

St Albans City & District Council –

Resident Engagement Strategy (Nov 24 – March 26)

Introduction:

We believe firmly that our services should be designed around the needs of our residents, working in partnership to identify improvements and innovative solutions. This will improve our performance and therefore the communities we serve.

We use the words ‘engage’ and ‘involve’ at various points throughout this document. We see engagement and involvement as the same: somebody who is involved is engaged. What’s important is that the conversation is happening and something better and different is achieved as a result – leading to direct resident influence over the services provided.

This strategy sets out our approach to Resident Engagement, what we want to achieve, how it’s going to work and what the benefits will be for our residents and the Council as a whole.

This is intentionally a short-term strategy. During and post Covid several regular engagement activities ceased and there is a need for a re-fresh. Whilst building on what we know works, a longer-term review of this strategy will start in 2025 to ensure we can further develop this area of work.

Every quarter an update will be shared detailing our current position on performance and a summary of the residents’ voice. This will be scrutinised by both residents and at the Housing & Inclusion Committee, ensuring decisions made by the Council are shaped by feedback from the people they serve.

This draft has been worked through and improved with our Tenant & Leasehold Forum members.

The environment in which we operate:

A lot has changed over the last ten years. Shifts in housing regulation with a focus on building more properties have meant some tough decisions on internal investment for many social landlords, and that has limited the amount of resident engagement in the past. The impact of the tragic events at Grenfell, as well as a series of other high profile news stories, have placed the microscope firmly over social landlords, questioning their integrity when it comes to listening to residents and understanding what’s important to them.

The sector is reacting positively to this challenge, but exactly how we do this is complex. The Government set out their requirements in the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023, but business plans are stretched, and priorities are being reviewed.

We are no different, but we can see how working closer with residents in developing new opportunities to have their voice heard and hold us to account will help us operate more efficiently. What tenants think collectively is referred to as the tenant's voice.

Having this interim strategy truly embedded in what we do will help demonstrate we meet all elements of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023; the requirements from the Housing Ombudsman, as well as the Building Safety Act.

This document sets out how we plan to tackle these challenges within this new operating environment now, while we work together with residents to create a longer-term plan.

The purpose of resident engagement:

We believe working together with our residents we can build stronger communities, design better and more efficient services as well as unlock potential in the organisation that wouldn't otherwise be possible.

We know that engagement is important to our residents too. We have heard clearly from the Tenant Satisfaction Measures that we need to be a better landlord. We know that residents want to be listened to and want to see positive change as a result. We are determined to improve our approach to Resident Engagement.

To achieve this, we have set out some clear principles to shape this strategy:

- We will make being involved accessible so that as many residents as possible can take part in the conversation. Support and training will be offered as appropriate.
- We know not everyone wants to be involved in the same way. Therefore, we'll provide lots of different ways.
- We'll try to ensure that the residents who are involved are representative of our diverse range of residents, by ensuring our activities and recruitment methods consider diversity from the outset.
- We will ensure that our approach to engagement is embedded in our services and our business plans.
- We will provide opportunities for residents to hold us to account when it comes to our performance.
- We will ensure that every opportunity to be involved has a clear objective.
- We will demonstrate the impact involving residents has had on the organisation's service designs and performance.

How residents can be involved:

The range of options for residents to be engaged will be at various levels enabling everyone an opportunity to be involved based on their preferences, as detailed below.

	Consultation	Collaboration	Co-Design
Dictionary Definition	Seek information or advice	Work jointly on a project	Design something jointly
What it means	I'm going to ask your views and balance those with other stakeholders views.	We're going to navigate our conflicting agendas and tensions & come up with mutually beneficial solutions that we wouldn't see on our own.	We're going to share power and start with a 'blank sheet of paper' to scope our design together.
What it means in the context of resident engagement	Get residents' feedback on pre-determined options as one input to making decisions.	Collaborate with residents on pre-defined projects or plans, to find mutually beneficial solutions, that go beyond individual & group agendas and interests.	Co-design solutions with residents and other stakeholders. Residents must be involved in defining the project & have decision making power.
Focus	Process	Relationship	Power
Structure	Typically done via surveys or meetings to get resident's inputs on pre-determined options.	Typically, work within existing roles and structures e.g., Residents Associations	Often sharing decision making powers requires establishing new governance structures.

Source: <https://grenfellenquirer.blog/2021/10/10/the-3-cs-of-resident-engagement/>

Residents can be involved at multiple levels:

- Be **consulted** on specific issues or services;
- Work **collaboratively** with the Council on specific projects or plans;
- Influence and **co-design** decisions that affect all our residents, our business plans and policies.

Generally, as you move down the list there is a greater time commitment required from residents. Expenses are covered for involvement in all formal meetings.

Being consulted is the most straightforward form of engagement.

We're committed to consulting with all our residents on changes that will affect them, their safety, their home or their neighbourhood. By consultation, we mean that we will contact each affected resident, providing information about the proposed change then giving a reasonable period to respond with feedback.

Where we can, we will use each resident's preferred method of contact when we do this, but sometimes for legal reasons we may have to do this by post.

After the consultation period, we will review each comment. We will then produce a response to all residents summarising the results of the consultation, any change made, or the reasons why some things haven't changed.

We also gather information on services provided to measure how well the organisation is performing and identify areas for improvement. We'll ensure there are a range of ways that this feedback can be provided to us, including SMS text, letter, phone and directly through the website. There will be times when we commission research from a third party. We'll do this when we need impartial and independent feedback, helping us to improve what we do to meet residents' needs.

