

**DECENT & AFFORDABLE HOMES PDG  
17 MARCH 2015**

**DRAFT TENANT INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY**

**Cabinet Member** Cllr Ray Stanley  
**Responsible Officer** Housing Services Manager

**Reason for Report:** The existing tenant involvement strategy was approved in January 2012 and is now due for review.

**RECOMMENDATION(S):** The Cabinet adopts the draft Housing Services tenant involvement strategy.

**Relationship to Corporate Plan:** The Council must run the Housing Service efficiently and effectively and in accordance with the provisions of the regulatory framework. The Corporate Plan includes a pledge entitled: "Better Homes" where the long term vision is to ensure that the housing needs of our residents are met through the provision of good quality housing. It also contains a pledge relating to the empowerment of our communities.

**Financial Implications:** The Housing Service has set aside a budget for tenant involvement activities.

**Legal Implications:** The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard within the Regulatory Framework for Social Housing sets out a number of required outcomes and specific expectations which the Housing Service, as a Registered Provider (RP) of social housing is expected to meet.

**Risk Assessment:** The regulator holds Boards and Councillors responsible for ensuring that registered providers meet the consumer standards, including the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard. Failure to deliver the outcomes and expectations required could lead to reputational risk and some tenant dissatisfaction.

## **1.0 Introduction**

1.1 The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) is responsible for the regulation of social housing. The regulatory framework is underpinned by the principle of co-regulation which means that, in the case of a local authority such as the Council, with retained stock, Councillors are responsible for ensuring the standards are met and that others such as tenants, MPs and other elected representatives have a role in scrutinising that this is delivered.

1.2 The regulatory framework consists of a number of standards and these are divided into those relating to economic issues and those relating to consumer issues. The Council is only required to comply with the consumer standards; the economic standards apply to housing association and other RPs.

1.3 The Tenant Involvement & Empowerment Standard specifies that tenants must be given a wide range of opportunities to influence service delivery and to be involved in scrutinising all the work undertaken by the Housing Service.

## 2.0 **The Revised Strategy**

2.1 The review of the tenant involvement strategy was informed by a survey of tenants undertaken during Spring 2014. Every Council tenant was surveyed and the low level of response provided a vivid demonstration of the apathy to tenant involvement activities which we have encountered in recent years.

2.2 Over 3000 households were sent a questionnaire survey but only 122 responses were received either by post or online. 29 tenants were invited to attend a focus group to give us their views, but, unfortunately, this was not very well attended, with only 3 attending.

2.3 Of the tenants who responded to the survey:

- Almost 50% said that they would find it easier to get involved with more online opportunities
- 54% said that they did not want to attend meetings
- 66% said that they were unable to attend a meeting very easily
- 48% said that they did not feel comfortable meeting new people

2.4 The draft tenant involvement strategy has been reviewed and includes an expanded menu of involvement which gives more opportunities for getting involved remotely online.

2.5 The menu of involvement consists of three different types of activity:

- Those that involve a low level of demand on time by staying informed
- Those that involve some commitment of time by getting participating in consultations
- Those that involve a higher level of demand on time because they entail participating in decision making

2.6 The activities included in each strand are detailed within the strategy.

2.7 It should be noted that in recent years, there has been increased interest in electronic means of communication. These methods of communication offer significant cost savings for the Housing Service. Whilst there is a recognition that such methods of engagement will not appeal to all tenants, with the increased numbers of Smartphones in use, it is an area where the service can be developed. The "MDDC Housing" page on Facebook now has 150 likes and it is used to disseminate information about a whole range of issues such as service improvements, issues of concern, events, performance, and new homes available for housing applicants. The page is also used to celebrate success.

2.8 The Scrutiny & Improvement Group (the SIG) offers tenants and also one leaseholder a real opportunity to get involved in how the Housing Service is delivering services to tenants. The SIG reviews all new policies, and those

under review, performance and other areas of work and is able to make recommendations to the Cabinet Member and to the Decent and Affordable Homes PDG. It is tenant-led and is currently considering a name change in order to make it more accessible to other tenants. In recent years, the SIG has become increasingly involved in the production of the Annual Report and the success of the calendar sent out during the Autumn of 2014 can be attributed in a large part to the contribution of the group to the design and editing.

### **3.0 Equality and Diversity**

3.1 The menu of involvement had been designed in such a way as to enable tenants to get involved as much or as little as they want. If tenants have sensory or mobility issues, the service can be tailored to meet their needs. The strategy enables the Council to provide training to those tenants who want or need it. The options available for training include courses that can be completed online and the training available enables interested tenants to overcome any barriers to getting involved.

### **4.0 Tenant Involvement**

4.1 The SIG reviewed this draft strategy at their meeting on 12 February 2015 and did not seek any changes to the wording.

