

## **Tenant Involvement Strategy 2016-2018**

### **Forward**

**By Councillor Jenny Patterson, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Landlord Services**

It gives me great pleasure to introduce West Lancashire Borough Council's Tenant Involvement Strategy. This has been written taking into account tenants views and aspirations and is about how we want tenants to take an active part in the services provided.

This new strategy replaces our previous one to reflect the changes that are happening in housing services nationally. The Strategy demonstrates the Council's continuing commitment to tenant involvement and empowerment and how we want to work with our tenants to make the service the best we can and offer value for money.

I hope you find this useful and that it will encourage more tenants to get involved and help to make a difference.

### **Introduction**

This Strategy sets out our commitment to involve tenants and leaseholders in shaping and improving landlord services. It is a guide to how we will deliver the expectations of our tenants, leaseholders, staff, elected members and the regulator, and will be reviewed on a regular basis by tenants, officers, leaseholders and Elected Members working together.

The Council needs to evidence to the regulator our serious intent in involving tenants in this process and this strategy supports this.

Throughout this document we refer to tenant involvement but this term includes leaseholders where they receive services as part of their service charge.

Tenant Involvement is about meaningful contact with our tenants who are able to give us their views about the services they receive and their experience of being a tenant or leaseholder.

Through a range of opportunities, tenants are involved in shaping our decisions, delivering our vision and provide valued feedback about services and improvement of those services.

The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) regulates social housing and provides regulatory standards that all housing providers must meet. Regulation requires "Co-Regulation" to take place. This means staff, elected members and tenants working together to provide scrutiny and challenge services to make improvements.

We understand there are challenging financial times ahead which will impact our tenants, we believe it is therefore critical we work in partnership together. This is a time of continuing change in the social housing sector and early engagement with tenants will be vital.

### **What has happened since the last strategy?**

Following our last Strategy, produced in 2011 we have made a number of improvements and changes to Tenant Involvement.

We have commissioned an independent review of the involvement structure working in partnership with Helena Housing and our tenants. The review recommended a number of changes to the scrutiny structure and these have now been put in place.

Some of the achievements from the last strategy include:

- Over the past 3 years, our tenant scrutiny model has changed to reflect the changes in Government and regulation. Tenants in February 2014 agreed new scrutiny arrangements which will see greater involvement of tenants monitoring and challenging the services.
- Our Tenant Inspectors programme continues to grow with tenants carrying out empty homes inspections on a regular basis.
- Tenants agreed to review the purpose of the Tenants and Residents Forum following a reduction in attendance and carry out a value for money exercise on this activity.
- A number of training sessions have taken place to increase the skills and knowledge for our involved tenants.
- Briefing sessions have also taken place on topics such as Welfare Reform – changes to housing benefit, which has helped to keep tenants informed about what is happening.
- Changes have also taken place with our Tenants and Residents Associations and the way these are monitored and funded. This arrangement is to try to make sure the groups are reflecting the needs of the communities they work in and that the funding they receive from the service area is delivering value for money for tenants.

Tenants have also successfully applied for the Environmental Improvement fund which has seen improvements in communities such as:

- Green spaces protected
- Provision of flower and raised beds
- Increased car parking spaces

Through use of the tenant scrutiny arrangements we have seen a number of improvements made to the service over the past 4 years such as:

- Changes to the caretaking services
- Improvements to garage sites and the way they are advertised and let
- Improvements to how tenants can give feedback on housing services

The TSG have also commented on various consultations carried out by the service area and have been involved in reviewing the Housing Revenue Account business plan and discussing rent charges.

More information about these changes can be provided by contacting the Tenant Involvement Team

## **What is the future for Tenant Involvement?**

Over the last few years the housing services nationally has developed at a very fast pace due to changes in regulation and Government policies. Further changes are going to happen and we will have to be flexible in order to meet these changes and demands. This is where tenant involvement will be even more important as we make sure changes suit the needs and requirements tenants have.

Through co-regulation and tenant scrutiny we will continue to improve the services we deliver and ensure we meet the regulatory requirements of the HCA.

We want to be confident that our involvement service is meeting the needs of our tenants and that our involvement service offer compares well to other housing providers in terms of outcomes and value for money.