Sometimes we get it wrong. Having an effective complaints process ensures that residents have a route to get problems resolved. It also helps us to identify improvements. We'll ensure we learn from our mistakes and improve services as a result.

Ways to give Feedback to consultation include:

- Respond to a survey by SMS or telephone
- Provide feedback directly through the website, by email, text or over the phone including making a formal complaint
- Taking part in our annual Tenant Satisfaction Measures perception survey or transactional surveys
- Attending any property specific safety meeting e.g., High-rise safety visits at Telford Court.

Collaborate with the Council

Some residents like to get involved in things beyond simple consultation processes. Many people help shape ideas and thinking while also providing more regular feedback that lets us test ideas and make improvements faster. We know it's not always possible for residents to give up a lot of time to take part in regular and formal groups.

To be able to accommodate those who either want to participate at a time that's convenient to them, or to take part in activities less regularly, activities like those listed below have been created to ensure these people are heard. Ways to Participate include:

- Scrutinise our performance
- Join a Focus Group around a particular issue
- Get involved in reviewing our Policies
- Attend our Community Days
- Attend the Meetings in our Sheltered Schemes (for those in this accommodation)
- Join us to form an Estate Improvement Group or an estate walkabouts
- Come along to any Residents events we hold
- Create a Residents Association and seek formal recognition from us

Co-Design plans, ideas and improvements

This will be directed through our Tenant & Leaseholder Forum which will have a link to the Housing and Inclusion Committee to help ensure that the issues that matter most to residents are heard by the Committee.

There will be different methods used to create this 'link' ranging from personal representations to survey results, to the Lead Councillor for Housing and Community Safety being invited to sit on the Tenant and Leaseholder Forum.

The Forum is limited to 12 members selected for their skills, experience and passion for making a difference. When selecting the members we will ensure we have representatives of the different areas we serve and our overall resident mix.

Measuring our success

Here are the main ways we will know whether this strategy is working:

- By April 2024, we will have at least 50 residents actively taking part in a formal activity within this strategy.
- We are committed to involving residents from all backgrounds. Our engagement activities will be designed to reflect the diversity of our community and ensure everyone has a voice.
- Each year, as a part of an annual review of resident engagement, we will demonstrate the positive contribution resident engagement has had on the organisation and its performance.
- We will check with residents through the Tenant Satisfaction Measures, to see how we are progressing and use the results to target further action
- We will produce quarterly performance information on our website to allow greater resident scrutiny
- Every Housing and Inclusion Committee will have an item on the residents' voice

Resident Influence Service Standards:

As a resident I want to feel:	To do that, the Council needs to:	Which means staff and services need to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respected • safe in our homes and neighbourhoods • seen, heard, and listened to • that you care • confident that you have understood and made a record of my views • that I will be told what happens next 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure all staff are aware of and working to a set of behaviours and values • focus more on resolving residents' issues rather than ticking boxes • demonstrate that decisions are made with residents and explain how • ensure you are offering all residents a chance to get involved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • value and encourage resident participation • learn from mistakes • have empathy and show they care • be human, honest, transparent and accountable • pro-actively update residents • be enabled to change processes or policies for the benefit of residents

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that I'm being treated as an individual • that I'm included in making decisions, and my experience is acknowledged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • earn residents' confidence and trust by improving services and working better together • use data and resident feedback to regularly review and improve, as part of our efforts in becoming a great Council • share results and feedback with staff and residents • ensure processes and systems are resident-focused, regularly reviewed and fixed when broken. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • avoid generic responses and "one size fits all" approaches • ensure residents feel listened to, heard and confident that action will be taken • be clear on who is taking responsibility and what the next steps are • collaborate across teams • respond to enquiries and communicate actions and outcomes to residents
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Partner Opportunities:

There are other established forums which residents and indeed the housing department can attend on specific issues. These include:

- Access Forum – run by the Council's Community Engagement Officer which would be good for consultation to ensure any new projects / Policies etc have been reviewed for accessibility.
- Faith & Culture Enterprise – has been set up in similar to the above and would have a different lens to review projects, policies etc.
- The Equalities Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Partnership oversees the EDI strategy. Another excellent forum which includes a broad range of local partners such as Communities First, the CAB, Police, Schools, and District & Parish Councillors.
- Our main repairs contractor Morgan Sindall delivers social value initiatives in connection with our contract. The resident engagement framework can help publicise these initiatives and ensure they meet the broader aims within the Housing Strategy.

Risks to achieving the aims of this strategy:

Silent voices - The Council needs to plan to reach the 'silent' voices within its resident base. This will be done by proactively reaching out to those not using the services provided, using tenancy audits, contractor intelligence and open communication.

Unrepresented groups taking majority of decisions – to ensure that decisions are based on available evidence, and where possible larger resident sample sizes are used which given greater assurance.

A supportive Council culture – we start from the top both culturally and structurally by reviewing, with residents, the role they play and the positions they hold within our overall governance structure and ensure the 'link' between the residents' voice and the Housing and Inclusion Committee is clear.

Allocating the right resources - the staff resources will be reviewed by the end of 2024 as there are staffing implications in this area of work. In addition, this is a specialist area, so TPAS will be considered to assist to build resilience and capability with the wider team.

Version: 1.0

Date discussed by the Housing Leadership Team:

Date discussed and agreed at the Tenants & Leaseholder Form:

Date of Review: Sept 25 (*giving 6 months for all stakeholders to be consulted on new strategy and for residents to help Co-design it*)