

# Public Document Pack



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27 June 2023

Dear Councillor

## **NOTICE OF DELEGATED DECISION – (DD10 23) ADOPTION OF HOUSING SERVICE TENANT ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY 2022-2027**

Please find attached details of a decision taken by Mr Mike Davis, Strategic Director (Finance and Housing), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Skills and Education, to adopt the Tenant Engagement Strategy 2022-2027 for the Council's Housing Service.

The deadline for call-in of this decision is **10.00am on Monday, 3 July 2023**.

If call-in is not activated, the implementation date for this decision will be noon on 3 July.

Members of the public who require further information are asked to contact Democratic Services on 01304 872303 or by e-mail at [democraticservices@dover.gov.uk](mailto:democraticservices@dover.gov.uk).

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kate Bailey - Smith". Below the signature is a short horizontal line.

Democratic Services Officer

ENCL

1 **NOTICE OF DELEGATED DECISION - (DD10 23) ADOPTION OF HOUSING SERVICE TENANT ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY 2022-2027** (Pages 2-35)

## Decision Notice

## Delegated Decision

<b>Decision No:</b>	<b>DD10</b>
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>ADOPTION OF THE HOUSING SERVICE TENANT ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY 2022-2027</b>
<b>Date of Decision</b>	<b>1 June 2023</b>
<b>Notification Date:</b>	<b>27 June 2023</b>
<b>Implementation Date:</b>	<b>3 July 2023</b>
<b>Decision taken by:</b>	<b>Mike Davis, Strategic Director (Finance and Housing)</b>
<b>Delegated Authority:</b>	<b>Cabinet Decision CAB 38(c) of 3 October 2022 delegated authority to the Strategic Director (Corporate Resources), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Social Housing, Port Health, Skills and Education, to make minor amendments to the Strategy arising from the consultation and thereafter to adopt the policy on behalf of the Council with effect from 7 November 2022</b>
<b>Decision Type:</b>	<b>Executive Key Decision</b>
<b>Call-In to Apply?</b>	<b>Yes (<i>Call-in will expire at 10.00am on 3 July 2023</i>)</b>
<b>Classification:</b>	<b>Unrestricted</b>
<b>Reason for the Decision:</b>	The Tenant Engagement Strategy 2022-2027 has been consulted upon with tenants and service users and there have been no further comments received. The Strategy now needs to be formally adopted.
<b>Decision:</b>	To adopt the Tenant Engagement Strategy 2022–2027.

## 1. Summary

- 1.1 At its 3 October 2022 meeting, Cabinet agreed to adopt, subject to consultation, a new Tenant Engagement Strategy 2022-2027 for the housing service.
- 1.2 The Regulator of Social Housing, Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard states that: “Registered providers shall ensure that tenants are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in:
- a. the formulation of their landlord’s housing-related policies and strategic priorities
  - b. the making of decisions about how housing-related services are delivered, including the setting of service standards.
  - c. the scrutiny of their landlord’s performance and the making of recommendations to their landlord about how performance might be improved.
  - d. the management of their homes, where applicable
  - e. the management of repair and maintenance services, such as commissioning and undertaking a range of repair tasks, as agreed with landlords, and the sharing in savings made, and
  - f. agreeing local offers for service delivery.”

- 1.3 It is a requirement of the Standard that: “Registered Providers shall consult with tenants in developing a published strategy that supports providers and their tenants to achieve these ambitions”.
- 1.4 The draft Tenant Engagement Strategy 2022-2027 (Appendix 1) sets out how the housing service intends to strengthen relationships and the voice of tenants and leaseholders considering:
- (i) Feedback from residents.
  - (ii) Feedback from housing staff.
  - (iii) Current best practice in involvement from social housing.
  - (iv) Current and future legal and regulatory requirements.
- 1.5 The current content of the Tenant Engagement Strategy was agreed by Cabinet on 3 October 2022 to go out for public consultation.

## 2. Consultation and Feedback

### The Consultation

- 2.1 A significant amount of feedback had already been received from tenants and considered in the development of the strategy. To reflect this, a shorter online consultation was approved by Cabinet and took place with tenants, leaseholders and stakeholders over a four-week period between November 2022 and December 2022.
- 2.2 Tenants were made aware of the consultation through the following means:
- (a) Keep Me Posted notifications sent to tenants who had signed up to the notification service.
  - (b) A dedicated consultation webpage was created which included information on the content, why the strategy was created, and how it benefitted tenants and the Council. Copies of the document were link to the webpage so tenants could access it.
- 2.3 Tenants were invited to comment and provide feedback on the proposed strategy via the Feedback pages and dedicated online survey.

### Tenant Feedback

- 2.4 We have received no comments, concerns or feedback from tenants on the proposed strategy during the consultation period.
- 2.5 We have received no comments, concerns or feedback from Members on the proposed strategy during the consultation period.

## 3. Identification of Options

- 3.1 Option 1: Adopt the Tenant Engagement Strategy 2022-2027.
- 3.2 Option 2: Not adopt the Tenant Engagement Strategy 2022-2027.

## 4. Evaluation of Options

- 4.1 Option 1 is the recommended option. The Strategy presented to Cabinet on 3 October 2022 was agreed subject to consultation. The consultation has taken place and no further comments have been received.

4.2 Option 2 - Not adopt the Tenant Engagement Strategy 2022-2027. This is not the recommended option as the housing service will be without a Tenant Engagement Strategy and will not in this area meet the requirements of the Regulatory Framework set by the Regulator of Social Housing.

5. **Any Conflicts of Interest Declared?**

5.1 None.

6. **Resource Implications**

6.1 The adoption and application of the Tenant Engagement Strategy will be delivered within existing resources in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

7. **Climate Change and Environmental Implications**

7.1 There should be no environmental or climate change implications as a consequence of this decision being taken.

8. **Corporate Implications**

8.1 Comment from the Director of Finance (linked to the MTFP): Accountancy has been consulted and has no further comments. (HL)

8.2 Comment from the Solicitor to the Council: The Solicitor to the Council has been consulted in the preparation of this decision notice and has no further comments to make.

8.3 Comment from the Equalities Officer: 'This report regarding the adoption of the housing service tenant engagement strategy highlights a number of potential positive impacts for several protected characteristic groups. In discharging their duties, members are required to comply with the public sector equality duty as set out in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/149>'

8.4 Other Officers (as appropriate):

9. **Supporting Information** (*as applicable*)

Appendix 1 - Draft Tenant Engagement Strategy

Appendix 2 - Cabinet Report of 3 October 2022

Dover District Council

# Tenant Engagement Strategy



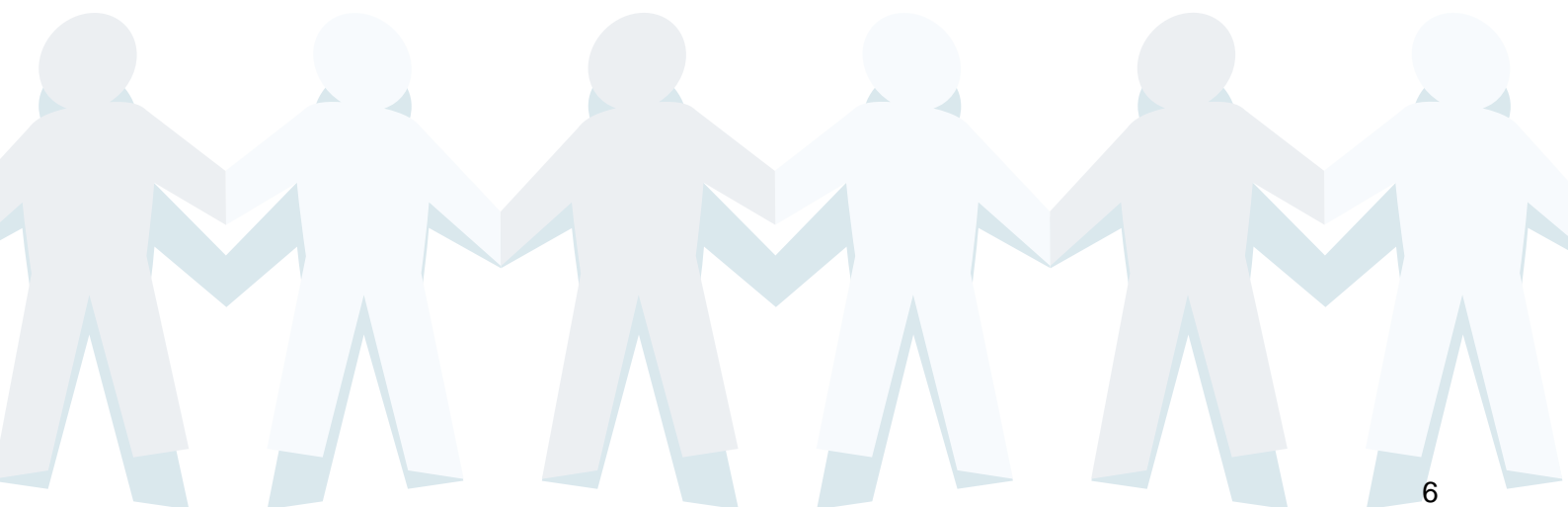
Working together to make a difference  
for tenants and leaseholders  
throughout the district

**HOUSING  
SERVICES**



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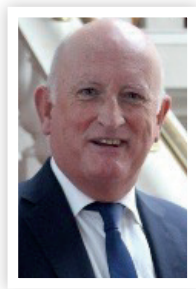
# 1. Joint Foreword

The way in which social housing landlords engage with their tenants and leaseholders is changing and there is a powerful push at national and local level to make sure that tenants have a real say in how their homes and services are managed. At Dover we want tenants and leaseholders to be at the heart of the housing service, and we recognise that we can only understand whether we are delivering the right services to the right standard if we have inclusive, representative, and active tenant engagement to support us.

This strategy has been developed against a backdrop of change for social housing landlords. In the wake of the Grenfell Tower fire and the publication of the Government’s Social Housing White Paper, ‘The Charter for Social Housing Residents’, more robust regulation of social housing landlords is planned and now more than ever social housing landlords must ensure that their tenants have an effective voice.

Rapid changes in technology and our use of them during the Covid pandemic mean that tenants and leaseholders can be involved, using their phones, in person or on screen. We want to harness this change and ensure a range of opportunities exist for all service users who want to be involved. Tenants have been involved in formulating this strategy from the start and we are grateful to the Dover District Tenants’ Group (DDTG) and dedicated Focus Group who have given up their time to help develop this document.

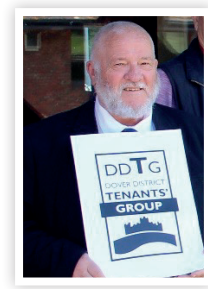
We all have a part to play in building successful engagement opportunities and we are committed as Members, Tenants and Officers to working together to improve services.



