about their performance and decision-making, so that tenants, leaseholders, and the regulator can hold them to account; put things right when they go wrong and listen to tenants and leaseholders through effective engagement.

To ensure that landlords meet these expectations the paper sets out seven key themes for tenants, leaseholders, and landlords, these are:

- To be safe in your home – the regulator will work with industry and landlords to ensure every home is safe and secure.
- To know how your landlord is performing, including on repairs, complaints and safety, and how it spends its money, so that tenants and leaseholders can hold it to account.
- To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly, with access to a strong Ombudsman who will give tenants and leaseholders swift and fair redress when needed.

- To be treated with respect, backed by a strong consumer regulator and improved consumer standards for tenants.
- To have your voice heard by your landlord, for example through regular meetings, scrutiny panels or being on its Board. The Government will provide help, if you want it, to give you the tools to ensure your landlord listens.
- To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in, with your landlord keeping your home in good repair.
- To be supported to take your first step to ownership, so it is a ladder to other opportunities, should your circumstances allow.

Engagement for all

We want to ensure that we provide a housing service that is inclusive and representative and that our tenants and leaseholders are treated without discrimination. This strategy will support us to deliver this commitment as we want all tenants and leaseholders to be involved regardless of age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity or marriage and civil partnership and we will provide the support to enable this.

Our strategy aims to widen our engagement offer and will seek to use a variety of ways as set out in our action plan (Appendix three) to reach a number of diverse groups within our community.

Performance Monitoring

It is important that tenants and leaseholders are able to hold us to account to ensure that we are delivering what we say we will and upholding our commitments. In order to do this we have set out a detailed action plan (Appendix three) which demonstrates what actions and commitments we intend to make and within what timescale.

Progress against the action plan will be monitored by the Housing Services Team and reported to Housing Services Cabinet Committee on a quarterly basis.

Progress will be published to tenants and leaseholders in the Annual Tenants Report.

Progress will also be reported to tenants and leaseholders via the various groups, panels and forums and using digital platforms to report progress on a regular basis.

Appendix One – Our Commitments

1. To be clear on what our engagement offering is

We want our tenants and leaseholders to contribute to how our services are delivered.

We want to do this by offering a range of engagement activities both formal and informal. To achieve this we will:

- Consult with tenants and leaseholders to identify their priorities for engagement.

- Have a direct line of communication for tenant and leaseholder engagement including dedicated Tenant Engagement Officers, email and website facilities, channelling all tenant and leaseholder engagement through one service, providing a recognised, publicised one point of contact for tenant and leaseholder engagement.
- Collectively develop the Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy with our tenants and leaseholders

2. To publicise our engagement activities

We want to ensure that we provide a housing service that is inclusive and representative of all tenants and leaseholder.

To achieve this, we will:

- Share the draft Engagement Strategy with our tenants and leaseholders.
- Expand the Annual Report for all of Housing Services.
- Publicise a diary of events.

3. To offer a range of engagement methods.

We want to ensure that we are delivering services that provides information and choices to meet the diverse needs of our tenants and leaseholders. To achieve this we will:

- Deliver a range of engagement methods, such as but not limited to:
 - Consultation.
 - Satisfaction Surveys.
 - Forums
 - Resident Associations
 - Working Groups
 - Community Events
 - Digital platforms i.e. Council website

4. To offer a range of engagement topics

In addition to offering a range of activities, we want to ensure we focus on the key topics identified as part of the consultation, such as ASB, repairs and maintenance. To achieve this we will:

- Consult with tenants and leaseholders to identify their engagement priorities.
- Deliver a range of engagement topics based on priorities and regulatory requirements, such as but not limited to:
 - Repairs
 - Complaints
 - Open spaces
 - National Agenda
 - Estate Management
 - Young People
 - Gypsy and Traveller Community
 - Older People

- Leaseholders
- Digital Inclusion
- Social Isolation
- Building Safety
- Climate Change

5. To be accountable to our tenants and leaseholders

We strive for continuous improvement and to put our tenants and leaseholders at the heart of everything we do.

We recognise that our tenants and leaseholders have a right to know how we are performing in order to be able to hold us to account

To achieve this we will:

- Publish an annual housing services report focused on performance throughout the year.
- Make our Complaints Policy clear and accessible to all.
- Report complaints to Housing Cabinet Committee to provide an opportunity for scrutiny at a number of levels.
- Utilise satisfaction surveys
- Introduce scrutiny panels

Appendix Two – Tenant Engagement Delivery Model

Tenant engagement will be delivered by the following categories and methods with consultation and scrutiny throughout.

