



South
Cambridgeshire
District Council

Resident Involvement Strategy

for Tenants and Leaseholders of
South Cambridgeshire District Council

2020-2023

Draft

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Introduction



The purpose of the Council's Resident Involvement Strategy is to set out the Council's determination to provide opportunities for those tenants (including leaseholders) living in Council homes to fully participate in the development and improvement of their housing service.



This Strategy sets out a new framework that provides the means and methods for tenants to have meaningful engagement. It encourages more tenants to be engaged through better communications and providing a variety of opportunities that allow tenants to participate either a little or a lot.



The outcome of implementing this Strategy will be a better informed, empowered tenant community. It promotes a relationship of trust and cooperation between South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC) and their tenants.

Vision and Values

The Resident Involvement Strategy supports a partnership between SCDC and their tenants. It provides tenants meaningful engagement, influence and scrutiny in housing services decisions. Tenants have a key role in helping SCDC deliver a responsive housing service that reflects SCDC's business plan – to deliver a caring, affordable and environmentally responsible housing service for current and future tenants.

SCDC Corporate Values:

- A modern and caring council
- Housing that is truly affordable
- Being green to our core
- Growing local business and economies



Objectives

The Resident Involvement Objectives reflect the need to provide the means and methods of delivering effective, meaningful and collaborative tenant engagement. It provides tenants with the opportunity to influence and scrutinise the housing service. This involvement should result in tenants and SCDC working together to deliver an exceptional housing service.

1. Develop a collaborative tenant engagement programme between SCDC and their tenants and leaseholders.
2. Establish and support a tenant engagement framework that delivers tenant involvement, influence and scrutiny opportunities. Support the new framework by recruiting and building the skills and capacity of involved tenants.

Objectives (cont.)

3. Create multiple communication channels between SCDC and their tenants.
4. Design campaigns that promote environmental engagement, community cohesion, resident wellbeing and reduce stigma associated with social housing.
5. Tenant involvement is planned, resourced, monitored and reviewed regularly with tenants.

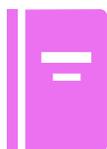
Regulatory Requirements

The Resident Involvement Strategy has been developed in accordance with the current regulatory requirements (October 2018) which are governed by The Regulator of Social Housing.

The Regulator of Social Housing regulates registered providers of social housing to promote a viable, efficient and well-governed social housing sector able to deliver homes that meet a range of needs. Regulations cover economic and consumer standards.

The economic standards do not apply to local authorities because these are regulated by central government.

The consumer standard applies to both local authorities and registered providers of social housing, such as housing associations. The aim of the consumer standard is to support the provision of social housing, to ensure that it is well-managed and of appropriate quality.



Consumer Standards

The four consumer standards are:

Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard

to ensure that tenants of social housing have the opportunity to be involved in its management and hold their landlords to account.



Home Standard

to support the provision of well-managed and appropriate quality housing.



Tenancy Standard

to ensure that actual or potential tenants of social housing have an appropriate degree of choice and protection.



Neighbourhood and Community Standard

to encourage social housing providers to contribute to the environmental, social and economic well-being of the areas in which the housing is situated.



Social Housing Green Paper

Following the Grenfell Tower tragedy there has been a greater focus on the need for social housing providers to give tenants the means to have their priorities and concerns heard. The government green paper emphasised that social landlords must provide an opportunity to have meaningful engagement and influence in housing issues that impact directly on their tenants.

The Resident Involvement Strategy sets out SCDC's approach to giving tenants a greater voice and influence in the services they deliver. This Strategy reflects SCDC's mission to:



Provide the methods and means for tenants to engage, influence and scrutinise housing decisions.



Make it easy for tenants to access information and share their views by creating user friendly communication channels.



Promote higher levels of engagement so that more people become involved tenants and that the interests of the whole community are represented.

Review of existing tenant engagement

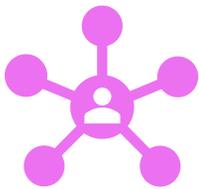
The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard specifies that social housing providers shall consult tenants at least once every three years on the best way of involving tenants in the governance and scrutiny of the organisation's housing management service.

SCDC conducted a review in 2019/20 in consultation with tenants. It reviewed best practice and other tenant involvement programmes. One of the key issues identified was that the existing Tenant Participation Group were not having substantive engagement with decision makers either with council members or the housing service.

The outcome of that review was to recommend a new framework for tenant and leaseholder involvement. The new framework has been incorporated in the Resident Involvement Strategy. It provides the direct link to decision makers within the Council and housing. It is more inclusive, providing better access to meetings locally (when allowed), a variety of methods to access information and a range of opportunities to work with other tenants to effect housing services direction and delivery.