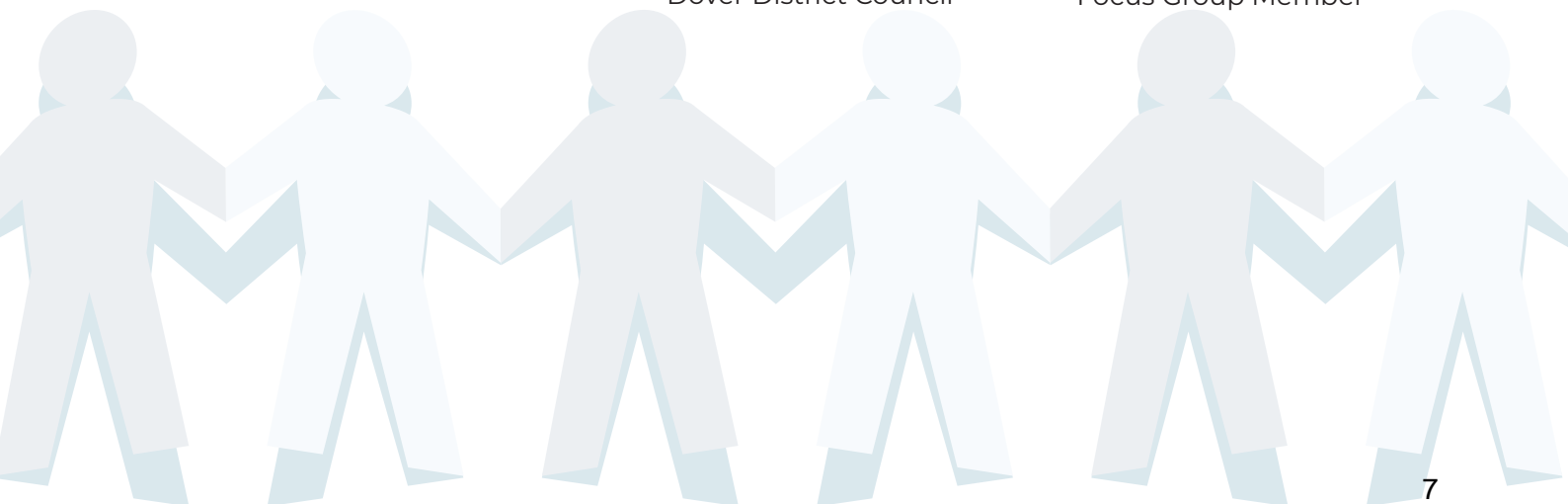
**Cllr Derek Murphy**  
Portfolio Holder for Housing



**Nadeem Aziz**  
Chief Executive,  
Dover District Council



**Neil Drakley**  
Chair of DDTG and  
Focus Group Member



## 2. Introduction

Dover District Council (DDC) owns and manages 4341 affordable rented properties, 95 interim accommodation, 428 leasehold properties and 32 shared ownership properties.

On 1 October 2020, DDC brought its housing management service in house for the first time in 9.5 years. In that time, the way tenants want to engage with their landlord has changed. With more online opportunities and increasingly mixed tenure estates, the involvement service must evolve to ensure we are listening and acting upon what we are told.

Tenant engagement takes many forms, but its core objective is to listen to residents and proactively use their feedback to influence, shape and improve services. As a landlord, the Council will strive to provide a varied and broad list of engagement activities and tools to ensure there is an opportunity to be involved for those who want it. This strategy sets out how we will work in partnership with our tenants and leaseholders to shape and deliver a high-quality housing service in the Dover District. It will build upon the good initiatives already in place but recognises that there are still improvements that can be made so that tenants remain involved and are consulted and included at whatever level they choose to be.

To formulate this strategy, we worked closely with a focus group of tenants, the Dover District Tenants' Group and members of our 'Keep Me Posted' group. We want to acknowledge and thank them all for their time and support for this.





### 3. What is Tenant Engagement?

Tenant Engagement (also known as Tenant Involvement) is a commitment from us, the landlord, to listen to, and act upon the views and recommendations of tenants and leaseholders who are directly impacted by the services we deliver.

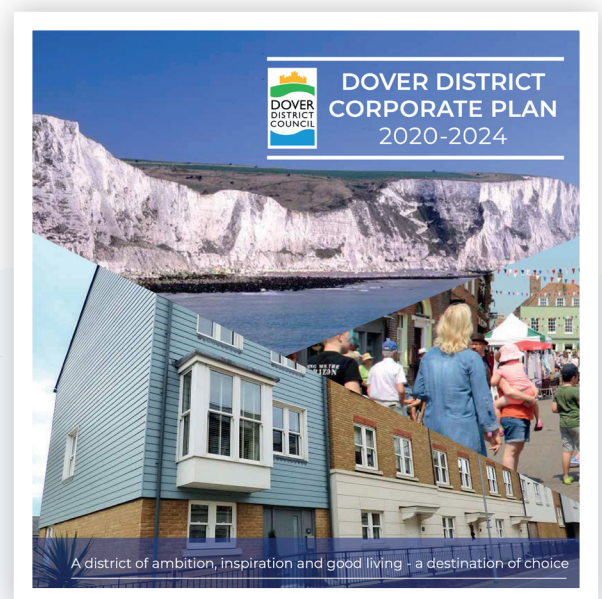
We want tenants and leaseholders to tell us what they think of the services we offer, for example repairs and housing management. We want them to help us improve how we communicate with them, eg through our website, by phone or letter, and we want to understand from customers what effect our decisions and choices have on them and how we can make improvements, from decisions about the type of playground equipment or front door colours we choose right through to bigger decisions about how the service works.

Resident and community engagement is vital and the Government's Charter for Social Residents and the Regulator for Social Housing's regulatory framework both underpin and reinforce the importance of landlords having consistent, continuous and meaningful engagement with their tenants.

### 4. Dover District Council's Corporate Objectives

Dover District Council wants to be a district of ambition, inspiration and good living and has bold and ambitious plans for a sustainable future for residents living in the district. The Council's Corporate Plan is designed to encourage, facilitate and deliver a stronger local economy, with opportunities for everyone to reach their ambitions. Some of the objectives associated with Housing and the Community are:

- Enable a range of good quality affordable homes for our residents in an attractive environment
- Work to build healthy, resilient and sustainable communities, where residents have good access to facilities and transport links to further their wellbeing
- Invest in our Council Housing stock, working with partners to keep people supported and healthy in their own homes.



## 5. Regulatory Considerations

### 5.1 Regulator for Social Housing

The Regulator of Social Housing is the body that oversees standards in the social housing sector. It has a regulatory framework setting clear standards for landlords to meet. There are currently four consumer regulatory standards with which Local Authority housing providers must comply and the Regulator is currently consulting with landlords regarding a fifth consumer standard based upon tenant satisfaction that it intends introducing in the winter of 2022. For the purposes of tenant engagement, the council must follow the requirements of the Regulator of Social Housing's Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard which has the following three sections:

- Customer service, choice and complaints
- Involvement and empowerment
- Understanding and responding to the diverse needs of tenants.

The Regulator of Social Housing has made it very clear that it expects social landlords to adopt its principles of co-regulation. Co-regulation is intended to bring elected members, tenants and officers together to scrutinise collectively their landlord services and make sure that these are delivered effectively and comply with all regulatory requirements.

Social Housing Landlords, including the Council are encouraged to support and provide tenants with opportunities to fully engage with the co regulatory approach and to be able to hold their landlord to account if standards are not met.

### 5.2 The Social Housing White Paper

The Social Housing White Paper sets out the Government's vision for improved social housing management and is informed by national consultation with tenants, landlords and other stakeholders. The Charter for Social Housing Residents sets out how registered housing providers must deliver this vision.

#### The Charter contains 7 expectations:

1. To be safe in your home. We 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.

*"Engagement can take many forms, but the crucial factor is that it is tailored appropriately. There will be tenants who want to proactively engage with the policies of their landlord, and others who simply want to know that their landlord is thinking of them in the way it implements change and is keeping them informed. We expect all landlords to tailor their engagement in the future."*

*From the charter for social housing residents: social housing white paper*

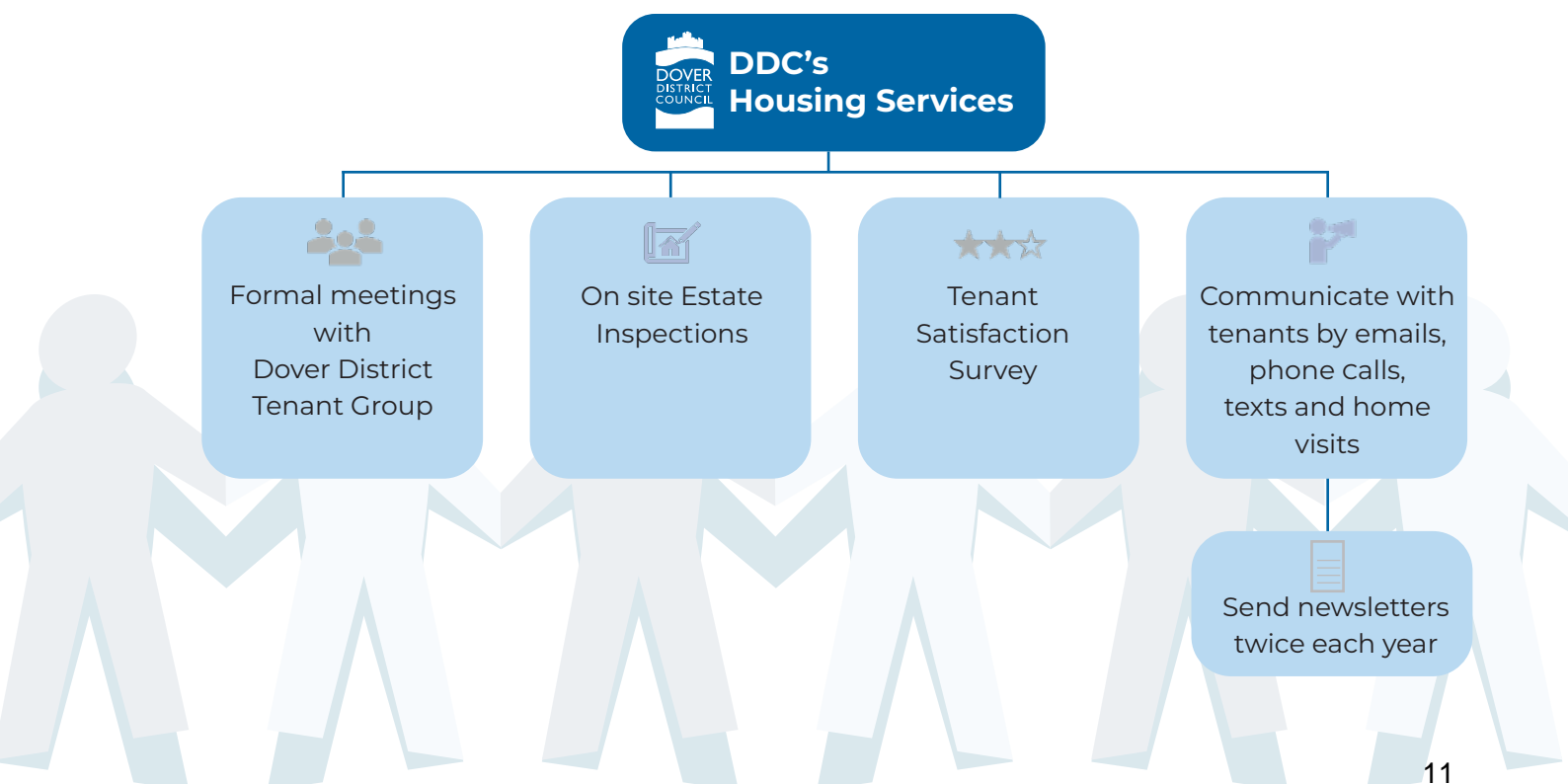
4. To be treated with respect, backed by a strong consumer regulator and improved consumer standards for tenants.
5. To **have your voice heard by your landlord**, for example through regular meetings, scrutiny panels or being on its Board. The government will provide help, if you want it, to give you 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.