We want to improve the way in which we communicate with our tenants to ensure they are kept well informed about what is happening in housing and are aware of the involvement opportunities available.

We want to measure and monitor the views tenants have on the services they receive and increase levels of satisfaction by acting on the feedback we receive.

We will continue to regularly review the ways in which we can encourage and support our tenants to get involved at a level that suits them.

Working closer with Elected members, we will keep them involved and informed in the process to enable us to support their role in seeking tenant views.

## **The Vision for Housing and Inclusion**

*“To be a top performing landlord within an economically vibrant West Lancashire”*

This strategy seeks to involve and engage with more tenants in the delivery of our services to help to achieve our vision.

## **The Vision for Tenant Involvement**

*“To offer a range of opportunities for tenant involvement, so everyone who wants to be involved can do so at a level that meets their needs and wishes and achieves positive outcomes which deliver value for money.”*

## **Aims/Objectives of this Strategy**

The aim of this strategy is to provide direction and focus for our landlord services in order to meet the requirements of the regulator. It will also inform our tenants of how they can get involved and our plans for future involvement.

The HCA has set out detailed standards that the Council must. Tenant Involvement and Empowerment is part of the consumer standards. For a brief summary of the standards see Appendix A. We will meet these requirements by:

- **Providing a Governance Structure**

The Landlord Service Committee (LSC) is made up of elected members and tenants working together to discuss housing issues. It reviews recommendations made by the Tenants Scrutiny Group (TSG) and gives comments and advice to Cabinet.

The TSG is made up of tenants only. The group carries out scrutiny of housing services as well as monitoring performance, services and conducts reviews of specific service areas.

These arrangements meet the basic requirements of co-regulation.

- **Improving opportunities for tenants to engage, get involved and get information**

Through the various methods available, tenants can get involved at a level that suits them. This varies from tenant scrutiny roles such as tenant inspectors, to giving opinions on services through the “Your Voice” consultation group.

We are always looking to improve opportunities for tenants to get involved by introducing new methods for involvement and create opportunities for tenants to engage and give us their views and feedback on the services they receive. We also want to improve how tenants are kept informed about what is happening in the service by reviewing how we communicate and are looking at other ways to get information out to tenants such as social media and mobile applications.

We will provide information and training opportunities on a number of housing related topics, to enable our tenants to get more effectively involved and make informed decisions about our services.

We will make sure our involvement is outcome led to ensure tenants views are used to shape services and publicise what has changed within the service as a result of tenant involvement.

- **Working with local communities**

At a time where cut backs are being made within housing services due to Government policies, we will work with our Tenants and Resident’s Associations to review the effectiveness within in community, the outcomes and value for money.

We will work with and promote the use of the community run community centres to help to support them.

We will work closer and improve our communication with Elected Members and Parish Councils to ensure the views of communities and local groups are heard and represented.

We will carry out training and support our tenants to enable them to get involved and work with partnership agencies to identify other training and employment opportunities. We offer a number of training and support opportunities for our tenants to help build their capacity and assist them to get involved. We will continue to work with other partnership agencies and signpost our tenant to other suitable training and employment opportunities.

## **Tenant Involvement in this Strategy**

Tenants have helped to develop this Strategy through consultation. This has helped us understand what tenants want and this information has been used to shape this document and how the service will be delivered.

The Tenants Scrutiny Group has also reviewed and agreed the content of this strategy.

## **Outcomes for Tenant Involvement**

By delivering this strategy we are hoping to achieve the following outcomes:

- Measure levels of tenant satisfaction with housing services
- Improve communication with tenants through use of profiling data and development of a range of communication channels which meet their needs
- Use tenants views to help shape how services are delivered
- Show how tenant representatives through the TSG, have scrutinised services to ensure they provide value for money, meet the satisfaction of our wider tenant base and monitor complaints
- Create partnerships between tenants, staff and elected members by working together on the LSC
- Help tenants feel they are listened to, valued and empowered through training and support
- Recognise the valuable role tenants' play and the vital contribution they make towards helping to try to improve services and achieve value for money

We will have clear outcomes for all involvement activities. This will allow us to clearly see the value of involving tenants and record the differences that tenants have made.

