

Sunderland City Council

Tenant Engagement Policy

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Introduction

This document acts as Sunderland City Council's plan for developing Tenant Engagement within the Housing Service's property portfolio. Key to shaping this strategy was the requirement from the outset to consult with and involve our current tenants to understand their thoughts and develop a better community narrative.

The Housing Service will seek to develop a comprehensive Tenant knowledge base, whereby Tenant views and opinions help us to inform our service via regular engagement. The Housing Service will evolve and grow in line with our housing stock, Tenant needs and Tenant views.

Legislation and Regulatory context

This strategy therefore operates in the context of high-level intentions and goals, which allow us to stay agile and respond to the growing needs of our tenants to achieve the Council's aims and objectives. As well as the above developing this active policy on tenant engagement and involvement has a regulatory context, as set out in the Regulator of Social Housing's Consumer Standards.

As a registered provider of social housing, we are committed to delivering against the standards set by the Regulator of Social Housing, including the Consumer Standards. The Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government's (MHCLG) Charter for Social Housing Residents: Social Housing White Paper published in November 2020 and the National Housing Federation's (NHF) Together with tenants both set out the case for landlords to further strengthen their relationship between residents and landlords.

Scope

This strategy sets out how tenants will be involved to influence service direction and improvements. For the purposes of this strategy, we define 'tenant' as a tenant, leaseholder, or other user of our services.

Confidentiality

To operate as an organisation, we may hold Personal Data about tenants, employees, boards, suppliers, and other individuals. The use of personal data is governed by the General Data Protection Regulation (the GDPR) and is supplemented by the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA18). We take data protection very seriously and understand the impact that data breaches and misuse of data may have on data subjects as well as on our activities. Compliance with this policy is necessary for us to maintain the confidence and trust of those whose personal data we handle.

How We Will Engage Tenants

This strategy aims to position Sunderland Council's Housing Service to be able to meet the evolving requirements of the regulatory environment.

Our priorities of this strategy are to:

- Engage with every tenant and ask them to participate in the Tenant Satisfaction Measures in line with the Regulator of Social Housing's guidance.
- Engage with every tenant regards our Complaints Policy and Procedures, in line with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

- Engage with every tenant on suggestions for making improvements to the services that they receive from us.
- Promote inclusion and an open, transparent two-way relationship with our tenants, which puts people at the heart of what we do and improves the tenant experience.
- Collect important information about our tenants and their households, which will be used to deliver the right services and / or support for them.
- Give everyone the opportunity to communicate with us or be involved with us and tailor our communication style to meet their needs.

We will do this by:

- Carrying out a survey annually as one to one personal consultations with every tenant in their home to better understand their household needs and aspirations, their views on our services, the neighbourhood where they live and how they prefer to be involved with us.
- Regularly reviewing complaints and compliments to ensure continuous development and embed a learning culture.
- Learning from complaints and compliments with findings published in our Annual Report, online and through social media channels.
- Providing relevant information to groups and involved tenants in an agreed time frame to allow them to monitor how key organisational objectives are being met.
- Developing a culture where tenant engagement is central to our decision-making.
- Providing information, which is clear and understandable with key points summarised, using an inclusive range of methods and in a format to suit the intended recipient.
- Outlining performance to every tenant within our Annual Reports.

A pro forma was designed to capture tenants views which includes the Tenant Satisfaction Measures and reflects the resident profile, responds to different needs in relation to equality strands and any additional support, which can be evidenced in the delivery of our services, engagement activities and communications to promote widespread engagement.

The Housing Service will support involved tenants to:

- Review and implement our Tenant Service Standards and publish them on the Housing Service web page.
- Attend tenant engagement networking events to gather best practice in resident engagement and increase their awareness of the wider housing sector challenges.
- Engage in emerging social housing sector policy consultations and responses.
- Assist in the development of Annual Reports to tenants, ensuring that it communicates the required performance results and information in a way that is interesting, easy to understand and jargon free. This will include (not exhaustive) information on performance against the Regulatory Standards, Tenant Satisfaction Measures; performance against the Services strategic commitments; detail on how income is being spent, complaint information and trends, impact from resident engagement and comparisons of the organisational cost structure and management costs.
- Agree and prioritise a menu of community investment activities.
- Assist in the development of our Newsletter is distributed to every tenant.
- Prioritise income maximisation and sustainable living for all residents.
- Identify and maximise employment and training opportunities for people living in our properties.
- Encourage tenants to take pride and ownership of their home and neighbourhood.
- Assist in the development of potential grant funding opportunities to directly benefit tenants.
- Improve digital access and connectivity for tenants.
- Attend estate walkabouts as and when required.