## 6. Our Current Structure

Since the Housing service was bought back in house to DDC, officers have continued to work with existing groups and engage in a range of activities to increase the opportunities for tenants and leaseholders to share their views with us.

We have worked closely with Dover District Tenants' Group, which has been established for many years. This independent group works closely with the Council to share views and make recommendations for improvements in service delivery. Throughout the pandemic the group met with officers online and easily adapted to this way of working.

While the existing engagement structure works well, there is more that can be done to involve residents in different ways and overcome barriers. This is how we currently engage with our tenants and leaseholders.



## 7. How Did We Consult Tenants in the Formulation of This Strategy?

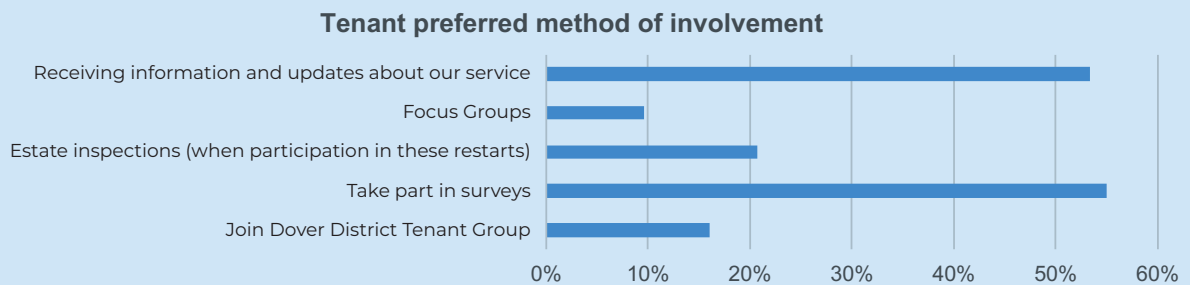
To help us identify ways of encouraging more tenants to become involved we worked closely with a dedicated focus group. This group was made of tenants from across the district who came forward when we advertised for group members to help develop the strategy at the 'ideas' stage. We have used the insight provided by this group of enthusiastic tenants to help DDC build a menu of opportunities through which to engage with tenants.

To ensure that as wide a variety of customer voices as possible be used to influence this strategy, we also used data and feedback from our whole district tenant satisfaction survey completed in summer 2021, the views of members of the Dover District Tenant Group, the outcome of semi structured question and answer sessions with our sheltered housing residents, and the 437 members who have proactively signed up to our housing Keep Me Posted service.

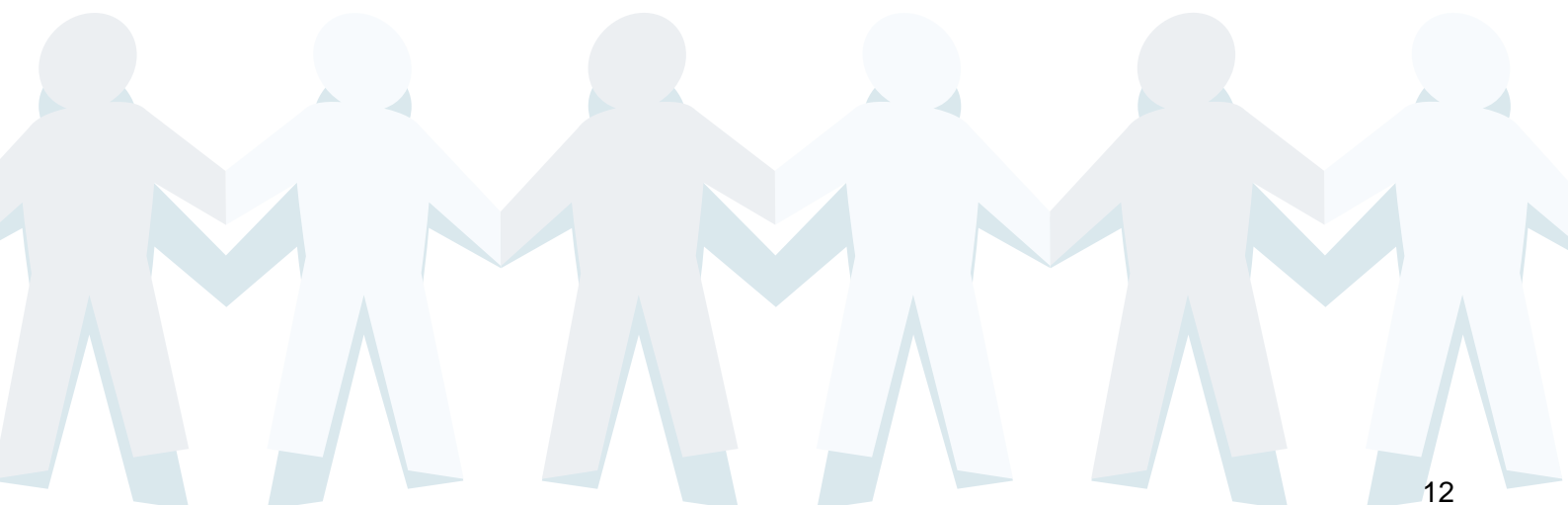
### Tenant Satisfaction Survey

In 2021, Dover District Council conducted a tenant satisfaction survey, sent to all tenants and available online to complete.

We asked tenants what their preferred method of involvement is, these are the results:



These results indicate that tenants are more interested in receiving information and participating from home or their local area than attending formal meetings.

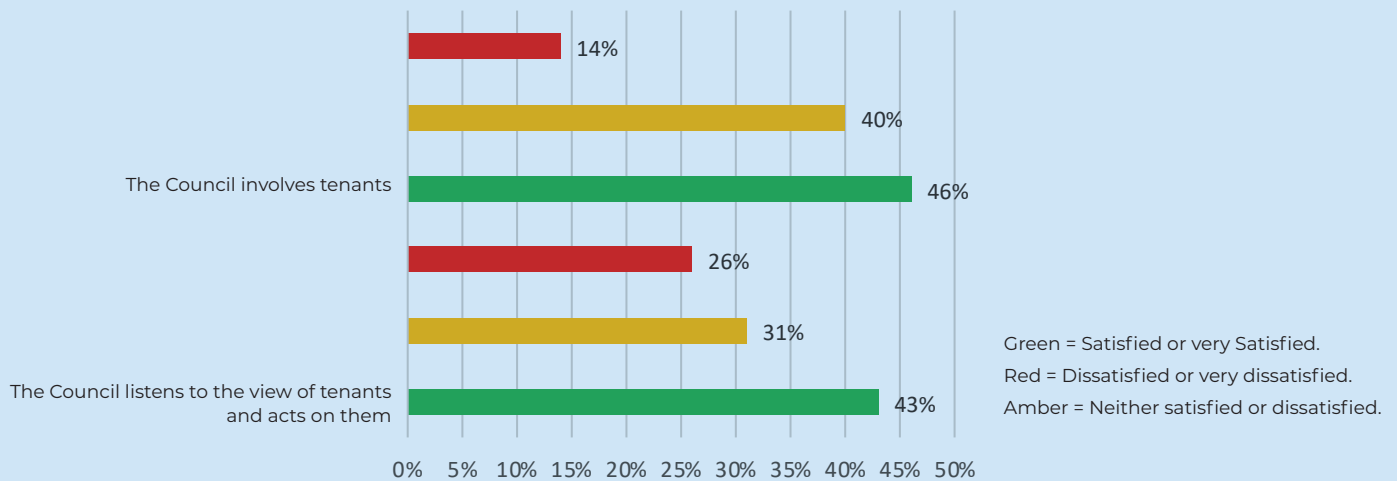


When questioned about their satisfaction with the way in which the Council involves tenants and listens and acts upon their views, the results show that although many tenants felt satisfied with how the Council involves and informs them, there were also higher levels of indifference compared to other questions asked, which may suggest one of two things:

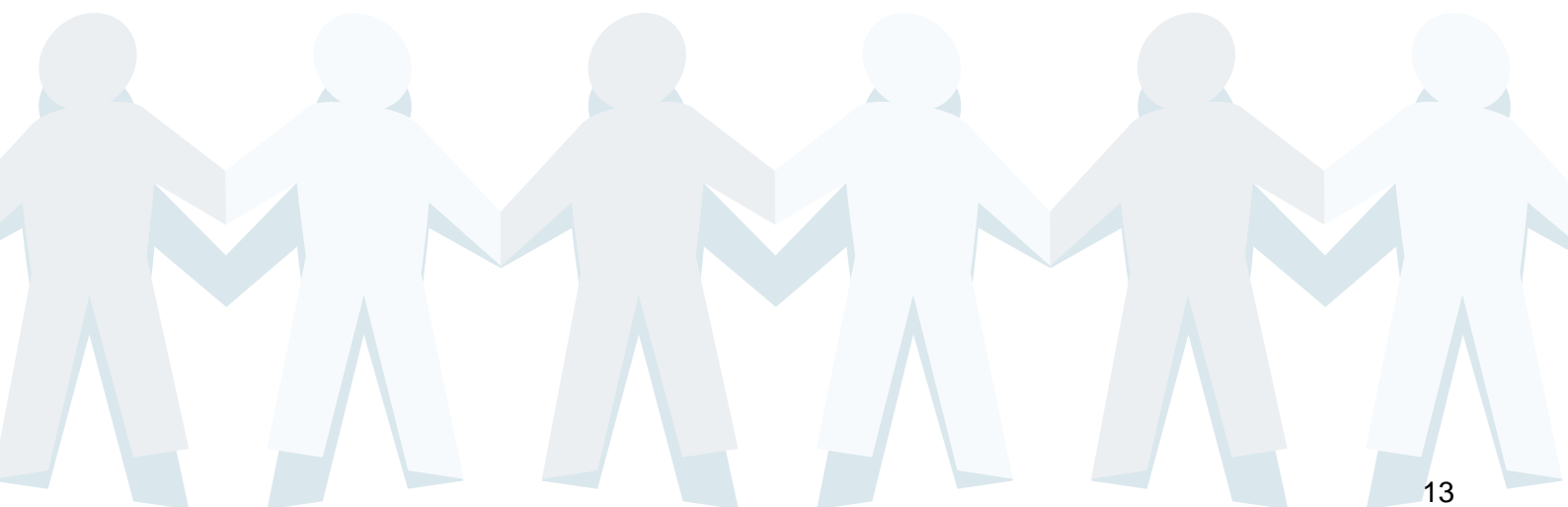
- a. that tenants may be content with the way they are being included and informed by the Council; or
- b. the high indifference could be attributed to low interest in involvement.

