

Housing Services Tenant Involvement Strategy

2024 - 2029

Foreword

Darlington Borough Council is committed to providing the best homes and services to tenants as possible. Involving and engaging tenants is critical to help achieve this. Tenants are best placed to let us know how to make improvements and to review our plans and proposals for the future.

This strategy increases our commitment to tenant involvement, which we plan to invest in more over the coming years. We know that not all tenants can get involved in the same way. So, we want to make sure there are as many different ways to get involved as possible – from making comments on individual repairs to sitting on the Tenants Panel.

Thank you so much to the many tenants that are already involved. I hope this strategy will mean that many more tenants can join them, so that Council homes and services can continue to improve and be the best they can be.

Councillor Matthew Roche, Health and Housing Portfolio Holder

As members of your Tenants Panel, we fully support this new strategy and the clear commitment to tenant involvement.

The strategy promotes the commitment of us as tenants, and Housing Services staff to work closely together to build better communities across the Borough. Partnership working is key to achieving our aims and we, as the Tenants Panel, are looking forward to supporting this through the next 5 years.

We recognise that over the next 5 years it will be challenging as the new government goes forward. There will be issues that will arise that affects all of us as tenants of Darlington Borough Council, and we embrace this challenge and look forward to supporting new ways of working and new strategies.

The Tenants Panel and Digital Tenants Panel allows us to have a direct voice in decisions that affect us all and all our communities. Some of our members have been involved with Housing Services through the Tenants Panel for over 10 years, showing our commitment to improving services and making change happen. As Tenant Panel members, our voices are heard, our opinions on issues are listened to, we are the voice of the tenants.

If you are interested in being a part of the exciting changes and helping us to improve, we're always looking for new members from across our communities in whatever capacity you can offer.

Housing Services Tenants Panel

Introduction

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 Tenant Panels.

This strategy sets out how we will continue to involve and empower our tenants, ensuring they are at the heart of everything we do. It also sets out how we will explore new ways to engage with our tenants and ensure that no-one is left out.

Our strategy will help us to meet regulatory requirements, strengthen and expand opportunities for our tenants to make a positive difference to our services and future direction.

Our Aims

- To provide our tenants with the right information.
- To ensure our tenants can give us their views in the ways they want to and make their voice heard.
- To ensure we offer our tenants a wide range of meaningful opportunities to influence and scrutinise.
- To improve and expand the ways our tenants can be involved and participate in decision making.
- To improve the ways, we can engage with our tenants, through digital and social media channels.
- To empower tenants by supporting tenant voice and providing training opportunities, to ensure they have the right skills to effectively scrutinise and make decisions around service delivery.
- To involve our tenants in making key decisions, such as improving safety and tackling climate change.
- To work with our tenants to improve services and help us implement change.
- To ensure we provide our tenants with feedback following consultation.
- To learn from complaints about our services, put things right and be open and honest when things haven't gone well.
- To work with our partners to get the best outcomes for our tenants.
- To meet the diverse needs of our tenants to ensure all tenants can engage with opportunities.

Our Priorities

Providing the right information

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.

How will we do this?

- We will make all our written communications easy to understand, accessible and clear about our services.
- We will provide up to date information about our services through our website, our tenants magazine Housing Connect and the Housing Facebook page.
- We will provide support and advice on how our tenants can use our digital services and through our Darlington Home Online service.
- We will regularly update our social media platforms giving tenants information about their homes and the area they live in.
- We will provide options where tenants can provide feedback on our services, as well as through the annual Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) survey.
- We will provide telephone and face to face services for those who need it and ensure our staff are on hand to speak to our tenants.
- We will provide and adhere to our customer service standards, so tenants know what level of service to expect from us.
- We will ensure we have useful leaflets and information available on a wide range of subjects for our tenants.
- We will provide data on our performance online, in our Annual Report and produce a special TSM edition of our Housing Connect annually, so tenants can scrutinise our performance.

How will we know we have been successful?