## **Service Standards**

In addition to the Councils corporate service standards, the service standards for Tenant Involvement are:

- Offer a variety of ways for tenants to be involved, at a level and time commitments to suit their needs
- Consult with tenants about proposed changes to the service/policy/strategy and gather feedback about the services tenants receive
- Support tenants to be involved in monitoring and scrutinising performance
- Consider tenants views and give reasons if we are not able to carry out tenants wishes
- Ensure tenants are not out of pocket when they take part in involvement activities by using the tenant involvement expenses framework
- Provide opportunities to help tenants develop their skills, knowledge and confidence
- Promote the difference involvement makes through various communication channels
- Ensure involvement and engagement activities offer value for money
- Provide information in any other language or format to support tenant involvement.

## **Measuring the Impact**

Tenant involvement activity will be recorded and evaluated to ensure we are engaging with our tenants in the most effective ways. To make sure involvement is outcome led we will carry out impact assessments which will review the:

- Type of involvement activity
- Cost of activity
- Value for Money
- Outputs and Outcomes

The impact assessments will be reviewed by tenants.

## **Our Commitment to equality and diversity**

We believe that equality means treating people fairly. Diversity means valuing people's differences. We aim to ensure we:

- Identify and try to reduce barriers that stop our tenants getting involved or accessing services.
- Encourage community equality
- Better tailor services to meet the needs of our tenants and leaseholders

We are committed to identifying and supporting the diverse make up of our tenants and leaseholders to get involved and improve services and their communities and will work to the Councils Equality Statement – Appendix B

## **Conclusion**

This strategy has been developed with tenants and is designed to improve services through improved tenant involvement and engagement. The action plan in Appendix C shows what we need to do over the next 2 years to deliver this strategy and improve how we engage with our tenants.

Through Government policies and emerging legislation and financial impacts, housing continues to change and we must be reactive to this. Therefore this is a living document which tenants will continue to review and monitor and amend the action plan in line with any changes which develop over time. An annual assessment will be included as part of the Annual Report requirement.

# **Appendix A – Homes and Community Agency Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard**

## **Required Outcomes**

### **1.1 Customer service, choice and complaints**

West Lancashire Borough Council shall:

(a) provide choices, information and communication that is appropriate to the diverse needs of their tenants in the delivery of all standards

(b) have an approach to complaints that is clear, simple and accessible that ensures that complaints are resolved promptly, politely and fairly.

### **1.2 Involvement and empowerment**

West Lancashire Borough Council shall ensure that tenants are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in:

(a) the formulation of their landlord's housing related policies and strategic priorities

(b) the making of decisions about how housing related services are delivered, including the setting of service standards

(c) the scrutiny of their landlord's performance and the making of recommendations to their landlord about how performance might be improved

(d) the management of their homes, where applicable

(e) the management of repair and maintenance services, such as commissioning and undertaking a range of repair tasks, as agreed with landlords, and the sharing in savings made, and

(f) agreeing local offers for service delivery.

### **1.3 Understanding and responding to the diverse needs of tenants**

West Lancashire Borough Council shall

(a) treat all tenants with fairness and respect

(b) demonstrate that they understand the different needs of their tenants, including in relation to the equality strands and tenants with additional support needs.

**We will produce a compliance statement to show how we are meeting all of the 4 Homes and Communities Agencies consumer standards**

## Appendix B – WLBC Equality Statement

We recognise that people who provide and use our services come from diverse backgrounds and have different experiences and needs. We value this diversity and the ways in which it contributes to the richness of life and character of our community.

We will develop, commission and deliver services in a way that will help to overcome discrimination and disadvantage. We want every resident and visitor to West Lancashire to be treated fairly and with dignity regardless of age, gender, disability, race, belief and sexual orientation and with respect to their marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity or gender reassignment status. We will use our position and influence to promote equality in all aspects of community life.

Everyone who works or has a role at West Lancashire Borough Council will:

- Promote and maintain an atmosphere in which people of all backgrounds feel welcome, valued and respected
- Understand that equality is not about treating everyone the same but about recognising and addressing the specific needs, experience and background of individuals
- Treat each person as an individual and find out what their needs are rather than making assumptions
- Be prepared to take a flexible approach, ensuring all service users can access our services
- Be aware of the behaviours and barriers that can form discrimination and understand the negative impact these can have on service users, visitors and staff
- Speak out and report if they witness, become aware of, or are a victim of any form of discrimination, bullying, unfair treatment or harassment
- Not victimise, or attempt to victimise, anyone who has made complaints on discrimination or provided information on discrimination
- Be aware of and take account of the Council's policies

We will regularly monitor and report on the progress we make in addressing discrimination and disadvantage in our borough and this progress will be evaluated regularly by our senior managers and elected members.



