

Housing Department, London Borough of Southwark

Draft Resident Involvement Strategy

Executive summary

One of the enduring legacies of the covid-19 pandemic is when you empower residents and work with them in a joined-up way, listen to them and weave their views into the fabric of defining and designing services, a lot more can be achieved. This strategy builds on the remarkable success achieved by working with residents during the height of the pandemic.

Residents have asked for more flexible and inclusive ways to voice their views. At the heart of the strategy is the role of community power in making things happen on all our estates and neighbourhoods. Building strong and effective relationships with residents and treating them with respect is key to unlocking the potential of the community. This requires an inclusive and partnership approach underpinned by a joined-up and respectful engagement style that values the diverse perspectives and reinforces trust and respect.

Four key draft strategic priorities have been developed to underpin our commitment to the highest level of resident involvement with a clear action plan to ensure we listen to the voice of our residents and firmly embed their priorities in delivering high standard customer-focused services:

- Giving power to residents to shape their neighbourhoods and estates.
- A wide range of involvement opportunities for residents to have a say in decision-making and development of policy and strategy.
- Providing flexible and adaptable mechanisms for residents to scrutinise the design and delivery of landlord services.
- Embracing and embedding equality and diversity in line with the principles of Southwark Stands Together

Foreword by the Cabinet Member for Council Homes



As the Cabinet Member for council homes, my ambition is to put power back into the hands of local residents to make decisions on how to shape their estates and neighbourhoods. My aim is to put the needs and aspirations of residents at the heart of delivering good quality homes and Landlord services. Our residents are the biggest experts on their homes and the local neighbourhood issues that affect them.



The tragedy at Grenfell, the findings of the Hackitt report and the pandemic have highlighted the crucial significance of tenant involvement, tenant voice, community engagement and community power. The White Paper and the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 strengthens the accountability of the council as a landlord for providing safe homes, quality services and treating residents fairly and with respect.

Trust and respect from our residents is earned by consistently delivering good quality landlord services and making sure we listen and act on the things residents have told us. The Regulator of Social Housing has created a new approach for assessing the performance of landlords at delivering good quality homes and services. We welcome the requirement to provide performance management information available to all residents. The resident perception surveys will enable all residents to determine and assess how well we are doing in delivering services to all residents.

The success of the Great Estates project highlights the benefits of people power in shaping their neighbourhoods and estates. The Great Estates project was designed with residents and for residents. The success it has recorded in transforming the pilot estates is testament to our commitment to working with empowered communities to transform the way we manage and deliver resident services on our estates and in our neighbourhoods.

Southwark Council owns and manages around 57600 homes occupied by council tenants, leaseholders and shared owners. We value the input of all our residents in creating great places to live and work, whether tenants, homeowners or other household members living in council homes.

Our resident involvement strategy lays out our aims for the next four years. It seeks to offer a variety of ways for residents to get involved, in a manner that suits their individual lifestyle and the time they have available. I am committed to working alongside officers and residents to ensure that this resident involvement strategy puts residents at the heart of the housing service. A housing service which continues to provide an effective, value for money package that answers the needs of today's residents and those of the future and returns power to local people to make local decisions about their estates and neighbourhoods.

Cllr Sarah King

Cabinet Member for Council Homes

Introduction by the Strategic Director of Housing



This four-year strategy seeks to set out a journey. The journey is to build on the already positive role we have in meaningfully involving residents in our housing service and giving power back to local residents to shape the services in their neighbourhoods.

We recognise that getting involved can mean a significant time commitment as well as personal energy. The aim of this strategy is to open up more ways for you to get involved. We recognise the importance of offering a range of methods which are fit for purpose and provide an opportunity for people to get involved at whatever level best suits their lifestyle.



The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 give tenants greater powers. This includes improved access to swift and fair redress when something goes wrong and enhanced powers for the Regulator of Social Housing to ensure landlords provide homes that are decent, safe and of a very good quality.

