

CABINET
5 NOVEMBER 2024

HOUSING SERVICES TENANT INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY 2024-2029

**Responsible Cabinet Member –
Councillor Matthew Roche, Health and Housing Portfolio**

**Responsible Director –
Elizabeth Davison, Executive Director - Resources and Governance**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To approve the Housing Services Tenant Involvement Strategy 2024-2029.

Summary

2. Darlington Borough Council Housing Services has a long history of working with our tenants to help shape their communities and influence decisions about their homes and the services we provide. Our approach to tenant involvement is embedded in our culture of openness and honesty, demonstrated through our Tenants Panels.
3. The Regulator of Social Housing's (RSH) new consumer standards from April 2024, set out their expectations for how social landlords must give tenants a wide range of meaningful opportunities to influence and scrutinise their landlord's strategies, policies and services.
4. The Housing Services Tenant Involvement Strategy 2024-2029 at **Appendix 1** sets out how we will involve and empower our tenants, including how our engagement activities will be monitored and reported, and how we will involve our tenants in decisions about the services they receive.
5. The Tenants Panel has been consulted on the draft strategy and they have given their full support.
6. This strategy was considered by Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee on 23 October 2024, who agreed its onward submission for approval by Cabinet.

Recommendations

7. It is recommended that Cabinet:
 - (a) Consider the contents of this report.
 - (b) Approve the Housing Services Tenant Involvement Strategy 2024-2029 at Appendix 1.

Reasons

8. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:
- (a) The Council values the support and involvement our tenants provide about the services they receive. Our tenants are best placed to let us know how to make improvements and to review our plans and proposals for the future.
 - (b) The RSH's Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard sets outcomes for social housing providers about the way we engage and involve our tenants. The adoption of a formal tenant involvement strategy is one of the ways to demonstrate how we will achieve this.

Elizabeth Davison
Executive Director – Resources and Governance

Background Papers

- (i) The RSH Consumer Standards

Anthony Sandys: Extension 6926

Council Plan	This report supports the Council Plan's HOMES priority to provide affordable and secure homes that meet the current and future needs of residents
Addressing inequalities	The Tenant Involvement Strategy will help the Council to deliver fair and equitable outcomes for our tenants
Tackling Climate Change	There are no issues which this report needs to address
Efficient and effective use of resources	There are no implications
Health and Wellbeing	There are no implications
S17 Crime and Disorder	There are no implications
Wards Affected	All wards with Council housing
Groups Affected	Council tenants and leaseholders
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not recommend a change to the Council's budget or policy framework
Key Decision	This report does not represent a key decision
Urgent Decision	This report does not represent an urgent decision
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

9. Darlington Borough Council provides over 5,300 high quality homes for local residents. We are committed to providing the best homes and services to tenants as possible. Involving and engaging our tenants is critical to help achieve this. Our tenants are best placed to let us know how to make improvements and to review our plans and proposals for the future.
10. The RSH sets a number of Consumer Standards, which apply to all social housing providers, including Councils. Specifically, in relation to the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard, social housing providers must:
 - (a) Take action to deliver fair and equitable outcomes for tenants.
 - (b) Take tenants' views into account in their decision-making about how landlord services are delivered and communicate how tenants' views have been considered.
 - (c) Communicate with tenants and provide information so tenants can use landlord services, understand what to expect from their landlord, and hold their landlord to account.
 - (d) Collect and provide information to support effective scrutiny by tenants of their landlord's performance in delivering landlord services.
 - (e) Ensure complaints are addressed fairly, effectively, and promptly.
11. The Council has well established processes in place to involve and engage our tenants in delivering our services. The Housing Services Tenant Involvement Strategy 2024-2029 at Appendix 1 promotes our continued commitment to tenant involvement. Specifically, the strategy covers the following areas:

Providing the right information

12. We will provide our tenants with the right information about our services in the ways they want. We will encourage our tenants to use our digital services, providing opportunities for everyone to be involved. We will ensure that we provide the right level of support for our tenants to access our services, ensuring no-one is excluded.

Supporting tenants to make their voice heard

13. We will encourage tenant involvement and effective participation. We will provide a wide range of opportunities for our tenants to be involved, develop, and feel fulfilled. We will put our tenants at the heart of everything we do and ensure their voice is heard.

Making decisions with our tenants

14. We will ensure the results of feedback are used to develop services and bring about positive change. We will use customer insight to make improvements and shape what we

do and how we do it. We value the contribution tenants make in improving services. We will involve our tenants to ensure their homes are safe and decent.

Maximising scrutiny and accountability

15. We will build trust and transparency and ensure our tenants can hold us to account. We will ensure our Council Members provide scrutiny of our decisions to ensure our tenants have been involved and listened to. We will work with our partners to get a better understanding of how we can engage with and support our communities. We will use complaints about our services to understand what has gone wrong and what we need to do to put things right.

Outcome of Consultation

16. Our Tenants Panel were consulted in September 2024 and overall, the Panel support the proposed Housing Services Tenant Involvement Strategy 2024-2029. Examples of the Panel's comments were as follows:
 - (a) "Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to read the proposed Tenant Involvement Strategy, which seems a great start for a commitment from both tenants and DBC, to work closer together to build a better community in all areas. This is why it is important that tenants get involved in groups like the Tenants panel, so tenants, through the Tenants Panel members, can have a direct voice in the decisions that affect them and their communities. The main thing I am looking forward to as a tenant panel member is change."
 - (b) "I have read the Strategy and support it fully. As a panel member and before that a member of the Tenants Board, I have spent something like 15 years helping the Council and tenants like me, work together for better understanding and improving scrutiny of how the council works. I've seen things change with much more involvement with the digital side of things allowing tenants who can't get to meetings get their point of view across. The council are constantly working to improve tenant involvement and inclusivity and are always willing to listen."
 - (c) "I think the Tenants Panel ask questions that otherwise would not be included in decision making. We know how important it is to have our voices heard."
 - (d) "As a Tenants Panel member, we as a team have read through a lot of information that goes to scrutiny before the council tenants and are always asked our opinions. As a panel member our voices are heard. Opinions on issues are listened to. We are the voice of the tenants. Over the next 5 years it will be more challenging as the new government goes forward. There will be issues I feel will arise that affects all tenants of DBC. To be able to help with that is going to be interesting."