- All our written communications, policies and strategies will be in Plain English and approved by our Tenants Panel.
- Increased hits to our website pages and more subscribers to our Facebook page.
- More subscribers to the Darlington Home Online service.
- Reduced calls to our Housing Contact team; helping us to provide more support to the people who need us the most.
- Positive feedback from our tenants about the information we provide and the ways in which they can contact us.

Supporting tenants to make their voice heard

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.

How will we do this?

- We will make it as easy as possible for our tenants to give their views and get involved. We will use a variety of ways such as through surveys, Tenants Panel, the Digital Tenants Panel, face to face consultations and mystery shopping.
- We will support tenant voice at an estate and local level, including via funding for local tenant-led groups, helping tenants set up and develop local associations/forums, and via other opportunities (such as, estate walkabouts, coffee mornings, attendance at local groups/activities/events).
- We will give clear expectations and explanations of the role our tenants play in tenant involvement and how these will shape services.
- We will consider tenant's views and will communicate to tenants how their views have been considered in decision making.
- We will develop training opportunities for our Tenants Panel and promote wider training opportunities for our tenants to ensure everyone has the right skills to get involved and participate fully in activities, which they feel are important to them.
- We will provide funding opportunities to support tenant led activities and groups (Community Fund).
- We will understand the barriers to effective engagement and take action to remove them.
- We will ensure community activities support locally prioritised actions.
- We will create a positive engagement culture, where all staff understand the importance of customer engagement and actively promote it as an essential part of their roles.
- We will use the results of transactional feedback surveys and Tenant Satisfaction Measure surveys to help us improve services to our tenants. We will hold Focus Groups with our tenants to understand results in specific areas and consult with our Tenants Panel on next steps and areas of improvement.
- We will promote the results of the annual Tenant Satisfaction Measure surveys through our tenant's magazine, Housing Connect which is delivered to every tenant, is available online and which is available in an audio version.
- We will make it easy for our tenants to contact us to make a complaint, a compliment or comment about our services. We will use these as areas of learning to help us to continually improve and meet tenants' needs.
- We will take all reasonable steps to ensure all tenants have an equitable opportunity to be involved and to provide feedback on our services.
- We will involve the Tenants Panel in decision making for Community Fund bids.

How will we know if this has been successful?

- Increased tenant involvement and evidence that tenants have given their views through a range of activities.
- Increased attendance by our Tenants Panel at training events, to help improve their knowledge and skills.
- Improved TSM results and transactional feedback survey results .
- Increased participation through online engagement.
- Tenant led activities and groups successfully delivered using the Community Fund.

Making decisions with our tenants

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.

How will we do this?

- We will use the results of any feedback to help us make decisions about our services and communities.
- We will provide feedback on what we have done to improve services and bring about positive change, as a direct result of tenant involvement.
- We will hold Focus Groups with our tenants in their communities, to help us understand more about what our tenants want.
- We will involve our tenants with the maintenance, safety, and energy efficiency of their homes.
- We will work with our Tenants Panel and tenants to recruit Community Champions in our local communities. We will promote the work of these Champions within the communities and provide them with training and support to undertake these roles.
- We will empower our tenants to make decisions and take the lead.
- We will engage with the tenants of our new build homes and use their feedback to inform our future designs and choice of products.
- We will ensure our tenants are aware of opportunities within their local community and within the wider town of opportunities.
- We will provide a wide range of opportunities for our tenants to give their views and get involved through Surveys, Tenants Panel, the Digital Tenants Panel, Face to Face consultations and Mystery Shopping.

How will we know that this has been successful?

- Increased satisfaction levels in feedback and surveys (including TSM results).
- Evidence that tenant involvement has been used to make decisions and shape services.
- Evidence that tenants have been empowered to make a positive contribution to the maintenance, safety, and energy efficiency of their homes.
- Increasing numbers of Community Champions across our communities.
- Evidence that tenant's views have informed our future designs and choice of products.

Maximising scrutiny and accountability

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.

How will we do this?