The new proactive consumer regulatory framework give more powers to the regulator to ensure landlords continue to provide homes that are safe, decent, well-maintained and tenants are treated fairly and with respect. As a peopled powered council and landlord, it is critical that we listen to the voice of residents and weave your views and perceptions into designing and delivering a landlord service that meets your needs and aspirations.

Southwark welcomes the new powers given to the regulator to ensure that we are providing good quality homes that are safe and our services are accessible to residents and we continue to treat all residents fairly and with respect. As we know from working with our residents, housing plays a vital role in offering a new start and a bedrock for accessing life's opportunities. Working together in partnership is therefore so important, because Southwark's housing is so much more than just a roof over someone's head, it is a home and a secure foundation to go forward on.

Hakeem Osinaike

Strategic Director of Housing

Resident Involvement Strategy

Resident involvement in Southwark is about:

- Giving power to residents to shape, influence and direct the design and delivery of landlord services.
- Working with residents to understand their needs, priorities and aspirations for their neighbourhoods and local community.
- Treating our residents courteously, fairly and with respect.
- Adapting our approach to resident involvement in response to the changing needs and complex work patterns and lifestyles of our residents.
- Developing a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by residents and working together to find practical solutions.
- Embedding the principles of co-design, co-creation and co-production of services that put residents firmly in the driving seat.
- Demonstrating care and empathy in the way we serve our residents.

There are four draft priorities that underpin our resident involvement strategy:

- Giving power to residents to shape their neighbourhoods and estates.
- A wide range of involvement opportunities for residents to have a say in decision-making and development of policy and strategy.
- Providing flexible and adaptable mechanisms for residents to scrutinise the design and delivery of landlord services.
- Embracing and embedding equality and diversity in line with the principles of Southwark Stands Together

In order to achieve the key strategic priorities, the strategy sets out a clear action plan to deliver outcomes that are verified by residents and assessed by the Regulator of Social Housing. We will at all times work with residents to:

- Define the service
- Set the service standards
- Monitor the service.
- Review the service using the GAP analysis framework

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1 – Giving power to communities to shape their neighbourhoods and estates

At the heart of the community power model is:

- Putting residents at the heart of everything we do.
- Empowering communities to shape the places they live in and make decisions about issues which affect their lives.
- Working with you to design the services we provide and support local people to deliver for their community



It entails changing the power dynamics of those who hold leadership and operational roles in the council and residents so that the learned and lived experiences of local people is woven into the fabric of decision-making that affects the lives, hopes and aspirations of local people.

We are keen to effectively use the individual and collective wealth of knowledge, skills and lived experiences of residents to deliver good quality landlord services that meet the needs and aspirations of residents. The community power model offers the opportunity to collaboratively work with residents to design and deliver services with better outcomes and value for money.

It entails putting power into the hands of local people to make local decisions because they are in a much better position as local residents to solve local problems. It requires:

- a) Co-producing solutions to complex neighbourhood service challenges
- b) Agreeing how we can jointly build an accountable framework with residents at the helm
- c) Co-create a communication, monitoring and scrutiny framework to meet the often complex and varying needs of residents.

The success of the Great Estates project highlights the benefits of people power in shaping their neighbourhoods and estates. The Great Estates project was designed with residents and for residents and the success it has recorded illustrates what can be achieved when we listen to and work with residents.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2 - A wide range of involvement opportunities for residents to have a say in decision-making and development of policy and strategy

- a) **Local Housing Forums (LHF)** –There are five local area forums which are chaired by residents. Everyone who lives in a council home, including council owned temporary accommodation, can attend their Local Housing Forum. At these meetings, you can take part in discussions with council officers and Councilors' on a wide range of housing related topics and policy decisions.