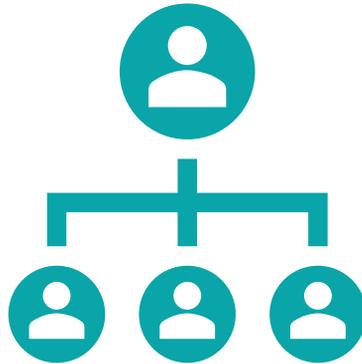
Tenant Engagement Framework

- ▶ The Tenant Engagement Framework provides a means for tenants, council members and housing officers to have meaningful engagement. It creates formal methods to engage, inform, discuss, scrutinise and debate issues that impact on tenants through the implementation of a new Housing Engagement Board (HEB) and Area Housing Forums (AHF).
- ▶ The Tenant Engagement Framework offers different levels of engagement and opportunities. Tenant engagement also includes informal engagement through customer contact and social media.
- ▶ Delivering tenant engagement requires a variety of communication channels that makes it easier for tenants to access information in a timely manner. Digital communication channels are a key method of communication in line with the Council's overall communication strategy for its residents.



The Housing Engagement Board (HEB)

The Housing Engagement Board (HEB) consists of three council members including the Lead Member for Housing, five elected tenant reps and one elected leaseholder rep, and the Head of Housing. The resident involvement team will provide secretariat support. Tenant rep board members are entitled to remuneration of up to £400 a year and are expected to meet the criteria set within the terms of reference for the Board. Elections to the Board are held every four years. The HEB meets four times a year.



It provides a forum to consult on new policy or major revisions to policy; to monitor performance on key areas; to receive presentations on topics of interest, request more in depth work on an area for example through a working group; and receive feedback in the form of minutes from forums and other working groups (see overleaf).

It provides a platform to engage with and consult with tenant and leaseholder representatives at a strategic level, and for those views to feed into the decision-making process in line with the Council's constitution, i.e. by Head of Housing, Lead Member for Housing or recommendation to Cabinet.

Area Housing Forums

There are also 3 Area-based Housing Forums that sit under the HEB which focus on local issues, using different formats to engage with local tenant and leaseholder interests. The Area Housing Forums are open to any tenant or leaseholder. They provide an opportunity to distribute information, lead specific topic or workshop discussions and answer general questions.

The forums are held quarterly. Issues raised will be taken away to be resolved or progressed to the Housing Engagement Board if they are broader or of strategic concern. Elected Housing Engagement Board representatives are expected to chair each of the Area Forums.



Groups

The new framework includes a Scrutiny Group that sits underneath the HEB, whose role is to monitor performance of our main contractors. The Scrutiny Group is made up of tenants, staff and the Lead Member for Housing and will meet quarterly to review repairs, landscaping, heating and gas performance, future plans and service issues.

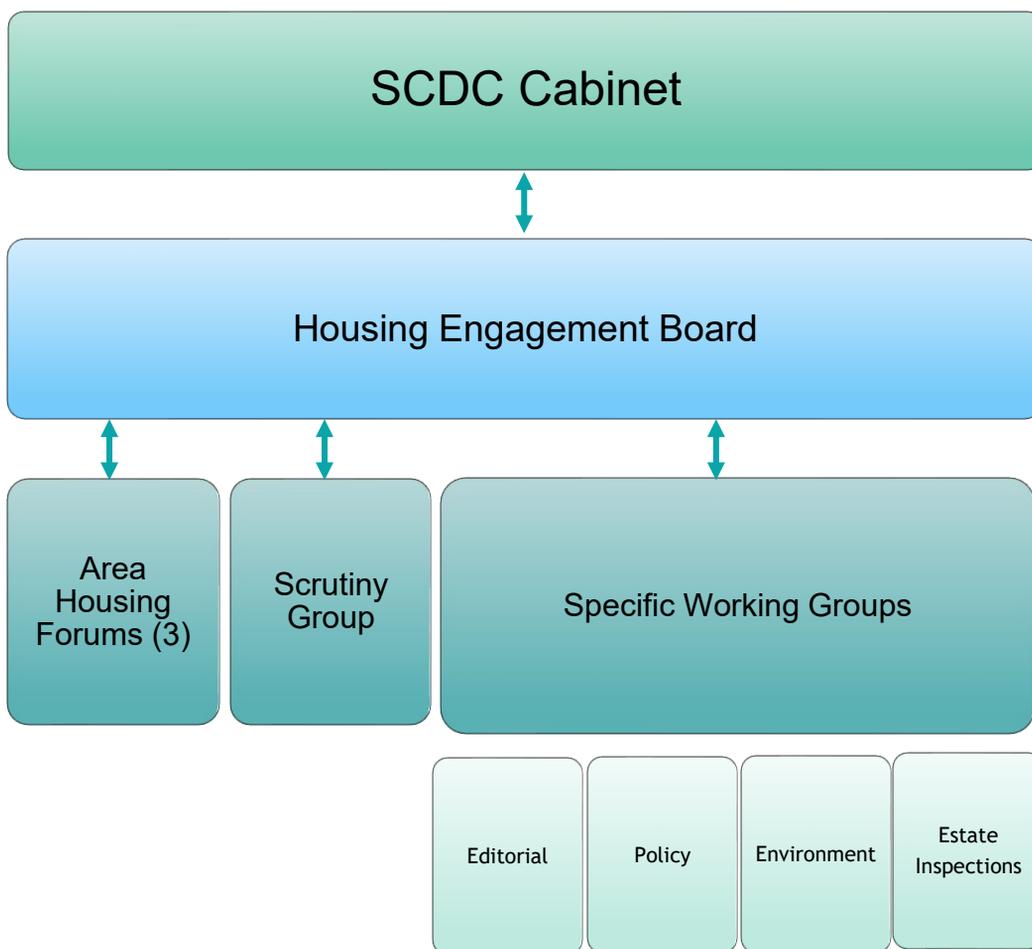
Specific working groups will also be established that allow tenants to contribute with less commitment focusing on topics that appeal to them. These groups cover subjects such as policy review, magazine editorial and environmental projects, with the option to add new ones in response to tenant priorities and interest.



