

2024-2027

# Tenant Engagement Strategy

Version: 1.0

Date: 2nd January 2024

Review date: 1st September 2026

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# Executive Summary

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## Tenants should be able to influence how their home and housing services are managed. The voice of the tenant matters.

There has been a call for more accountability and transparency of the housing sector following the events of Grenfell Tower and high-profile cases involving disrepair. The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 now sets regulatory requirements that all social housing providers must meet to drive improvements in the quality of housing and housing services for tenants.

From April 2024, the Regulator of Social Housing introduces new consumer standards and will provide a Code of Practice for landlords to follow. These strengthen the accountability of landlords to their tenants and fulfil the obligations set out by the Act.

A keystone of re-dressing any imbalance between tenant and landlord is tenant engagement. Our engagement strategy, detailed in this document, signals an approach to genuinely listening to what our residents say and ensuring that their input directly impacts how we manage their homes and services. We want to reassure tenants that we are not creating this strategy solely due to regulatory changes, but because it is something that should always be in place and influence everything we do.

This strategy sets out our intentions and vision for tenant engagement, for both tenants and leaseholders, and how we aim to enact that strategy.

Our vision is **Engagement Before Action**. A pledge to ensure that we collaborate and consult with our tenants and that they are at the centre of decision-making.

Three core commitments are key to ensuring we meet that vision:

- **Improve communication and interaction**
- **Strengthen engagement, participation and empower tenants**
- **Be accountable and open to being challenged**

# Introduction

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## About ABC Housing

Our Housing service sits under the Caring Ashford tenet of our Corporate Plan. This is the long-term aim of providing welcoming and safe places and offering a high quality of life, where everyone is valued and respected. To enable homes that are affordable to local people on low incomes and ensure that homes and neighbourhoods in the borough meet the needs of local people of all ages, incomes, and abilities to live sustainably and safely.

Ashford Borough Council owns and manages some 5000 properties. This portfolio consists of a variety of property and ownership types, ranging from independent living schemes to leasehold properties. Our range of affordable housing options ensures that our diverse population of tenants and leaseholders have somewhere that they can call home.

## About the Regulator of Social Housing

Providers of registered social housing in England are governed by the Regulator of Social Housing, which seeks to promote a housing sector that can deliver and maintain homes of appropriate quality to meet a variety of resident needs.

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 has provided extended powers to the Regulator to set standards for providers to achieve, and from April 2024 these standards as well as a Code of Practice will be published. Providers are expected to reach all standards and can be held accountable by their tenants and the Regulator for non-compliance.

One of the revised standards that the Regulator is setting is the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard. This states that landlords must be open with tenants and treat them with fairness and respect. Part of this standard directly refers to engagement with tenants, with registered providers required to take tenants' views into account in their decision-making and how their services are delivered.

# Background

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## What is Tenant Engagement?

Tenant engagement has been defined by TPAS, who are experts in tenant engagement, as “being about working with tenants to co-produce effective services that meet a variety of needs... It’s about empowering tenants, residents, and communities to work with your organisation to achieve shared aims”.

## Our engagement approach

The need to re-invigorate and refocus the engagement strategy of the service became evident in 2022. A consultation was held with TPAS to bring together a focus group of tenants and housing officers to discuss what is required for a new strategy. The findings and recommendations from those sessions have helped form our new vision and commitments set out in this document.

It was clear from the consultation that the lack of resources of dedicated engagement staff to drive the culture and training internally for engagement, as well as activities with tenants, limited the reach of any tenant involvement. Without sufficient mechanisms to evidence and scrutinise activities, engagement could not be recorded, lessons learned, and success promoted.

In 2023, the Housing service employed two full-time Tenant Engagement Officers, demonstrating the focus on re-energising our tenant involvement. They will drive forward the engagement strategy with our tenants and housing staff and ensure that we are fulfilling engagement obligations set out by the Regulator of Social Housing.

Ashford Borough Council founded the Ashford Citizens Panel in 2023 seeking all residents’ views and scrutiny, not just tenants living in our properties. It is our desire that our tenant involvement, driven by the engagement strategy, will help champion tenants within this wider remit.

