
Tenant Engagement Strategy

April 2022

Housing Services

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Approved by: *Housing Committee*

Tenant Engagement Strategy

Introduction

Stroud District Councils (SDC) housing profile is made up of 5024 properties, which includes 712 Independent Living properties. The tenant involvement programme is promoted across the district in an attempt to encourage cross generational involvement.

Stroud District Council is committed to tenant involvement in line with the governments white paper (The Charter for Social Housing Residents), ensuring that tenants and residents shape, deliver and improve the housing services that we deliver to our communities. Listening to the voices of tenants is placing our tenants at the heart of service delivery.

This strategy is written against the backdrop of the national context in regard to the current issues that we are aware tenants are facing:

- COVID 19 impact
- Cost of living crisis
- Increase in inequalities
- Increase in poor mental health

This has had a significant impact on our tenants which have seen increased numbers of referrals to statutory services such as P3, Weavers Croft, safeguarding and increased levels of antisocial behaviour (including fly tipping) and increased levels of poor mental health.

Purpose of the strategy

The strategy sets out SDC's approach to tenant involvement and has been developed in partnership with tenants, councillors and officers, ensuring that SDC continues to promote tenant involvement through a wide range of opportunities. One of our primary drivers is to address the overall wellbeing of tenants by working together as one Council with an outcome focused approach supported by council services, councillors and other stakeholders

The main benefits of tenant involvement include:

- Enhanced service delivery
- Increased efficiency and value for money
- Increased tenant satisfaction
- Transparency and Accountability
- Holistic understanding between tenants and SDC resulting in more cohesive communities

The strategy informs what information tenants can expect and ways in which tenants can become involved. As we enhance the number of tenants we engage with, aspirations and preferences may develop which may evolve into more practical and fit for purpose ways of engagement that suit as many people as possible.

The Housing White Paper expectations

The Housing White Paper includes the Charter for Social Housing Residents outlining seven key commitments that tenants should expect from their landlord and this underpins all the work we deliver; the charter includes:

1. **To be safe in your home.** Government will work with industry and landlords to ensure every home is safe and secure.
2. **To know how your landlord is performing,** including on repairs, complaints, and safety, and how it spends its money, so you can hold it to account.
3. **To have your complaints dealt with** promptly and fairly, with access to a strong Ombudsman who will give you swift and fair redress when needed.
4. **To be treated with respect,** backed by a strong consumer Regulator, and improved consumer standards for tenants.
5. **To have your voice heard** by your landlord, for example through regular meetings, scrutiny panels or being on its Governance board (Housing Committee). The Government will provide help, if you want it to give you the tools to ensure your landlord listens.
6. **To have a good quality home** and neighbourhood to live in, with your landlord keeping your home in good repair.
7. **To be supported** to take your first step to ownership, so it is a ladder to other opportunities, should your circumstances allow.