Residents' views and information obtained through tenant care visits and tenant complaints learning, will be shared via our website, tenant e-mails, annual report to tenants, tenant newsletters and social media.

Tenant Engagement Policy provides a foundation for partnership working with our tenants. The objectives and priorities are based upon what our tenants have asked for and we will work closely with other strategic partners to deliver them, to make our neighbourhoods safer and better places to live.

This strategy seeks to build a two-way relationship with our tenants, whereby trust and mutual respect through transparency will be very important. We have listened to what tenants have asked for and this strategy sets out how we will deliver and build upon these priorities and aspirations in the coming years. The Housing Service will continue to engage with tenants to ensure that they are involved in decision making and in setting key strategic priorities for our business.

Through the engagement strategy we will be supporting our tenants to make positive changes and to work collaboratively with other stakeholders to ensure that we get greater value for money. The Housing Service will work towards building a co-regulatory approach with our tenants, allowing them to play a full and productive role in the design, delivery, and evaluation of services in the future.

This strategy will be the overarching agile document that will evolve around the development of tenant involvement and scrutiny. The Housing Service will build on these foundations and the future development of this strategy will be widely influenced by the views of our tenants and include several key themes.

Themes

The themes below form key areas which the Tenant Engagement Strategy will focus on.

- Taking pride in your home and the area - empowering and enabling tenants, stakeholders, and community groups to take responsibility and to be proud of where they live.
- Financial inclusion and income maximisation – providing opportunities for tenants to access one to one financial and/or welfare benefit advice.
- Promoting health, wellbeing, and mindfulness - addressing the links between housing and health; both physical and mental. Considering food and fuel poverty, promote the value of a healthy lifestyle and improved physical and mental wellbeing.
- Supporting community activities - working with other departments and stakeholders to provide opportunities to bring local people together, create fun and meaningful experiences for residents to enhance their outlook and encourage them to look out for one another via an increased sense of community.
- Maximising training and employment opportunities - working with other departments, stakeholders, and contractors to maximise opportunities for tenants and their families to access valuable training and employment support.
- Tackling the fear of crime - working with tenants and the police to tackle crime and the fear of crime.
- Digital Connectivity - working with internal partners and other stakeholders to improve digital access and more affordable online access for tenants to digital services.

Monitoring

We will monitor our success by:

- The number of community projects and activities that are undertaken in the delivery of the Tenant Engagement Strategy. These will be subject to an impact assessment. This approach will allow the Housing Service to demonstrate that investment is achieving value for money and having a positive impact delivering the priorities outlined in this strategy.
- Publishing learning from complaints and tenant feedback on our website and through social media channels.
- Monitoring the level of our tenants who wish to interact with us digitally and tailor the service to meet their needs.

How We Will Achieve Delivery

The Housing Service will utilise other opportunities for tenant engagement and community activities through a variety of ways including:

- The delivery of our development and investment programmes which will bring employment and training opportunities and other social investment opportunities to the table.
- Using the community budget to fund projects which will deliver against the key objectives of this strategy to improve community cohesion and the lives of our tenants.
- Support our tenants to access services through our partnerships which may have a positive impact on their lives.
- Proactively exploring and maximising grant and match funding opportunities to benefit tenants and in our neighbourhoods.
- In the interests of transparency and greater accountability to tenants, with effect from April 2022, all non-confidential performance reports will be published on the Council website.

Future Strategy Development

This Tenant Engagement Strategy sets out an initial social, regulatory, and business case for engagement and involvement and it will be aligned with our Housing Strategy and vision for housing in Sunderland.