4.2 The PDG is asked to recommend that the Cabinet approves the draft Tenant Involvement Strategy.

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**Circulation of the Report:** Councillor Ray Stanley, Management Team

**List of Background Papers:** The Tenant Involvement & Empowerment Standard (part of the Regulatory Framework for Social Housing)

# **TENANT INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY 2015 - 2018**

**February 2015**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.0 The Aims and Objectives of the Strategy**

This new strategy for 2015-2018 builds on previous tenant involvement strategies. The purpose of tenant involvement is to find out the priorities of our tenants and this includes leaseholders. This will enable us to focus on listening to tenants' views and aspirations and to ensure tenants are able to influence future service delivery by scrutinising performance and identifying areas for improvement. During 2014 we surveyed tenants asking them how they wanted to engage with us. We have incorporated their views within this strategy.

The main aims and objectives of our strategy are to make sure tenants:

- Can contribute to the debate about how we use the resources available to us in such a way as to deliver services appropriate to their needs
- Have opportunities to identify issues relating to service delivery and to influence service improvement
- All have an opportunity to participate in the work which we do
- Feel that they have been listened to and their views considered
- Find it easier to get involved and have their views heard
- Have confidence in the housing service and are satisfied with the service they receive

### **2.0 Who is responsible for delivering this strategy?**

To make this strategy a reality we need help from all those with an interest in the housing service:

- Elected members
- Tenants, residents and leaseholders of Mid Devon
- Mid Devon District Council employees
- Community and voluntary sector
- Partners and other stakeholders

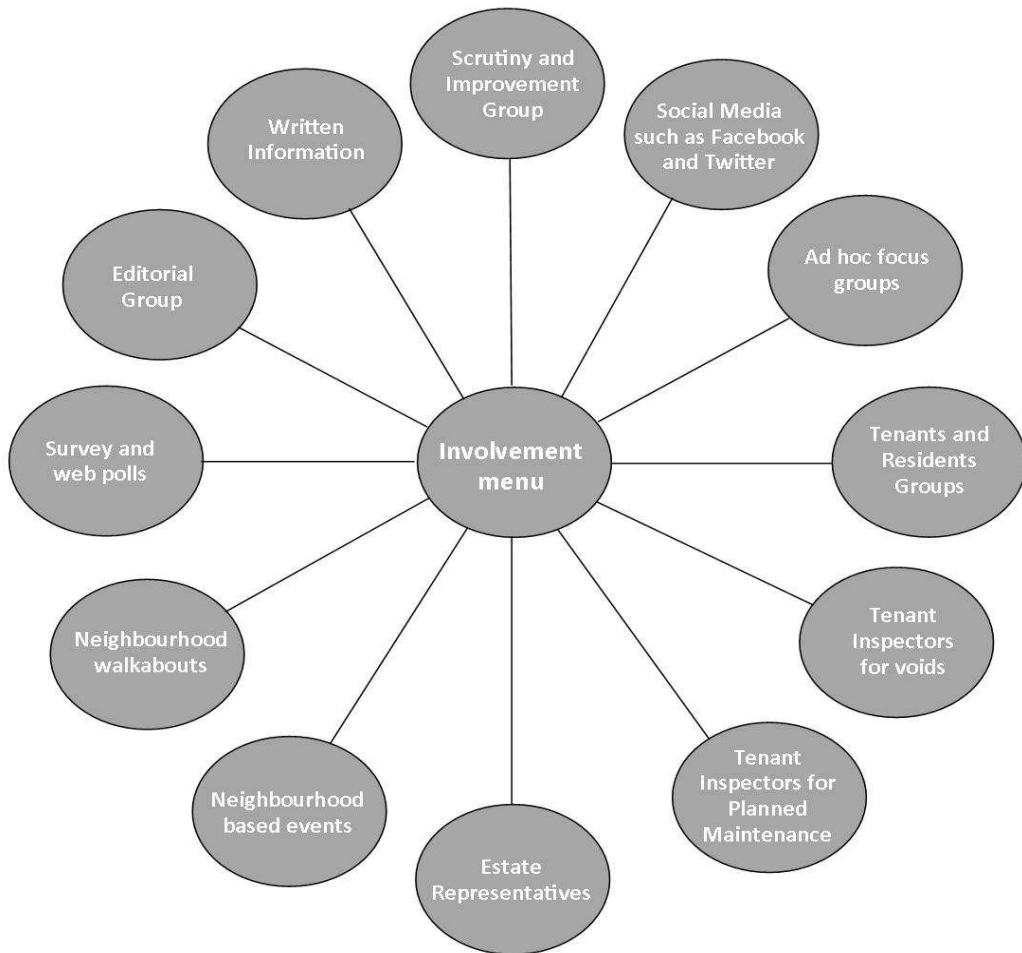
### **3.0 The Statutory & Regulatory Framework**

The National Standard relating to Tenant Involvement and Empowerment contains certain expectations and as a result RP's must:

- Tailor our services to meet the needs of our tenants
- Treat all tenants with respect and fairness
- Ensure tenants are given opportunities to influence and be involved in shaping services to reflect local priorities
- Give tenants opportunities to identify areas for improvement and delivery
- Offer training and support to tenants to help them develop their skills and capacity so that they can make a meaningful contribution

### **4.0 Menu of involvement**

The menu of involvement for 2015-2018 is set out below, and more detailed information about delivery is contained in Appendices A and B of this strategy.



