



Minutes from the St Albans City & District Council Tenant and Leaseholder Forum

- 1. Date / Time:** 24 October 2024, 6pm – 7:40pm
- 2. Attendees:** Seven tenants and leaseholders from various locations within the district attended, living in a diverse range of locations within the district and housing types (bungalows, flats, and houses). Introductions were made by everyone individually.

The tenants are eager to have their voices heard in an ongoing effort to strengthen resident engagement, and the Council keen to hear the lived experience of residents to aid decision making – a true win-win.

3. Disclosure of personal and pecuniary interests:

[To introduce at next meeting]

- 4. Minutes of previous meeting (including matters arising):**
n/a as newly formed group

5. Resident Engagement Strategy

The draft Resident Engagement Strategy was shared with the group for scrutiny and discussion. Residents asked for a greater focus on 'respect' being always shown to tenants by Council employees and contractors. Some examples were shared where this did not happen. There was also the view that 'security' needed to come out stronger as some residents need to feel safe in their homes and don't always, feeding back on decisions and capturing learning.

The Forum agreed the draft strategy with assurance that their views would feed into the final draft going to the Housing & Inclusion Committee to sign off in two weeks' time. In addition, a new Resident Engagement strategy would be co-created to start in 2026 which would be designed from the ground up with stakeholders including this group.

6. Draft Terms of Reference for this Forum

It was explained why this forum needed Terms of Reference to help with governance. We explained that Settle (a local housing association) had shared a copy of theirs with us and we wanted this forum to review them and help give them a St Albans look and feel.

Some broad themes came out of the discussion to test the draft against:

- We need to communicate clearer and listen
- Everyone needs a fair chance to talk and be heard
- Tenants feel that diversity is 'missing' e.g. Asian community
- Equality Diversity & Inclusion needed to be represented
- Tenants from all across the district

Forum members agreed to take the Terms of Reference home for further scrutiny. **Members are encouraged to provide feedback on any additional amendments or gaps they identify within the following two weeks.**

7. Initial feedback from the Tenant Satisfaction Measures

This year's questionnaires have now been sent to all tenants and leaseholders by MEL. Research on behalf of the Council. The period for returns was still open but the group were shown that overall satisfaction with services was at 60%. This was consistent with the previous year and consistent with what the forum were reporting – some things go well and other things less well. The forum discussed specific challenges in improving tenant satisfaction, including service responsiveness and the quality of maintenance work.

The forum agreed to focus specific effort on understanding the experiences of tenants with neutral feedback to identify areas for improvement.

8. This led to some very useful discussions leading to some general themes:

Resident Engagement & Communication

- **Desire for Respect & Influence:** Tenants expressed a strong desire to be treated with respect and to feel like valued stakeholders rather than "second-class citizens." Many feel that engagement is often one-sided, with council decisions seeming to prioritise procedural "box-ticking" over meaningful action.
- **Communication Gaps:** Many tenants highlighted that communication between council departments and with tenants is inconsistent, leading to unresolved issues and tenant frustration. Improvements in transparency, follow-up, and accountability are essential.
- **Lack of Empathy:** Residents feel that council staff, particularly in housing management, lack empathy, leading to a sense of being "passed around" without adequate support or accountability.

Safety and Security Concerns

- **Insecure Living Conditions:** Haig Close was specifically mentioned as an area where tenants do not feel safe. There are concerns about inadequate security measures, including stairwell hygiene and lack of locks, particularly in communal areas. **This could be an area for a neighbourhood improvement plan as described in the Resident Engagement Strategy.**
- **Anti-Social Behaviour:** Tenants reported ongoing issues with drug use, particularly in communal stairwells, and feel that council response has been insufficient. While tenants appreciate police presence at engagement events, they expressed the need for stronger, coordinated actions to mitigate anti-social behaviour. **Possible future focus group on how we manage tenants with complex issues?**

Maintenance and Repairs

- **Quality of Services:** Tenants noted dissatisfaction with the standard of some repair work by council contractors, feeling that privately paid services often yield better results. Issues with contractors, especially regarding cleanliness after repairs, were raised.
- **Accountability of Contractors:** Specific mention was made of Morgan Sindall, with tenants **requesting direct accountability from the contractor at future forum meetings.**
- **Specific Maintenance Needs:** Tenants at Haig Close requested regular gutter cleaning and improved upkeep of communal areas, which they feel impacts their quality of life and makes it difficult to invite guests.

Accessibility and Inclusivity

- **Engagement of Diverse Communities:** The forum acknowledged that certain demographic groups, particularly older residents, younger generations, and minority communities, may face barriers to engagement. Tenants noted a need for more inclusive strategies to encourage wider participation.
- **Representation & Diversity:** There was a particular emphasis on the absence of certain cultural groups in resident engagement, with tenants calling for more diversity and representation across forums and decision-making processes. This is built into the Resident Engagement Strategy which we expect will be agreed by the Council shortly.

Event Scheduling & Venue Accessibility

- **Timing and Location of Events:** Residents raised issues with community days scheduled during standard working hours, which prevents full attendance. Suggested timing adjustments include evening hours to accommodate working residents, as well as more accessible venues, such as St Luke's.
- **Consistency in Communication:** Tenants expressed the need for advance notification of event dates to improve planning and participation. **This was agreed!**

Systemic Issues in Housing Management

- **Attitude and Culture in Housing Management:** Tenants felt that an overarching culture of entitlement and poor follow-up within housing management detracts from the effectiveness of resident services. **Is a new customer approach required?**
- **Lack of Accountability:** Multiple tenants voiced frustration over delays and inadequate responses from housing management, believing these issues result from systemic rather than individual failures.

Additional Community Concerns

- **Fly-Tipping and Waste Management:** Fly-tipping was highlighted as a significant issue, with tenants requesting educational initiatives and collaboration with waste management to mitigate these problems.
- **Hygiene and Cleanliness:** Issues regarding the cleanliness of communal spaces, particularly in stairwells, were mentioned, with residents advocating for more frequent cleaning and maintenance.

Future Actions and Improvements

- **Enhanced Resident Feedback Mechanisms:** Tenants expressed a desire for the council to incorporate resident feedback into decision-making processes actively and transparently, with an emphasis on clear communication regarding outcomes and rationale. **A clear remit for this group!**
- **Improvement in Accessibility of Documents:** Some tenants raised accessibility issues with online agendas and survey formats, suggesting alternatives for future meetings, such as beige-coloured documents, to assist with readability.

A Specific Case of ineffective consultation

- Example to do with relocating communal re-cycling bins at various locations
- Surveyor attended one block, managed the situation and took some tricky conversations
- However, perceived poor planning as letter sent but inadequate time for real consultation
- Residents left feeling 'done to'

To be used as a case study to learn from at future meeting.

9. Conclusion:

The forum highlighted examples of good customer service but also where things had gone wrong. Tenants focused on a strong need for **respect** from the Council, a prioritisation of **safety** for tenants living in their homes, and **accountability** for seeing through promises made. There was a clear call for **improved communication, inclusivity, and responsiveness** from council services.



It was agreed that this will require a cultural shift which can only be improved by listening to and addressing the needs of tenants and leaseholders. This meeting was the first step in doing this and will require a concerted effort across council teams and external contractors, with a focus on transparent engagement, empathetic communication, and proactive service improvement.

10. Date of Next Meeting:

Question asked, if future meeting times/dates will be given in advance? **The answer was yes and emails will be sent to members and published on the resident engagement page of the website!**