Tenant engagement and involvement requires dedicated resources, as the activity itself is both specialist and intensive. All Housing Staff will play a key role in the success of this strategy and to ultimately fulfil the Consumer Standard regulatory expectations as required by the Regulator of Social Housing. By evolving and delivering this strategy, the Housing Service will not only comply with the regulatory expectations, but it will cement trust and loyalty with its tenants, thus safeguarding the huge investment that the Council has made in the new housing stock and the surrounding environment.

Sunderland City Council will communicate and involve tenants in discussions which involve any significant changes in service provision in a timely manner. Housing Services will ultimately review the success of its tenant engagement, involvement, and empowerment, through management performance measures and biennial satisfaction surveys. Measurable outcomes of the sector wide survey of tenants and residents will include the new satisfaction measures (TSMs) as prescribed by the Regulator of Social Housing's Consumer Standard. Where future regeneration or planned improvements take place, Tenants will be fully informed and from the start they will be consulted as part of the project planning, delivery and monitoring of the scheme.

Appendices Appendix 1 – Tenant Code of Conduct Code of Conduct – Tenant / Resident Involvement

Sunderland Council's vision is to forge a healthy, vibrant, dynamic future for the city and its residents and to make Sunderland a place where people can be proud to live, work and play, where no community is left behind.

The Housing Delivery and Investment Plan aims to ensure that:

- we deliver homes to meet our residents needs now and as they age.
- vulnerable residents can live in properties that support them to live independently for longer, in which they are enabled to live a happy, fulfilled life.
- we tackle the empty homes which often blight neighbourhoods, breathing new life into bricks and mortar and creating attractive new homes for our residents.

Housing Services are committed to maintaining the highest standards of conduct in all areas of our activity and expect that residents participating in meetings, workshops, training, and events, or representing the organisation to outside bodies, observe this Code of Conduct.

Scope

This Code of Conduct covers all meetings, workshops, training, and events hosted by Housing Services including:

- Tenant Panels and sub-groups
- Working groups, topic groups and other similar groups called for a specific purpose.
- Specific protective characteristic user groups, including language-based groups.
- Conferences and events, including annual tenants conference, advocate meetings and community activities held for tenants / residents.

It does not cover:

- Focus groups and mystery shopping exercises or other one-off market research or consultation meetings.
- Independent Tenant / Resident associations and other groups, unless they choose to adopt this code of conduct themselves.
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The purpose of the Code of Conduct is to ensure:

- That all members feel welcome and are able to contribute fully at meetings, workshops, training, and events.
- That meetings are conducted in an open and business-like manner.
- That the highest standards of behaviour are always maintained by members

Personal Conduct

Those attending meetings, workshops, training, and events must:

- Promote equality and diversity by not discriminating unlawfully or unfairly against any person.
- Treat all members, staff, and guests with respect.
- Not use any racist, sexist, homophobic or offensive language
- Not make derogatory, inflammatory, or personal remarks about other people

- Welcome new members and make them feel comfortable in meetings, workshops, training, events, and conferences.

Declarations of interest

When an issue arises where members have a personal interest or could benefit personally from a decision, they should declare their particular interest, and the meeting will then decide if they should withdraw from the discussion and/or the decision.

Confidentiality and Openness

Sunderland City Council Housing Service is committed to working openly and in a transparent way over all the decisions and actions in meetings, workshops, training, and events.

Any items which are unavoidably confidential will be clearly marked “Confidential” and must be treated as such by involved tenants.

If residents are to be involved in matters of a clearly confidential nature, such as the review of services and/or contracts, the Housing Service may set specific conditions for involvement with such work.

Conduct at Meetings, Workshops, Training and Events

Involved tenants and guests will always observe the following when taking part in all meetings, workshops, training, and events:

- Always conduct themselves in a professional and reasonable manner and treat everyone fairly and with respect.
- Read and understand all papers prior to attending meetings.
- Arrive on time for meetings, workshops, training, and events.
- Keep mobile phones switched off during meetings except when an emergency is anticipated.
- Keep to the subject under discussion and contribute accordingly.
- Respect the right of other people to speak without interruption and allow everyone the opportunity to speak.
- Respect the views and opinions of others and accept that these may not always be the same as their own.
- Not discuss issues described as ‘confidential’ with any person or body outside the meeting.
- To adhere to the Chairperson’s instructions regarding agenda items and points of discussion
- Not swear, use abusive language, or deliberately disrupt meetings, workshops, training, or events
- Not attend forums when under the influence of alcohol, illegal substances etc.