Groups (cont.)

Tenant Estate Inspections are done in conjunction with housing officers, trained tenant inspectors and local tenants. Each new financial year a calendar with details of estate inspections, date and time for the next 12 months is produced. Estate inspections are promoted using social media, newsletters and by the housing officers. Estate inspections are a valuable activity in building relationships with the local community, gaining their feedback and to monitor the condition of estates.

New Framework Structure



Tenant Communication

A successful tenant involvement programme requires good communication between the Council and their tenants. Good communication relies on understanding tenant priorities, staff engagement, multiple communication channels and monitoring. The benefit to the tenants and the Council is being able to build a productive, positive working relationship that delivers a better, value for money housing service.

The tenant communications' objective is to enable tenants to:



Have access to the latest news, events and meetings



Easily find information regarding housing services



Share their views and be consulted on tenant issues

To achieve these objectives, the Council uses multiple communication channels:



Tenant and leaseholder magazine. This is a printed publication that is delivered to every tenant and leaseholder.



Estate officers produce newsletters for sheltered housing schemes. The resident involvement team assist them in the process improving quality and consistency of the newsletters.



The SCDC website has a housing section which is being developed further to include additional features to improve communications.



Other forms of tenant contact are also being explored, such as making more use of the rent statements to communicate to all tenants, after service surveys and improving one to one contact with the repairs team, housing officers and contact centre.



Meetings and groups provide valuable person to person contact with tenants. The opportunity to talk to someone about concerns, grievances or ideas is important to tenants.

New Communication channels

Digital technology is key to increasing contact, provide information and to gain feedback. Digital tools that are available include:



One view portal to deliver personalised content



Social media to inform and gain feedback



E-newsletter to inform



Surveys and polls to respond to specific questions



Analytics to gauge response and popular content



Orchard housing management system may provide other options including emailing or SMS messaging.

Tenant programmes

- ▶ Supporting the SCDC priorities of a caring council, the Resident Involvement Strategy uses programmes to promote information on environmental and economic issues, community cohesion and resident wellbeing.
- ▶ Community Gardens is a new initiative to bring local tenants together to create outdoor space that will promote the Council's "Green to our Core" value. The Community Gardens initiative will not only help to improve the tenants' local environment, the Council's land but will also bring tenants together socially which will help to tackle loneliness as well as promoting a healthy activity.
- ▶ The resident involvement team works to promote tenant, community and individual wellbeing. The service is cross-cutting throughout the Council, promoting the work undertaken by the sustainable communities and the environmental teams that benefits our tenants.

Accountability

The resident involvement team provides an annual report to tenant and leaseholders regarding how the housing revenue account money is spent. There are numerous opportunities to provide more regular information to tenants. This includes:



Give tenants regular updates on housing services and key performance indicators. These can be distributed at meetings and promoted using social media and newsletters.



You said, we did' – publish actions SCDC has taken in response to tenant requests, complaints or ideas.



Minutes of meetings – publish and promote outcome and actions from involved tenant meetings.

Resources

The Council supports a small team of resident involvement staff including:

- Resident Involvement Team Leader (full time permanent post) – covering policy and strategy and ensuring compliance with Consumer standards.
- Resident Involvement Officer (full time permanent post) – covering day to day resident involvement work such as supporting meetings, group activity, responding to requests.
- Resident Involvement Project Support Officer (full time temporary contract) - covering project work such as digital rollout and newsletters/promotional events.

It is important to allocate resources to ensure that resident involvement objectives are met.

1. Prioritise resident involvement activities to support the framework and communications. Set realistic targets.
2. Train, develop and support staff across the housing service, so they can identify and promote resident involvement opportunities.
3. Provide support and training for involved tenants and leaseholders so they can be effective in their roles.
4. Consistently deliver social media and newsletters content. Support staff to deliver digital engagement by providing training and mentoring.
5. Regularly review resident involvement outcomes to determine that activities are delivering objectives and offering value for money.