It is clear however that more can be done to encourage tenants to be actively involved at some level and to understand the benefits that this can bring.

### Tenant involvement, views, and Council action



Information taken from the from the DDC Tenant Satisfaction Survey summer 2021



## 8. Barriers to Involvement

Although there are clear benefits to tenant involvement, not just to the service but to those involved, we understand that not all tenants want to join in. For some this is because they choose not to but for others there are barriers that make involvement more difficult. As a social housing provider we need to be aware of these barriers and seek to overcome them.

To help us understand what potential barriers there might be we asked our tenant focus group. They came up with the following and some suggested solutions.

Barriers identified:	Solutions identified:
Work and family constraints such as busy lifestyle, work commitments and school runs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online feedback methods</li> <li>• Arranging meeting times at agreed times and locations and possibly evenings</li> <li>• Offering hybrid meeting solutions so that tenants can join from home.</li> </ul>
Difficulty getting about due to physical or mental illness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hybrid options for meetings when equipment becomes available</li> <li>• Increased events at a community level</li> <li>• Wheelchair access, disabled parking and hearing loops</li> </ul>
The cost of getting to meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tenant reasonable expenses policy to be agreed to outline travel expenses.</li> </ul>
Lack of skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tenant training and ongoing support</li> <li>• Descriptions and red, amber, green (RAG) status in data to provide explanations and visual representation</li> <li>• Additional options for survey responses if online isn't suitable.</li> </ul>
English not first language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Signposting to training and services to overcome literacy or skills based barriers</li> <li>• Descriptions and RAG status in data to provide explanations and visual representation.</li> </ul>
Disinterest in the landlord service and apathy for getting involved.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High visibility of involvement options on website and newsletters</li> <li>• Increase promotion of successful projects and 'you said we did' to increase trust in services</li> </ul>

Through the priorities and actions in our Tenant Engagement Strategy, we hope to be able to proactively engage with tenants who may ordinarily struggle to be involved in their housing service. We will create an equalities group, who can delve deeper and establish a range of inclusive involvement opportunities and challenge the service.

## 9. Digital Inclusion and Hybrid Working

Digital by default is a government initiative, launched in 2010, to make public services easy to access online. This shift is across all public services and included the first online only census held in 2021. The Covid pandemic has also seen more households than ever before communicating with each other through online digital platforms. For many this has been something they have been able to move to quite easily and enjoy. We want to harness this willingness to use digital platforms and will offer a raft of engagement activities that can be done online.

### Benefits of online services to many of our tenants include:

- No need to travel to meetings, saving time and money
- Ease of involvement by joining in from the comfort of your own home
- 24/7 access to information, logging and reporting. Great for those that work or have busy days
- Providing information once, and all that access it will receive the same information, eliminating human error and mixed messages.

The balance of those online is much higher than those not and Office of National Statistics (ONS) data suggest that the number of those not online is decreasing every year.

Whilst the availability of digital services is enjoyed by many, there is a section of people who either choose to not be online or are not online for other reasons. This could be financial or skills based. We also recognise that the rural nature of some parts of Dover District can pose connectivity challenges for some of our residents and exclude them from effective engagement online.

It is important for the tenant involvement service to engage across all groups of tenants and leaseholders and therefore our strategy and engagement opportunities offer ways to engage to suit those online as well as those that prefer more traditional methods. Examples of these include:





- 'Hybrid meetings', a mixture of online meetings and in person meetings
- A group of tenants who conduct surveys from home
- Newsletters published online in addition to being printed and posted to addresses
- E-newsletters via DDC's 'Keep Me Posted' for those signed up online
- Community events.

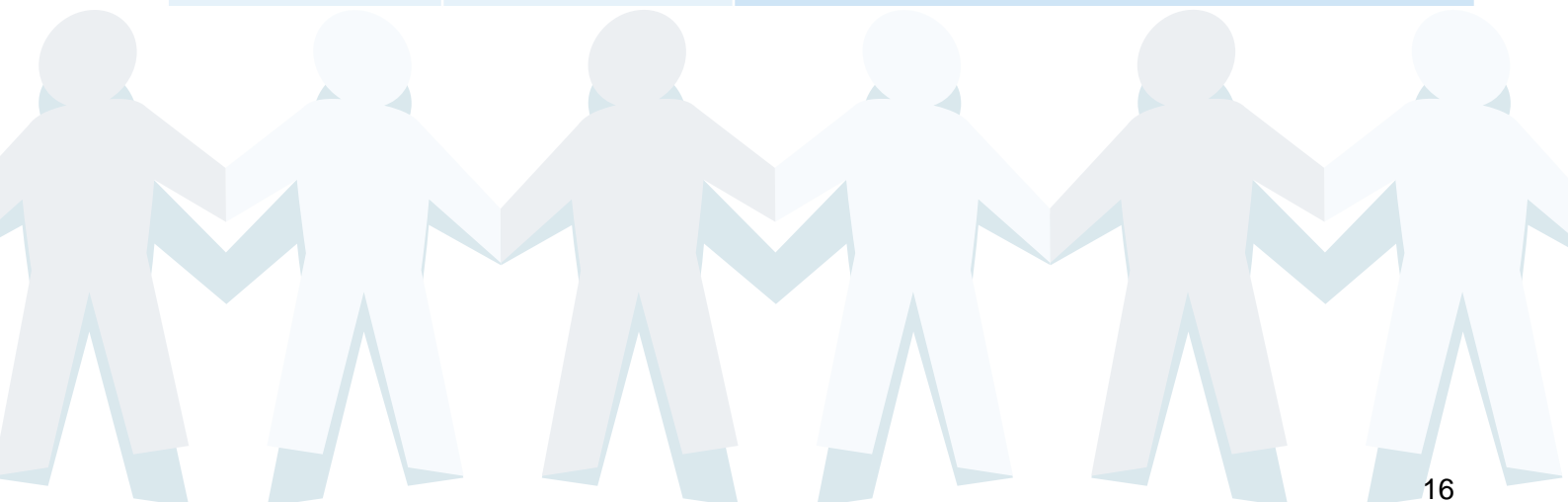
*"In January to February 2020, 96% of households in Great Britain had internet access, up from 93% in 2019 and 57% in 2006 when comparable records began."*

*Source: ONS Internet access - Great Britain: 2020*

# 10. Our Plans for the Future and Key Priorities

Through our work with tenants and leaseholders we have identified 4 key priorities. Each action point on the action plan will relate to one or more of these priorities:

	<b>Breaking down the barriers</b> to being involved by:	Making it easier to have tenants' voices heard
		Striving to ensure no one is discouraged from becoming involved due to circumstances, abilities, and characteristics
		Increasing visibility by providing information about the housing service and what we're up to.
	<b>Rebuilding the trust</b> that tenants have in Dover District Council by:	Listening to points of views
		Working with tenants in constructive ways
		Being visible by providing regular examples of how service has improved using tenants' input
		Providing ways tenants' influence can drive tangible change
	<b>Increased offering and a larger variety of opportunities</b> to encourage more people to be involved in ways that suit them by:	Special interest groups now added to the menu of involvement
		Newly renamed Estate Walkabouts and community events for local level involvement
		Greater opportunities to provide feedback.
	<b>Supporting tenants to be involved</b> through training, guidance and support.	Providing timely administrative support for tenant groups and meetings
		Being approachable and regularly offering support and guidance in housing matters.





## How will we achieve these?

### Priority One – Breaking down the barriers

We want all of our customers to have the opportunity to be involved if they want it in ways that are convenient for them. To do this we will:

- Increase the options for engagement to ensure that they are inclusive and offer our tenants and leaseholders opportunities to engage in ways that require various degrees of commitment
- Continually review and consider the barriers to engagement based upon feedback from our tenants
- Provide support, resources and training so that tenants and leaseholders can engage with us
- Assess the impact of all our involvement activities in collaboration with tenants and report back on the difference involvement has made.

### Priority Two - Rebuilding the trust

We want our tenants and leaseholders to have trust in us that we will provide the best services we can with the resources we have and listen and act upon their concerns. To do this we will :

- Be open and transparent in our communication and decision making
- Provide timely and accurate performance information about how we are doing
- Make it as easy as possible for our tenants to report their concerns to us, especially if these relate to health and safety, and make sure we respond quickly to deal with these
- Use our communications with tenants to reinforce key messages about our services and tenant health and safety
- Introduce new customer satisfaction measures, in line with the proposals set out in the Government's Social Housing White Paper and publish the results
- When things go wrong make sure we learn from this and change the way we do things by monitoring complaints carefully. Publish this information on our website
- Include our tenants and leaseholders when we set our service improvement plans
- Strengthen our tenant scrutiny arrangements.

### Priority 3 - Increased offering and a larger variety of opportunities

We recognise that not all tenants want to be involved in the same way and want to make sure that we offer a variety of opportunities calling for varying degrees of commitment to suit more people. We will achieve this priority by:

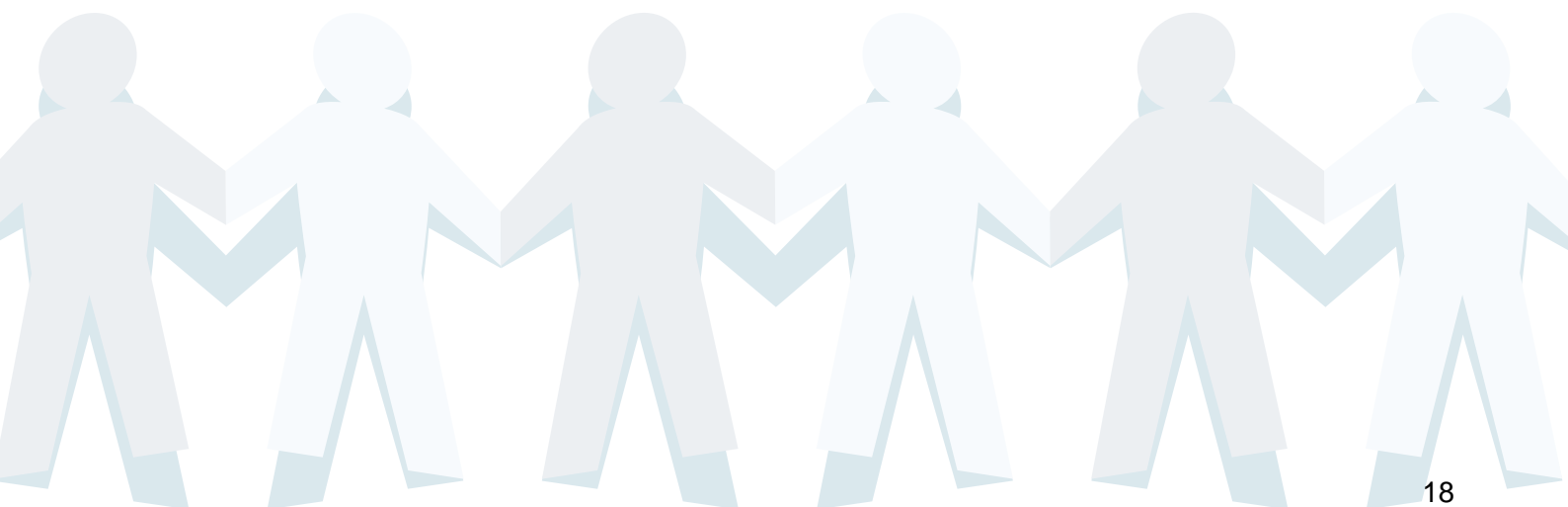
- Using a range of engagement methods that includes digital channels to make sure we capture feedback and new members who might otherwise not be able to participate
- Offer opportunities that involve our tenants and leaseholders in estate improvements so that they can help us create attractive areas to live
- Involve tenants in our investment decisions especially where these relate to building safety
- Measure the impact of tenant involvement to make sure it offers value of money and makes a difference.