- b) **Tenant and homeowner forums** - The tenants' forum focuses on tenant specific issues and the homeowners' forum focuses on homeowner specific issues. Members of both the tenant and homeowner forums meet regularly to look at issues which affect both tenants and homeowners.
- c) **Tenants and residents association (TRA)** – A TRA is a group of residents who come together to work with the council and hold the housing and other services accountable to ensure a consistently high level of service for local residents. You can get more information on how to set up a new TRA by emailing resident.participation@southwark.gov.uk
- d) **Tenant management organisation (TMO)** – The right to manage regulations 2012 give tenants the framework for taking on the direct management responsibilities for agreed services set out in a management agreement with the council. To take over management, the tenants must set up a properly constituted organisation. More information on TMOs can be found by clicking on the link <https://www.southwark.gov.uk/housing/housing-getting-involved/tenant-management-organisations-tmos>
- e) **The building safety residents' board** - The building safety residents' board plays a critical role in facilitating regular and open communication between the service and residents. The law requires each in-scope building to have its own residents' engagement strategy and to build a profile for each building, taking into account the demographic details of the residents.
- f) **Repairs Improvement Residents' Board** -The repairs service improvement plan was agreed by Cabinet outlining the council's vision for a service that:
- Consistently gets repairs completed right first time
 - Responds to the needs of residents
 - Grows the council's own workforce
 - Works with local suppliers to help boost the local economy
 - Achieve the very best value for money

The role of the board is to scrutinise the repairs service improvement plan including:

- Implementation and forecasts
 - Provide transparency and conversation about the service and key performance indicators (KPI's)
 - Provide residents with a voice to influence change.
- g) **Postal surveys-** Postal surveys are also used to facilitate resident participation. Survey questionnaires are sent out in pre-paid envelopes for residents to complete and return.
- h) **Joint estate inspections** - Joint estate inspections with officers and contractors of the council offer residents the chance to make sure their estate is clean, safe and well cared for. Residents are able to hold officers/contractors directly accountable for the cleaning, grounds maintenance and communal repairs on the estates.
- i) **Housing and community safety scrutiny commission** - This commission is a sub-committee of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and has been established to examine and monitor the performance of services provided by the Council and other agencies in matters regarding housing and community safety. Elected members and residents constitute the commission. The individual meeting recordings can be reached on the meeting pages and are hosted on the Council's YouTube channel:
<https://www.youtube.com/user/southwarkcouncil/>
- j) **Online residents' panel** – the online residents' panel enables residents to get involved in decisions remotely and can choose from a list of topics or decisions they want to be involved in, complete online surveys, comment on draft documents. Additional information on how to join the online panel can be found via this link <https://www.southwark.gov.uk/housing/housing-getting-involved/online-residents-panel>
- k) **Resident scrutiny panel** – The purpose of the resident led scrutiny panel is to provide an independent scrutiny of the service and to assist with drawing up an action plan to ensure the service meets the needs and aspirations of residents. The panel is independent and they choose the service they want to scrutinise. Training is provided to panel members who are recruited using

various online tools, face to face contacts during home visits by tenants and homeowner involvement officers, telephone contacts with the customer contact centre and other events organised for residents.

- l) **Surveys-** The Regulator of Social Housing has developed tenant satisfaction measures (TSMs) to determine and benchmark social housing landlords against the consumer standards published by the regulator. The TSMs will cover five themes: repairs, building safety, respectful and helpful engagement, managing complaints and responsible neighbourhood management. Perception surveys will be used to measure resident satisfaction with the service.

- m) **Block representatives**
Some residents are happy to assume responsibility for inspecting and reporting any service issues to the Resident Services Officer as well as the Resident Services Manager for their specific block. Block representatives help to keep the blocks clean and safe by reporting communal repairs, lift breakdowns and other issues to the council.

- n) **Focus groups** - Focus groups offer an opportunity to be consulted on housing service issues like fire safety, repairs, anti-social behaviour, new homes, youth engagement etc. The tenant and homeowner involvement officers provide support to these groups to facilitate resident involvement.

- o) **Social media and digital media platforms** - The pandemic has witnessed the innovative use of digital technology to bring people together in a way that was less utilised before the pandemic. Most of the residents are now increasingly using WhatsApp messenger to monitor estate services. The strategy would seek to optimise the use of digital engagement to spot and leverage social media trends. The strategy also seeks to broaden the reach of content and effectively use audience segmentation to target under-represented groups to ensure their views are captured in the design and delivery of landlord services.