- We will provide a wide range of opportunities for our tenants to scrutinise our performance, our policies, strategies, and decisions.
- We will use our Tenants Panel to provide effective tenant scrutiny and challenge and ensure that decisions that affect our tenants are transparent.
- We will develop the link between our Tenants Panel and tenant voice at an estate/local level.
- We will publish our performance through our Housing Connect magazine and online on a regular basis, so that tenants can see how we are measuring up and improving.
- We will ensure we have robust governance arrangements and key decisions about our services will be made by Council Members, and the results of tenant involvement will form the basis of any recommendations. Equality impact assessments will help us understand any adverse effects on the decisions we make.
- We will ensure tenants understand the level of service they can expect from us and what to do if they don't think we're meeting it.
- We will ensure our tenants know how they can complain about our services and that complaints are given priority. We will thoroughly investigate all complaints and provide tenants with a full and honest response.
- We will put right what has gone wrong and ensure we learn from any mistakes, publishing the details of any improvements.
- We will engage with our colleagues and external organisations about how we can better engage and support our tenants.
- We will use the results of transactional feedback surveys and TSM surveys to help us improve services to our tenants. We will consult with our Tenants Panel on next steps and areas of improvement.
- We will advertise our performance and give benchmarking data, so tenants can compare our results with previous years and other providers.
- We will adhere to the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code and will annually report on performance. We will also report complaint performance to our Tenants Panel quarterly.

How will we know when we have been successful?

- Evidence of decisions made in consultation with our tenant's panel.
- Evidence of challenge and scrutiny by our Council Members.
- Evidence that key performance measures and how we compare with others are regularly published and communicated to our tenants. Evidence that performance has improved.
- Evidence that complaints are consistently resolved promptly, politely, and fairly.
- Evidence that we meet the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.
- Complaints about our service are reducing.
- Evidence that complaints about our services have been used to drive changes and improvements.

How can tenants get involved?

The following table explains the opportunities that are available to all out tenants to get involved and how we share information with our tenants:

Activity	Frequency	Participants/Recipients	Where to find more information
Neighbourhood inspections	Bi-monthly	Tenants, Housing Officers, StreetScene, Police, Local Councillors, Tenant Involvement Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website • Housing Connect • Social media
Coffee mornings	Weekly	Tenants, Lifeline Officers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within relevant sheltered or extra care facilities
Tenant Hubs	Usually monthly	Tenants, Housing Officers, Lifeline Officers (where appropriate), Tenant Involvement Officers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website • Social media • Housing Connect
Focus Groups	Following Tenant Satisfaction Measure results	Tenants, Housing Officers, Tenant Involvement Officers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media • Within relevant community centres • Website • Housing Connect
Tenants Panel	10 each year	Tenants, Housing Officers, Tenant Involvement Officers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website • Housing Connect • Social media
Housing Connect magazine	3 each year	Tenants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website • Hand delivered to each tenant's home
Social Media (Facebook)	Usually a minimum of 3 posts each week	Tenants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media
Transactional Surveys	As appropriate	Tenants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website • Social media • Housing Connect

Activity	Frequency	Participants/Recipients	Where to find more information
Tenant Satisfaction Measure surveys	Annually	Tenants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Connect • Website • Social media
Digital Tenants Panel	As appropriate	Tenants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website • Social media • Housing Connect
Tenant Groups	As arranged by individual groups	Involved tenants (can include non-Council tenants)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media • Website • Housing Connect
Consultations	As required	Tenants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website • Social media • Housing Connect
Community Fund	As required	Tenants (Tenants Panel involved also in decision making)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website • Social Media • Housing Connect

Measuring and Monitoring

Effective monitoring and reporting of this strategy will help us understand if our engagement activities are making a difference. Therefore, we will measure and report on the effectiveness of this strategy by doing the following:

- We will expect to see an increase in the number of our tenants becoming involved and influencing decision making. We will measure and report on this through our website, our Tenant’s Panel, Housing Connect magazine and an annual report to our tenants.
- We will evaluate the progress of engagement activities at regular intervals throughout the year to ensure these are working effectively.
- We will publish the details of tenant involvement opportunities through an annual plan, regularly reporting on how we are progressing.
- We will publish the records of meetings and decisions made.
- We will provide an annual report to the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee on progress against our strategy.
- We will ensure tenant involvement forms a core competency for housing staff and is reflected in all job roles, recruitment processes and training plans.