Information

- Communication using digital technology to keep tenants and leaseholders informed
- Sharing policies and procedures
- Satisfaction surveys
- Expansion of annual report

Engagement

- Forums
- Resident associations
- Community Events
- Dedicated liaison officers
- Working groups

Empowerment

- Estate champions
- Scrutiny panels
- Complaints and published lessons learnt
- Feedback and accountability through regular reporting to tenants and leaseholders

Appendix Three - Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Action Plan

| Action | Timescale |
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| Consult with tenants and leaseholders to identify what their priorities are for engagement. | Year 1 |
| Update the general 'tenant participation' email address, so that it reflects the new title of tenant engagement and can be shared with tenants and leaseholders. | Year 1 |
| Update complaints process to ensure investigating managers review lessons learnt as part of the complaints process and whether any processes need to be carried out differently to ensure that complaints are dealt with swiftly and promptly and that tenants and leaseholders have swift and fair redress when needed. Also providing an opportunity to listen and learn as part of continuous learning. | Year 1 |
| Share the draft tenant and leaseholder engagement strategy with tenants and leaseholders to ensure that they have the opportunity to examine that there consultation feedback has shared the strategy and provide a further opportunity to influence the strategy. | Year 1 |
| Review of complaints policy to provide a clear and accessible policy and that complaints are resolved promptly and fairly. | Year 1 |
| To expand the Annual Report to encompass all of housing services so that tenants and leaseholders are able to hold us to account and that we are meeting expectations. | Year 1 |
| Regular reporting of complaints at Housing Cabinet Committee to ensure that we are being transparent in our reporting and providing an opportunity for scrutiny at a number of levels. | Year 1 |
| Develop a Tenant and Leaseholder engagement area of website to enable tenants and leaseholders to easily access information regarding engagement activities in their area and how to be involved. | Year 1 |
| To produce a Tenant Engagement Framework for identified areas for redevelopment and ensure that staff are trained to provide effective engagement regarding regeneration and development to ensure that tenants and leaseholders are fully engaged in any activities and decisions relating to the homes and areas that they live in. | Year 1 |
| Continue to actively engage with Sheltered Housing Forum. | Year 1 |
| Implementation of the 'Rate my Estate' Survey providing tenants and leaseholders with an opportunity to regularly provide feedback regarding the caretaking services provided on their estates. | Year 1 |
| Implementation of repair satisfaction surveys, providing tenants and leaseholders with the opportunity to provide feedback and suggestions regarding any repairs carried out in their homes and estates. | Year 1 |
| Consult with tenants and leaseholders regarding the play areas on their estates and implement an improvement action plan following the results of the consultation. | Year 1, 2, 3 |
| To publicise a diary of events linked to national agenda weeks that are relevant to housing, utilising the tenant engagement area of the website to share this information and keep it up to date. | Year 1, 2, 3 |

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| A full review of policies and procedures to ensure that there are up to date, relevant and easily accessible for tenants and leaseholders on our website where appropriate. | Year 1, 2, 3 |
| The roll out of Estate Champions on our estates for identified tenants and leaseholders to provide a valued voice on our estates, helping us work together to improve our estates. | Year 2 |
| Improve relations with the gypsy and traveller community living in areas managed by the Council; having been in a Specialist Housing Officers to engage with the gypsy and traveller community with the aim to expand this support to all settled gypsy and travellers living within the Gravesham Community. | Year 1, 2, 3 |
| To increase digital inclusion by working with local services to provide support to tenants and leaseholders that may be struggling with accessing a digital environment. | Year 2 |
| Reducing social isolation by working with local services to provide support to tenants and leaseholders that are isolated and in need of support. | Year 2 |
| Ensure that the Tenant and Leaseholder Handbook is up to date, relevant and easily accessible for all tenants and leaseholders. | Year 2 |
| Reinstate resident associations that diminished as a result of covid and actively seek to promote and create 'area tenant and leaseholder groups' for areas that currently do not have, but would like to have an active group. | Year 2 |
| Provide a variety of community events for tenants and leaseholders across the borough, ensuring that events are meaningful and targeted to address local community issues. | Year 1, 2, 3 |
| To engage with the Environmental Protection Team regarding microchipping events for tenants and leaseholders across the borough. | Year 1, 2, 3 |
| Implementation of a Building Safety Working Group | Year 2 |
| Implementation of a Repairs and Maintenance Scrutiny Panel | Year 2 |
| Introduce a dedicated Energy Resident Liaison Officer role to support and tenants and leaseholders to improve energy efficiency in their homes. | Year 2, 3 |
| To engage with young people living in our homes to provide support for issues relevant to them such as accessing health and employment services. | Year 3 |
| To ensure that 'Resident Engagement Strategies' are in place for every building identified as a high-risk building. These will be individual for each building. | Year 3 |
| Introduce the use of satisfaction surveys following the closure of cases such as ASB and the completion of major works to the council's buildings and estates | Year 3 |