- p) **Co-design workshops with residents** – co-design workshops with topics or issues decided by residents provide a valuable tool to engage residents on single or multiple issues relating to the service. Co-design workshops help with discussions on how

services can improve. This will be increasingly utilised to get the perception of residents on specific services and how to improve the service and make it more accountable to residents.

- q) **Individual interviews** – one to one interviews also provide an opportunity for resident participation.
- r) **Work with community champions to build trust and inspire confidence** – collaborative partnership with community leaders helps to tap into existing social networks which can form the basis for meaningful engagement especially with close knit hard to reach communities.
- s) **Webinars with questions and answer sessions** – webinars give the opportunity to reach residents with smart devices. Residents are able to listen or watch the broadcast at their own time and place and the on-demand flexibility means residents are able to access the sessions multiple times.
- t) **Resident conferences with contents determined by residents** – resident conferences offer an opportunity for residents to hold service providers accountable for the services provided. The workshops, question and answer sessions offer an opportunity to probe key service areas and the resulting action plans with target completion dates helps to make the service accountable to residents.
- u) **Digital inclusion** - Southwark Council is committed to being a digitally inclusive borough, where all residents and businesses have access to the digital tools they need to live and work. Access to high speed broadband is an important part of the council's Fairer Future promise to build a strong local economy for everyone. Training Officers currently provide support for digital training for residents in designated resource centers. More information on digital inclusion can be found via this link (<https://www.southwark.gov.uk/housing/housing-getting-involved/better-broadband-for-southwark>)

- v) **Resident day events and other community activities** – Resident day events are a good way of bringing the community together. These are normally held in the spring and summer months and offer the opportunity for tenants and leaseholders to meet directly with officers of the council and ward members.

- w) **Themed cultural events to promote inclusivity and diversity** – themed events which celebrate the diversity of the communities are proving to be popular with residents. These events celebrate the beauty in diversity and extol cultural values as well as celebrate the richness of every culture through food, dress and music.

- x) **Home visits by tenants and homeowner involvement officers (THIOs)** – THIOs carry out home visits as part of the strategy to build effective relationships with residents. During the visits, THIOs will encourage residents to talk about their perceptions of the housing service and seek to recruit them to the formal consultative structures as well as the other alternative engagement bodies.

- y) **Sporting activities and other games** – sports and other games have proved to be a very useful method of bringing diverse communities together and cuts across every age.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3 – Providing flexible and adaptable mechanisms for residents to scrutinise the design and delivery of landlord services.

The White Paper and the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 strengthens the accountability of the council as a landlord for providing safe homes, quality services and treating residents fairly and with respect. The new consumer standards impose legal obligations on the council as a landlord to provide homes that are of a good quality, safe, decent and well-maintained. There is also a requirement to treat residents fairly and with respect. To achieve this, the council as a landlord must listen to residents and provide flexible and adaptable mechanisms for residents to scrutinise the design and delivery of landlord services.

The repairs improvement residents' board and the building safety residents' board, for example, play a critical role in facilitating regular and open communication between the service and residents. The residents' voice is required to support building management in making decisions that impact upon the safety of the building as well as ensuring residents continue to live in well-maintained homes. The law requires each in-scope building to have its own residents' engagement strategy and to build a profile for each building, taking into account the demographic details of the residents.

The tenants and residents associations, the local housing forums and the tenant and homeowner forums provide a framework to residents to hold the council as accountable for all landlord services.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4 – Embracing and embedding equality and diversity in line with the principles of Southwark Stands Together

Southwark Stands Together is a borough wide initiative in response to the killing of George Floyd, the injustice and racism experienced by Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities and the inequalities exposed by Covid-19 and exacerbated by the current cost of living crisis.

As a landlord, we recognise that we work in diverse communities and that some groups are likely to experience disadvantage and discrimination because of a protected characteristic. Our communities are our greatest strength and the lived and learned experiences of residents are invaluable in designing and delivering vibrant and sustainable neighbourhoods.

The council remains committed to knowing who our residents are and what their needs are in order to provide appropriate accessible services. We will do this by:

- a) Providing funding to support themed co-designed events in local communities to facilitate the participation of minority ethnic groups.