Breaches of this Code

In the event of this Code being breached the following action can be taken:

- A verbal warning will be given to members, staff, tenants, and guests if they are in breach of the Code of Conduct

- Anyone in breach of the Code may be requested to leave the meeting, workshop, training, or event.
- In the event of serious or persistent breaches, a person may be permanently excluded from future attendance at some or all meetings, events etc hosted by Housing Services - alternatively, in such cases, a person may be excluded from some meetings.

Appendix 2 – Expenses Policy Tenant Involvement – Expenses Policy

At Sunderland City Council we feel fortunate to have tenants who give up their time and energy, to help us to improve services for the benefit of all our residents. These are people who volunteer to work with us in partnership, whether that is to simply complete a survey, or to attend meetings, workshops or events, tenant feedback is invaluable to us.

Sometimes we ask tenants to take part in activities that require them to incur costs – for example travelling to a meeting and in these instances, we reimburse tenants with their expenses because we don't want money to be a barrier to anyone who wishes to be involved with us.

We have strict guidelines in place for claiming expenses which apply to all activities. All claims are checked and adherence to this policy is monitored. Any perceived abuses of the policy will be challenged, investigated, and fraudulently claimed money will be recovered.

To make a claim for travel expenses, residents must arrange the travel with a member of the Housing Services Team before any bookings are made. For more information about claiming expenses for engagement activities, contact our Housing Management Team on 0191 561 2715 or via e-mail at sunderlandhousing@ Sunderland.gov.uk

Equality and Diversity

The Council is committed to promoting equality of opportunity and has procedures in place to ensure that all residents are treated fairly and without unlawful discrimination.

Claims

Before claiming any expenses, involved residents must submit the following information to the Housing Management Team including:

- Name of the account holder (e.g., Mrs A B Smith)
- Bank account number and sort code.
- An e-mail address for remittance
- Tenants must provide these details via a signed written letter or email from an 'identifiable' email address.

Tenants should always submit expenses claims in writing to the Housing Operations Managers along with relevant receipts, to ensure that their claims are processed and paid accordingly. The following guidelines will then apply:

- Mileage will be paid in accordance with current HMRC approved mileage rates.
- Copies of bus or train fare tickets should be provided as part of the claim. All tickets for travel outside of Sunderland (e.g., for an event) should be booked via a Housing Operations Manager
- If an involved tenant does not have their own means of transport, the Housing Service can make arrangements for a taxi (tenants could be asked to share a taxi with others attending an event, unless they have a reason for not doing so). A Housing Operations Manager will deal with the taxi company and will process invoices accordingly. Residents may not book their own taxis.
- Reasonable costs will be reimbursed for car parking, upon production of a receipt, for meetings or events held at times when free parking is not available.

- Registered carer and support expenses should be discussed with the Housing Operations Managers and could be paid to enable you to attend a meeting, if you have to provide care for a family member or you have to arrange care for children under the age of 14 years, out of school hours.
- Receipts for all expenses claims should be provided, and tenants are required to submit their expense claims within a month of the activity, where possible.
- A Housing Operations Manager is available to provide guidance to residents who are entitled to claim expenses and will support people who require further assistance.
- Claims for expenses will be processed in a timely manner and residents should inform a Housing Operations Manager if payment has not been received within 20 working days of submitting their claim.

Breaches of Policy

If a tenant submits a claim outside the scope of this policy, a Housing Operations Manager will discuss the appropriate action to be taken.

Social Media

Sunderland Council Housing Service may use social media to share news and information that we believe would be of interest to our tenants. If you are interested in any of the above areas or please do not hesitate to email us at: sunderlandhousing@ Sunderland.gov.uk