## Appendix C - Action Plan 2016-2018

### Provide a Governance Structure

| What we are going to do  | How we will do it   | Why we're doing it  | Showing its success / Targets   | Who is doing it?                      | When it will be done by          |
|--|---|---|---|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Recruit additional enthusiastic, new tenants in our governance arrangements. They will provide challenge and scrutiny. | <p>Recruit for new members on the LSC</p> <p>Recruit for new members on the TSG by advertising the role to tenants.</p>   | <p>To ensure tenant places are filled on LSC and tenants views are considered</p> <p>Compliance with regulatory requirements and demonstration of a commitment to supporting a co-regulatory operating environment.</p>           | <p>All places filled by tenants on the LSC</p> <p>All places filled on the TSG</p> <p>Tenants trained and ready to take future vacancies through shadowing opportunities.</p> | <p>Tracy Berry</p> <p>Lisa Conroy</p> | Spring 16                        |
| Support the TSG to carry out service reviews and scrutinise the services delivered to tenants.                         | <p>Create development plans with each member of the group to ensure they have the knowledge and skills to be able to scrutinise services on behalf of all tenants.</p> <p>Carry out annual planning and review event for the TSG.</p> | <p>Compliance with regulatory requirements and demonstration of a commitment to supporting a co-regulatory operating environment.</p> <p>Increased accountability to tenants who are more able to challenge service delivery.</p> | <p>Number of recommendations being made and implemented</p> <p>Carry out 2 scrutiny reviews per year</p>  | Lisa Conroy                           | <p>Spring 16</p> <p>Annually</p> |

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| Set up a monitoring reporting system to implement recommendations made by the TSG. | Arrange for the actions to be set up on Covalent which the TSG can monitor | Compliance with regulatory requirements and demonstration of a commitment to supporting a co-regulatory operating environment.<br><br>Ensure agreed recommendations are implemented and delivered. | Number of agreed recommendations actioned within set timescales.   | Lisa Conroy                           | Spring 16                      |
| <b>What we are going to do</b>   | <b>How we will do it</b>   | <b>Why we're doing it</b>  | <b>Showing its success / Targets</b>   | <b>Who is doing it?</b>               | <b>When it will be done by</b> |
| Review the role of tenant inspectors   | Benchmark against other providers the role their inspectors carry out      | To increase the numbers of inspectors and widen the role they do .<br><br>With an increased role the inspectors can carry out mystery shopping and service checks on behalf of the TSG.            | Development of the tenant inspector role tenants who carry out the role.<br><br>Increase number of tenant inspectors by 50% (current number involved is 4) | Lisa Conroy<br><br>Francesca Blundell | Spring 16                      |
| Increase opportunities for tenants to give feedback on services                    | Carry out targeting surveys to tenants who have accessed services          | To measure and monitor levels of satisfaction  | Information will be regularly reported on feedback findings and actions being taken.   | Tracy Berry<br><br>Lisa Conroy        | On-going                       |
| Increase engagement and communication with Elected Members to ensure a there is an | Send regular updates to members about the work completed by the team.      | Compliance with regulatory requirements and demonstration of a commitment to supporting a co-regulatory operating environment.   | Members have a greater understanding about the work the team do and how landlord services are  | Tracy Berry                           | Autumn 16                      |

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| understanding about the regulatory requirements for tenant involvement |  | To improve communication between the involvement team, elected members and the tenants they represent. | regulated. |  |  |
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### Improving opportunities for tenants to engage get involved and get information