#### Priority 4 - Supporting tenants to be involved

We also recognise that we will need to offer training, learning and support to all involved tenants to develop their skills and confidence to be effective in their involvement.

We will do this by:

- Providing opportunities for training and development to tenants and leaseholders who want to have more involvement
- Producing our information in a more meaningful and understandable format
- Increasing the amount of information about the service that we include in our newsletters for everyone to read
- Supporting meetings through advertising, providing administrative support and providing timely and relevant information
- Ensuring that staff are aware of the role of involvement and encourage and support tenants who want to work with us.



## 11. Resources to Support Tenant Engagement

DDC has a dedicated resource to support tenant engagement in the shape of our Tenant Involvement and Continuous Improvement Officer (TEO). The TEO is largely responsible for the successful implementation of this strategy and action plan and for the ongoing support of groups, meetings and managing resources.

In addition to the TEO, it is important for a culture of tenant engagement to be embedded throughout the Housing and Asset teams, and to ensure tenants are involved with staff at different levels in activities such as procurement, improvement works at a local level or with Housing Officers on walkabouts or community events.

### Financial support

We acknowledge that supporting tenant engagement does incur associated costs, many of these costs such as printing, staffing costs and consumables are absorbed by the housing management budget as a whole, but there are more specific costs such as:

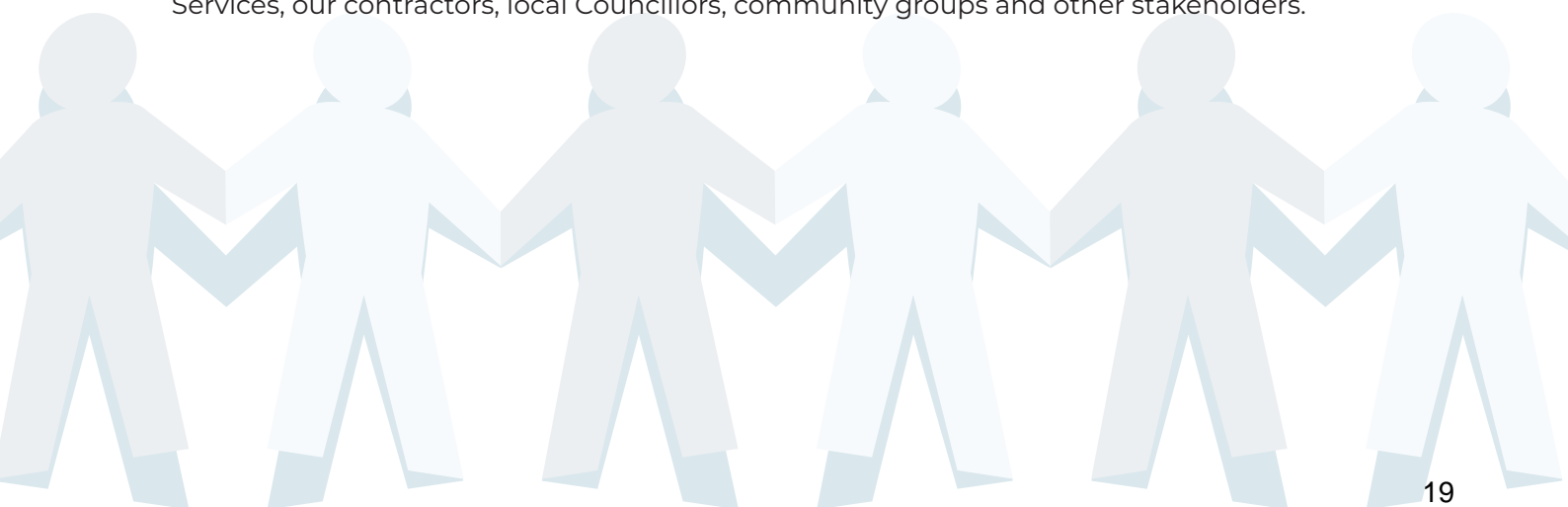
- Payment of expenses for tenants and representatives to attend meetings
- Independent advice
- Training and development, attendance at external consultation events and tenant conferences
- Promotional information and materials
- Purchase of equipment.

These costs will need to be attributed to a Tenant Involvement budget and DDC is committed to annual meetings with finance staff to set a budget for the forthcoming year.

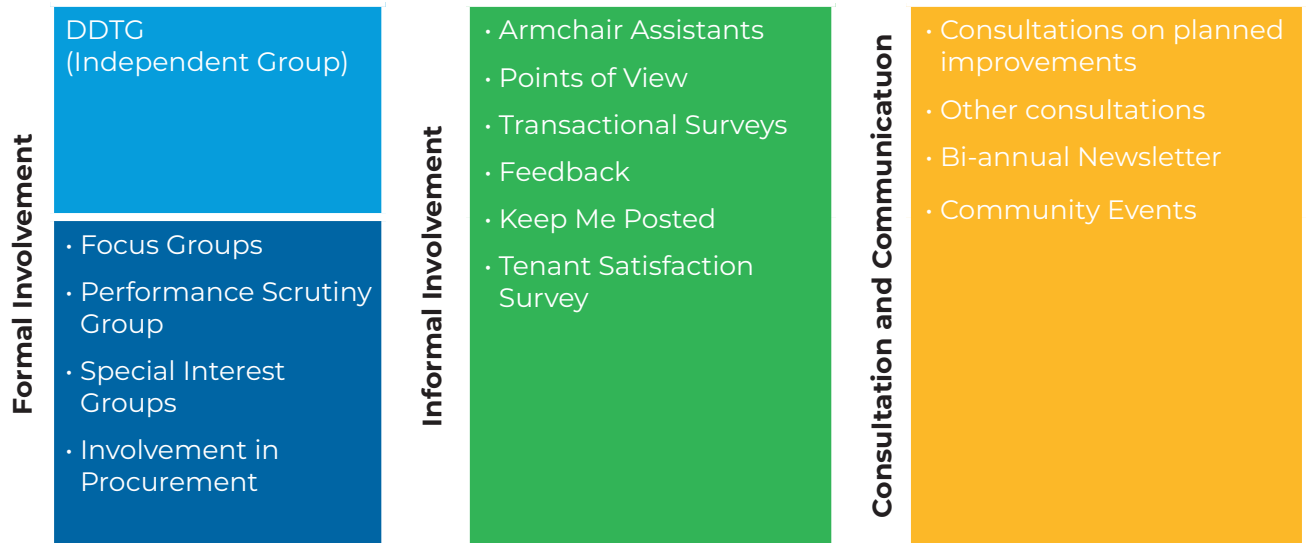
### Working with others

We understand that we can't do this all on our own, we will ensure we will join other teams and agencies to work together in partnership on projects and events. In addition to the engagement opportunities that the housing service offer, our team members help support resident associations and community groups worked with by our colleagues in the Community Development team.

We endeavour to work collaboratively with other Dover District Council teams including Waste Services, our contractors, local Councillors, community groups and other stakeholders.



## 12. Tenant Involvement Framework



Our revised tenant engagement framework includes a menu of opportunities for tenants and leaseholders to be involved. We recognise that not everyone wants to be or can be involved in the same way and the menu reflects this. The menu offers opportunities to be involved simply by reading our newsletter right through to being elected chairperson of one of our formal groups. Each of the ways that tenants and leaseholders engage with us will take up varying amounts of their time and we have tried to identify this in the menu which is shown in full at the end of this strategy.

### 12.1 Formal involvement

The Tenant Involvement framework includes opportunities to be more ‘formally’ involved with the housing service. This might be through membership of the Dover District Tenants’ Group and/or our focus groups and tenant panels.

#### Dover District Tenants’ Group (DDTG)

The Dover District Tenants’ Group (DDTG) has been in existence for many years. It is an independent group with 12 membership places and tenants and leaseholders from across the district can apply to join.

The aim of the DDTG is to work with DDC, tenants and leaseholders to resolve local community issues, to support local community projects and to oversee estate improvements. The work that the group undertakes is valuable to meet the regulator for social housing’s specific expectation to enable tenants to scrutinise services.



### **The Dover District Tenants' Group supports the following functions:**

- Provide feedback and make recommendations regarding the Council's housing related policies and strategies
- Raise local & community issues, not individuals' issues, with DDC on behalf of tenants and leaseholders and recommend solutions
- Scrutinise the service provided by using performance and research-based approaches, with a view to make recommendations for service improvements
- Support and/or promote community projects which benefit DDC tenants and leaseholders
- Oversee estate improvement programme and help decide how the budget is spent on projects throughout the district.

### **Focus groups/tenant panels**

There will be times where more in depth and outcome driven involvement will be required. This might be to help write and implement a strategy, make changes to processes, or speak to a particular group of residents.

Focus groups and tenant panels allow tenants and DDC to join forces and disband once the project has been completed. This is a 'Task and Finish' style of tenant engagement.

### **Special interest groups**

One of our key priorities is to break down barriers, one of the ways we can do this is to speak to tenants who perhaps have a different perspective that we want to hear from. This could be from under-represented groups or collections of tenants with protected characteristics that may find it harder to engage traditionally.

These groups are interchangeable based on the needs at the time. For example, we may have a project or desire to speak to tenants who are below a certain age or young parents, we would then set up a method of engagement based on the preferred method of that group.

Similar to focus groups, these groups can be a 'task and finish' style of involvement, focusing on one topic or they could be longer running, looking at a wider variety of topics and areas.

## **12.3 Informal engagement**

### **● Tenant Surveys**

In addition to the large-scale Tenant Satisfaction Survey, sent to all residents, it is an important goal for us to implement more surveys to ascertain tenants' thoughts by targeting tenants at the end of a service received. An example of this is the anti-social behaviour (ASB) satisfaction surveys to collect data on how positive or negative the tenants' experience was with the housing team.

Feedback forms are available to complete 24/7 on DDC's website. Printed feedback forms are also available at community events.

We will continue to gather tenants' opinions via a variety of methods.

● **Armchair assistants**

A new involvement opportunity for tenants to be added to a 'Keep Me Posted' mailing list to receive regular surveys and opportunity to provide service feedback

● **Points of view members**

Distribution list of residents to hear about services and opportunities to respond

● **Social media**

We are aware that many of our tenants are on social media. Other providers have created groups and pages to directly communicate with tenants, provide information and gain responses and feedback. We will look into this as a potential new resource.