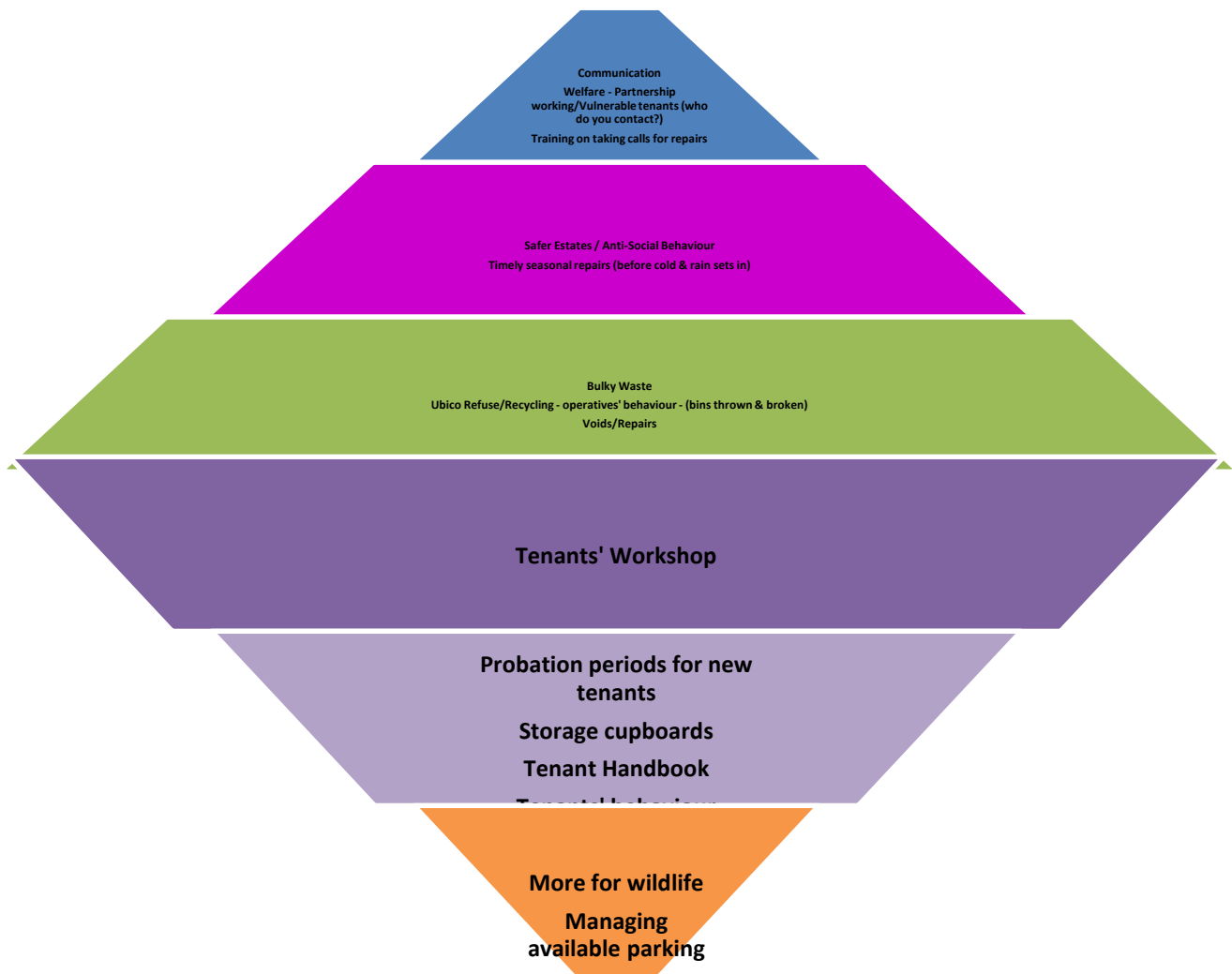
The Government have outlined a clear intention that organisations should be looking to continually improve the way they engage with tenants and should be focusing on providing more detailed performance information.

Successful tenant engagement should provide benefits for all involved, including tenants, councillors and officers and should aim to create a respectful partnership, resulting in fewer complaints and higher satisfaction levels.

Tenant views should be key to how the service is developed and tenants should be involved in all issues that may affect them. We aim to engage with our tenants by providing a range of different involvement opportunities and to understand the issues that our tenants would like us to consider as a priority, helping to empower our tenants to be involved in all decision making.

Tenant Priorities

At a recent event, tenants considered their priorities for improving the services delivered by Stroud District Council and placed them in order of importance. The information gained from this task will be used to inform the focus group taster sessions and prompt areas to be prioritised by the tenancy scrutiny group.



The priorities listed above as important to tenants have resulted in further investigation and insight into how we can accommodate these requests. It is important that residents feel valued and that their voice has been heard and therefore it is important that we continue to evaluate these priorities and feedback to tenants how their ideas have progressed.

Resources

SDC recognises that that in order to maximise resident involvement adequate resources must be made available, to remove barriers that may prevent residents from becoming involved and has therefore committed to ensure practical solutions are in place to assist residents in a variety of ways, which include:

- A dedicated training budget, to deliver training sessions to support increased confidence and knowledge
- A wide range of involvement methods, to fit in with a variety of lifestyles, including day and evening and child friendly events
- Providing transport or covering financial costs incurred by residents attending training or events
- Arranging meetings and events at times and locations that are easily accessible

- Access to expert organisations, such as the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS)
- Dedicated SDC staff to support this area of activity

Stroud District Council have committed to invest in new and modern ways of engagement, including digital engagement and enablement with the introduction of a new housing management system (HMS), due Spring 2023, which will improve the way we connect with our tenants and improve the information we hold and also enable tenant access to the systems including rents and repairs.

How will we enhance involvement in tenant engagement

We need to recruit more volunteers and enhance the number of tenants that wish to engage with us. Tenants have told us that they enjoy the 'café conversations', they enjoy 'sharing ideas' 'meeting staff and other tenants' and 'discussing relevant topics'.

As a result of tenant feedback we are in the process of rebranding the Neighbourhood Ambassador role as tenants have advised they believe this name is too formal and have suggested that we change this to 'Community Friend'.