Our programme of involvement is divided into three parts:

- Staying informed (low level of demand on time)
- Being consulted (some demands on time)
- Participating in decision making (higher level of demand on time)

### **Staying informed**

Housing News 4U  
Website

Facebook, Twitter, email and any other forms of social media

Service Business Plan and Performance information

Annual Report

Letters to individual tenants about their tenancy and work to their home

### **Being consulted**

Facebook, Twitter, email and any other forms of social media  
Surveys and Web Polls  
Email Group  
Neighbourhood walkabouts  
Estate Representatives  
Tenants and Residents Groups  
Neighbourhood based events

### **Participating in decision making**

Scrutiny and Improvement Group (the SIG)  
Attending the Decent and Affordable Homes Policy and Development Group (PDG) Meetings  
Facebook, Twitter, email and any other forms of social media  
Tenant Inspectors for Voids  
Tenant Inspectors for Planned Maintenance  
Short-term Focus/Working Groups  
Editorial Group  
Local Tenants and Residents Groups

### **5.0 Scrutiny arrangements**

The Regulatory Framework encourage landlords and tenants to work together to improve the levels of service delivered. We are committed to offering opportunities for tenants to scrutinise the work of the Housing Service and have a well-established Scrutiny and Improvement Group. This group's role is to:

- Monitor and check performance
- Challenge and improve services
- Ensure the Housing Service runs the business well and that it meets the needs of its tenants

### **6.0 Training**

We recognise the need for targeted training and development opportunities for tenants and staff. We give new staff a briefing about tenant involvement as part of the induction process. We also encourage and support tenants to access training activities. This enables our tenant representatives to have an understanding of current housing issues. Training has been focussed on individuals but group training is also available, if a need is identified.

### **7.0 Conclusion**

This strategy has outlined the Council's principles and approach to tenant involvement. The Tenant Involvement Strategy will be monitored by the Scrutiny and Improvement Group annually. This strategy will be reviewed January 2018.



## APPENDIX A: MENU OF INVOLVEMENT

Staying Informed	Details
Housing News 4U	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tenant magazine providing information on current issues/events and services</li> <li>• Newsletter can be provided in a range of formats such as large print, audio or electronic</li> </ul>
Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A range of information and links</li> <li>• Dates and details of tenant involvement activities</li> </ul>
Performance and Business Plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In depth information relating to performance</li> <li>• Available on our website, in our offices or sent out on request</li> </ul>
Annual Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In depth information relating to how our service have performed over the past 12 months</li> </ul>
Receive information from various teams on a regular and ad hoc basis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tenants receive individual information about their tenancy including rent and charges</li> <li>• Tenants and leaseholders receive information regarding any major improvements works to their homes</li> <li>• Tenants receive a Tenant Handbook</li> </ul>
Being Consulted	Details
Surveys and Web Polls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tenants can take part in completing surveys by telephone, text messaging, over the Internet or in person</li> </ul>
Email Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To establish a group of tenants who wish to be consulted by email</li> </ul>
Local Estate Based Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultation takes place in various locations across the district to inform and consult tenants on a on a variety of issues.</li> </ul>
Social Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tenants asked regularly for feedback and views on service improvements</li> </ul>

Neighbourhood Walkabouts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We visit each area at least every six months to meet tenants and check for repair needs. Tenants are invited to join officers and elected members as they walk around their area to raise any concerns and share ideas for improvement</li> </ul>

<b>Participating in decision making</b>	<b>Details</b>
Scrutiny and Improvement Group (the SIG)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Membership consists of a maximum of up to twelve independent tenants (and one of those tenant places is reserved exclusively for a leaseholder) and the Lead Member for Tenants' from the Decent &amp; Affordable Homes Policy and Development Group (PDG). The group examine, in detail, how we manage the service and how we deliver these services to tenants and for them to make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Housing, the PDG and the Cabinet to improve the service</li> </ul>
Tenant Inspectors for Voids	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We recruit tenants that inspect our standard of repair for our void properties and ensure they are up to the Decent Homes Standard</li> </ul>
Short-term Focus/Working Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ad hoc groups are held as and when necessary to consult on issues relating to a service</li> <li>These groups are ideal for tenants who have a particular interest in areas of interest to them</li> </ul>
Tenant Inspectors for Planned Maintenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We recruit tenants to check our Planned Maintenance works. The role of Tenant Inspector is to assist in the 'liaison' between the tenant and the Planned Maintenance Team</li> </ul>