An annual survey of tenant satisfaction now takes place and will form a part of a scrutiny package enabling our tenants and the Regulator to hold us to account on a variety of areas. Two specific survey questions will allow us to quantify and track how effective our engagement is. How satisfied tenants are with being informed and how satisfied they are that we listen to tenants’ views and act upon them.

## Our Vision

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Engagement *before* action. We want tenants to be at the centre of decision-making.

We want to ensure that the view of every tenant and leaseholder counts and that they have an effective voice.

Our residents must be at the heart of our Housing Service, and we must collaborate to drive positive changes in our communities and enhance what we do. We must consult with them before decisions are made.

We will measure and monitor the quality and reach of our tenant engagement throughout the year to ensure that each contact provides value to both residents and our service.



**Engagement *before* action**

# Our Commitments

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## Our strategy's 3 commitments

We have three core commitments that are key to ensuring that we reach our vision of 'engagement before action' and to ensure that all engagement is effective, purposeful, and meaningful.



### 1. Improve communication and interaction

- We will look to reduce and remove barriers to engagement and provide engagement opportunities that are accessible to all
- We will actively listen and ensure our communications are clear
- We will facilitate discussions with residents to find solutions and help us to make better decisions



### 2. Strengthen engagement, participation and empower tenants

- We will create a supportive environment and encourage open and respectful communication
- We will collaboratively problem solve and encourage idea sharing
- We will acknowledge ideas and opinions and create a space where people feel valued and able to contribute



### 3. Be accountable and open to being challenged

- We will monitor the impact of our decisions and provide opportunities for people to challenge us
- We will welcome feedback, both positive and negative, to help improve our service
- We will be available to address issues that arise

# Our Guiding Principles

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## Effective engagement to power positive communities.

Every engagement activity and contact we have with our tenants and leaseholders, no matter how large or small, will follow our guiding principles.



A positive culture across our Housing service and beyond is required to foster collaboration and trust with our tenants and their homes.



# Action Plan

## Performance goals to monitor and measure progress.

To ensure accountability and to track how our engagement strategy is progressing, we have set out specific actions with timescales for their completion. All 34 actions are driven by our '3 Core Commitments' and are underpinned by our guiding principles of engagement. Our action plan provides manageable, practical steps to ensure tenants feel informed and satisfied that we listen to their views and act upon them.

Tenant Engagement, along with Housing Management and tenants will review the list annually to scrutinise whether the actions have taken place and evaluate reasons why any have not. We will publish updates on our goal attainment to ensure that we are accountable for all that we do.

Action		Core Commitment	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
1	Share engagement strategy: externally with tenants and leaseholders, internally with Housing and Councillors	1 & 2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Review existing engagement communication with tenants and leaseholders – Housing newsletters, emails, letters, webpages	1	<input type="checkbox"/>		
3	Agree annual budget for engagement work with Housing Management	3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Promote culture internally of encouraging tenant and leaseholder input in the development of Housing services	1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Develop tenant engagement area of website to provide information on engagement projects, how to get involved and Housing Newsletters	1	<input type="checkbox"/>		
6	Create an engagement framework for Housing services to ensure projects requiring tenant input and collaboration work are clearly defined	2	<input type="checkbox"/>		

# Action Plan

7	Revise Housing webpages to improve customer journey and access to information	1	<input type="checkbox"/>		
8	Publicise opportunities for tenants and leaseholders to meet and engage with the Housing team and participate in community events	1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	Tenant profiling to increase understanding and to provide tailored services	1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	Write and agree Terms of Reference and policies for tenant and leaseholder groups to be set up to collaborate and scrutinise Housing services	2	<input type="checkbox"/>		
11	Create a variety of ways for tenants and leaseholders to get involved with Housing services– formal/informal/more in-depth/ad hoc	2	<input type="checkbox"/>		
12	Encourage sign-up to tenant and leaseholder groups to scrutinise Housing services	1 & 2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13	Establish skills training programmes for those involved in our tenant and leaseholder groups in areas such as how to scrutinise effectively, computer and group meeting skills	2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14	Set up and roll out key estate improvement groups with tenants and leaseholders - Estate Champions/Estate Mates to provide a valued voice for their area	3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
15	Implement a Repairs and Maintenance Scrutiny Panel with tenants, leaseholders, and Repairs Team	3	<input type="checkbox"/>		
16	Implement a Building Safety Working Group with tenants, leaseholders, and Asset Team	3		<input type="checkbox"/>	