Our identified roles already in place are :

- Two Tenants Voice Representatives to feed information and views into Housing Committee
- Tenants invited to Task & Finish Groups covering three areas including tenant involvement and empowerment, Voids and repairs and energy (including retrofit)
- Neighbourhood Ambassadors

And roles for development are:

- Community Friend – feedback to SDC Officers and/or ward members with concerns in their communities
- Empty Homes Champion- to view our empty properties and report back on the lettable standard
- Green Champion- to work with SDC to find ways of educating tenants and reducing the contaminated waste that we have in our communal refuse
- Focus group involvement – attend focus groups meetings to discuss performance, comment on housing committee reports and feedback on areas that tenants wish to discuss
- Improve links with community hubs and Independent living hubs
- Digital Engagement – many of our tenants will require proactive support to feel confident with digital engagement. We have given tablets to tenants who are currently involved in the task & finish groups. At a further focus group we will be discussing a digital strategy for rollout.

We are also working with TPAS to arrange scrutiny training for our tenants so that tenants can measure how well we are delivering housing services.

Following a successful Independent Living focus group, in addition to the quarterly meetings held on each site, there will now be a quarterly tenants group meeting where tenants can meet across sites to enhance social inclusion and choose topics for discussion.

Community Hubs

We are proud of the community hubs (MOTH & Transform) that have been set up by tenants across the district. Neighbourhood Management Officers, Neighbourhood Wardens, Police and other representatives meet regularly via zoom meetings to share information and resolve outstanding issues in the communities. Attendance at these groups will aid SDC in ensuring we can work smarter together, improve living standards and reduce Anti-social behaviour (ASB) on estates, ultimately increasing health & wellbeing for all.

How will be measure success

Housing Services provided within the Communities Directorate commit to engage with and involve tenants to monitor progress and performance

We will measure the success of tenant engagement through outcomes resulting in feedback and communicate the difference that tenant engagement has made from:

- Feedback from café conversations
- Feedback from Independent Living group meetings
- Maximise the potential of tenants who engage on a regular basis with us
- Understanding why there may be barriers to involvement and addressing these
- Reports from Empty Homes Champions
- Reports from Green Champions
- Feedback on Housing Committee Reports
- Feedback from Estate Walkabouts
- Feedback from Housing Hubs
- Benchmarking our services through TPAS
- Report on services through social media showing 'you said and we did'
- Present performance through the Keynotes newsletter
- Satisfaction surveys
- Implementation of actions from attending Community Hub meetings

All feedback to be fed back to tenants and councillors through social media platforms, annual report and Housing Committee

Equality & Diversity

Stroud District Council have committed to providing services which promote equality and diversity treating all residents with respect and fairness and will ensure that all services are accessible for all. We will ensure that all individuals have equal opportunity to engage with us. These commitments are reinforced by the Councils values and statutory and legislative requirements, ensuring these are embedded in our day to day working practices.

We will continue to ensure that residents feel valued and recognised for the contribution that they make through engagement.

In order to ensure any barriers to engagement are removed we will:

- Ensure meeting venues are easily accessible

- We will pay mileage or arrange transport
- We will use translation services when required
- We will ensure communication aids are available, such as hearing loop
- We will ensure we note communication preferences, such as large print
- Provide training and support where needed



How will we implement the strategy:

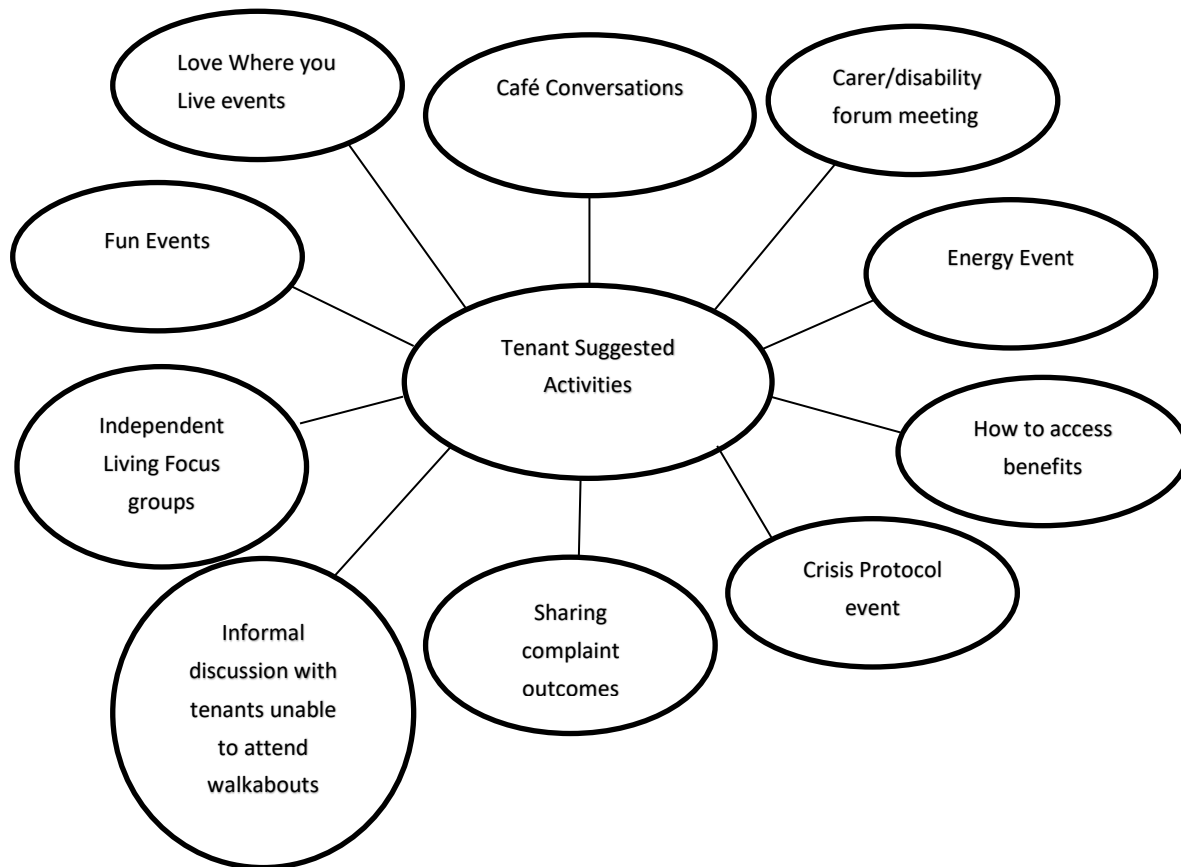
- Arrange four 'Love where you Live' events across the district
- Arrange 'Café Conversation' events every quarter throughout the district, each with a theme
- Arrange Scrutiny taster focus group training session with TPAS and will use the themes from the tenant priority diamond to kickstart the topics
- Complete induction for 'Tenants Voice' representatives
- Rebrand tenant involvement roles
- Arrange training for all involved tenants on the governments white paper, ensuring they are aware how their views can inform service delivery.
- Arrange yearly intergenerational event
- Complete digital strategy and rollout
- Promote Estate Walkabout
- Promote Housing Hubs
- Work with Gloucester County Council on their supported families programme

An action plan is to be drawn up to show the full programme of dates for the above.



At recent consultation sessions on tenant engagement activities (marketed as café conversations), tenants shared their thoughts (see pictures above) about the sort of future tenants engagement that interested them most. The diagram below shows the depth and wealth of their ideas.





Asset Based Community Development

Stroud District Council is on the precipice of investing in the Asset Based Community Development (ABCD). This approach considers that members of all communities have skills to offer that should be valued and harnessed. This also considers how we can empower communities by investing in tenants and valuing the investment that they can contribute to improve the area where they live. The ABCD approach encourages us to tackle wider social issues by taking a holistic view to community development. Through a tenant led approach we will have a greater understanding of the social issues taking place in our communities.

Housing Hubs

To support the ABCD, Housing Officers will be spending time each month in a 'HUB' on their patch. We will also be promoting this with our external partners, police, pcso's, etc and inviting them to join us. This is to ensure that residents can meet their Housing Officer and other professionals who work in their community, further enhancing the holistic approach.

Future of Tenant Engagement

By 2025 our aims are to:

- To engage with a much wider tenant base and to continue to address any obstacles to involvement activity as highlighted by tenants

- To understand more about the needs of our tenants through profiling and use this to inform event themes.
- To have a greater understanding of the diverse needs of our tenants
- Ensure that tenants are empowered to have their voice heard
- Be able to demonstrate how tenants have shaped service delivery and feedback to tenants these achievements in appreciation of their input
- Complete the digital rollout, giving us greater access to a wider group of people
- Invest in the ABCD approach and therefore be able to demonstrate better outcomes for communities.
- Hold focus groups on a more regular basis to help shape, develop and improve services
- Produce Keynotes every quarter in a paper and digital edition, dependent on tenant's requirements
- Ensure tenants have the skills and knowledge to participate with confidence through bespoke training and induction
- Proactively seek to engage with hard to reach groups

The Council plan also has performance measures specific to resident involvement and these will form part of performance member reports to Housing Committee on a quarterly basis

The strategy will cover the period 2022 – 2025 and will be reviewed annually to ensure it is still fit for purpose. An action plan detailing timescales and outcomes will be developed and monitoring of outcomes from these groups and activities will be fed back to Housing Committee annually.