- b) Targeted visits and phone calls to individual Black, Asian and minority ethnic residents to discuss the benefits of resident involvement and work with each individual to address any barriers or challenges they face that prevents them from engaging.
- c) Targeted community leadership training, development and capacity building of Black, Asian and minority ethnic residents.
- d) Creating mentoring and networking opportunities with established Black, Asian and minority ethnic community leaders.
- e) Home visits and phone calls to Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities residents by tenants and home owner involvement officers (THIOs) using the data from Northgate.
- f) Themed cultural events to celebrate diversity and inclusion.

OUR RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT AGREEMENT

We have developed seven “Involvement Promises” which form our Resident Involvement Agreement to residents to demonstrate our commitment to achieving the draft strategic resident involvement priorities. These are:

- a) We will publish a strategy (a plan setting direction and actions) every 4 years detailing our approach to carrying out resident involvement. We will consult with residents about whether the right things are included in the strategy.
- b) We will involve residents in making decisions that will affect them.
- c) We will offer a menu of choices to get involved with options to suit different lifestyles and meet the needs of individuals.
- d) We will support new and existing residents’ groups including grant funding.
- e) We will offer training and development support to help residents influence our services.
- f) We will provide a range of opportunities for residents to monitor and scrutinise our performance and services.
- g) We will report back to residents on the difference their involvement has made.

DEALING WITH DISPUTES

Successful resident involvement is about partnership working in order to find the best possible solutions to any issues that arise. However, disputes between landlords and residents’ groups can occur from time to time. If a resident feels that the council has not kept to the resident involvement agreement, they may make a complaint using the complaints procedure. If dispute resolution

becomes necessary, we will make independent advice available through a national tenant participation consultancy to a residents' group. If required, we will also consider engaging the services of an independent mediator to deal with any disputes.

MONITORING OUTCOMES AND MEASURES OF SUCCESS

We will continue to use the Southwark TRAs, the on-line panel and other involvement structures as key groups to monitor the delivery of this resident involvement strategy. We will also report to the Departmental Management Team (DMT) Senior Management Team (SMT) and the Cabinet member for Council Homes and Homelessness and will include features on a regular basis through our website and in the 'Engage' Resident Involvement newsletter.

ANNUAL REVIEW

Each year we will produce information which reports on how well we are meeting the aims of this resident involvement strategy. This information will detail the influence residents have had on business and service improvements and what has changed as a result. This information will be scrutinised by the resident involvement structures, senior managers and councillors.

The evaluation of resident involvement can be complex, as many outcomes cannot be measured in terms of numbers or finance. Also some outcomes do not show themselves immediately but take place over time. Therefore the views, opinions and perceptions of staff, councillors and residents all need to be taken into account to assess the level of influence residents have had and whether this has resulted in the expected continuous improvement over the life of this strategy.

MEASUREMENT OF SUCCESS

We will measure the success of this four-year Resident Involvement Strategy by measuring our performance against the following outcomes:

- a) We will have a wider range of residents involved in a greater number of involvement activities through the life of this strategy.
- b) We will have clear evidence that involvement has made a difference in terms of tangible service improvements.
- c) Resident Involvement is embedded and forms part of the day job for all staff and the evidence is collected through the tenant satisfaction measures and survey of homeowners.
- d) We will have achieved improved resident satisfaction with resident involvement.

ROAD MAP

1. The first stage was to review the existing literature, engage with a small sample of 650 residents and produce the draft resident involvement strategy, October 2022 to July 2023.
2. The second stage is to embark upon a wider consultation exercise, listen and learn from residents, November 2023 to March 2024 and produce a revised resident involvement strategy.
3. The third stage is to develop the strategy, test the findings with residents between April 2024 to June 2024 and submit the final draft strategy to residents.
4. The final stage is to launch the strategy in August 2024.
5. We will use the agreed formal consultation mechanisms as well as other informal structures to ensure the views of residents are firmly embedded in the final resident involvement strategy.