# Action Plan

17	Set up group with tenants and leaseholders to provide feedback and help influence draft reports, letters, and documents sent by Housing	1 & 2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
18	Identify and explore creation of special groups for underrepresented areas e.g. young mothers, senior citizens	2		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19	Provide a variety of events for tenants and leaseholders to boost community involvement with Housing such as family fun days	2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20	Develop Tenants Portal to offer opportunities to engage with Housing services and improve communication	1 & 2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
21	Update Tenant and Repairs handbooks to ensure relevant and easily accessible for tenants and leaseholders	1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22	Improve digital inclusion for tenants and leaseholders in accessing Housing information in a digital environment	2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23	Improve Asset Team communication with tenants and leaseholders to ensure involvement and awareness of planned works	1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24	Improve Developments Team communication with tenants and leaseholders to ensure awareness of new ABC housing developments and how to influence them	1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25	Set up and implement Rate My Estate feedback for tenants and leaseholders for caretaking services in communal areas	3		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
26	Engage with young people living in our homes to provide support for issues relevant to them	2		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

# Action Plan

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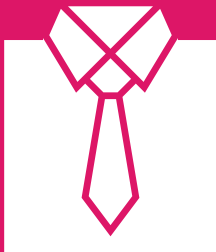
27	Continued engagement with Independent Living sites	2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
28	Review Housing policies and procedures to ensure relevant and up to date	3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
29	Regular publishing of actions taken, and lessons learnt on Housing complaints	3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
30	Promote successful projects and you said/ we did with tenants and leaseholders to provide transparency	1 & 3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
31	Annual Housing Tenant Satisfaction Surveys implemented and improvement plans generated from results	3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
32	Drive implementation of client care satisfaction surveys to be issued at the conclusion of any matter such as repairs, anti-social behaviour, planned maintenance works, etc.	3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
33	Utilise data and statistics from repairs and planned maintenance works to track performance and help drive improvements for tenants and leaseholders	3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
34	Review Engagement Strategy with management and tenant group every 3 years or when new legislation implemented	3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

# How to Get Involved

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## We will provide a selection of ways for tenants and leaseholders to be involved and share their voice.

A range of engagement options will allow for residents to collaborate as much, or as little, as they wish. There will be options for those that are able to commit more time and become champions for their area, but also options for those that wish to get involved on an ad-hoc basis or only regarding specific areas of interest. All interactions with our tenants and leaseholders will help shape what we do.



### Formal

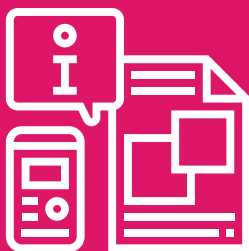
These will involve the most commitment from residents.

Groups will be set up to strategise, scrutinise and support projects.

### Informal

Less time commitment is required.

A variety of ways to voice opinions and provide feedback.



### Communication

For residents preferring to receive information and updates.

Options to participate as and when the tenant desires.

# Involvement Options

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A selection box of ways for everyone to get involved in engaging with their Housing service.

This menu of involvement options is not limited to those detailed below and will be developed over time as we gain a greater understanding of our what our tenants and leaseholders want.



## Formal Meetings

- Scrutiny panels
- Focus groups
- Leaseholder panel
- Special interest groups
- Local meetings



## Publications and Updates

- Email updates
- Current and relevant webpages
- Newsletters
- Annual reports
- Survey feedback
- Reports and statistics



## Informal Engagement Activities

- Community events
- Satisfaction surveys
- Estate Walkabouts
- Rate My Estate
- Competitions
- Litter picks



## Activities and Tools

- Mystery shopping
- Workshops
- Staff presentations
- Training and support
- Community Heroes



## Online Involvement

- Surveys
- Feedback forms
- Consultations
- Social media
- Tenants Portal

## Conclusion

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The importance of a strategy to help lead our engagement cannot be underestimated, not only from a regulatory perspective, but also from our tenant's point of view. We must listen, understand and work together to improve our services and to make the homes, lives, and communities in the borough of Ashford, better.

## Contact

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