● **Estate Walkabouts**

Previously known as Estate Inspections these offer an opportunity to be involved in person and join us once a year for a community event. DDC staff conduct inspections alongside stakeholders including contractors, councillors, tenants and leaseholders.

We have altered the name of these on the recommendation of members of our focus group who felt that the formality of the title inspection might put residents off and suggest that we were expecting them to act on anything they found. They felt that the term 'Estate Walkabout' more accurately described what was going on.

## 12.4 Engagement through communications

53% of tenants told us that their preferred method of involvement is to receive information and updates of the service.

This correlates with our involved residents who say that communication is key and they enjoy receiving new information via Keep Me Posted email updates and biannual newsletters.

We aim to provide a range of ways in which we will communicate with our residents.

*"Communication is key"*

*Neil Drakley, Tenant Focus Group*

### Communication

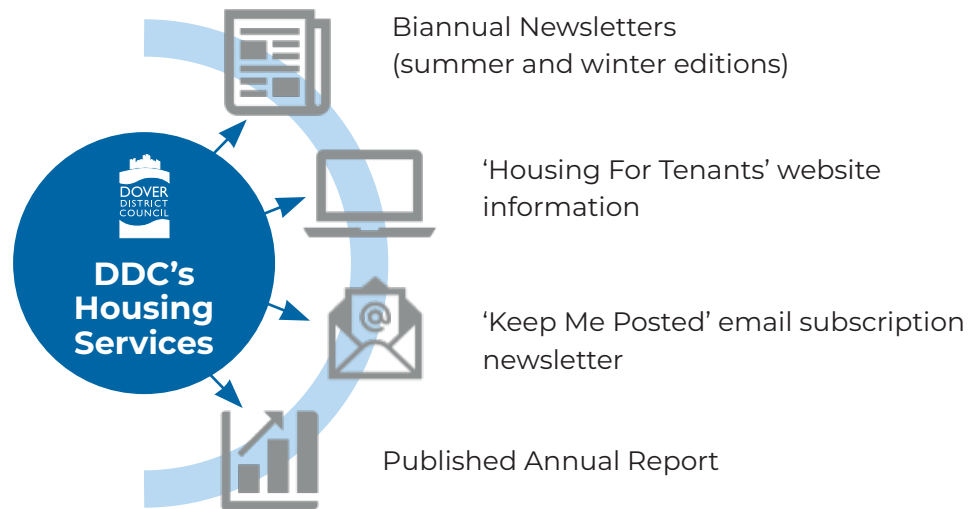
- Local consultations: for example, consultation with residents affected by a specific project
- Newsletters
- General letters/ emails and telephone calls to tenants and leaseholders
- Our website.

We will create a consultation framework to identify which projects would benefit from resident consultation and how that will be undertaken to provide fair opportunities to be involved in changes made to residents' own environments, blocks and estates.



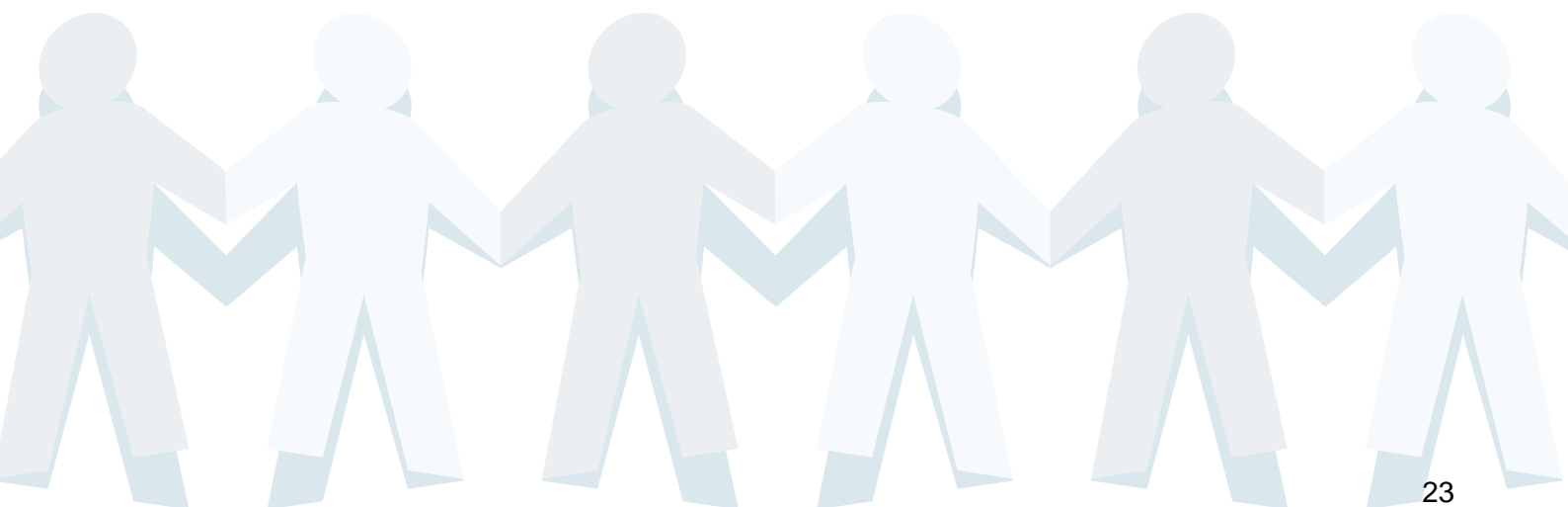
### Publishing Tools

We use a variety of methods to publish information to tenants, both to their door (newsletters), to their inbox (Keep Me posted) or information they wish to seek on the website or in the Annual Report to tenants.



### Information about our performance

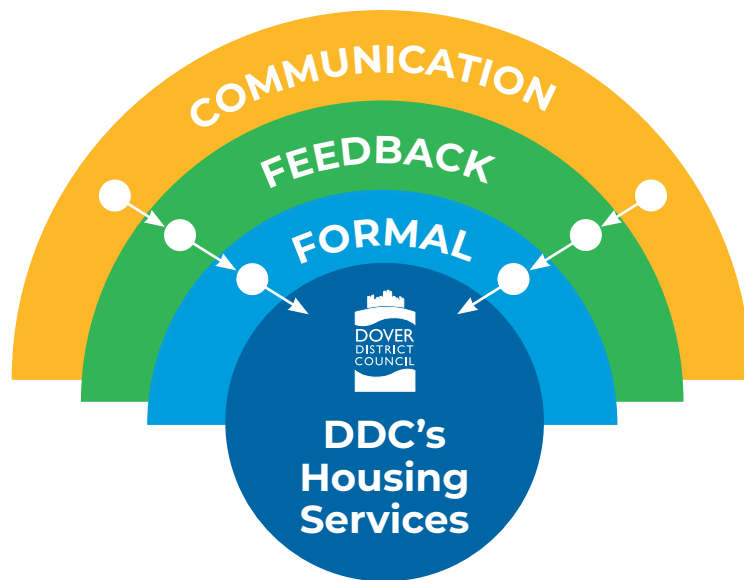
It is vital that to effectively scrutinise services, our tenants and leaseholders must have access to timely and accurate performance data. We will not only provide annual report data, but will publish our performance and service standards on our website.



## 13. How We Will Use Customer Feedback

We will make sure that we use the feedback we receive from a variety of sources to improve our service delivery arrangements and deliver improvements that make our estates healthy, safe and attractive places to live.

We will develop a consultation framework that we adopt whenever we do local estate based consultation exercises and the outcome of these interactive surveys will be to better understand what our residents are telling us about our plans for their area. This type of consultation feeds into our investment plans and asset management strategies.



## 14. Monitoring

The tenant involvement and empowerment standard's specific expectation states that providers must consult tenants at least once every three years on the best way of involving tenants in the governance and scrutiny of the organisation's housing management service.

The strategy and action plan outcomes will be reviewed annually and we will use the following performance indicators and reporting tools to help us measure our success:

- Overall customer satisfaction taken from our annual tenant satisfaction survey
- Customer satisfaction with the measure in our annual tenant satisfaction survey around how many of our tenants feel we have listened to and acted upon their views
- The number of participants engaging with each of our involvement methods
- Impact assessments which demonstrate the valuable outcomes that have been achieved from particular involvement activities, allowing everyone to clearly see the value of involving tenants in all that we do.



## 15. Equalities

Different groups are protected in law (the Equality Act 2010) and DDC is committed to ensuring barriers to involvement are considered and minimised wherever possible.

An equalities impact assessment has been conducted to ensure fairness, access and inclusion of tenants in the influence of housing landlord services.

## 16. Menu of Involvement

Our menu of involvement includes a wide variety of ways residents can be involved with the landlord service; they include:



### Formal Meetings (largest time commitment)

- Dover District Tenants' Group - Independent
- Special interest groups
- Focus groups
- Performance Scrutiny group



### Informal Engagement Activities (moderate time commitment)

- Estate Walkabouts
- Litter picks
- Local targeted involvement for estate improvement or planned work
- Annual competitions
- Community events
- Completing surveys



### Online Involvement (smallest time commitment)

- Armchair Assistants
- Consultations
- Feedback forms
- Completing surveys



### Publications and one way communication

- 'Keep Me Posted' email updates
- Up to date and relevant website information
- Biannual printed and posted newsletter
- Investigate



### Activity Toolbox

Methods and tools at the disposal of residents to aid effective engagement in service delivery.

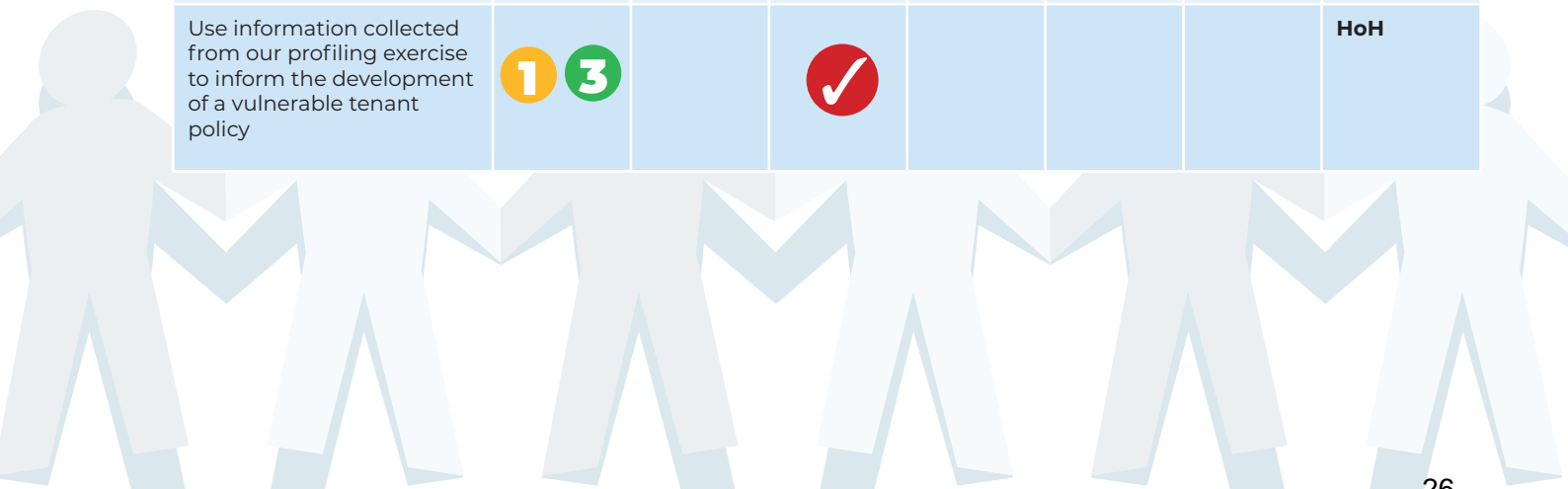
- Scrutiny
- Mystery shopping
- Reports & statistics
- Staff presentations
- Surveys
- Workshops