| What we are going to do   | How we will do it  | Why we're doing it   | Showing its success / Targets  | Who is doing it?  | When it will be done by |
|---|--|--|--|---|-------------------------|
| Increase the numbers of tenants signed up to "Your Voice".                            | Regular marketing campaigns via the website, social media and press releases as well as direct targeting | To ensure there is a sufficient number of tenants giving their views on the service                        | Decisions and improvements being made based on tenants feedback<br><br>Increase number of Your Voice members by 25% (current number involved is 160) | Francesca Blundell  | On going                |
| Carry out regular door knocking exercises to engage with tenants and seek their views | Based on profiling information, satisfaction levels and complaints                                       | To ensure we are speaking to our tenants about services and gathering their views and profiling data gaps. | Using the information gathered to improve services<br><br>Results of this will be part of measuring satisfaction levels with housing services        | Tracy Berry<br><br>Francesca Blundell<br><br>Emma Routledge | On going                |
| Use technology to create new options for  | Review software currently used for   | Allows tenants to fill in surveys and communicate with us easier.  | Number of tenants using the on line/email /text  | Lisa Conroy   | Spring 17               |

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| consultation   | consultation  |  | consultation option  |   |                                |
| Exploring different channels of communications with our tenants        | Review how we can engage with tenants using a mobile application.   | To make it easier and more convenient for tenants to receive information and give feedback   | Increased satisfaction levels in communication indicators.                             | Tracy Berry   | Spring 17                      |
| <b>What we are going to do</b>   | <b>How we will do it</b>  | <b>Why we're doing it</b>  | <b>Showing its success / Targets</b>   | <b>Who is doing it?</b>   | <b>When it will be done by</b> |
| Develop robust internal and external involvement communications plans. | <p>Use tenant profiling to review the way in which we are communicating with our tenants.</p> <p>Use profiling and insight information to communicate with tenants in their preferred method</p> <p>Review the information on the Housing &amp; Inclusion sections of the Councils web pages to ensure they are user friendly and informative</p> | <p>Make more tenants aware of involvement opportunities, either directly or via informed staff.</p> <p>Work with staff and elected members to make them aware of the involvement methods and help them to identify tenants who could become involved.</p> <p>Help other teams within the department when communicating with tenants.</p> | Increased numbers of tenants actively involved through formal or informal arrangements | <p>Tracy Berry</p> <p>Lisa Conroy</p> <p>Francesca Blundell</p> | Summer 17                      |

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|   | and are an effective communication tool.   |  |   |                                |           |
| Continue to develop new and innovative involvement and communications techniques to make involvement activities more inclusive and successful | Continue to benchmark services against other providers<br><br>Investigate other methods of involvement and communication such as Twitter and Facebook. | To keep generating interest in involvement and engagement methods which suit the business and tenants needs. | Involvement activities that tenants are interested in taking part in resulting in increased take-up and achievement of involvement objectives | Tracy Berry<br><br>Lisa Conroy | Summer 17 |

### Supporting local communities

| What we are going to do   | How we will do it  | Why we're doing it  | Showing its success / Targets          | Who is doing it?  | When it will be done by |
|---|--|---|--|---|-------------------------|
| Encourage development of local community groups to carry out projects within their neighbourhoods and identify external funding to enable/support activities to take place. | Identify suitable tenants/groups through other tenant engagement activities who could support activities such as Big Tidy Up<br><br>Develop a support package for tenants who want to set up "single | Increase the number of involved tenants whilst making improvements local people want within their neighbourhoods<br><br>To support regulatory requirements on the involvement and neighbourhood standards<br><br>To offer activities for the community which offer value for money by | Carry out 2 community events each year | Tracy Berry<br><br>Francesca Blundell<br><br>Emma Routledge | On going                |

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|   | <p>action groups” to deal with single issues or improvements</p> <p>Research and apply for relevant funding</p>                    | gaining external or match funding  |  |  |           |
| Carry out a review of the Tenants and Residents Associations (TRAs) | <p>Report on the compliance of the TRAs to the LSC</p> <p>Benchmark against other organisations</p> <p>Gain community feedback</p> | To review the effectiveness within the community, outcomes and value for money | <p>An outcome which suits the needs of tenants and offers value for money.</p> <p>Have measurable outcomes that have helped improve the community that they are working in</p> | <p>Tracy Berry</p> <p>Emma Routledge</p> | Summer 16 |
| Carry out a review of the Tenants and Residents Forum               | Report to the LSC following discussions with Forum officers.   | To review the effectiveness, outcomes and value for money of the meetings      | An outcome which suits the needs of tenants and offers value for money.  | <p>Tracy Berry</p> <p>Lisa Conroy</p>    | Summer 16 |