Editorial Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This group consists of tenant volunteers who are involved in editing newsletters</li> </ul>
Tenants and Residents Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tenants and Residents Groups are where local tenants and residents get together and discuss housing issues in their neighbourhood</li> </ul>
Estate Representatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tenants can represent the interests of their neighbours in a block of flats, street or any other agreed specified area within their neighbourhood</li> </ul>

## **APPENDIX B: TENANT INVOLVEMENT ACTION PLAN 2015/2016**

This Action Plan is a working document for the Housing Service. The actions in this plan are designed to make sure that our work in 2015/2018 achieves the aims and objectives set out in the Tenant Involvement Strategy.

	<b>ACTION REQUIRED</b>	<b>COMPLETION DATE</b>	<b>SUCCESS MEASURE / OUTCOME</b>
1	Promote and develop on-line services and the use of social media to engage with the wider community by updating the tenant involvement web, Facebook and Twitter pages on a regular basis. Publish involvement activities, survey results, outcomes etc	On going	Web pages will be current and more informative for tenants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tenants kept informed</li> <li>• Encouraging involvement opportunities</li> <li>• Improved, 24/7 access to information for service users</li> </ul>
2	Produce four newsletters per year with tenant editors and one representative from the Scrutiny and Improvement Group (SIG)	January April July October	Newsletters published and sent out to all tenants and are promoted on our web, Facebook and Twitter pages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keeping all tenants informed</li> <li>• Encouraging involvement opportunities</li> </ul>
3	Produce the Housing Service Annual Report	Annually	Sent out to all council households by the required date <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informing tenants on how well we performed last year</li> </ul> Encouraging tenant engagement
4	Promote and increase tenant involvement with Neighbourhood Officers and Community Housing Support Officers by facilitating and supporting the use of social event such as coffee sessions, , keep fit sessions, healthy lifestyle events, gardening clubs and other events which promote greater sustainable communities	On going	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achieving wider aspiration of tenant, residents and all service users and their communities</li> <li>• Improve residents lifestyles and build sustainable communities in our neighbourhoods</li> </ul>
5	Promote Neighbourhood Walkabouts on our website, Facebook and Twitter pages, newsletters and on communal notice boards	Annually	Increase involvement on our estates. Evidence outcomes and publish on website, communal notice boards, newsletters etc <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better tenant satisfaction at a local level</li> <li>• Tailoring services to suit the needs of tenants in local areas</li> <li>• Improving neighbourhoods</li> </ul> Help create communities where people want to live

6	Increase engagement with young people by working in partnership with agencies who engage with young people	On going	Young people's views being incorporated in the service delivery
7	Increase tenant profiling	On going	Use customer knowledge to identify services most relevant to tenants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capture views from current under- represented groups</li> <li>• Increased scope for inclusion</li> <li>• Tailor our services to meet tenants' needs</li> </ul>
8	Continue to support Tenants and Residents Groups and promote the need for more involvement groups to reach the 'hard to reach' groups. Ensure all are accessible for people across the seven strands of diversity. Use tenant profiling information to target specific groups	On going	Promote the work of the current Tenant and Residents Groups across the district by having good news articles on our website, Facebook, Twitter pages, communal noticeboards and in newsletters <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased numbers of groups in our neighbourhoods</li> <li>• Leading to better community cohesion</li> <li>• Increased involvement in shaping service delivery</li> <li>• Better tenant satisfaction</li> <li>• Improving neighbourhoods</li> </ul>
9	Increase tenant involvement, especially from the tenants in rural communities	On going	More partnership working with Parish Councils. Promote estate representatives in the rural areas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help create communities where people want to live</li> <li>• Ensuring the views of rural tenants' are being captured</li> <li>• Better tenant satisfaction locally</li> <li>• Tailor service to meet tenants' needs</li> </ul>

10	Continue to support existing Tenant Inspectors for Voids and Planned Maintenance and encourage more to come forward	On going	Promote the work of the Tenant Inspectors across the district by having good news articles on our website, Facebook and Twitter pages, communal noticeboards and in our newsletters
11	Continue to support existing Estate Tenant Representatives and encourage more to come forward	On going	<p>Promote the work of the Estate Reps across the district by having good news articles on our website, Facebook and Twitter pages and in the newsletters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help create communities where people want to live</li> <li>• Views of rural tenants' being captured</li> <li>• Better tenant satisfaction locally</li> <li>• Tailor service to meet tenants' needs</li> </ul>