# 17. Tenant Engagement Strategy Action plan

Key objectives are set out in the section 10 in the Tenant Engagement Strategy and each action point complies with one or more key objectives. Actions are divided into groups of the following subjects:

- Creation of supporting documents
- Launching new and additional projects, groups and activities
- Publishing tasks
- Digital and technical
- Understanding our residents
- Supporting our residents

Action	Complies with Key Objectives	Year 1 By April 2023	Year 2 By April 2024	Year 3 By April 2025	Year 4 By April 2026	Year 5 By April 2027	Responsible Officer
<b>Creation of supporting documents</b>							
Write and agree Terms of References for Groups	3	✓					TEO
Write and agree Tenant Expenses Policy	1 4	✓					TEO
Create a consultation framework and toolkit to ensure consultations are carried out at local level for appropriate projects such as bin storage relocations, parking alterations, new signage, windows and doors, etc.	2 3	✓					TEO
Use information collected from our profiling exercise to inform the development of a vulnerable tenant policy	1 3		✓				HoH



Action	Complies with Key Objectives	Year 1 By April 2023	Year 2 By April 2024	Year 3 By April 2025	Year 4 By April 2026	Year 5 By April 2027	Responsible Officer
<b>Launching new and additional projects and groups and activities</b>							
Identify younger tenants living in our stock and try to engage them through information activities	1 3		✓				TEO
Conduct customer journey mapping exercises as a tool to identify where improvements can be made to services.	3		✓				TEO
Launch an Equalities Group to investigate and ascertain how we can ensure we are engaging with tenants with protected characteristics moving forward.	1 3	✓					TEO
Work with tenants to review Tenant Engagement Strategy, targets and monitor progress.	2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	TEO
Working with Asset team to ensure that tenants are involved in planned work when they are directly affected by the work proposed.	2 3		✓	✓	✓	✓	AM
Develop a new customer satisfaction survey for a variety of areas, such as ASB, complaints and asset maintenance and use feedback from this to monitor our services.	3		✓				HM
Reintroduce the Estate Improvement Programme, using resident involvement to directly improve estates.	3		✓				TEO & AM
Rename Estate Inspections to Estate Walkabouts to encourage a more approachable community activity.	3	✓					TEO
Explore creation of Special Interest Groups and identify underrepresented areas.	1 3		✓				TEO

Action	Complies with Key Objectives	Year 1 By April 2023	Year 2 By April 2024	Year 3 By April 2025	Year 4 By April 2026	Year 5 By April 2027	Responsible Officer
<b>Publishing tasks</b>							
Encourage new tenants to sign up to Keep Me Posted at first contact with their housing officer.	1 3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	HM
Publish Annual Reports and work with tenants to agree what our local offers look like each year	2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	HoH
Increase promotion of successful projects and 'you said we did' to increase trust in services	2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	TEO
<b>Digital and technical</b>							
Roll out hybrid meeting options for open meetings held in person at Dover District Council.	1 3		✓				TEO
Investigate the use of social media as a multimedia forum to enhance our engagement opportunities.	1 3		✓				TEO
<b>Understanding our residents</b>							
Increase understanding of our tenants by completing tenant profiling exercise, made easier by census data becoming available in 2022.	1		✓				TEO
Develop and carry out a 'lifestyle' questionnaire to gain greater understanding of our tenants and what their needs and aspirations are.	1 2		✓				TEO
<b>Supporting our residents</b>							
Agree annual Tenant Engagement budget with DDC Finance	1 4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	HoH
Establish a programme of skills training for our engaged tenants working with partners to identify opportunities for training to be supported by them. Review every 2 years.	4	✓		✓		✓	TEO

**Abbreviations:**

HoH: Head of Housing

HM: Housing Manager

TEO: Tenant Engagement and Continuous Improvement Officer

AM: Asset Manager

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>DOVER DISTRICT COUNCIL DRAFT TENANT ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY 2022–2027</b>
<b>Meeting and Date:</b>	<b>Cabinet – 3 October 2022</b>
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Louise Taylor, Head of Housing</b>
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	<b>Councillor Derek Murphy, Portfolio Holder for Social Housing, Port Health, Skills and Education</b>
<b>Decision Type:</b>	<b>Key Decision</b>
<b>Classification:</b>	<b>Unrestricted</b>
<b>Purpose of the report:</b>	To seek Cabinet approval of the draft Tenant Engagement Strategy attached at Appendix 1 for consultation purposes and agreement for wider formal consultation with stakeholders and service users.
<b>Recommendation:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. That Cabinet approves the draft Tenant Engagement Strategy and Action Plan at Appendix 1 for consultation purposes.</li> <li>2. That Cabinet notes and approves the draft consultation plan for the Tenant Engagement Strategy for formal consultation with tenants and leaseholders for a 4-week period.</li> <li>3. That Cabinet delegates to the Strategic Director (Corporate Resources), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Social Housing, Port Health, Skills and Education, authority to consider the consultation responses and to make any minor amendments arising therefrom and thereafter, and to adopt this document on behalf of the Council with effect from 7 November 2022. Should more significant amendments be considered desirable, the matter shall be the subject of a further report to Cabinet.</li> <li>4. That Cabinet delegates to the Strategic Director (Corporate Resources), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Social Housing, Port Health, Skills and Education, authority to make future minor amendments to the strategy as required.</li> </ol>

## 1. Summary

- 1.1 The way in which landlords engage with their tenants and leaseholders is changing and both nationally and locally there is a significant push to ensure tenants have a genuine say in how their homes and services are managed.
- 1.2 This strategy has been developed against a backdrop of demands for greater transparency and accountability in the social housing sector following the Grenfell Tower tragedy. The publication, in the wake of Grenfell, of the Government’s Social Housing White Paper ‘The Charter for Social Housing Residents’ will result in a more robust regulatory regime overseen by the Regulator of Social Housing, more emphasis upon tenant satisfaction as a performance measure and greater intervention by both the Regulator and Housing Ombudsman if required.
- 1.3 The draft Tenant Engagement Strategy 2022-2027 (appendix 1) sets out how the housing service will strengthen relationships, give an effective voice to our tenants and leaseholders

and increase the opportunities they have to work with us. It has been developed in collaboration with tenant and leaseholder representatives and is intended to help Dover District Council develop stronger, more inclusive tenant engagement activities in the future.

## **2. Introduction and Background**

2.1 As a registered provider of social housing, Dover District Council must comply with the regulatory framework developed by the Regulator for Social Housing. This framework has three economic standards (applicable to housing associations only) and four consumer standards. The standard set for resident involvement is the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment (Consumer) Standard and covers:

- (i) Customer Service, Choice and Complaints.
- (ii) Involvement and Empowerment.
- (iii) Understanding and Responding to Diverse Needs of Tenants.

2.2 Underpinning the Regulators approach is the concept of co regulation. This means that boards and Councillors who govern providers' service delivery are responsible for ensuring their organisation is meeting the Regulator's standards and are open and accountable in their approach. Co-regulation also requires providers to encourage and support their tenants to engage with the shaping and scrutinising of service delivery.

2.3 The Regulator of Social Housing is currently reviewing its Consumer Standards and consulting with social landlords regarding the introduction of a fifth standard requiring all social landlords to use and report upon a suite of national tenant satisfaction measures. It is expected these will be introduced from April 2023.

## **3. The Social Housing White Paper – 'The Charter for Social Housing Residents'**

3.1 In the wake of the Grenfell Tower tragedy the Government published its Social Housing White Paper, The Charter for Social Housing Residents. This paper was heavily informed by lessons learnt from the disaster and focuses upon tenant health and safety, landlord accountability and transparency and greater tenant empowerment. At its heart is a desire to see a cultural shift in the way in which housing providers interact with their tenants and leaseholders. In terms of effective tenant engagement landlords are expected to:

- (i) Seek out best practice and consider how they can continually improve the way they engage with their tenants.
- (ii) Support more effective engagement with tenants by giving them the tools to influence their landlord's and hold them to account.
- (iii) Review the professional training and development of their officers to improve the service delivery arrangements for service users.
- (iv) Be more transparent with the publication of their service and performance standards.

3.2 The recently published Social Housing (Regulation) Bill will move significantly beyond the current arrangements for sector regulation and introduce proactive consumer regulation by the Regulator for Social Housing. It also strengthens the role of the Housing Ombudsman Service.

## **4. Strategy Aims**

4.1 Since the return of the housing service to the Council in October 2020 officers have worked hard to consult with tenants and leaseholders about the services we are delivering and to listen to what they are telling us and act upon their feedback.

4.2 The draft Tenant Engagement Strategy 2022-2027 (appendix 1) sets out how the housing service intends to strengthen relationships and the voice of tenants and leaseholders taking into account:

- (i) Feedback from residents.
- (ii) Feedback from housing staff.

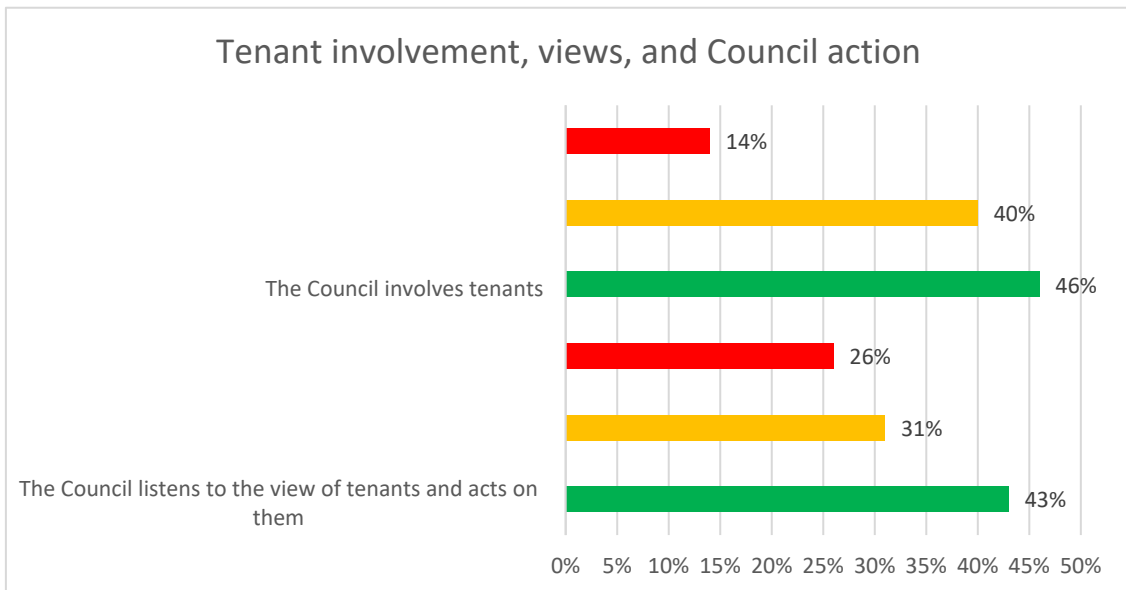
- (iii) Current best practice in involvement from social housing.
- (iv) Current and future legal and regulatory requirements.

4.3 The strategy recognises the hard work and commitment of existing involved residents and highlights the need to strengthen the voice of underrepresented groups and extend our reach through a programme of accessible and flexible involvement opportunities that are tied together through the new framework.

## 5. Strategy Development

5.1 The Strategy has been developed over the course of the last 12 months and has been informed by feedback and material from a range of sources. Last summer the housing service organised a full scale tenant satisfaction survey (STAR). Over 550 council tenants and leaseholders responded to this and analysis of the results has helped us focus on service delivery areas we need to improve.

Key:



Green = Satisfied or very Satisfied. Red = Dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Amber = neither satisfied or dissatisfied

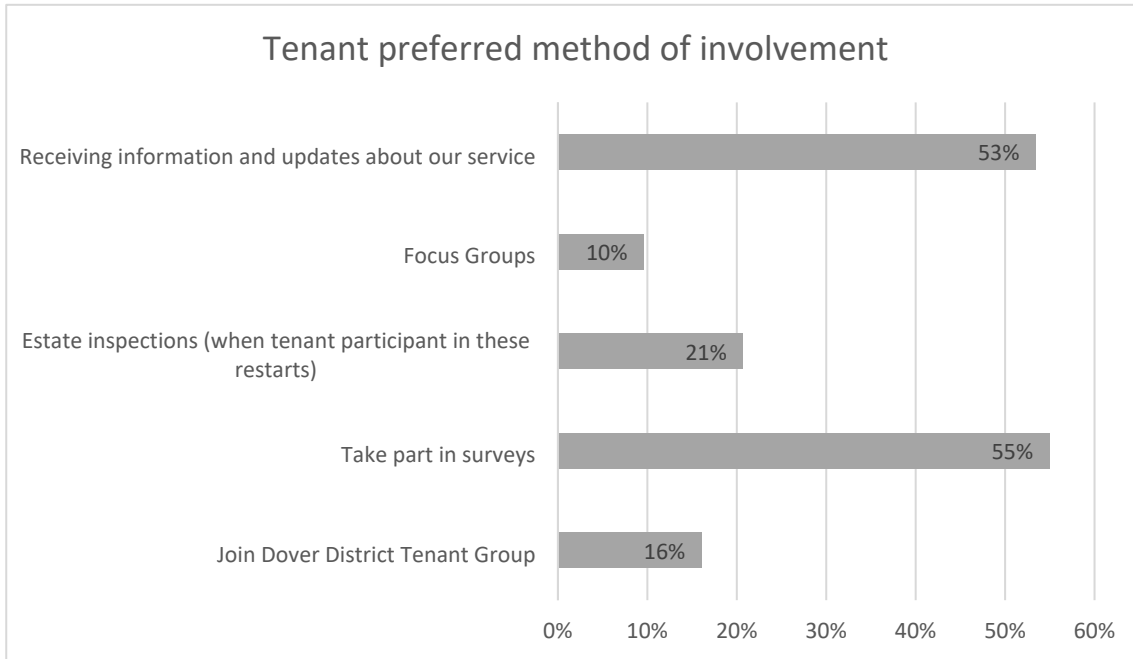
5.2 When questioned about their satisfaction with the way in which the Council involves tenants and listens and acts upon their views, the results show that although there were many tenants satisfied with this there were also a higher number of respondents who were indifferent compared to other questions asked.

This suggests that possibly:

- (i) Our tenants are content with the way they are being included and informed by the Council; or
- (ii) There is a lower level of interest in involvement.

It is clear however that more can be done to encourage tenants to be actively involved at some level and to understand the benefits that this can bring.

5.3 The survey also asked tenants what their preferred method of involvement would be. The results show that there was a strong preference by tenants to get involved by either taking part in surveys, or by receiving information and updates about services. The Tenant Involvement Strategy has taken into account the information gleaned from the full-scale tenant satisfaction survey and in particular the types of activity that tenants and leaseholders have indicated they would be most interested in.



5.4 Between February 2022 and April 2022 a series of workshops took place with a focus group recruited to help develop the engagement framework. This included tenants (some of who had previously been engaged with the housing services and others who had not), leaseholders and staff. A number of consistent themes emerged from the workshops and these have been used to inform the strategic priorities and the 'menu' of opportunities that underpins the engagement framework.

5.5 Between May and August the draft priorities and engagement opportunities were consulted upon more widely through:

- (i) Discussion with the Dover District Tenant Group.
- (ii) A full online survey for all tenants and leaseholders with covering information and links to it featured in the tenant newsletter sent by post to all households in July 2022.
- (iii) A staff survey.
- (iv) Semi structured interviews and meetings with the Councils sheltered housing tenants.
- (v) Survey reminders sent to all 437 members of the housing specific Keep Me Posted Forum.

5.6 The feedback received from tenants, leaseholders and staff has been both helpful and consistent, with a clear aspiration to work in partnership to help improve services. In all approximately 120 service users and staff have contributed to the development of this strategy.

5.7 Those who contributed frequently cited the following as essential ingredients for successful resident involvement:

- (i) Honesty and Trust.
- (ii) Transparency and accountability.
- (iii) More and different opportunities to meet diverse needs.
- (iv) Support for tenants to make a difference.

## **6. Strategic Priorities**

6.1 Building upon the work undertaken in the last 12 months four key strategic priorities have been identified. These are:



- (i) Priority one – Breaking down the barriers to being involved. Tenants and leaseholders want us to make it easier for their voices to be heard and to try to ensure that all tenants can feel there are opportunities for them regardless of their circumstances, abilities, and characteristics.
- (ii) Priority two – Rebuilding the trust that tenants have in Dover District Council. There has been a recurring theme in the comments given by tenants and leaseholders that Dover District Council has the opportunity to build a better relationship with its tenants after years of management by East Kent Housing.
- (iii) Priority three - Increased offering and a wider variety of opportunities to encourage more people to be involved in ways that suit them. Tenants are keen that there be a range of ways in which they can share their views with their landlord. This needs to take into account that individuals wish to be involved in different ways and to varying degrees.
- (iv) Priority 4 - Supporting tenants to be involved. The respondents to our survey all felt that it was important that the Council support tenant and leaseholder involvement with guidance, encouragement and training where needed.

## **7. The ‘Menu’ of Engagement and Action Plan**

- 7.1 The engagement framework includes a variety of ways in which service users can be involved. These form a ‘Menu of Opportunities’ and include ways to be involved at a more formal level where the time commitment required is higher, through to simply picking up and reading the newsletter.
- 7.2 The need for so many households to communicate with each other through online platforms during the pandemic has transformed the way in which large sections of the population communicate with each other still. Wherever possible we will be promoting opportunities for engagement through digital channels and enabling tenants and leaseholders to engage with the housing service in ways that suit their lifestyle.
- 7.3 The strategy reflects our hope that offering digital and online channels of communication will increase the diversity of the customers that we engage with especially if they are able to do so from their own homes and at times that suit them. It should result in less reliance on (but not a complete move away from) face-to-face meetings and make engagement more easily accessible and appealing to a wider group of tenants with different backgrounds.
- 7.4 We recognise however that this isn’t suitable for everyone and that there are tenants who are digitally excluded or choose not to interact in this way. For those we will continue to provide more traditional methods of engagement ie by telephone and with face to face meetings.
- 7.5 The action plan sets out the actions we propose to take to help us meet the four priorities and demonstrate to tenants and leaseholders our commitment to work in partnership with them to help shape and improve the services we offer. All actions listed in the Action Plan are aimed at achieving one or more of the above priorities.

## **8. Wider Consultation**

- 8.1 A significant amount of feedback has already been received from tenants and taken into account in the development of this strategy. To reflect this, it is proposed that a shorter online consultation take place with tenants, leaseholders and stakeholder of 4 weeks. This will be through the Council’s website, targeted awareness raising among tenants and leaseholders through social media posts and reminders sent to those who are already signed up to our keep me posted service.

## **9. Identification of Options**

- 9.1 Option 1: Approve for consultation the draft Tenant Engagement Strategy and delegate to the Strategic Director (Corporate Services) in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Social Housing, Port Health, Skills and Education authority consider the consultation responses and to to make minor revisions to the strategy following the outcome of the consultation exercise

and thereafter adopt formally the Strategy. In the event that consultation responses are received which make more significant revisions to the Strategy desirable, a revised versions will be brought back to Cabinet for approval.

9.2 Option 2: Not approve the Tenant Engagement Strategy

## **10. Evaluation of Options**

10.1 Option 1 - is the recommended option because the proposed structure has been designed to maximise the ways in which tenants and leaseholders can get involved with the housing service.

10.2 Option 2 - is not the recommended option as it is a requirement for local authorities (under the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard of the Regulatory Framework for Social Housing) to involve and engage their tenants and therefore to do nothing would place the authority at risk of challenge.

## **11. Resource Implications**

11.1 The Tenant Engagement Strategy will be delivered within existing resources in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). A range of opportunities to be involved with the service are already in place and the strategic ambition is to build upon these.

## **12. Climate Change and Environmental Implications**

12.1 The strategy seeks to increase the level of engagement and communication with residents via digital channels to improve access for residents whilst minimising the impact on the environment. Increased engagement and communication should bring about improvements for tenants in their home environment.

### **Corporate Implications**

13.1 Comment from the Director of Finance (linked to the MTFP): Accountancy have been consulted in the writing of this report and have no further comment to add (AC)'

13.2 Comment from the Solicitor to the Council: The Solicitor to the Council has been consulted in the preparation of this report and has no further comments to make.

13.3 Comment from the Equalities Officer: An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed which highlights potential positive impacts for several protected characteristic groups. Members are required to comply with the public sector equality duty as set out in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/149>

13.4 Other Officers (as appropriate): None received.

### **Appendices**

Appendix 1 - Dover District Council Draft Tenant Engagement Strategy 2022 - 2027

Appendix 2 - Proposed consultation plan

Appendix 3 - Equality Impact Assessment

### **Background Papers**

Regulator of Social Housing Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tenant-involvement-and-empowerment-standard/tenant-involvement-and-empowerment-standard-2017>

The Social Housing White Paper: A Charter for Social Housing Residents [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/936098/The\\_charter\\_for\\_social\\_housing\\_residents\\_-\\_social\\_housing\\_white\\_paper.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/936098/The_charter_for_social_housing_residents_-_social_housing_white_paper.pdf)

Contact Officer: Louise Taylor, Head of Housing